

A North Wind

THE NEW REALISM OF THE FRENCH- WALLOON *CINÉMA DU NORD*

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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NOVEMBER, 2013

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ideas sometimes come in the middle of the night yet they are never fully one's own. They are for a very large part the fruits of the places and organizations one works or is supported by, the communities one lives in and traverses, and the people one loves and is loved by. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the support I received from the following institutions: the American Council of Learned Societies, the Huygens Scholarship Program of the Dutch government, the Prins Bernard Cultuurfonds (The Netherlands), and, at the University of Minnesota, the Center for German & European Studies (and its donor Hella Mears), the Graduate School (and the Harold Leonard Memorial Fellowship in Film Study), as well as the Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature. As for my home department, I could not have wished for a warmer and more intellectually vibrant community to pursue my graduate studies, and I express my gratitude to all who I have worked with. A special word of thanks to my academic adviser, Cesare Casarino, who has taught me how to read many of the philosophies that, explicitly or implicitly, have shaped my thinking in the following pages, and who has made me see that cinema too is a form of thought. I also thank the other members of my dissertation committee: Tim Brennan, Rembert Hueser, Richard Leppert, and John Mowitt. Furthermore, I would like to thank the friends that I have made in Minneapolis. In particular I thank Nichole Neuman, who has made me see the beauty of the Minneapolis, and St. Paul. I would also like to thank my parents, for their continuous support throughout the years. Finally I thank Adair Rounthwaite, with whom I

began my Mid-Western adventure. Our lives have split, but this project continues to bear the traces of our life together.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	i
Contents	iii
Introduction—A North Wind	1
1. A Cinema of Life: <i>Rosetta</i> and <i>L'humanité</i>	23
2. <i>Cinéma du Nord</i> : A Transnational Region and its Cinematic Manifestations	90
3. <i>Cinéma du Nord</i> : A Transnational Regional Cinema	169
4. A Cinema of Life: New Realism	233
Bibliography	305

INTRODUCTION | A North Wind

“Vent du Nord,” the French regional newspaper *La Voix du Nord* exclaimed on May 25, 1999. “The battle of humanity has been won: the jury’s big blow to the cinema professionals,” the Walloon newspaper *Le Soir* headed that morning in a similar triumphant spirit. And reporting about the same event, *Le Monde* stated on its front page: “A Rosetta, pour l’humanité.”¹ This event was the closing ceremony of the 1999 Cannes International Film Festival, where the Walloon filmmakers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne won the *Palme d’or* for *Rosetta* (1999, BE/FR), while the northern French Bruno Dumont was awarded the *Grand Prix* for *L’humanité/Humanity* (1999, FR). In addition, both films’ leading actresses, Emilie Dequenne and Séverine Caneele, as well as the leading male actor from *L’humanité*, Emmanuel Schotté, were laurelled with the festival’s most prestigious acting prizes.² This wholehearted embrace of the jury, which that year was presided by David Cronenberg, of these two at first sight bleak and grim portraits of human struggle in northern francophone Europe caused a controversy the size of which the festival had not experienced since the 1987 Golden Palm for Maurice Pialat’s *Sous le soleil de Satan/Under the Sun of Satan*, perhaps not coincidentally another film entrenched in the “enfer du Nord,” the Hell of the North. (Pialat’s response to the booping

¹ “Vent du Nord,” *La Voix du Nord* (May 25, 1999), p. 1; Luc Honorez, “La Bataille de l’humanité est gagnée: la formidable baffe du jury aux professionnels de la profession,” *Le Soir* (May 25, 1999), p. 12. “A Rosetta, pour l’humanité,” *Le Monde* (May 25, 1999), p. 1.

² See also: “Palmarès festival de Cannes dont Palme d’Or aux frères Dardenne pour Rosetta,” video, *Soir 3 (France 3)* (May 23, 1999), <http://www.ina.fr/cannes/1997-2010/video/CAC99022160/palmares-festival-de-cannes-dont-palme-d-or-aux-freres-dardenne-pour-rosetta.fr.html> (accessed February 23, 2013).

and whistling that befell him has become legendary: “If you don’t like me, let me tell you, I don’t like you either,” upon which he raised his fist, in triumph and bitterness.³)

Though most of the Cannes audience and commentators in the international press could live with the jury’s unanimous choice for *Rosetta* as best film, its abundant acclaim of *L’humanité*, and of both films’ amateur and first-time actors, created bad blood, not in the last place because with that choice the jury passed over contenders such as *The Straight Story* (David Lynch), *Felicia’s Journey* (Atom Egoyan), *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (Jim Jarmusch), and *Todo sobre mi madre/All about my Mother* (Pedro Almodóvar), as well as these films’ professional actors. “Clearly Cronenberg, after the Cannes furore over *Crash*, seemed determined to remain controversial,” *The Guardian* commented. “La palme de l’exigence,” *Le Monde* wrote, lamenting the jury’s lack of consideration for the acting profession. And Almodóvar, who still did win the prize for best director, paid homage in his speech to Lynch, Egoyan, Jarmusch, and Arturo Ripstein, implicitly critiquing the jury’s anti-establishment statement.⁴ In fact that statement the jury, by voice of the British actress Kristin Scott Thomas, had already announced at the festival’s opening ceremony, when Thomas reminded the congregated stars of the war going on in the Balkan: “This evening, I can’t and don’t want to forget that with what is going on two hours by plane from here, cinema is more precious to us

³ “Palmarès festival de Cannes dont palme d’or aux frères Dardenne pour ‘Rosetta’,” video, Soir 3 (France 3), 1999; “Palme d’or à Maurice Pialat pour son film *Sous le soleil de Satan*,” video (Antenne 2) (May 20, 1987), <http://www.ina.fr/cannes/1978-1996/video/CAB87019039/palme-d-or-a-maurice-pialat-pour-son-film-sous-le-soleil-de-satan.fr.html> (accessed February 23, 2013).

⁴ Derek Malcolm, “Belgian Film’s Surprise Cannes Victory,” *The Guardian* (May 24, 1999), p. 2; Jean-Michel Frodon, “Le jury du 52e Festival décroche la palme de l’exigence,” *Le Monde* (May 25), 1999.

than ever, like a counter poison. I would have liked this evening to be entirely festive, but Cannes cannot be reduced to its shine and its glamour. We'll still need films to testify, and to fight forgetting and indifference.”⁵

Without further speculation about the jury's precise motivations, and leaving aside the question of whether *Rosetta* and *L'humanité* are more political forms of cinema than, say, *The Straight Story* and *Ghost Dog*, what is certain is that this heated Sunday in the French South meant a triumph for the cinemas of the French North and the Belgian South, and in fact provided a glimpse of a cinema traversing the French-Belgian border. As Serge Toubiana, president of the *Cinémathèque française* since 2003, observed that year in *Cahiers du cinéma*: “It is not so much Belgium or France that won this year at Cannes, but this rough and proud *Nord* that with ups and downs produces a regional cinema, the primary virtue of which is to maintain a certain flame, or to entertain a true anger.”⁶

This transnational regional *cinéma du Nord* is the subject of this study. Roughly speaking, the “Nord” to which this cinema from and of the North owes its names consists of the French northernmost administrative region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, and Wallonia, the predominantly francophone Belgian South. Besides the French language, their geology, and their relatively cold and rainy climate, these bordering regions share a long common socioeconomic trajectory, including their coal mining past. Major industrial centers for most of the nineteenth century, Wallonia and the French North have been

⁵ “Ouverture du festival,” video (France 2) (May 12, 1999), <http://www.ina.fr/fresques/festival-de-cannes-fr/fiche-media/Cannes00335/ouverture-du-festival-1999> (accessed February 21, 2013), translated from French.

⁶ Serge Toubiana, “Le Cinéma retrouvé,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 536 (1999): 22-3, pp. 22-3.

struggling economically for a long time, and especially so since the late 1950s, when their coal mines were depleted and their industries superannuated. In *Rosetta*, which is set and was shot in Seraing, a suburb of Liège, this crisis becomes visible in the protagonist's subproletarian struggle for "a normal life," starting with a job. In *L'humanité*, whose story largely takes place in Bailleul, a small town near Lille, it provides the setting for the film's carnal-spiritual quest for "humanity." The cinéma du Nord, I argue, expresses and, moreover, is driven by this crisis. It expresses this crisis in the sense that it consists of a body of films that explicitly or implicitly engage with the question of how these regions' uneven transition from a socioeconomic structure directly inherited from the first Industrial Revolution to a diversified and more precarious post-industrial economy has affected the social fabric, down to the structures of people's quotidian lives. The cinéma du Nord is driven by this crisis in the sense that the emergence of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais as small yet prominent sites of filmmaking and film production cannot be seen as separate from their more general endeavors to reposition themselves as European centers after decades of recession.

As my project's title already suggests, the cinéma du Nord is a "new wind" rather than a "New Wave." Whereas a wave overflows and inundates a territory, and in doing so makes itself clearly visible, a wind penetrates a space, and only manifests itself in its effects. It does so as a chill, or, as the "wind in the trees," to invoke an expression connoting cinematic realism, which as we will see is a clear tendency of the cinéma du Nord. The cinéma du Nord exists, I have no doubt about that, but it does not simply exist "out there," as an object that one can stumble upon and explore. Much more than is the

case with cinemas and cinematic movements that are bound to and express, if only by name, territories whose existence and contours are firmly entrenched in international law and power relations, the cinéma du Nord is largely immanent to the efforts that are made to prove and substantiate its existence as well as that of the transnational region after which it is named. (And let me state here from the outset that my thinking about space and territory has been inspired by Spinoza's equation of right and power, which in this context implies saying for example that France has the borders it has for no other reasons than the fact that the power and hegemonic structures that keep these borders in place outweigh the powers that might have a desire to challenge them, e.g., the Basque National Liberation Movement, Basque Country being a region that, like the Nord, exists transnationally, albeit in a very different way.)

Before further specifying my definitions and methods, let me briefly situate my intent to identify a transnational regional cinema in relation to recent debates in film studies about the relation between cinemas and "their" spaces. For a long time film studies has been dominated by a nation-state-based approach, an approach that goes as far back as Siegfried Kracauer's 1947 *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. As Dudley Andrew writes in "An Atlas of World Cinema" (2006), "national cinema studies have by and large been genealogical trees, one tree per country . . . Their elaborate root and branch structures are seldom shown as intermingled."⁷ Also

⁷ Dudley Andrew, "An Atlas of World Cinema," in Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim eds., *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film* (London; New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), pp. 19-29, p. 21.

in the era of world cinema, this approach continues to be the dominant model, though Andrew also observes two promising developments:

Let me not be coy. We still parse the world by nations. Film festivals identify entries by country, college courses are labeled “Japanese Cinema,” “French Film,” and textbooks are coming off the presses with titles such as *Screening Ireland*, *Screening China*, *Italian National Cinema*, and so on. But a wider conception of national image culture is around the corner, prophesied by phrases like “rooted cosmopolitanism” and “critical regionalism.” . . . Such terms insist upon the centrifugal dynamic of images, yet without surrendering the special cohesion that films bring to specific cultures.⁸

The persistence of the nation state as the dominant spatial referent partly follows from the fact that many states continue to promote their own national cinemas. Whether in spite or precisely because of their ongoing integration into transnational structures, nation states continue to put their stamps on the production, distribution and consumption of moving images. They do so by regulating domestic markets for audiovisual productions (e.g., through import restrictions, tariffs, censorship and copyright laws), by supporting production infrastructures (e.g., through subsidies to individual productions or to film training institutions), and by promoting national film culture at large (e.g., through the support of archives, festivals, and *cinémathèques*).⁹ Though the nation state remains a crucial factor in the process that determines the types of films that are shot, produced, and consumed by its citizens or within its borders, in most cases the concept of “national

⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁹ See also: Stephen Crofts, “Concepts of National Cinema,” in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson eds., *World Cinema: Critical Approaches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1-10; Mette Hjort & Scott MacKenzie, *Cinema & Nation* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

cinema” falls short in identifying the relations that unite films into bodies. Such is now also the opinion of Andrew Higson. Whereas in 1989, with the publication of his seminal “The Concept of National Cinema,”¹⁰ Higson was among the first to problematize the relation between cinema and nation, more recently he has started to doubt the usefulness of the concept of national cinema. In line with Andrew’s call for both a world systems and a critical regionalist perspective, in “The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema” (2000) Higson advocates an approach of cinematic formations that challenges national boundaries, for the reason that “the contingent communities that cinema imagines are much more likely to be either local or transnational than national.”¹¹

In recent years many film theorists have indeed moved beyond the nation state, often in the two directions suggested by Andrew and Higson. First, film studies has seen a surge in publications adopting a transnational perspective. As Nataša Durovičová emphasizes in the preface to *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (2010), the concept of “transnational” distinguishes itself from those of “international” and “global.” Whereas the latter two terms remain in her view predicated on relations of parity between nation states and the category of totality, respectively, “the intermediate and open term ‘transnational’ acknowledges the persistent agency of the State,” and in doing so implies “relations of unevenness and mobility.”¹²

¹⁰ Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” *Screen* 30.4 (1989): 36-46.

¹¹ Andrew Higson, “The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema,” in Hjort & MacKenzie, *Cinema & Nation*, pp. 63-74, p. 73.

¹² Nataša Durovičová, “Preface,” in Nataša Durovičová & Kathleen Newman eds., *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (New York; London: Routledge, 2010), pp. ix-xv, p. ix. Besides this volume, other significant publications on transnational and global cinema include: Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam

Second, largely intertwined but also partly in opposition to this transnational turn, film studies has seen an increase in attention for small cinemas, including local, regional and small national cinemas. The notion of “small cinema” has been most clearly developed by Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie. In their edited volume on the topic, *The Cinema of Small Nations* (2007), they argue that many small nations are characterized by the following tension: on the one hand small nations have limited domestic markets for locally produced goods and services, with the result that they experience a relatively strong pressure to integrate their economies into transnational structures. On the other hand, many small nations, in particular those that emerged out of twentieth-century processes of decolonization, have shown a strong interest in the creation and maintenance of a sense of national identity.¹³ The particular form of this tension, and the way it plays

University Press, 2005); Rosalind Galt & Karl Schoonover, *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Hill & Gibson, *World Cinema: Critical Approaches* (2000); Mike Wayne, *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema: Histories, Borders, Diasporas* (Bristol: Intellect, 2002); Catherine Fowler ed., *The European Cinema Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002); Andrew Nestingen & Trevor G. Elkington, *Transnational Cinema in a Global North: Nordic Cinema in Transition* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Ezra & Terry Rowden, *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006); Rosalind Galt, *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006); Dennison & Song Hwee Lim eds., *Remapping World Cinema* (2006); Luisa Rivi, *European Cinema after 1989* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Catherine Grant & Annette Kuhn, *Screening World Cinema: A Screen Reader* (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2006); Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Saverio Giovacchini & Robert Sklar eds., *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style* (Jackson: The University of Mississippi Press, 2012).

¹³ Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie, “Introduction,” in Hjort & Petrie ed., *The Cinema of Small Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 1-19, p. 15. Another important publication on the topic of small cinemas is: Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones & Belén Vidal eds., *Cinema at the Periphery* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010). There have also been several conferences organized around the theme of small cinemas, including: *European Landscapes: Small Cinemas at the Time of Transition* (University of Western Ontario, June 2010); *Small Cinemas in Transition* (SUNY Oswego, September 16-8, 2011); *Small Cinemas: Promotion and Reception* (Timisoara, Romania, June 1-3, 2012).

out in relation to cinematic production, varies per nation. As the essays in *The Cinema of Small Nations* demonstrate, in postcolonial or revolutionary states such as Burkina Faso, Tunisia and Cuba, state support for cinematic productions has often been tied to a politics of national identity, much like this has been and to some degree still is the case, in cinematic superpowers such as France, Italy, Germany, and the USSR. Small European national cinemas, in contrast, are often strongly integrated in transnational structures, for the main reason that in small countries it is often difficult to gather the funds required for a feature length fiction film without looking across the border.¹⁴

By pointing out the transnationality inherent to most small national cinemas, Hjort's and Petrie's book contributes to the rethinking of the concept of national cinema. To do so is also one of my own intentions. Yet whereas most contributions in *The Cinema of Small Nations* still make recourse to the category of the nation state in order to name and delimit cinematic formations, my project identifies a cinema that is transnational not only because it is small, but also because it is attached to and named after a region that itself is transnational. In doing so, I pursue what I think is one of the main promises of the transnational perspective: to generate the visible evidence for the existence of regions whose borders we do *not* find in atlases, whether or not the communities populating those regions think of themselves as a nation and long for their own state. Through the particular case and in many respects privileged example of the cinéma du Nord, this project seeks to rethink, and in doing so develop a method to think, the material connections between cinematic expression and production on the one hand,

¹⁴ Hjort & Petrie, "Introduction," 16. See also: Mette Hjort, *Small Nation, Global Cinema: The New Danish Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

and geopolitical, socioeconomic, and cultural-historical space on the other. Specifically, I advocate a transnational perspective on “cinemas” that not only explores the ways that films or production structures exist across borders but also allows one to see spaces, borders, and communities that otherwise would have perhaps gone unnoticed.

Like any transnational region, the Nord is a space in spite of the fact that it is intercut by an international border, and that in crossing that border also to some extent erases it, or at least makes it liquid and blurry. In the Nord, in other words, Belgium and France partly blend into each other, like the washed-out colors of a rain-drenched map. Defined most precisely, the Nord is the idea of a geographical space that is largely immanent to the geopolitical, socioeconomic and cultural-historical (including linguistic) commonalities between the two spaces, and the communities populating those spaces, that are separated by the French-Belgian border. I write “largely immanent,” because in recent decades the Nord has become somewhat legally recognized through bi- or multilateral interregional treaties involving Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Wallonia or parts of these regions. The existence of these treaties is also part of the reason that throughout most of this project I will use “Nord” in its more congealed definition: Wallonia (that is to say the region that since 1970 has been officially recognized by the Belgian constitution as “the Walloon Region,” and since 1992 also as “Wallonia”) plus Nord-Pas-de-Calais (which was formed in 1956 by the joining of the departments of Nord and Pas-de-Calais, which have also continued to exist separately). Here it is important to note, moreover, that Wallonia, which is primarily an economic region, is not identical to the French Belgian Community, which is primarily a cultural region, and which in addition

to the francophone part of Wallonia—which also has a small germanophone part—also includes the Brussels-Capital area. “Wallonia plus Nord-Pas-de-Calais”: it is a *working* definition. I will return to this in more detail in the second chapter. For here it suffices to say that to use “Nord” in this more territorialized form is justified by the fact that especially since the early 1990s both Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais have developed small regional cinemas that clearly profile themselves within the cinematic structures from which they have emerged and in which they continue to remain integrated, namely francophone Belgian cinema and French national cinema.

Having specified my use of “Nord,” let me also further specify my definition of the *cinéma du Nord*. By the *cinéma du Nord* I understand the phenomenon that consists in the discursive and material relations of mutual determination between the Nord on the one hand, and cinema on the other. “*Cinéma du Nord*” both indicates the body of films “du Nord,” as well as the infrastructure of film production in this transnational region. More specifically, in its connotation of a body of films, the *cinéma du Nord* includes all fiction features, documentaries and shorts that: 1) have a narrative that is set or partly set in either Wallonia or Nord-Pas-de-Calais (or what is now Wallonia or Nord-Pas-de-Calais); 2) have a production connection to either Wallonia or Nord-Pas-de-Calais, because they were shot or partly shot in one or both of those regions, or because their production involved at least one organization, institution or funding structure established in one of these regions; *and* 3) help define the Nord as a transnational region. In its connotation of a cinematic infrastructure, the *cinéma du Nord* refers to all organizations, institutions and structures that finance, or otherwise promote, film production in either

Wallonia or Nord-Pas-de-Calais, including of course collaborations between the two regions.

Let me say a few more things about these definitions. First of all, since the Nord is not a region by definition but one in need of a definition, I define the cinéma du Nord recursively. The cinéma du Nord is a cinema whose films allow me to identify and substantiate the space that it is named after, and by consequence to prove its existence as a transnational regional cinema. Films therefore fulfill two roles in my project, which becomes most clear in the second chapter. On the one hand they figure as the equals of the other texts or objects that allow me to substantiate the idea of the Nord, including literary texts, cultural histories, political reports, economic analyses, interregional maps, and even railway stations. On the other hand, I simply discuss them as products of a transnational region whose existence I postulate, like most studies of French cinema take the existence of France as a given.

Second, almost all films that meet the third as well as either the first or second criterion of the first definition (the cinema du Nord as a body of films) also meet the remaining criterion (so if 1 and 3 then also 2, and if 2 and 3 then also 1). In other words, when a film was shot or produced in the Nord and also may be considered to illuminate the Nord's existence, this almost always implies that this film also has a narrative set or largely set in the Nord. This can be explained as follows: while of all the factors binding together Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais the most crucial is their shared socioeconomic trajectory, both Walloon and northern French cinema show a tendency for the real, for

socially critical, location-shot films. That tendency toward the real is a tendency toward the cinéma du Nord.

Third, the second criterion for the cinéma du Nord in its first connotation I largely base on the funding criteria used by the Centre Régional de Ressources Audiovisuelles (CRRAV) and Wallimage, which since 1985 and 1999, respectively, have been the primary institutional promoters of film production in Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais.¹⁵ It is important to emphasize here that not all films that may be considered part of the cinéma du Nord were produced or coproduced regionally. For example, Xavier Beauvois's 1991 *Nord* was shot in Nord-Pas-de-Calais but not coproduced by an organization established there, while *Rosetta* was coproduced by the Walloon Region only *after* the film's success in Cannes. Furthermore, even before Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais started to develop infrastructures of film production, films "du Nord" were made in both of these regions. Some of the first examples include André Capellani's 1913 *Germinal*—also one of the first feature length films that was shot almost entirely on location—and Henri Storck's and Joris Ivens's 1933 *Borinage*—later renamed as *Misère au Borinage/Misery in the Borinage*—which is the genesis of the Walloon social documentary tradition.

Fourth and in conclusion of this reflection on definition, let me emphasize that I do not pin down the cinéma du Nord to an historical period, at least not directly, because of course the Nord, like any space, is also a product of history.

¹⁵ As I discuss in Chapter 3, Wallimage came forth out of an investment fund created by the Walloon regional government in 1999, following the success of *Rosetta*.

This deliberate degree of vagueness in the periodization of my “object” finds expression in my analysis. Rather than telling the story of the cinéma du Nord from its beginning—let’s say Capellani’s *Germinal*—to its open ending, I depart from the event through which the cinéma du Nord became visible to an international audience for the first time: *Rosetta*’s and *L’humanité*’s joint Cannes 1999 victory. That moment was a true gift, perhaps even a miracle, as it put the spotlight on and ensnared itself into a web of textual and non-textual parallels between these two films that is almost so perfect as something Almodovár could have woven.¹⁶ This is also why in the following four chapters I at repeated occasions gravitate back toward these two films, considering them in yet another light and in yet another methodological voice. Or to use a different image: were this project a museum exhibition, it would commence in an auditorium where *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* are projected back to back. From there, the exhibition continues in four connected gallery spaces, each of which corresponds to a different methodological approach to the cinéma du Nord. While one space contains a lot of frame grabs, others contain a lot of maps or statistical data, and while at some moments the gaze of analysis may seem obstinate, at other moments I will paint in broader strokes. What unites these four spaces is their joined endeavor to explain why the two films whose sounds pervade the exhibition as a whole saw the light at the place and at the historical moment they did.

Metaphor aside, whereas the first and last chapters are rooted in close analysis and are mostly theoretical in nature, the middle two chapters are more historical in their

¹⁶ Curiously, in a 2009 interview Dumont claims to have never watched *Rosetta*. See Romain Sublon, “[cinéphilies:] Bruno Dumont et Julie Sokolowski,” *Cut* (2009), cutlarevue.fr/2009/11/26/cinephilies-bruno-dumont-et-julie-sokolowski/ (accessed March 3, 2013).

orientation and are largely based on the research I carried out at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris and the Bibliothèque National de France (which also houses the “Inathèque” of the French Institut National de l’Audiovisuel) in Paris, as well as the Cinematek in Brussels. This methodological diversity is central to my project’s goals in that it allows me to not only make visible and explain the emergence of the cinéma du Nord from a wide variety of perspectives, but also to demonstrate that while firmly rooted in the particularity of the Nord, films such as *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* in fact address a more universal question: what is a “normal,” “human” life in a time and place where the normative power of life-shaping institutions is waning?”

As far as my research in Paris and Brussels is concerned, at the above listed institutions I substantiated my idea of the French-Walloon Nord and the cinéma du Nord, and I watched many films that are hard to find outside of France and Belgium. This also implies that it is actually only at those institutions that it is possible to get a sense of the cinéma du Nord “as a whole.” For example, Paul Meyer’s 1960 masterpiece *Déjà s’envole la fleur maigre/The Scrawny Flower Already Flies*—the most Italian non-Italian neorealist film ever made—has still not been released on DVD, while VHS copies of the film are difficult to track down.

The first chapter, “A Cinema of Life: *Rosetta* and *L’humanité*,” is a *very* close reading of *Rosetta* and *L’humanité*. “What is it exactly that unites *Rosetta* and *L’humanité*, apart from the fact of having been enveloped at the last Cannes festival in the jury’s same consecration, as well as in the same reproach of a large part of

professionals and critics?”, Jacques Rancière asks in a 1999 *Cahiers du cinéma* essay.¹⁷ The parallels that Rancière does *not* mention in his own answer include: first of all, *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* are reworkings of the two films by Robert Bresson that are set in the French North and that he adapted from novels by the French catholic novelist Georges Bernanos. While *Rosetta* is a reworking of *Mouchette* (1967), *L’humanité* is a reworking of *Journal d’un curé de campagne/ Diary of a Country Priest* (1951). Moreover, *L’humanité* also cites Pialat’s earlier mentioned *Sous le soleil de Satan*, which was also based on a Bernanos novel. Second and related, both films largely owe their affective power to the Dardennes’ and Dumont’s idiosyncratic but very different methods of working with their predominantly non-professional actors. Third, despite the stark narrative and formal contrasts between the ways *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* engage the economic depression that is felt in their small towns, they are both driven by the question of what constitutes “humanity” in the face of a dehumanizing world. Fourth and finally, both *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* end with a close-up, in which we at one and the same time see a fictional face, a real face, and the idea of a face.

Combined, these parallels make *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* privileged examples of a *cinema of life*. A cinema of life is a cinema that makes life out of life, that examines and affirms, through its thematic concerns and through its treatment of the “real” acting bodies it captures, a notion of human life, and in doing so confronts the question, “what is a ‘normal,’ ‘human’ life, here and now, and more universally?” Let me be up front about the fact that I will be deliberately flirting with somewhat essentialist understandings of

¹⁷ Jacques Rancière, “Le Bruit du peuple, l’image de l’art: à propos de *Rosetta* et *L’humanité*,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 540 (1999): 110-2, p. 111.

reality, representation and human life. It is a risk worth taking, because *Rosetta* and *L'humanité* take this risk themselves, and because the shameless humanism of these films allows me to diagnose the symptoms of a potentially repressed humanism, however minimally, in critical theories of “life” such as Gilles Deleuze’s.

The flirting with essentialist understandings of reality continues in the two middle chapters, which indirectly connect the cinéma du Nord to the coal reserves stitching together the French North and the Belgian South. The second chapter, “*Cinéma du Nord: A Transnational Region and its Cinematic Manifestations*,” presents a historical analysis of the Nord and its cinematic expressions. The first part of this analysis largely takes the form of a comparison between the socioeconomic trajectories of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, from their coal mining pasts to their attempts to reposition themselves at the crossroads of Europe after decades of recession. Subsequently, I analyze the ways that filmmakers have engaged the Nord. As one might expect from a coal-fired cinema, at both sides of its internal border the cinéma du Nord displays a clear tendency toward socially critical and stylistically austere forms of realism. At the same time, there are also some important differences between the two parts of the cinéma du Nord. Most crucially, northern French cinema, much more than its Walloon counterpart, is also a regional-*ist* cinema. As I will argue, for a large part this difference may be attributed to the differences in development between these regional cinemas. Whereas Walloon cinema has developed gradually out of its documentary origins, even though for decades a Walloon fiction feature seemed a financial impossibility, a truly regionally anchored

northern French cinema did not see the light until the mid-1980s, even though films have been made in Nord-Pas-de-Calais since the early decades of cinema.

While the second chapter's approach to the cinéma du Nord is mainly textual, the third chapter, "*Cinéma du Nord: A Transnational Regional Cinema*," studies it as an industry. This chapter presents an historical sociology of institutions of film production and funding in Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, and more broadly in Belgium and France at large. It does so with the goal to explore the existence of a causal link between Wallonia's and Nord-Pas-de-Calais's uneven socioeconomic transitions and the fact that, toward the turn of the twenty-first century, cinema has become the most privileged medium for expressing this transition. Before diving into that analysis I will return to the national cinema debate already touched upon in this introduction. Specifically, I will dwell on the question of what constitutes a film's national identity, in the context of which I will zoom in on the example of *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Israel-Palestine* (2003), a Belgian-French-British-German production directed by the Belgian-Palestinian Michel Khleifi and the Israeli Eyal Sivan. Subsequently, building upon the characterization of the cinéma du Nord developed in the second chapter, I examine the emergence of the regional cinemas of Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Wallonia, the one a forerunner province within Europe's largest, and still very centralized, national cinema, the other a clearly identifiable subset of the francophone half of an internally split small national cinema. This analysis brings to light an important unbalance between the respective parts of the cinéma du Nord: whereas almost all Walloon feature length films are Belgian-French coproductions, this is the case for a much smaller portion of northern

French fiction films. The reason is that Paris continues to remain the financial heart of francophone cinema. That said, as we will see, structures such as Wallimage and the CRRAV have been crucial in the cinéma du Nord's self-realization since the early 1990s as a cinema that at once expresses and is driven by the Nord's economic transition.

That process has not occurred in isolation. With the exception of a few blockbusters such as *Germinal* (Claude Berri, 1993) and *Bienvenu chez les Ch'tis/Welcome to the Sticks* (Dany Boon, 2008), the films made and produced in Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais since the early 1990s may be considered part of what has become known as the *jeune cinéma français*, a new New Wave of auteur films in which also francophone Belgian cinema—as an adopted province of French cinema—has shared. Some examples of Walloon or northern French films for which this holds true are: *Nord* (Beauvois), *La Vie rêvée des anges/The Dreamlife of Angels* (Erick Zonca, 1998) (whose two principal actresses, Elodie Bouchez and Natacha Régnier, shared the best actress award at Cannes 1998), *Quand la mer monte . . ./When the Sea Rises* (Yolande Moreau and Gilles Porte, 2004), and of course *Rosetta* and *L'humanité*. As is often the case with new waves, the rubric of “young French cinema” groups together a heterogeneous multitude of films that, when looked at from a distance displays three mutually reinforcing tendencies: a centrifugal move from Paris to and beyond the French margins (including the banlieus), a return of the political, and a return of a realist aesthetics.

Combined these three tendencies amount to a *new realism*, the subject of the concluding chapter, “Cinema of Life: New Realism.” This chapter characterizes new

realism as an aesthetics and ethics of filmmaking that: 1) reinvents earlier socially critical, and especially neorealist practices of depicting the everyday lives of ordinary people for the age of global capitalism; and 2) revives a belief in the mimetic promise of the cinematic image, while also showing the influence of television, and mobilizing the haptic and affective potential of new image and sound technologies, whether analog or digital. New realism at one and the same time constitutes a return to the neorealist spectacle of reality, a rupture with New Wave modernism, and a continuation of the long tradition of “Bazinian” realism and humanism in French and francophone cinema. New realism is what realism becomes in the wake of “the modern cinema.” I am using this last term in the connotation Deleuze gives it in his *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (*Cinéma 1: l'image-mouvement*, 1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (*Cinéma 2: l'image-temps*, 1985). From the perspective of the narrative hinge between these two volumes, the return of a mimetic, overtly humanist and predominantly narrative-driven realism can only be considered to be a regression. I argue though that new realism, when realized in its full affective and conceptual potential, allows us to see a *cinema of life* that the modern cinema has repressed.

The *Cinema* books cannot be seen separate from Deleuze’s more general, lifelong labor on an ontology of difference, the endeavor to think life, not “life” in the minimally humanist connotation that I give the term in “cinema of life,” but life understood as a preindividual, posthuman intensity, as a will to power. The passage from the movement-image (*Cinema 1*) to the time-image (*Cinema 2*) that structures Deleuze’s cinema philosophy corresponds to, and expresses, a transition that “happened a very long time

ago in philosophy.”¹⁸ It is the passage from Descartes-Kant-Hegel to Spinoza-Nietzsche, from dialectics to immanent causality, from representation to expression, from the human to the posthuman, and from diachronic time to synchronic time, the eternal return of the “new pure present.”¹⁹ Therefore to identify a type of cinema that remains unaccounted for by the classification of images that the *Cinema* books offer also implies to identify a potential blind spot in Deleuze’s immanentism at large.

Deleuze has been a crucial influence on this project, not only his thinking about cinema but also that about space and concepts. In *What is Philosophy? (Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?*, 1991) he and Félix Guattari write: “The plane [of immanence] is like a desert that concepts populate without dividing up. The only regions of the plane are concepts themselves, but the plane is all that holds them together. The plane has no other regions than the tribes populating and moving around on it.”²⁰ Concepts and planes are inseparable. Concepts are the products philosophy extracts from language, and every act of philosophy begins with rolling out a plane that is always already full of concepts. A plane is not a concept itself, but rather “the image of thought.”²¹ It is thought’s prephilosophical condition of possibility. It is also a risky place: “We head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return with bloodshot eyes, yet they are the eyes of the mind.”²² This raises the question: What does the philosopher see on this

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. xi.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

²² *Ibid.*, 41.

journey? A *monstrum* perhaps, an inassimilable, gazing sign that confronts thought with the unthought lying at its heart? And what if this monster turns out to have a human face?

CHAPTER 1 | A Cinema of Life: *Rosetta* and *L'humanité*

Rosetta. A door slams. A girl walking down a corridor, agitatedly, the handheld camera on her heels. She is wearing a white overcoat and a hair net. She turns right, right, left. A second door. Slam! Down the stairs. A second door, behind which a factory hall, which remains blurry, because the focus is on her, on her back. Noise of machines. “Entrez dans mon bureau!” (“Come back to my office”). The man, shirt and tie, is blocking her way. “Entrez dans mon bureau, je vous dis!” She evades him, slipping under a machine, the camera trying to stay on her trail. “C’est vrai que t’as dit que je suis souvent en retard?” (“Is it true you’ve said I’m often late?”), she speaks, in anger, trembling, out of breath, to a female coworker. The girl has been laid off, we realize. We have not yet seen her face.

Inevitably this attempt to transcribe the opening sequence of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne’s *Rosetta* (1999) remains insufficiently expressive, of its colors, its sounds, its movement. The girl is Rosetta (Emilie Dequenne) who is about seventeen (also the age Dequenne was at the time of the film’s shooting). The entire realism of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne is here: in Rosetta’s flight forward, in the extreme close-up shots of the back of her head, in the elliptical editing, in the direct sound, and more generally in the film’s refusal to leave its protagonist alone, in both senses of the expression. The camera is determined to follow Rosetta and to reveal what moves her, both what makes her human and what makes her lose her humanity, and to make felt her struggle for life, her small war.²³

²³ In the screenplay of *Rosetta*, the opening sequences reads as follows:

Other than *Rosetta*, the film that stands central in this chapter is Bruno Dumont's *L'humanité*. Both films are prime examples of what I call *a cinema of life*, a cinema that 1) takes the human form as its matter of creation as well as its subject of artistic expression; and 2) in doing so engages the ways the question, "what is a human life?", is addressed in a time and place where the power of normative, life-shaping institutions is waning. "Cinema of life" is also my answer to the question Rancière poses in his short essay "Le bruit du peuple, l'image de l'art" ("The Noise of the People, the Image of Art"):

What is it exactly that unites *Rosetta* and *L'humanité*, apart from the fact of having been enveloped at the last Cannes festival in the jury's same consecration, as well as in the same reproach of a large part of professionals and critics? . . . That Bruno Dumont persists in filming the small people of the Nord and the Dardenne brothers the slums and the indefinite terrains of Wallonia . . . all that seems to suffice for certain people to locate—and generally lament—a new wave

"1. Intérieur—Atelier/Fabrique de surgelés—Jour.

La nuque, le dos de Rosetta (dix-sept ans) déboulant un escalier, traversant l'atelier. Elle est revêtue d'une combinaison-plastique verte et coiffée d'un bonnet hygiénique. Elle est suivie par un homme en chemise/cravate qui tente de lui parler. Elle marche, le visage en colère, croisant quelques ouvriers et ouvrières à leur poste sur la chaîne de refroidissement /empaquetage, eux aussi revêtus d'une combinaison-plastique verte et coiffés d'un bonnet hygiénique. L'homme en chemise/cravate veut la retenir par l'épaule, elle le repousse d'un geste violent. Elle s'approche d'un bureau vitré dans lequel est assise une femme (revêtue d'une combinaison-plastique verte) en train de consulter un écran d'ordinateur.

2. Intérieur—Bureau vitré/Fabrique de surgelés—Jour

Rosetta: C'est vrai que t'as dit que j'étais souvent en retard?

La Femme: Non, j'ai dit...

L'homme en chemise/cravatte: Peu importe ce qu'a dit Madame Riga, je vous ai expliqué que...

Rosetta: Tu l'as dit ou pas?

La Femme: J'ai signalé tes deux retards mais j'ai dit que c'était à cause du bus... C'est noté ici... (*elle prend un dossier*)

L'homme...: (*à la femme*): Ça n'a aucune importance, laissez!

Rosetta (*à l'homme*): Pourquoi avez-vous dit qu'elle l'avait dit?"

See Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, *Scénarios: Rosetta, suivi de La Promesse* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma: 1999), p. 11.

of “realism” and a new instance in which art compromises itself with the “social.”²⁴

I will return to Rancière’s analysis, and connect these films’ capturing of what he calls the *bêtise*—which both means stupidity and animality—of their protagonists to recent endeavors in cinema studies to rethink the concept of mimesis in terms of the affect the moving image produces in its viewers. But I will also discuss the parts of the answer to Rancière’s question that he himself leaves undiscussed, including the fact that *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* are explicit and forceful interventions in the long tradition of socially critical, humanist realism in French and francophone cinema. *Rosetta* is a reworking of Robert Bresson’s *Mouchette* (1967), while *L’humanité* arguably is a reworking of this director’s *Journal d’un curé de champagne* (1951), and furthermore contains references to Maurice Pialat’s *Sous le soleil de Satan* (1987). In turn, these three films that *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* stand in conversation with are all adaptations of novels by the French Catholic author Georges Bernanos, all of which are set in the Pas-de-Calais region, i.e. *Nouvelle histoire de Mouchette* (*New History of Mouchette*, 1937), *Journal d’un curé de campagne* (1936), and *Sous le soleil de Satan* (1926).

Above all this chapter is a *very close* reading of *Rosetta* and *L’humanité*. By a very close reading I mean the unraveling of the structures of signification through which an object makes sense, and simultaneously the attempt to capture that object’s surface effect, its potential to create a certain affect in the reader, the experience that we are being moved and touched by something without that we are fully able to conceptualize that

²⁴ Rancière, “Le Bruit du peuple, l’image de l’art,” 111.

experience, to translate that experience into signs. On the one hand, this two-faced textual approach is in line with poststructuralist, and especially deconstructionist, acts of interpretation that expose in a textual structure the signifying lack on which that structure's signifying power ultimately depends. These are modes of reading, in other words, that are driven by the desire to identify in a system of signs that absent-present sign that remains unspoken but that makes possible signification as such. On the other hand, my approach has affinity with recent endeavors in film studies and in critical theory to move beyond the understanding of objects as mere texts and to also take into account their non-signifying, affective dimension. In the case of cinema, this dimension often depends on the viewer's sense that the images and sounds form an immediate registration of a profilmic reality, something that holds true for both documentaries and fictional narratives. Therefore, when one wants to pin down the full scope of a film's address of its audience, one must not only consider the cinematic image itself, but also the particular relation that this image has toward the profilmic reality of which it forms the imprint.

I realize that I am balancing here on the fine line between a position of critical reading that unmasks the hidden agenda behind terms such as "reality" and "nature," and precisely such an essentialist position. To do so is precisely my intention, for three reasons. First, *Rosetta's* and *L'humanité's* obsession with the physical body makes it almost impossible to not flirt with an argument rooted in the sense of immediate presence of the acting body/subject these films create in the viewer. To steer entirely clear of the risk of getting bogged down in an essentialist argument almost certainly leads one to missing these films' haptic engagements with the form-of-life called human. A crucial

part of that engagement results from the Dardennes' and Dumont's idiosyncratic, but very different, methods of casting and working with their mainly non-professional actors. I therefore pay close attention to the way these filmmakers "exploit" their actors' real-life bodies, emotions and personalities in order to create the affective on-screen presence of their fictive protagonists. Specifically, I analyze the dialectic between, on the one hand, the "real," profilmic acting bodies and subjects that *Rosetta* and *L'humanité* include the "documentary" footage of, and, on the other hand, their narratively constructed fictive illusions of acted bodies and subjects. With such an investigation I am taking up the challenge that both films present to the interpreter.

The second reason why it is crucial to walk the fine line between textual criticism and essentialism, is the fact that *Rosetta* and *L'humanité* walk this line themselves, and at moments blatantly cross it. Both films revolve around their protagonists' quests for a "normal," "human" life. And both films, though in very different ways, create in their viewers the experience of being in the immediate presence of a particular human being. At the same time, both *Rosetta* and *L'humanité* also connect the particularity of their protagonists to a more universal moral stake and ultimately develop and affirm an *idea* of human life. While making visible and felt a world in which institutionalized structures of belief have significantly lost their power, both films, though *L'humanité* perhaps more explicitly than *Rosetta*, employ a Christian, humanist vocabulary in order to express certain, arguably essentialist visions of human life, visions that cite, moreover, or explicitly deviate from the ones we find in Bresson's and Pialat's films. These visions only become intelligible to a reader who wants to let speak *all* signs, especially the ones

that at first sight, or at first hearing, remain mute and that, in their muteness, perhaps do not even appear as signs in the first place. It is exactly such signs, signs that pass themselves off as insignificant non-signs hiding in plain sight, that lead one to see that Rosetta, unlike Mouchette, is not an angel but a very normal girl looking for a job, and that Pharaon, the protagonist of *L'humanité*, really is not normal, but is the simultaneously more-than-human and less-than-human redeemer of humanity, the mute Christ.

Third, how else could the concept of a cinema of life be defined than by seeking the limits of conceptualization? Doesn't "life" resist conceptualization, and perhaps even form the nonconceptual condition of possibility of concepts as such? In *The Open: Man and Animal* (2002), Giorgio Agamben writes:

For anyone understanding a genealogical study of the concept of "life" in our culture, one of the first and most instructive observations to be made is that the concept never gets defined as such. And yet, this thing that remains indeterminate gets articulated and divided time and again through a series of caesurae and oppositions that invest it with a decisive strategic function in domains as apparently distant as philosophy, theology, politics, and—only later—medicine and biology. That is to say, everything happens as if, in our culture, life were *what cannot be defined, yet, precisely for this reason, must be ceaselessly articulated and divided*.²⁵

What is life? what is human life? what is *a* human life? And what separates a human life from what it is not, from the non-human (animal, God, non-organic matter . . .), outside of and within itself? Let it be clear that the answers *Rosetta* and *L'humanité*

²⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 13, emphasis in original.

give to these questions are ultimately not very satisfactory for those averse to a secular-religious, humanist outlook on being and beings. Insofar as these films indeed answer these questions, they are empty shells, painted with moving images that remind the viewer of bygone times in which images still had intrinsic values and questions still satisfying answers. Yet an empty shell is more than nothing at all. The fact that these films engage with such questions, while simultaneously acknowledging the waning of power structures backing up the possibility of engaging with them in a satisfactory manner, is a fact worth exploring. That what makes *Rosetta* and *L'humanité* the privileged examples of a cinema of life is not merely the fact that both films take life as their creative matter and as their subjects of art, but also that, in doing so, they express the ways the affective concept of “life” is thought and rethought at the turn of the twenty-first century.

A Normal Life: *Rosetta*

Let's return to *Rosetta* now. After the opening sequence, which ends with Rosetta being dragged out of the factory by the police, and after having shown her eating a waffle, the camera follows her home: on the bus, through some wooden gate that we surmise she is not permitted to use, across a road, through the forest, underneath a fence, to the place she hides her rubber boots, to the trailer she lives, together with her alcoholic mother. By trailing Rosetta's path, including her trespassings and shortcuts, the camera maps her destitute world and her subproletarian existence in it. This world is the town of Seraing, a post-industrial gritty suburb of Liège that is also the hometown of the Dardennes. Liège

is the largest metropolitan area in Wallonia, which for decades has suffered unemployment rates among the highest in Europe, and especially youth unemployment has been a big problem. In *Rosetta* this problematic is present through the title character's desperate attempts to find a job. This desire to become a member of the working class, and to "fit in" on a more general level, Rosetta most clearly expresses at the end of the day on which her painstaking efforts have finally been rewarded. Lying in bed in her friend Riquet's (Fabrizio Rongione) apartment she whispers to herself:

Tu t'appelles Rosetta. Je m'appelles Rosetta. Tu as trouvé un travail. J'ai trouvé un travail. Tu as trouvé un ami. J'ai trouvé un ami. T'as une vie normale. J'ai une vie normale. Tu ne tomberas pas dans le trou. Je ne tomberai pas dans le trou. Bonne nuit. Bonne nuit. [Your name is Rosetta. My name is Rosetta. You have found a job. I have found a job. You have found a friend. I have found a friend. You have a normal life. I have a normal life. You won't fall in a rut. I won't fall in a rut. Good night. Good night.]

The day following her secular prayer, however, Rosetta is fired again and relegated to the situation she found herself in the opening scene.

Rosetta, as Luc Dardenne observes himself in his cinematic journal *Au dos de nos images* (*On the Other Side of Our Images*, 2005), "is in a state of war."²⁶ Other than the trailer park, landmarks in Rosetta's life are the second hand store to which she sells the clothing she and her mother mend, the social security office that turns her down, the waffle stand where she aspires to work, and the apartment of Riquet, who works at this stand until Rosetta betrays him in order to get his job. By having Rosetta revisit these

²⁶ Luc Dardenne, *Au dos de nos images (1991—2005), suivi de Le Fils et L'Enfant par Jean-Pierre et Luc Dardenne* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2005), p. 66.

places over and again, in sequences that are very similar in terms of framing and editing, the Dardennes familiarize the viewer with Rosetta's habitat and her habits, including the place she hides her boots: off the highway, down the shoulder, into the forest, in a concrete drain pipe, behind a stone. Upon having exchanged her shoes for her boots and put the stone back in its place, Rosetta, carrying a plastic bag, and with the camera on her heels, zigzags her way through the woods and climbs under a fence in order to arrive at the *Grand Canyon*, the trailer park.

Like most of the Dardennes' films, *Rosetta* is a moral drama that tests the "humanity" of its protagonist. How far is Rosetta able to go, physically and morally, in the pursuit of her dream? Her action radius is limited. Rosetta is confined in her immediate social milieu, an entrapment that prevents her from moving on in her life, including from moving away. Because where would she go, without much of an educational background and with her mother to look after? From the State she does not have to expect much. The state is only present in its absence, with the exception of the police intervention in the opening scene. As a young person she lacks job protection, the reason why twice in the film she can be fired for no good reason. And when she applies for unemployment benefits, she is turned down because the period she has worked for is "not long enough."

And yet the film refrains from letting Rosetta's decisions and actions be fully explained by her precarious and solitary position, thus leaving space for a minimum of agency on her part. This becomes most clear in the scene in which Rosetta, after a long

moment of inner struggle, decides to pull Riquet out of the water, whereas it would have perhaps been more advantageous to her to have let him drown.

This spark of humanity, however, does not lead Rosetta's character to demonstrate, in the words of Thorn Andersen, "the possibility of human agency in a time when we have lost faith in that possibility."²⁷ Andersen makes this claim in relation to the Dardennes' *Le Silence de Lorna/Lorna's Silence* (2008). Lorna, Andersen argues, is different from the wandering protagonists we find in Italian neorealism. "Her perceptions lead immediately to actions," he writes, "there is no dissociation between them. Against the tide of neorealism, the Dardennes continue to insist that action is character."²⁸ True, Lorna, like Rosetta, and in fact like all of the Dardennes' protagonists, are always moving. They are always acting, and in that respect they are not wanderers. However, if perceptions immediately lead to actions, which means that perceptions cannot be distinguished from the actions they trigger, then what is the role of agency, conceived of here as the locus of indeterminacy connecting actions to perceptions? If Rosetta is acting, it is because she is acted upon. She is acted upon by a society that chases, confines, excludes, exploits and dehumanizes her. Most of the time she is acting out of instinct rather than agency, instinct or drive being the near elimination of the gap between perception and action. Her interactions with her direct environment resemble the way that soldiers act in hostile territory. The forest she cuts through and where she fishes, not for fun but for food, is a wilderness within civilization. It is a space that, though strictly speaking still part of

²⁷ Thorn Andersen, "Against the Grain: Adding a Touch of Noir, the Dardenne Brothers Rethink Neorealism in *Lorna's Silence*," *Film Society of Lincoln Center* (2009), <http://www.filmlinc.com/fcm/ja09/lorna.htm> (accessed April 16, 2010).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

society, has been forgotten by the people or institutions, whether private or public, to which it legally belongs, which allows this space to be appropriated, and to a certain degree made productive, by people who themselves have been forgotten. So if Rosetta does not wander, the reason is not that she is less desperate than her neorealist predecessors. The reason is that she simply does not have the time and cannot afford to waste time.

In order to understand Rosetta's relation to time and the temporal structure of her subjectivity, it is productive to compare her to Bruno, the protagonist of the Dardennes' *L'Enfant/The Child* (2005), both a modern *Pickpocket* (Bresson, 1959) and *Accattone* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1961). Bruno, who is slightly older than Rosetta, is the leader of a small "gang" of petty-thieves. Assuring himself that he will always "find money," he is only interested in the current rate at which "things" are going, from a stolen camera to a child, his own child. Bruno lives strictly in the present moment, which makes him seem somewhat psychotic. Rosetta, in contrast, refuses a reality that forces her to strictly live in the present. She struggles to survive, but she also has her pride and persistence, her humanity. Whereas Bruno has sort of accepted his marginal life and simply lives from day to day until the moment reality decides otherwise, Rosetta wants a normal life, starting with a job. Unlike Bruno, she is obsessed with her future, with making a quantum leap into normalcy, a desire for which she is willing to totally sacrifice the present. This is why she turns down the option to apply for welfare or rejects Riquet's offer to aid him in swindling his boss by making extra waffles to sell at the stand. Rosetta wants "un vrai travail," "a real job." She refuses to dehumanize herself in the face of a dehumanizing

society. It is the reason she throws out the salmon her mother has been given for free: “On n’est pas des mendiants” (“We’re not beggars”). Rosetta prefers to catch her own fish, with her homemade fishing gear. And this is why she tears out the plants her mother has planted in front of their trailer. Rosetta refuses the idea of having a trailer as her home: “Pourquoi tu plantes tous ces trucs? On va pas quand-même rester ici hein?” (“Why are you planting all these? We are not staying here anyway”).

What is this normal life that Rosetta is so obsessed by? Before addressing *Rosetta’s* approach to these questions, let’s first define the concept of “a life,” with an emphasis on the indefinite article. In placing this emphasis I am invoking Gilles Deleuze’s 1995 essay “Immanence: A Life.” Halfway through that essay, Deleuze gives an example of “a life,” taken from a passage in Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5). In that passage a man who is held in contempt by everyone is found dying, and “suddenly” bystanders try to save him, meeting every of his last signs of life with “love.” This love withers, however, the moment the man is regaining strength and returns to life. According to Deleuze it is precisely at the infinitely small juncture between these two stages that “a life” becomes visible, as in a flash. Deleuze writes:

Between his life and his death there is a moment that is only that of a life playing with death. The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens, a “Homo tantum” with whom everyone empathizes and who attains a sort of beatitude.²⁹

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), p. 28.

A “Homo tantum,” a mere human being. Up until this example Deleuze, in an act of performative tautology, circles around the nonconceptual affective concept of “a life,” equaling it to the “immanence of immanence,” “A LIFE,” and—with a reference to Spinoza’s *Ethics*—“complete bliss.” However, in the text’s transition to the above example of a life, something happens. Suddenly “a life” becomes “a human life,” a seemingly humanist addition that takes place almost imperceptibly.³⁰ Here one could argue that when talking about a concept that poses itself at the limit of discourse, that in fact poses itself *as* this limit, a minimum of humanism cannot be avoided. Only a being that is in discourse can be confronted, and thereby, affected by this limit. Such a being is usually referred to as “human,” even though also non-human animals can be in discourse. As the Dickens example demonstrates, for Deleuze, to encounter a life is to be overcome by “bliss,” by a love that is lost the moment one is touched by it and that, perhaps, may also be referred to as “humanity.” According to this reasoning “a life” is indeed always already equal to “a human life.” Even when “a life” is encountered in living beings that are considered “non-human,” partly “non-human” or “super-human” (plants, animals, angels, gods, cyborgs), the concept itself remains imbued with humanity, making “human” the silent point of reference for “a life.”

Yet “a life,” for the concept to make any sense, is more than something that only shows itself in the split second that it threatens to, perhaps, give way to its inconceivable opposite. It is also the movement that this singularity is involved in. In other words, I am

³⁰ In his *Ethics* Spinoza defines bliss or beatitude as that what accompanies intuitive knowledge, or the so-called third kind of knowledge. This kind of knowledge is the “infinite intellectual love with which God loves himself.” (Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. G.H.R. Parkinson [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], p. 310 [part V, Prop. 36].)

conceiving of “a life” as an entity or body that is living rather than non-living, and simultaneously the totality of passions and actions experienced and performed by that body. How does a life become recognizable, to itself and to others? It only does so insofar as it is a *normal* life. A life only becomes visible and utterable insofar as it is integrated in a web of discursive, normalizing structures that attach it to a certain socially recognizable set of subject positions, as well as to a trajectory, “from cradle to grave,” associated with that subject position.

I partly base this line of argument on the essay “Bodies and Power Revisited” (1990), in which Judith Butler defends Foucault against the allegation of not having sufficiently theorized resistance. Butler outlines how Foucault, in “The Subject and Power” (1982) and in the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (1984), develops a dialectical understanding of subjectivity, according to which the subject is both the product of power as well as a form of resistance against the ways power attaches the subject to its own identity. Butler observes in this understanding of the subject an “implicit theorization of passion,” passion being the attachment with which the subject relates to itself through mediating social norms. Yet Butler also recognizes a tendency in Foucault’s thinking to conceive of passion as a persistence in being that seeks to detach itself from the norms that limit its movements. It is an idea, Butler argues, that shows affinity with Freud’s idea of the drive or with Spinoza’s notion of *conatus*. In an attempt to combine these two lines of thought at work in Foucault, Butler writes:

Perhaps we can speculate that the moment of resistance, of opposition, emerges precisely when we find ourselves attached to our constraint, and so constrained in

our very attachment. To the extent that we question the promise of those norms that constrain our recognizability, we open the way for attachment itself to live in some less constrained way. But for attachment to live in a less constrained way is for it to risk unrecognizability, and the various punishments that await those who do not conform to the social order.³¹

To detach oneself from social norms, and thereby to detach oneself from oneself, is to risk oneself, to risk one's life. To do so is dangerous, but it is also potentially transformative. I fully agree with this reading of Foucault, but it should also be noted that this idea of resistance-as-detachment presupposes a type of society that closely monitors its members. In "The Subject and Power" Foucault argues that the modern Western state is able to do so because it has integrated a form of power that originated in Christian institutions. This "pastoral power," Foucault explains, is salvation-oriented, oblativ (as opposed to sovereign), individualizing, coextensive and continuous with life, as well as linked to a production of truth of the individual itself. Even though since the eighteenth century this power's ecclesiastical institutionalization has lost its vitality, its principle has become widespread. This has led the modern state to become "a very sophisticated structure in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns."³²

Yet what happens at the margins of the State, where the salvaging structures are less powerful or absent altogether? What happens to those who remain to at least some

³¹ Judith Butler, "Bodies and Power Revisited," in Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges eds., *Feminism and the Final Foucault* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), pp. 183-194, p. 192.

³² Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-26, p. 214.

extent unintegrated and whose individuality in that respect remains formless and precarious? What does resistance look like when one does not have access to a “normal life” through which can attach oneself to oneself in the first place? It is exactly this dilemma that *Rosetta* expresses.

Rosetta is all resistance, but rather than being an attempt to detach herself from a norm, her struggle for recognition is driven by precisely her attachment to the idea of a normal, working class life. Rosetta wants to escape the moral and social vacuum she is stuck in. All she wants is to be considered a subject. As Lauren Berlant argues, what matters most for Rosetta is the *feeling* of normativity, of being confirmed in her existence by reality. Berlant writes: “The ongoing prospect of low-waged and uninteresting labor is for Rosetta nearly utopian, and it makes possible imagining living the *proper* life that capitalism offers as a route to the *good* life.”³³ Time and again, however, Rosetta is thwarted in her feeling of belonging, for the reason that her life is not needed by a society in crisis. Her character represents a new postindustrial, precarious underclass that is hard to represent, politically and aesthetically. It is a class beyond class consisting of people who, for a multiplicity of reasons, scrape by working shitty jobs, or find themselves excluded from the work process altogether, and who are cast away by this process as superfluous because unexploitable. Rosetta is highly aware of this position of excess that her social background and a society with few unskilled labor opportunities forces upon her, and it is this less-than-human non-subjectivity that she resists, with all her life force.

³³ Lauren Berlant, “Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in *La Promesse* and *Rosetta*,” *Public Culture* 19:2 (2007), pp. 273-301, p. 275.

This struggle for humanity, Rosetta's small war, the film does not merely tell, it also makes it felt. It does so by staying literally close to its protagonist, mimetically rendering Rosetta's movements, and revealing the corporeality of her struggle, her sweat, her breath, her pain. Characteristic of the film's "sensuous realism,"³⁴ as Joseph Mai characterizes the Dardennes' style, are the rapid movements of the handheld camera, the extreme close-ups, the direct sound, the fast-paced editing, and the abrupt beginnings and endings of many shots and sequences. Like almost all of the Dardennes' films, *Rosetta* was shot with a lightweight 16mm handheld camera (the Arriflex 16SR3), allowing its camera operator (Benoît Dervaux) to follow Dequenne at a very close range.³⁵ Often Rosetta's body, and especially her back or the back of her head, almost fills the entire frame. Many instances, when Rosetta suddenly turns and the camera lacks time to adjust, shots are bouncy and out of focus.³⁶ And most sequences lack an establishing shot,

³⁴ Joseph Mai, *Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), p. 53.

³⁵ Dervaux states the following about his shooting of *Rosetta*: "We shot in Super 16 with an Arriflex, a camera weighing less than others (well, with all its accessories it was still 17 kilos!, yet at waist level, it still is smaller and more manageable than lots of others." ("Benoît Dervaux, cadreur," *Génie culturel*, <http://genieculturel.siep.be/metiers/metiers/metiers-techniques-et-de-l-ombre-2/interviews/105/> [accessed February 8, 2013]). About the filming of *L'Enfant*, which was made on a budget of 3 million US dollars, Jean-Pierre Dardenne says in an interview: "We shoot in Super 16 millimeter, which lowers the cost of filming. It's cheaper than 35mm, and we can film for longer. We'd rather shoot for longer on Super 16 than for less time on 35mm. Also the gear is more flexible and lighter. We prefer to work as light as possible. There's no machinery." Cited in Margaret Pomeranz, "Interview: The Dardenne Brothers' *Child*," in Cardullo ed., *Committed Cinema*, pp. 171-5, p. 174.

³⁶ Luc Dardenne writes about his and his brother's camera use: "Les mouvements du corps de Benoît Dervaux (le cadreur) portant la caméra sont plus subtils, plus vifs, plus sentis et plus complexes que n'importe quel mouvement réalisé à l'aide d'une machinerie. Son buste, son bassin, ses jambes, ses pieds sont ceux d'un danseur. Avec Amaury Duquenne (son assistant) qui l'accompagne et le soutient dans ses mouvements, ils forment un seul corps-caméra." (*Au dos de nos images*, 175)

thereby giving predominance to Rosetta's presence before revealing where she is and what she is doing.

Following Rosetta closely, the film always leaves the viewer trailing one step behind. As Mai argues: "Sensuous realism demands a good amount of effort on the part of viewers. Objects and bodies become more important but less coded, and we tend to look at them as we do to real objects and bodies, as shapes, textures, weights, smells, and relations we investigate."³⁷ Mai situates the notion of sensuous realism in opposition to theories of realism that ground themselves in cinema's photographic nature. The Dardennes' "play of proximity and distance," he argues, "redefines cinematic realism, bringing the emphasis away from media specificity and toward the relation between viewer and film."³⁸ Rosetta's uneven, jolting quest certainly is affective. As I will argue later in this chapter, the film's poignancy is the result of the dialectic between Rosetta's self-perpetuating flight forward and the Dardennes' "caméra coup de poing" ("punch camera"), as Rancière describes the film's rendering of Rosetta's struggle.³⁹ Through this dialectic the film transfers to the viewer its own obsession with Rosetta, its obstinate desire to get close to what moves her and to see her "humanity."

³⁷ Mai, *Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne*, 57.

³⁸ Ibid., 61. Mai invokes here the notion of "haptic visuality," a term coined by Laura Marks as "the way vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one's eyes." Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. xi. Marks's writing on cinematic touch is part of a larger tendency in cinema studies to redeem the concept of mimesis from essentialist understandings of cinema's relation to reality, and to redefine it in terms of the image's potential to arouse an affect in the viewer. Apart from Mark's work, other examples include Linda Williams's writings on pornography ("Frenzy of the Visible," 1999), Vivian Sobshack's *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004), and Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body* (1993), to whose argument on Bresson I will return.

³⁹ Rancière, "Le Bruit du peuple," 110.

First though I will turn to *L'humanité*. Like *Rosetta*, Dumont's film is obsessed with the question of what constitutes the human. And like *Rosetta*, *Pharaon* is obsessed with an idea of normalcy, of "une vie normale." However, the ways that both films examine these concepts are very different. Whereas the Dardennes follow *Rosetta* on her heels, Dumont's "entomologist camera" (Rancière) keeps much more distance from its characters. As Luc Dardenne states: "[W]e don't film bodies the same way and Dumont shows more sky than we do."⁴⁰

Normal, All Too Normal: *L'humanité*

L'humanité, which Dumont insists on spelling with a lowercase "h,"⁴¹ opens with a static, extremely long shot of a slightly sloping landscape that leaves a little more than the lower half of the widescreen frame green and the rest of the frame blue and white, with the exception of four trees in the top left corner. Earth and sky. Before we spot the human figure on the horizon, slowly making his way across the image, his or her head bent forward, in a hurry it seems, we hear a sound close-up of heavy breathing. After this figure has left the frame, the breathing continues for a few more seconds, upon which the film cuts to a medium long shot of the man we have just seen and heard. His face tormented, he climbs across a barbed-wired fence and continues his way through a

⁴⁰ Cited in Joan Dupont, "Two Belgian Brothers' Working-Class Heroes," in Cardullo ed., *Committed Cinema*, pp. 85-8, p. 87. In *Au dos de nos images*, Luc Dardenne writes: "Pourquoi ne nous éloignons-nous pas des corps? Pourquoi ne les voyons-nous pas dans un paysage? Pourquoi ces corps solitaires, déracinés, nerveux, ne pouvant habiter un paysage, ne pouvant exister dans un plan large, un plan de terre et de ciel, de nature?" (p. 138)

⁴¹ François Gorin, "Une journée au Nord," *Télérama*, http://www.brunodumont.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=12:a-propos-de-lhumanit%C3%A9&Itemid=53&lang=fr (accessed April 10, 2011).

freshly plowed field. Brown and grey, mud and sky, colors that are matched by his outfit. The man, his breathing still in our ears, now walks away from us, upon which the film cuts to a close-up of his feet, plowing their way through the mud, followed by a close-up of the upper part of his body, of his sloping shoulders, his washed-out jacket and his empty gaze. The man falls forward into the mud, where he, his cheek on the earth, keeps lying as if dead for more than half a minute, after which the breathing resumes.⁴²

This man is Pharaon De Winter (Emmanuel Schotté), a police lieutenant in the small community of Bailleul, Dumont's hometown, about thirty kilometers northeast of Lille. *L'humanité* paints a naturalist portrait of this community and its environment. The films' many long takes of static or slowly moving, deep-focus, CinemaScope shots—which were made with a 35mm Moviecam compact camera—present a disaffected outlook on bodies and their social and natural milieu. It is the part of the world that Emile Zola's *Germinal* (1885) is set in, and it not unlike Zola's clinical gaze that Dumont's film dissects this part of the world. *L'humanité* is an unmistakable product of the French North, of its landscape and vegetation, of its skies and diffuse light, of its architecture and social infrastructure, and of the physiognomy of its inhabitants. At the same time, the images are highly modeled and abstract. In reality this town of about 18,000 people is certainly not as emptied out as in Dumont's film (or as in his earlier *La Vie de Jésus/The*

⁴² In the film's screenplay, the opening sequence reads as follows: "Il marchait dans le Pas de Calais. La terre n'était pas sourde. Lui respirait à peine et son corps s'humidifiait. A plus de vingt mètres au-dessus de son crâne, bien haut, une alouette à tue-tête son air béni. De la pâture, il franchit une clôture barbelée et gagna des labours. Là, une terre grasse et nue le retint. Son ralentissement—des mottes de limon emportées—l'inquiéta. Il frémissait." (Bruno Dumont, *L'Humanité—écrit pour un scénario*, http://www.brunodumont.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=20:sc%C3%A9narios&Itemid=54&lang=en [accessed April 10, 2011].)

Life of Jesus [1997]). François Gorin describes the town as “a small, pleasantly commercial village, reconstructed after World War I, where the red of the bricks fights the gray of the dust and the sky. The alimentation and textile industries have declined, and many people go work in Lille.”⁴³ In Dumont’s rendering of Bailleul, however, these socioeconomic characteristics have been marginalized. Instead the film turns the town into a laboratory setting for its more universal, abstract investigation of the title concept, of the question, “what makes the human ‘human’?”

This investigation coincides with Pharaon’s investigation of the murder. With Pharaon still stretched out in the mud, we hear a signaling sound emitted by a parked car in the distance. The next shot shows Pharaon sitting in this car. He answers the intercom: “J’arrive” (“I’ll be right there”). First, however, he turns on the cassette player, his dirt covered finger resting motionless on the play-button. For more than a minute Pharaon—his head tilted backward, his gaze blank—listens to the harpsichord piece by the French composer Panrace Royer that also accompanies the closing titles.⁴⁴ This shot is followed by a long point-of-view shot of the plow that must have cleaved the earth that a few minutes ago still supported Pharaon’s head, and that we almost feel on our own fingers. Pharaon already knows what he is about to confront. He turns off the music and starts the car. Cut to a close-up of the genitals of a murdered girl, in a composition citing Marcel

⁴³ François Gorin, “Une journée au Nord.”

⁴⁴ This composition is: “Le Vertigo: rondeau,” which is part of Royer’s 1746 *Première livre de pièces pour clavecin*.

Duchamp's installation *Etant donnés* (1946—1966).⁴⁵ The corpse is yellow-grey from the cold and its state of decay. Up and down its leg climbs an ant.

The double quest *L'humanité* structures itself on proceeds by a continuous juxtaposition of extremes. Horror versus art, earth versus heaven, nature versus culture, flesh versus spirit, bestial versus human. Through these binary oppositions, the film raises the question of whether these extremes really exclude each other. In itself this question seems banal, but what makes *L'humanité* so compelling is its slightly absurdist and sometimes downright unsettling portrayal of its protagonists. Like *Rosetta*, *L'humanité* depicts its protagonists as being determined by forces operating at the border of the “human” and the “non-human.” They locate this border at very different places. In *Rosetta*, the protagonist's non-sexualized appearance (to which I will return), and more in general her inability to do anything that in her own self-image is not directly geared toward survival, constitutes a crucial part of her “animality,” the extent to which her character is depicted as being driven by mere instinct. In *L'humanité*, in contrast, the human lack manifests itself in sexual excess.

In many respects Pharaon has the normal life that Rosetta is so obsessed with. He has a job, a house, and a few friends. In his free time Pharaon takes care of the flowers in his allotment, travels to the coast with his neighbor Domino (Sévérine Caneele) and her partner Joseph (Philippe Tullier), or goes for a bike ride. Back from cycling he eats an apple or helps his mother peeling potatoes. In short, Pharaon is leading the life of a very normal northern French man. However, Pharaon appears as all but normal. Take his

⁴⁵ The full title of Duchamp's installation is: *Etant donnés: 1er la chute d'eau/2ème le gaz d'éclairage*.

eating of the apple. Even before Pharaon almost chokes in the fruit and we see and hear him gagging above the sink, this activity already appears as slightly perverse. This is so not only because of the deliberation with which Pharaon puts his teeth in the apple, but also because of the film's emphasis on this activity, as if mimicking Pharaon's deliberation. Like in other scenes, this emphasis is for an important part the result of sound close-ups, which make us hear things that, however normal, we are not used to hearing, and that we perhaps rather not hear at all, like the spit in Pharaon's mouth.

Apart from *L'humanité's* caricatural, by moments perverted rendering of Pharaon's normalcy, the other part of the reason that Pharaon appears as abnormal is the film's depiction of his sexuality. At first, Pharaon's desire seems straightforward: he is attracted to Domino. However, as the film unfolds Pharaon's sexuality becomes more and more complex. Seated in his car, he rests his gaze on his chief's crotch. During a factory strike, he decisively pushes back Domino, who is among the protestors. And during a work visit to the psychiatric clinic, Pharaon all of a sudden embraces a male nurse. Even more puzzling is Pharaon's behavior in the police office, where he caresses and kisses a French-Algerian arrestee, an act he later repeats toward Joseph, who turns out to be the murderer.

What unites these acts? Some of them clearly contain an overtly homoerotic charge. Others present Pharaon as acting out of pity or the need of affection. The moment he pushes away Domino he is just "doing his job," as he himself explains. What is certain is that part of the pleasure Pharaon is deriving from these actions is the fact that he commits them while on duty, which gives these actions an inappropriate or even abusive

side. It is equally certain that Pharaon, like Rosetta, is obsessed with an idea of normalcy, which in his case represents a heteronormative family life. However, unlike Rosetta, whose actions are oriented toward her goal of finding a job, Pharaon's relation to his object of obsession remains ambiguous. He is leading a double life. As a law enforcer he is driven toward behavior transgressing the sexual norms he is haunted by. In his private life, however, he is less forward. His monotonous voice and his incapability to respond spontaneously to his environment reveal him to be emotionally blocked and perhaps even autistic. Partly this emotional blockage is explained by the fact that he has recently lost his fiancé and child, a traumatic event that *L'humanité* only refers to in an offhand way, as if doubling Pharaon's own repression. Combined with his sexual transgressions during work-time, his dominant mother, and the film's overall emphasis on the normative, oppressive power structures that are often associated with small communities, this prehistory suggests a rather straightforward psychological profile. Pharaon is a sexually and emotionally traumatized middle-aged man who, while at work and while actively contributing to the smooth-functioning of the social order, experiences the freedom to act out the fantasies that his community's narrow-minded and surveilling gaze forces him to repress. In other words, in many respects Pharaon is a very normal man with very normal desires, perversions, and frustrations. This is the case not only in spite of his slow appearance, but also, and more surprisingly, in spite of his overtly transgressive behavior, especially toward the two arrestees. Even though from a strictly legal perspective, and probably also in the eyes of many viewers, his kissing of the Arab man and Joseph qualify as sexual harassment, what is actually most transgressive about these scenes is the

normalcy the film gives to these interactions. The arrestees are not surprised at all by Pharaon's advances. This is especially true in the case of Joseph, not only because his reaction is at odds with his earlier ridiculing of Pharaon, but also because it duplicates the earlier, very similar response of the Arab man. This repetition really affirms the normalcy of Pharaon's transgressive behavior.

This simultaneous normalization of the perverse and perversion of the normal is the strategy of *L'humanité*'s investigation of "humanity." The film locates this notion at the intersection of three domains: the socioeconomic, the biological-physiological, and the moral-religious. In the film's own unraveling of the forces that drive its characters, these last two domains outweigh the first. In this respect, *L'humanité* somewhat deviates from Dumont's first feature, *La Vie de Jésus*, which is also set in Bailleul and which places much more emphasis on the socioeconomic motivations of its protagonists. The world of *L'humanité*, in contrast, is governed by primary, natural forces, whether immanent or transcendent. The film explicitly marginalizes history. It does so especially through the way it deals with the working class identities of its protagonists. For example, when confronted with the looming relocation of the food-processing factory Domino works, she and her co-workers go on strike, an attempt at collective resistance that falls through almost right away. As Domino explains herself, she and her colleagues are "pas très courageux" ("not very courageous"), a statement that functions as a commentary on the waning influence of local labor movements and class cohesion in general.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The other instances of class confrontation in *L'humanité* are the two scenes in which the film places its protagonists in an explicitly "bourgeois" situation (eating dinner in a nice restaurant and participating in a guided tour in the fortifications of Boulogne-sur-Mer). Both these situations end

While mapping Bailleul's social structure (the police office, the psychiatric clinic, the farms) and its direct surroundings (Lille, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Paris, London), the film's double quest also universalizes the town. This universalization of the particular is best illustrated through the scene in which the viewer witnesses Pharaon watching news images of some armed struggle. His television on mute, Pharaon is humming along with a preprogrammed tune on his electronic piano, as if he is aspiring to redeem what he is forcing his eyes to see. Pharaon is suffering. Present yet muted, the TV-images simultaneously speak and do not speak. They speak to the extent that they, much like the film's other markers of historical reality, add some *couleur locale* to the narrative. They do not speak in the sense that they leave ambiguous the exact part of the world they were shot. The images are indices of universal violence and not of particular acts of violence. They present themselves as *any* representation of interhuman conflict⁴⁷ and in doing so contribute to the film's overall portrayal of a mute human nature. Pharaon embodies this naturalization of the historical. His blank gaze registers the muteness of things, a sight that leaves him speechless. Most of the time this speechlessness takes the form of silence, with one exception. While running through the field, right after he has visited the improvised memorial for the murdered girl, Pharaon utters a scream, in a shot citing Edvard Munch's painting. His run is interrupted by a fence. Caged by his simultaneous sensitivity and inexpressivity, he utters a second scream, which is smothered by the

with Joseph getting into an argument with others who clearly feel more in their element in such settings.

⁴⁷ The same holds true for the street fight Pharaon witnesses during his visit to London, a fight that is muted by the train station's large windows

bypassing Eurostar, a furious monster cutting through the grayish northern landscape, connecting Paris to London.

The Acting/Acted Body

Pharaon's gaze is the driving force of *L'humanité*, much like Rosetta's obstinacy, her refusal to accept the life she is cast in as *her* life, constitutes the driving force of the Dardennes' film. Both films do not only show these forces, they also make them felt. How? How do both films *work*, that is to say produce an affect in the viewer? What makes the Dardennes' realism sensuous, a term that also applies to *L'humanité*?

To begin with the Dardennes, from *La Promesse/The Promise* (1996) onward the brothers have produced all of their films through their own production company, Les Films du Fleuve, which they established in Liège in 1994. (The documentary films that the brothers made before they turned to fiction they produced through their other production company, *Dérives*.) The Dardennes' desire to remain as financially and artistically independent as possible manifests itself in many other aspects of their practice. They almost always film in Seraing. They work with small crews. And they give themselves ample time to prepare and shoot their films. As Luc Dardenne writes, he and his brother try to "shoot each scene in multiple image sequences even if some of those contain moments without interest."⁴⁸ They generally work with a lightweight handheld camera. The exceptions are their two latest films to date, *Le Silence de Lorna* and *Le Gamin au vélo/The Kid with the Bike* (2011), which they shot on 35mm. Except for this

⁴⁸ Dardenne, *Au dos de nos images*, 173.

last film, the Dardennes shot all of their films during the winter months, because the diffused northern European winter light “makes the colors come out.”⁴⁹ Finally, many of the actors they work with have little to no screen-acting experience.

This last aspect deserves closer attention. In almost all of the Dardennes’ films the cast consists of a combination of actors with little to no acting experience and professional actors, many of whom they have worked with several times. In this context it is remarkable that all of the actors they have cast more than once are male. Olivier Gourmet appears in five of their films, most memorably so as Olivier in *Le Fils/The Son* (2002). (In *Rosetta* he acts the trailer park janitor). Jérémie Renier has leading roles in *La Promesse* (at the age of fourteen), *L’Enfant*, *Le Silence de Lorna* and *Le Gamin au vélo*. And Fabrizio Rongione appears in *Rosetta*, *L’Enfant*, and *Le Silence de Lorna*. The Dardennes’ female protagonists, on the other hand, including Dequenne, Déborah François (Sonia in *L’Enfant*), and Arta Dobroschi (Lorna), all had little to no screen acting experience at the times they were cast. The exception is Cécile de France who plays Samantha in *Le Gamin au vélo* and who is the most famous actor the Dardennes have worked with to date.

The Dardennes spend a lot of time casting and training their actors. Jean-Pierre Dardenne states about the casting process for the role of Sonia: “We were looking for someone who was the most flexible, who in a way was like clay, who we could work

⁴⁹ Luc Dardenne cited in Karin Badt, “The Dardenne Brothers at Cannes: ‘We Want to Make it Live’,” *Film-Criticism* 30.1 (Fall 2005): 70.

with.”⁵⁰ This statement evokes Bresson’s theory of the “model.” Like Bresson, the Dardennes think of their actors as raw material for artistic creation. Yet unlike Bresson, who rarely re-cast his actors and who strictly worked with non-professionals, the Dardennes are much more interested in establishing a personal relationship with their actors. And whereas Bresson, as he writes in his *Notes sur le cinématographe* (1975), thought of his models as thoughtless automatons, as “all face,” as “two mobile eyes in a mobile head, the latter itself on a mobile body,” the Dardennes are clearly also very concerned with bringing out the real *humanity* of their actors.⁵¹

How does this dialectic between the “real” acting body and the fictional acted body play out in *Rosetta*? The Dardennes ultimately selected Dequenne out of an initial group of two thousand girls with an age between fifteen and seventeen who had responded to an announcement that was aired on and distributed in the Walloon radio and press. From this group the Dardennes invited three hundred girls for a screen test. Something that was very important to the brothers was the accent of their potential Rosettas, which was why they did not cast in France or in Flanders. Rosetta, Luc Dardenne explains, “had to speak French without a Parisian accent, given the fact that in the script—and even more in the script than in the film—there are ‘*belgicisms*.’ We also looked for a way of speaking, for [a girl] which had the same accent as we, as we do not really speak like you [the *Cahiers du cinéma* interviewers].”⁵²

⁵⁰ Robert Sklar, “The Terrible Lightness of Social Marginality: An Interview with Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne.” *Cineaste* 31.2 (2006): 19-21, p. 20.

⁵¹ Robert Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 37, 39.

⁵² Bernard Benoliel and Serge Toubiana, “‘Il faut être dans le cul des choses’: entretien avec Luc et Jean-Pierre Dardenne,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 539 (1999): 47-53, p. 49.

Dequenne having been selected, she still had to be transformed into Rosetta, because in real life Dequenne looked like, as Luc Dardenne states, a “*medinette*” (a young and naive city-girl). The Dardennes asked her to dye her hair and to let her plucked eyebrows grow back, and during a period of two months the brothers practiced gestures and actions with her, including the fishing, the waffle making and the fighting. Other things Dequenne had to “unlearn,” such as dancing, because Rosetta does not know how to dance.⁵³ During the shooting the Dardennes continued to work their actress. The film was shot in late fall, early winter, but Rosetta only wears a summer jacket and a skirt. So if Rosetta’s cheeks are rosy and her fingers numb, and if she is shivering after having been thrown into a stream, it is because Dequenne, who was not wearing any make-up, was really cold. Similarly, many scenes that reveal the fatigue actions such as dragging her drunk mother up the stairs or carrying a heavy gas canister cause to Rosetta owe their poignancy to the real fatigue these actions caused to Dequenne. As Luc Dardenne states about the shooting of the final scene: “[W]e did maybe ten takes and chose the last one, because the more the actress did it, the more tired she got. And the moment when she falls is the moment where we improvised in the frame.”⁵⁴

In some respects *Rosetta* is thus the product of the real “exploitation” of Dequenne’s physique. Yet in other, perhaps more common respects, the film explicitly

⁵³ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁴ In Bert Cardullo, “The Cinema of Resistance: An Interview with Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne (June 2009),” in Cardullo ed., *Committed Cinema*, pp. 188-204, p. 190. Illustrative is also Jean-Pierre Dardenne’s commentary about the filming of the scene for *L’Enfant* in which Steve almost drowns: “It was a feat for [Jérémie Segard] because the water was cold. It wasn’t a studio shot. And after 200 years of steel-making there, the water is disgusting. They both [Segard and Jérémie Renier, who plays Bruno] had to go to hospital with poisoning. Nothing serious, but they swallowed some water.” (Pomeranz, “Interview,” 172.)

refrains from exploiting its actress. At no point does it eroticize Dequenne (as is arguably the case in many of the subsequent films she acted in), and by extension Rosetta. The reason I call this refrain explicit is because Rosetta is frequently seen in positions and situations that in slightly different depictions of them would have obtained an erotic charge. An example is the scene in which Rosetta is struggling and rolling over the grass with Riquet, the camera revealing her from the waist down, showing her underwear and her stockings. The film's rendering of Dequenne's body corresponds to Rosetta's disinterest in sexual or romantic interactions, a disinterest that for some part may be understood as a form of resistance toward her mother who only thinks of "drinking and fucking," as Rosetta reproaches her. More generally, Rosetta's sexual lack and the film's non-eroticization of Dequenne's/Rosetta's physique results from the survival mode that Rosetta clings to. "Je peux avoir les bottes?" ("Can I have the boots?"), she asks Riquet only minutes after having showed up at his place for the first time. Riquet is clearly attracted to her, but Rosetta is not there for a date but in order to escape from her mother, who just before almost drowned her.

Rosetta is imprisoned by her apparent lack of emotions. In the entire film she is seen reacting spontaneously only once or twice, most clearly so when during the same scene at Riquet's place his poor gymnastics skills make her smile. But Riquet is moving too fast. Rosetta cannot dance, as she tells him, and when he tries to make her anyway, she is immediately overcome by one of her cramp attacks. The exact cause of these cramps, which also return in other parts of the film, remains unclear. They could be menstruation cramps, in which case they would also indirectly emphasize the fact that the

narrative spans only a couple of days. They could also be psychosomatic stress symptoms. Moreover, the attentive viewer can diagnose a connection between the cramps and Rosetta's intolerance for drafts. The first time the film shows Rosetta contracted with pain, in a scene that takes place in the trailer, she meticulously stuffs a crack between the window and the window frame, while earlier in the film she decisively closes the bus window and blows her nose. It is also certain that the cramps are related to the fact that Rosetta is a girl, as becomes clear from a dialogue between her and her mother, who had similar problems when she was her age.⁵⁵

This last observation is absolutely crucial for our understanding of the film. Even though Dequenne's body is not depicted in an overt sexual fashion, Rosetta is clearly gendered as female. Rosetta is a girl. This fact upon which the film's entire effect depends starkly contrasts with Luc Dardenne's confession that, because of his and his brother's doubt about their ability to depict female characters, "on the set we called Rosetta Rosetto."⁵⁶ But Rosetta needs to be Rosetta, not because of the nature of her struggle itself, but because of the film's depiction of this struggle, of what this struggle is and what it is not, for several reasons. First of all, had Rosetta been a boy, the film's non-sexualization of her and her actress—a non-sexualization that now contributes to the film's depiction of Rosetta's lack of the normalcy she is pursuing—would have probably been much less explicit. Second, it would have been less explicit that Rosetta's struggle is primarily a class struggle, and that it only *also* is a gendered struggle insofar as gender

⁵⁵ Luc Dardenne describes Rosetta's cramps as "birthing pains that deliver no child" (Dardenne, *Au dos de nos images*, 91).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

relations can be understood through class relations. Third, Rosetta's simultaneous resistance toward and protection of her mother is clearly depicted as that of a daughter, because one way in which Rosetta expresses her refusal to inherit her mother's position is by denying the fact that in many respects she *is* like her mother, socially but also physically. "Moi c'est pas toi" ("I'm not you"), Rosetta interrupts her mother when the latter wants to tell her how she used to deal with the cramps. Fourth, the film's depiction of Rosetta's fighting and her carrying of heavy objects (the flour bag, the gas canister) relies heavily on the "ungirlish" nature of these actions, as well as on the fact that her performance of them borders on what her body is physically capable of doing (and of what Dequenne was probably physically capable of doing). Had her character been a boy of the same age her struggle would have seemed much more "normal." Fifth, Rosetta is a girl because she just is. Her gender identity is not an attribute to her subjectivity as it is created by the Dardennes' film, but an integral and inalienable dimension thereof.

In this context it is also important to mention that whereas the film meticulously constructs Rosetta's gender identity, it explicitly passes over her ethnic descent. Rosetta's name allows us to speculate, nevertheless, as to whether her absent father, who is never referred to, is or was part of Wallonia's large Italian immigrant community. (As I discuss in the second chapter, following World War II Belgium started to actively recruit Italian immigrants for its *bataille du charbon*.)

To the extent, however, that the film makes us believe in Rosetta's existence, to that extent it also misses her. The camera is always trailing behind her and always arrives one step too late. Often the camera is too close to catch Rosetta's image. This is so in a

literal sense, because frequently Rosetta remains out of focus or slips out of the frame, and in a metaphorical sense, because it is precisely the lack of physical distance between the camera and Rosetta that makes felt our real distance to her. The film never fully grasps what moves her, can never coincide with her struggle for life. This split within *Rosetta*'s engagement with its protagonist is most palpable at those moments whose narrative pertinence remain ambiguous. Other than Rosetta's opening of the bus window, examples are her chugging of a bottle of beer at Riquet's place, or her boiling and eating of an egg right before she tries to gas her mother and herself. These are all seemingly insignificant elements or signs that simultaneously do and do not contribute to the unfolding of the narrative. And even when we are able to integrate such elements into a larger interpretation of Rosetta's subjectivity, they still keep their superfluous, contingent nature. Unlike in classically narrative, "realist" films, in which every sign ultimately appears as motivated or potentially motivated, in this kind of realism, acts that appear as contingent or without immediate narrative meaning and that contribute to the film's overall "documentary feel," keep this contingency and seeming meaninglessness, even after the viewer has been able to establish their narrative pertinence.

This documentary feel is precisely what the Dardennes are after and what they construct very deliberately. Luc Dardenne: "In a documentary, if the person makes an unexpected movement, you try to follow them but you don't always succeed. The person goes in and out of shot. What takes a lot of time in our rehearsals is constructing scenes or shots as if we couldn't manage to be in the right spot with our camera."⁵⁷ The result is

⁵⁷ Pomeranz, "Interview: The Dardenne Brothers' *Child*," 172.

a fictive documentary image. We know that we are not watching actual footage of real historical events, but still The Dardennes' films instill in the viewer a desire for a non-mediated image of the real that surpasses the mere disavowal specific to film viewing as Christian Metz theorized it.⁵⁸ The more the images manage to hide their artificial nature, the stronger this desire becomes. However, this desire for the real, or more exactly for that what a film such as *Rosetta* implicitly posits as real, is not only produced through the mimesis of a non-mediated pro-filmic reality, but also through the interplay of that reality and the film's highly structured narrative. The film's non-documentary documentary images only *work* to the extent that they are integrated in the film's equally contrived narrative logic to corner Rosetta by letting her corner herself.

This is a good point to turn again to *L'humanité*. Like *Rosetta*, Dumont's film is the product of its director's exploitation of its actors and shooting locations. However, in appearance and texture *L'humanité* could hardly be more dissimilar from *Rosetta*. Unlike *Rosetta*'s contrived documentary nature, *L'humanité* has a highly aestheticized, painterly feel. While rooting itself in the "real," the film also exposes itself as "art." It does so most explicitly through its many citations of iconic paintings, including Cézanne's apples and Rembrandt's urinating woman. As Rancière writes, Dumont "affirms to make art and art only." This affirmation, Rancière continues,

⁵⁸ Metz writes in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (trans. Celia Britton et al. [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982], p. 72): "It is understood that the audience is not duped by the diegetic illusion, it 'knows' that the screen presents no more than a fiction. And yet, it is of vital importance for the correct unfolding of the spectacle that this make-believe be scrupulously respected (or else the fiction film is declared 'poorly made'), that everything is set to work to make the deception effective and to give it an air of truth (this is the problem of *verisimilitude*)."

. . . operates in two ways. On the one hand it borrows the classical forms of the citation and the self-demonstration. The corpse of the young girl, turned back in the same pose as the mannequin from [Duchamp's] *Etant donné[s]* . . . seen through the hole in the door of the Museum of Philadelphia, warns us—through its celluloid aspect, the very “made-up” red of its blood and the very pictorial ant—that “this is art.”⁵⁹

On the other hand, Rancière continues, *L'humanité's* aesthetic self-affirmation also operates on the level of its investigation of the notion of humanity, including that investigation's spiritualist side. I will return to this spiritualism. First I continue my exploration of the secular, sensuous aspects of Pharaon's quest. Important here is Dumont's frequent use of the long, static take, whether as part of an extreme long shot that reduces the human figure to an insect in a landscape, or as part of an extreme close-up that cuts bodies and object—or parts thereof—loose from their environments, thus transforming them into their own “screen-scapes.” Other than the shot of the violated girl, examples of such extreme close-ups are the graphic depictions of the flowers in Pharaon's garden, the sweat-stained collar of his chief, his mothers' hands peeling potatoes, or Domino's vagina (in a shot citing Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* [1866]). Much like the film's opening shot, they are shots that explore the limits of signification. As Martine Beugnet argues:

Dumont's filmmaking pushes banality, and the banality of horror to its limits; his camera investigates the concrete surface of things relentlessly, the long take extending the possible meaning of the images well beyond their denotative and connotative functions, to the point of total defamiliarization, where the categories

⁵⁹ Rancière, “Le Bruit du peuple,” 112.

are upturned and the banal turns into the repulsive and the uncanny, and, more rarely, the repulsive into the absorbing and moving.⁶⁰

To this we can add that *L'humanité* does not only push the banality of horror to its limits, but also that of desire, including desire for the abject and the horrific. Many of the film's banalizing shots may be attributed to Pharaon's vision, either because they are point-of-view shots, or because they are impregnated with his alienated perspective on the world and on himself. This alienation primarily manifests itself in the many moments that Pharaon stands, motionless, gazing at things, seemingly without understanding or even registering what his eyes are seeing. Even though it might be true that, as one reviewer remarks, "[t]he reason Pharaon de Winter is a cop is simply that it gives him a license to stare at people and things,"⁶¹ as I argued earlier Pharaon's gaze also has an obsessive or even psychopathic side. As Beugnet observes, "[t]he intense stare of Pharaon . . . betrays his incapacity to distance himself from the world's meaningless, organic obscenity."⁶²

Pharaon does not merely gaze because gazing is a part of his profession. Nor is his gaze explained by the fact that he is the grandson of the famous painter (1849—1924) after which both he and the street he lives in are named. Pharaon cares little about painting. "Il est beau ce bleu" ("The blue is beautiful"), he comments on one of his grandfather's works in the Palais des Beaux Arts de Lille. "Il est unique" ("It is unique"),

⁶⁰ Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 104.

⁶¹ Tony Rayns, "L'humanité," *Sight and Sound* (October 2000), <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/433> (accessed April 9, 2011).

⁶² Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 104.

the curator politely outbids him. No, if Pharaon, like the donkey in Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), gazes at the world, it is because the world gazes at him. The ant, the apple, the sweat, the flowers: to Pharaon's eyes they are what Jacques Lacan calls the "gaze of the real," that what orients one's field of vision but that itself refuses to be grasped by vision, and which stirs the subject in his or her movement. For Lacan, this gaze of the real is synonymous to the concept of "*tuché*," insofar as the latter pertains to vision. *Tuché*—which is usually translated as "luck"—is "the encounter with the real" but also "the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter."⁶³ Semiotically, the gaze or *tuché* is a symbol that appears to escape processes of signification and that in doing so ceases to be a symbol. It is a *monstrum* or index ("There!"), a signifier without a signified that, by presenting itself as a hollow, emptied-out, inassimilable sign, turns its interpretant into an object, into *its* object. The real that the gaze refers to, and that it is "of," is not a real "over there." It is the subject's very inclusion in systems of signification, the fact that he or she—and in fact "it" would be even more accurate here—is marked by the signifier that orients his or her vision, or desire at large.

Pharaon does not understand, as he explicitly states right after the girl's murder, but simultaneously he understands too well. Pharaon is paralyzed by the banality of things, not in a philosophical, existentialist way, but in a very banal way. His mode of behavior is pensive or even slow. He weighs every syllable, and, as we have seen, he

⁶³ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), pp. 53, 55.

gives every small action great deliberation. In part, Pharaon's appearance can be ascribed to the physiognomy, the face, the motor system, the voice, and the manner of speaking of his actor, Emmanuel Schotté. In an interview, Dumont states: "I spent a year finding my Pharaon. I needed someone who was massive and very sensitive at the same time, and with somewhat bulging eyes. Someone older, and also more cultivated, than the guys from *La Vie de Jésus*: someone who expresses kindness and is receptive for all emotions. Someone porous."⁶⁴ Dumont could have added, "someone like the priest in Bresson's *Journal d'un curé de campagne*," because the "Pharaon" he ultimately found bears remarkable similarities to Claude Laydu, the model—to use Bresson's term—who played the *curé d'Ambricourt* (his hair, his sloping shoulders, his eyes). At the time of his casting Schotté was an air force soldier from the Lille area who had never acted before. Similarly, Séverine Caneele, who played Domino, had no acting experience and in real life was a factory worker, like her character.⁶⁵ Dumont's use of his non-professional or inexperienced actors is thus very different from that of the Dardennes. Whereas Dequenne only became Rosetta after having undergone a rigorous metamorphosis, Caneele's and Schotté's appearances in *L'humanité* are much closer to their real life personalities.

This short circuit between the acting and the acted body makes Dumont's practice of selecting and instructing his actors very close to that of Bresson, whose abhorrence of professional actors was famous. Bresson writes to himself in his *Notes sur le*

⁶⁴ In Gorin, "Une journée au Nord."

⁶⁵ After having been awarded the Best Actress award at Cannes, Caneele was quoted saying that she now wanted to take acting lessons. (Guy Austin, "The Amateur Actors of Cannes 1999," *French Cultural Studies* 251 [2004]: 251-63, p. 258.)

cinématographe: “It would not be ridiculous to say to your models: ‘I invent you like you are.’”⁶⁶ In *The Cinematic Body*, Steven Shaviro interprets this Bressonian principle as follows: “Bresson’s models do not act; they are neither themselves nor somebody else. . . . The models *are* exactly as, and only as, they *appear*.”⁶⁷ Such statements also seem to apply to Dumont’s approach. Dumont too expresses his aversion for professional actors: “I immediately see their game, their tics, their falsity, I need unprocessed material [*matière brute*] in order to sculpt my characters.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, Dumont does not let his actors read his screenplay, which suggests that he wants them to at least to some extent perform themselves. Yet much less than is the case with Bresson, whose models mostly appear as emptied-out vessels for an abstract speech that directly flows out of the soul of language, in Dumont’s films the report between brute matter and processed end product is not a one-way street. Before and during the shooting Dumont invests a lot of time in building a personal relationship with his actors. He does so not in order to become their “friends,” but in order to be able to bring out elements of their real-life personalities and, as Dumont admits, steal their emotions:⁶⁹

You cannot make someone cry by saying: ‘Come on, cry.’ If you want that it is powerful, one needs a tension. . . . I am not a torturer, but I am demanding. . . . In order to make an actress cry, I will remind her in her ear of things that she has

⁶⁶ Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe*, 35.

⁶⁷ Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 244.

⁶⁸ In Gorin, “Une journée au Nord.” Dumont deviated from this rule for *Camille Claudel, 1915* (2013), which stars Juliette Binoche.

⁶⁹ Jean Mottet, “Mardi 28 novembre 2006: Bruno Dumont,” in Frédéric Sojcher ed., *La direction d'acteur: carnation, incarnation* (Editions du Rocher, 2008), pp. 171-210, p. 195.

told me. I will try to make her recall personal situations that get [the crying] started. . . . I can only direct actors on the basis of what I know of them.⁷⁰

Moreover, often Dumont deviates from or adapts his scenario in order to negotiate his actors' personalities, including their reservations about the part they are asked to act. For example, the ending of *L'humanité* Dumont quite radically changed after he was confronted with Schotté's uncomfot about acting in a sex scene:

It was foreseen that Pharaon de Winter fucks Domino at the end of the film. When I asked [Schotté], he refused. I could have very well told him: "Listen, *mon petit père*, if this is the case, I take someone else." But I wanted him, and I accepted it. The moment the actor says "no," I revise myself, and from time to time I realize that what I ask is not really justified. It is good to have a reaction from someone that calls into question a scene's principle. Pharaon, Emmanuel Schotté, has given a lot of spirituality to the character, while mine was hypersexual. . . . It is up to me to know what I want or what I don't want. But I rest convinced that I don't know what I want: I want to realize what occurs.⁷¹

Dumont's efforts to negotiate his actors' personalities, limitations and restraints are part of his more general attempt to deal with the contingencies of production conditions at large. Like the Dardennes, Dumont works on modest budgets, and he too embraces the limitations that result from that choice. For example, he cannot always afford the rights for music that he wants to use, and he often does not have the possibility

⁷⁰ In this context it is also worth noting that for the close-ups of Domino's vagina, as well as for the scenes in which Joseph is shown penetrating Domino, Dumont used doubles. (Mottet, "Bruno Dumont," 193-194). Before the shooting of the final scene of *Flandres*, Dumont, in this "stealing" of his actors' real emotions, even went as far as confronting his male lead actor (Samuel Boidin) with his unrequited love for one of the actresses (Adélaïde Leroux), a situation that mirrored the relation between their characters. See *L'Homme des Flandres* (d. Sébastien Ors, 2006).

⁷¹ Mottet, "Bruno Dumont," 200-1.

to reshoot scenes. Therefore, “if it rains, it rains” (which it does not in *L’humanité*).⁷² It is therefore defensible to argue that to an indeterminable yet significant extent Pharaon resembles his real life actor, something that also seems to hold true for Domino. The film places much emphasis on the biological body, or more precisely on aspects and determinants of modes of being generally considered “human” that the film itself portrays as “natural” or “animal-like.”

The question of the human thus manifests itself at the narrative level, as well as through the film’s relation to its pre- and profilmic processes of casting, acting, staging, shooting, etc. Like *Rosetta*, *L’humanité* renders the relation between the acting and the acted productive, and turns into the source of its sensible and signifying text-matter. Yet, while analyzing the filmic text, how can one distinguish between these two dimensions? How can one determine which aspects of the body one sees on the screen belong to the actor’s activity of acting, and which to aspects in the actor’s body that are not actively acted, but that are “real,” that are acting through the actor’s body? In “Notes on Gesture” (1992) Agamben conceptualizes precisely this non-acted excess that the film viewer witnesses in the screen-actor. Agamben argues that at the essence of cinema lies not the image but the gesture. Following the ancient Roman author Varro, Agamben distinguishes gesture from acting and making. “What characterizes gesture,” he writes, “is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported. The gesture, in other words, opens the sphere of *ethos* as the more proper

⁷² Ibid., 176.

sphere of that which is human.”⁷³ Gesture is that action in a person’s acting that happens inadvertently, that accompanies acting but that also happens in spite of it. Escaping discourse itself, gesture points at, rather than signifies, the fact that we are human only insofar as we are discursive beings. “[C]inema’s essential ‘silence’,” Agamben argues, “. . . is, just like the silence of philosophy, exposure of the being-in-language of human beings, pure gesturality.”⁷⁴

I agree with Agamben’s characterization of gesture as that aspect in an act that appears to be more than that act and that does not seem to contribute to that act’s intended purpose, and that perhaps even thwarts that purpose. However, Agamben does not take into account the possibility that what appears as an element of textual excess that, in its muteness, exposes textuality as such, may in fact be a deliberately constructed sign that veils its purpose of passing as a sign without purpose, of passing as a non-sign. It is along these lines that Roland Barthes, in “The Reality Effect,” theorizes the function of the “insignificant detail” in relation to the nineteenth century realist novel. Barthes writes:

[F]or just when those details are reputed to *denote* the real directly, all that they do—without saying so—is *signify* it; Flaubert’s barometer, Michelet’s little door finally say nothing but this: *we are the real*; it is the category of “the real” (and not its contingent contents) which is then signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, become the very signifier of realism[.]⁷⁵

⁷³ Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti, Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 57.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁷⁵ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 148, emphasis in original.

In other words, the insignificant detail presents itself as a direct mimetic capturing of the real, but in reality is a sign that, in combination with all the other insignificant details surrounding it, presents itself as a verisimilar representation, as a snap shot of reality.

Could we make a similar argument about *Rosetta* and *L'humanité*? Yes and no. On the one hand we know that the Dardennes extensively practiced acts such as that of the waffle selling with Dequenne in order for these acts to look “natural,” for them to look like gestures. On the other hand, one of the reasons the Dardennes’ picked Dequenne was precisely that during the casting “she made the stand exist.” “We went to buy waffles,” Luc Dardenne recalls, “and we really felt it was her stand.”⁷⁶ From this we may surmise that Rosetta’s presence in the stand as it appears in the film would have felt very different had the Dardennes practiced the gestures with a different actress. In *L'humanité* the situation is different yet equally complicated. We can only agree with Dumont that Pharaon could not have been played by a different actor. At the same, however, we also realize that only as a result of the film’s highly aestheticized self-presentation Schotté’s real-life appearance obtains Pharaon’s meaningful muteness.

In both cases the result is that while the viewer *senses* the split that is internal to the appearance of the onscreen acting/acted body, he or she *knows* that this split remains invisible. The reason is that this split is not a fine line separating the performing real from the performed non-real, but instead fully coincides with the on-screen presence of a performing/performed life.

⁷⁶ Benoliel and Toubiana, “Il faut être dans le cul des choses,” 49.

Signs Speaking and Mute

This sensible yet conceptually ungraspable dynamic between mediated and unmediated reality does not only characterize *Rosetta's* and *L'humanité's* rendering of their protagonists-actors, but also that of their narrative and shooting locations. This especially holds true for *L'humanité*. The film transforms the northern-French fields and towns (Bailleul, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Lille) into the setting for a more universal reflection on guilt, belief and humanity. In doing so, Dumont cites two films by his French cinematic fathers: Bresson's *Journal d'un curé de campagne* and Pialat's *Sous le soleil de Satan*. In *Le Nord et le cinéma* Paul Renard writes about these two films:

The places do not only provide a realist framework. Due to the lighting and the framing they also obtain a supernatural dimension. Bresson, in a black-and-white film, insists on the black. Cassocks of priests, the presbytery's interior during the night, undergrowth cast in darkness. . . . Pialat often presents Donissan as a remote silhouette that is crushed by the immensity of a nature whose green grass and grey sky take on cold nuances; the "temptation of despair" (the title of one of the parts in Bernanos's novel) thus emanates from the landscape.⁷⁷

Journal d'un curé and *Sous le soleil* belong, moreover, to what we could refer to as the Mouchette legend. The original character of Mouchette—whose name means "little fly"—we encounter in Bernanos's 1926 novel *Sous le soleil de Satan*, whose first section

⁷⁷ Paul Renard, "Les Adaptations cinématographiques des romans," in L'Association Jean Mitry ed., *Le Nord et le cinéma: contributions à l'histoire du cinéma dans le Nord/Pas-de-Calais* (Pantin: Le Temps des Cerises, 1998), pp. 216-27, p. 225. Renard points out, furthermore, that in their depictions of the French North, Bresson and Pialat, much less than Bernanos "insist on the rain and the humidity of a region that is really not in lack of those" (226). The indeed remarkable refrain in these films of the use of the weather conditions Nord-Pas-de-Calais is so much associated with in the eyes of those living in more sunny parts of the hexagon, also strikes us in *L'humanité*. Also in Dumont's film rain remains absent, while the wind never grows stronger than a breeze playing with Pharaon's jacket.

is entitled “Histoire de Mouchette.” Though Mouchette commits suicide, the idea her character embodies is reincarnated in Bernanos’s *La Nouvelle histoire de Mouchette* (1973), which formed the basis for Bresson’s *Mouchette*. Like the other Bernanos novels discussed here, *La Nouvelle histoire de Mouchette* is set in the French North. Bresson’s screen adaptation, however, was shot in the Vaucluse and evokes the Pas-de-Calais region only remotely.⁷⁸ “Un film Chrétien et sadique” (“A Christian and sadistic film”), as Jean-Luc Godard’s trailer for Bresson’s film states, *Mouchette* famously ends with the scene in which the protagonist (Nadine Nortier) drowns herself in a stream. Also Rosetta falls into a stream, but unlike Mouchette she is pushed into it, and unlike Mouchette Rosetta fights for her life.

Another narrative aspect of *Mouchette* cited in *Rosetta* is the heroine’s cutting through the woods, and like in *Rosetta*, in *Mouchette* these deviations from the normal, paved paths emphasize the protagonist’s animal-like existence. Mouchette is about thirteen and lives in a cramped one-room apartment together with her terminally ill mother, her alcoholic father and brother, and her baby brother. At home most chores fall on her, while at school Mouchette is mocked by her bourgeois classmates for her poor dress and treated harshly by her teacher for failing to hold key during the chanting of religious songs. Mouchette rebels, but her only means of resistance are her curses and the mud that she throws at her classmates and stampedes into the church. The woods give her some relief, but even there she is not safe. The film creates a parallel between her and the rabbits, who are targeted by not only the licensed hunters (her classmates, her father), but

⁷⁸ The film references Bassompierre, a fictive town whose name vaguely resonates with that of Dompierre in Pas-de-Calais (ibid., 224).

also by the poacher, Arsène, a social outcast like herself. When one night Mouchette is caught in a rainstorm, Arsène helps her find her clog. Mouchette feels sympathy for Arsène. She agrees to provide him with an alibi for a murder he fears having committed, and she wipes off the vomit from his drunk mouth, singing to him, off-key, the song she has learned at school. Mouchette is an angel, a truly human being in a world devoid of humanity, who despite her misery keeps humming while preparing coffee for her family, in a scene that calls to mind the maid Maria, an angel too, in Vittorio de Sica's *Umberto D* (1952). Yet in a God-less world, also an angel's will-to-live can be thwarted. First Mouchette is raped by Arsène, who she keeps defending as her "boyfriend." Then her mother dies. In the meanwhile the uncompassionate public opinion sees itself confirmed in its opinion of her as a " salope," a slut.

Other than the woods and its protagonist's name, *Rosetta* echoes *Mouchette* in numerous ways: the mother-daughter relationship, the absent father, the male friend who seeks to involve the solitary heroine in his illicit activities, the lost footwear, the alcohol, the mud, the stream, the fighting. But the Dardennes' film also significantly deviate from Bresson's. The first crucial difference concerns their dealing with the girls' bodies and sexualities. Whereas Rosetta's struggle leaves her no space for romantic interests, that of Mouchette coincides with her sexual awakening. Furthermore, in sharp contrast with Rosetta's, Mouchette's character is explicitly sexualized. Second, whereas the Dardennes' camera attaches itself to Rosetta, Bresson's stays at much more distance from its heroine, both literally and in terms of emotional investment. Third, *Rosetta* ends on a hopeful note.

I will return to that ending, and more in general to the *Rosetta*'s simultaneous invocation and rejection of Bresson's Jansenist existentialism. First let me turn again to *L'humanité* and this film's engagement with "Mouchette." Like *Rosetta*'s self-positioning in relation to *Mouchette*, *L'humanité* is a complex, inverted citation of *Journal d'un curé de campagne* and, though less explicitly, *Sous le soleil de Satan*. The latter, on its turn, contains many parallels to Bresson's film. The protagonists of *Journal d'un curé* and *Sous le soleil* are both catholic priests. Like Pharaon, they have been entrusted with the duty to mediate between an institutionalized Law and the members of their rural communities, the small towns of Ambricourt (about 75 kilometers south-west of Lille), and Campagne (in the Artois region, the interior of the Pas-de-Calais department), respectively. And like it is the case with Pharaon, this duty weighs heavily on their seemingly strong shoulders. The priests are burned-out, physically and spiritually. The nameless priest of *Journal d'un curé* (Claude Leydu) is tortured by terrible pains in his stomach, which contribute to his sense that he is passing on the grace that he is so much lacking himself. This does not prevent him, however, from considering his ability to "faire présent ce qu'on ne possède soi-même" ("make present what one doesn't possess oneself") the miracle of his life. Similarly, Donissan (Gérard Depardieu), the protagonist of *Sous le soleil*, states that he is spending his life seeing God humiliated, and that the only thing he still feels capable is to "absoudre ou pleurer" ("absolve or weep").

Priests, however, like policemen, are not supposed to "feel," at least not in the all-too-human way that the curé d'Ambricourt, Donissan and Pharaon do. The problem they have in common is not even so much that their pains and sensitivity, including their

sensitivity for the flesh, lead them to doubt the existence of the authorities they represent. After all, such doubts are very “normal” and even necessary in the constitution of a true believer, certainly in the austere, almost protestant “Jansenist” Catholicism that the curé’s and Donissan’s stories are soaked in. As Blaise Pascal has rationalized this doubt: “If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible, since, having neither parts nor limits, He has no affinity to us. We are then incapable of knowing either what He is or if He is.” This fundamental doubt necessitates us to play a Game. “You must wager,” Pascal writes, “It is not optional.” As Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2*, the problem of this wager is not “that of choosing between the existence or non-existence of God, but between the mode of existence of one who believes in God, and the mode of existence of the one who does not.”⁷⁹ It is a game of heads and tails in which mankind has an Infinity to gain and a finite nothing to lose, so “wager, then, without Hesitation that He is,” Pascal urges the reader.⁸⁰ However, is one still able to keep their head up when asked to toss the coin an infinite number of times? The curé and Donissan are too fatigued and oversensitive to wager much longer, a condition that disables them to neutralize the violent impulses the world bombards them with and that frustrates them in their worldly jobs of ventriloquizing the Law. They are no longer able to relate the signs of the senses to the self-referential Sign that explains the existence of all signs, including the ones they are themselves.

And how about Pharaon? Is he able to believe in humanity? The part of *L’humanité* that evokes *Journal d’un curé* and *Sous le soleil* most explicitly is the

⁷⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 1

⁸⁰ Blaise Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensées with an Introduction by T.S. Eliot*, trans. W.F. Trotter (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1958), pp. 66-7.

opening scene. Also in Bresson's and Pialat's films we see the protagonists struggling through the northern landscape, in journeys, which in their cases are nightly ones, that put their vocations to the test. Like Pharaon, Donissan is framed as a remote silhouette tracing the horizon. And like Pharaon, the curé d'Ambricourt ultimately falls flat forward in the mud. There is also a difference. Whereas Pharaon really is alone with the unforgiving landscape, both priests have an encounter with the Other. Donissan, whose journey mimics that of Christ through the desert, is tempted by Satan who, in the guise of a horse-trader, offers him a "don de vision à travers les êtres" ("a gaze traversing the things"). Donissan finds, however, the power to cite Christ: "Retire-toi Satan!" ("Be gone, Satan!")⁸¹ The curé d'Ambricourt, on his turn, facedown in the mud and tormented by his pains, is haunted by the sublime idea of the Holy Virgin who, as his superior has explained to him earlier that day, is not only "la mère du genre humain" ("the mother of mankind"), but also her daughter, "une petite fille, cette reine des anges" ("a little girl, this queen of angels"). However, when She finally appears to his delirious vision, the Holy Virgin does so not in the guise of a queen but in that of a poor girl whose hands are rough and whose face is lacking the promised splendor. This girl is Séraphita, who is among the students the curé has been preparing for their first Holy Communion. Séraphite helps him on his feet and, like Mouchette does to Arsène, wipes the vomit from his face.

Séraphita is Mouchette, because Mouchette is not one girl but the idea of a girl or young woman who throughout Bernanos's oeuvre, as well as their cinematic adaptations,

⁸¹ *Matthew* 4:10.

is incarnated by an adolescent girl who is struggling with her sexuality, or who is sexually harassed or even violated. She is the idea of an angel, a little fly in a world without grace. As stated earlier, the original incarnation of this figure we encounter in *Sous le soleil de Satan*, which I will discuss here through Pialat's version. Germaine, "dite Mouchette" (Sandrine Bonnaire) is the sixteen-year old daughter of a wealthy brewer. Early in the film she kills her lover whose child she is carrying. Mouchette is the reason of Donissan's journey through the northern desert. Convinced that it is in fact Satan who is guilty of her sins, he sees it as his duty to restore her faith. "Jusqu'à cette jour vous avez vécu comme un enfant," he explains her to herself, "qui n'a pas pitié d'un enfant?" ("Until today you have been living like a child. Who doesn't feel pity for a child?") But the flirtatious Mouchette does not want to be saved. She does not believe in his God. "De quelle droit osez vous?! . . . Dieu, quelle rigolade, 'Dieu' ne veut rien dire" ("What gives you the right?! . . . God, what a joke, 'God' doesn't mean anything"). Soon after their encounter, Mouchette slits her throat, after which Donissan carries her corpse to the altar of his local church. The scandal that this act causes necessitates Donissan to temporarily retreat in a monastery. It is only there that he becomes the Savior he always already was. First he receives a visitation from Mouchette, an angel now. Next, after having been appointed as the curé of the hamlet of Lumbres, he resurrects a little boy.

In *L'humanité*, in contrast, any hope for such visions and miracles is crushed from the outset. The landscape that Pharaon crosses is really deprived of grace. No one appears to help him up and to wipe the mud off his face. The only encounter Pharaon has is with the decomposing, faceless corpse of the little girl, a Mouchette clipped of her wings, of

her flirtatious behavior, of her individuality too. It is this vision that leaves Pharaon gazing, speechless.

This muteness is the last difference, which is only an apparent difference, between Pharaon and his predecessors. Both the curé and Donissan have the gift of the word, in two respects. They have the word of God that they mediate and on which their authority is founded. Second, they have their journals to which they confide their thoughts and doubts. In fact, as emphasized by its title, the actual protagonist of *Journal d'un curé de campagne* is not the curé, who at the point in time the film is narrated from is already dead, but his journal that often fills the entire frame. Yet if both priests have the word, it is only because they have the *written* word. Like Pharaon they often stand speechless, in the face of human nature and in the face of God. Although initially the curé d'Ambricourt is still able to justify his inability to pray by reassuring himself that "the desire to pray already is a prayer, and that God would not desire more," eventually he has to confess to himself that his suffering has killed his spiritual appetite. Similarly, Donissan admits to his superior that he can only "absolve or cry," which is why he flagellates himself until he is bleeding. Like the curé d'Ambricourt, he is lacking the all-redeeming grace that his profession demands him to pass on to others. And like Bresson's protagonist, he can only carry out this duty at the expense of his own well-being. Ultimately both the curé and Donissan die, yet in the name of whom or for what? Of God? For Humanity? In its final scene, *Journal d'un curé* confides the viewer with the curé's last words (which were recorded by his friend—a former priest, now a pharmacist in Lille—and sent in a letter to the curé de Torcy):

Puis il a paru retrouver des forces, et d'une voix presque inintelligible m'a prié de l'absoudre. Son visage était plus calme, il a même souri. L'humanité ni l'amitié ne me permettraient un refus, tout en m'acquittant de mon devoir j'ai voulu exprimer à mon infortuné camarade les scrupules que j'avais à rendre de son désir. Il n'a pas paru m'entendre. Mais quelques instants plus tard, sa main s'est posée sur la mienne, tandis que son regard me faisait nettement signe d'approcher mon oreille de sa bouche. Il a prononcé alors distinctement, bien qu'avec une extrême lenteur, ces mots que je suis sûr de rapporter très exactement: "Qu'est-ce que cela fait? Tout est grâce." Je crois qu'il est mort presque aussitôt. [Then he seemed to regain some force, and in an almost inaudible voice asked me for absolution. His face was calmer, he even smiled. Neither humanity nor friendship would permit me to refuse, though while discharging my duties I explained to my unfortunate comrade my hesitation against granting his request. He didn't seem to hear me. But a few moments later he laid his hands on mine while he entreated me to draw closer to him. He then said very distinctly, if extremely slowly, these exact words: "What does it all matter? All is grace." I believe he died just then.]

With the curé de Torcy's voice as a voice-over now, and the Passion music that Jean-Jacques Grunenwald composed for the film entering the frame, the image of the machine typed letter gradually gives way to the shadow of a crucifix. André Bazin has famously hailed this shot—"the screen free of images and handed back to literature"—as "the triumph of cinematographic realism." interpreting this crucifix as "a witness to that whose reality was but a sign [*témoigne de ce dont sa réalité n'était qu'un signe*]." ⁸² Bazin is right, not only because the lines on which the film ends are a literal yet slightly abbreviated citation from Bernanos's novel, but also because if it is true that "all is grace," the crucifix—the sight of which also constitutes the ending of *Sous le soleil*—has lost its intrinsic, signifying value. Instead it has become a sign like any other. And like any other sign, it remains mute about that what it claims to directly speak about.

⁸² André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma (Edition définitive)* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1975), p. 124.

It is this muteness of signs that Pharaon, who is all gaze, sees, hence his own muteness. Pharaon's repeated speechlessness expresses the lack that *L'humanité* revolves around: the inhumanity of human nature, the absence of a real referent of the film's title concept. The reality of "humanity" is its muteness, its lack of sense and sensitivity. According to this understanding of humanity the human figure is nothing but an insect in a deserted landscape, and the human body nothing but mere flesh. It is a vision in need of redemption, the resurrection of "humanity." From a Christian perspective, such a miracle can only be performed by a figure who is nothing but "human," contradicting an idea of humanity that is only grounded in its own nonexistence. This figure is, of course, Pharaon, the mute Christ.

Face to Face: *Rosetta* and *L'humanité*

Before we investigate Pharaon's miraculous normalcy and Dumont's humanism with a small "h," let's return, once again, to Rancière's question, "What unites *Rosetta* and *L'humanité*?" Rancière begins his answer to this question by evaluating the degree in which both films partake in the "Bovary effect," or more generally the "art effect" of nineteenth century literary realism. This effect is the phenomenon, which is best witnessed in Gustave Flaubert's 1856 *Madame Bovary*, that a literary text becomes "art" "not *in spite of* but precisely *because of* the nullity of the action and the *bêtise* [stupidity and animality] of the characters, because of their brute and obstinate presence on top of

all codification of social species . . .”⁸³ Both films do partake in this effect, Rancière argues:

Rosetta is not a subproletarian representative whose misery, surrounded by wide camera shots, moves us with and alerts us about the condition of her equals. The wide shots of faces [*plans des visages*] in *Rosetta* and in *L’humanité* do not bring us closer to human suffering and the human face. On the contrary, they exercise the function . . . [of] transforming one part of the human body into a strange texture or a monstrous animal. Rosetta’s goal-oriented obstinacy, her clenching fists or her stomach contracted by pain, much like the fatigued blush on the face of Domino having an orgasm or the sweat on the police chief’s obese face, they are not properties revelatory of a social state given to know in its cruelty. They are precisely the *subject* of art, the brute presence, the “*bêtise*” with which art’s will realizes itself as art by annulling itself as will.⁸⁴

In other words, Rosetta’s struggle and Pharaon’s obsessive gaze are not subjected to social allegory. They are precisely what they appear to be: mute, “monstrous” signifiers. It is precisely because of their lack of sense and humanity that they become “art.” At the same time, Rancière continues his argument, *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* also move beyond the Bovary effect. They drive their protagonists’ *bêtise* to a stage of excess. In doing so these films reinvest their images with social caricature:

The self-projecting camera of the Dardenne brothers and the distant camera of Bruno Dumont let us pass through the wall of the image, in order to lock us up into a resonant universe, a primordial roaring where we are given the evidence that, much like the proletarians’ sweat is a property of their skin, their breathing is more loud and their sex is more resounding than those of the bourgeois.⁸⁵

⁸³ Rancière, “Le Bruit du peuple,” 111, emphases in original.

⁸⁴ Ibid., emphasis in original.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 112.

I only partly agree, because I would argue that this argument of “the Bovary effect driven to excess” applies less to *Rosetta* than it does to *L’humanité*. The latter’s disaffected outlook on the animalism of its protagonists indeed prevents these protagonists from becoming allegorical figures, while at the same time contributing to their appearance as stereotyped proletarians. With *Rosetta*, however, the situation is even more complex. Even though I agree with Rancière that the film’s real *subject* is Rosetta’s *bêtise*—or more precisely those elements of her struggle for normalcy that the film depicts as bordering on the non-human—this does not prevent her from *also* being an allegorical “subproletarian representative.” Rosetta’s struggle is not just her own, as Rancière in fact argues himself later in his essay, where he describes her as a Brechtian “*Fille Courage*” who testifies to the dehumanization to which a society forces people.”⁸⁶ *Rosetta* repeatedly reminds us of the social relations that determine its protagonist’s small world and struggle. The film does so by letting her briefly but poignantly bump into the young mother whose job she has just taken over, emphasizing the fact that there are more Rosettas. The film does so by having Rosetta travel from the factory, to the campground, to the thrift store, to the supermarket that is not hiring, to some social assistance institution that “only hires long-term unemployed” but that can offer her a conversation “in all confidence” (but she wants a job), to the social security office that cannot give her an unemployment benefit for the reason she has “not worked long enough” and that recommends her to apply for welfare (which she will not, because she has her pride). It does so by never telling us why Rosetta is no longer in school. And it does so through her

⁸⁶ Ibid.. The reference is to Bertolt Brecht’s drama *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, which was first performed in 1941 in Zürich.

cramp attacks. These attacks are not just instances of Rosetta's "brute presence, her animality," as Rancière argues. They also have a clear allegorical function, in that they, as I argued earlier, position Rosetta in a relation of inheritance toward her mother. Rosetta is not like her mother. She refuses to inherit her mother's social position, denying the fact that in many respects she *is* like her mother. *Rosetta's* bodily obsession is thus not only part of its haptic, overmimetic strategy. It is also part of the film's construction of Rosetta's social identity. By following Rosetta closely, the film at one and the same time mimics and analyzes the motivations behind Rosetta's self-perpetuating flight. The camera moves because she is, and because it wants to know why she is.

The force driving Rosetta's struggle is the discrepancy between her current situation and her self-ideal, which is that of a "normal," "human" working-class young woman. Rosetta refuses to dehumanize herself in the face of a dehumanizing society. Yet, it is precisely in her desperate obstinacy to affirm her humanity, in her refusal to inherit, that she loses that humanity, and that her *animality*, the extent to which her actions are driven by a mere drive to survive, manifests itself. Rosetta simultaneously does and does not know what makes or what would make her human. That is why she almost cannot resist the temptation to let her only friend Riquet drown after he has fallen into the stream. And that is why she betrays him in order to get his job at the waffle stand. The next day, however, she realizes that by having transformed "a friend" and "a job" from complementary into exchangeable commodities she has stripped the latter of the normalizing value it first had in her eyes. Instead of having progressed toward her ideal she has relegated herself to square one of her flight forward. "Laisse-moi passer," she

keeps repeating to Riquet when he tries to corner her in order to make her account for her betrayal. “Let me through.” Rosetta’s only answer to the world is her flight forward. Across the road, the boots, the campground where she finds her mother drunk again. She drags her mother into the trailer, boils an egg, leaves the trailer and walks to the payphone, quits her job, returns, eats the egg, opens up the gas canister, covers up the crack underneath the door, lies down and waits, all in one interrupted movement. For a long minute the camera remains immobile, in one of the film’s few long close-ups of Rosetta’s face. Her eyes are still moving, she is still breathing, but we hear the gas filling up the image, before the sound swells and dies out. Rosetta stands up, puts on her boots, disconnects the canister, and grabs money to buy a new one. While we watch her on her way back to the trailer, struggling with the heavy canister that she sees as her only relief, we can only think of Mouchette, who did succeed at her second attempt, and whose little tragedy Rosetta is on her way to cite. Rosetta moves on, also when the sound of Riquet’s moped comes closer, and also when her former friend starts to aggressively circle around her, until she stumbles, falls, and breaks out into tears, her head resting on the canister. Riquet helps her up, while Rosetta, exhausted, just looks.

Let’s have a very close look at this final shot, and compare it to the ending of *L’humanité*. Rosetta just looks, crying, breathing, with exhaustion, out of despair, ashamed. The trembling of her face, of her mouth, of her red cheeks, is mimicked by the handheld camera, which seems exhausted and seems to breathe with exhaustion too, and which now has come to a halt, because Rosetta has, in a shot that lasts for eighteen seconds, upon which the film, in the middle of Rosetta’s and its own movement, cuts to

black. Rosetta just looks, like a trapped little bird, not at the viewer, who, like the camera, is only present *to* and never *in* her world, but at Riquet, who is reaching out his hand.

Also *L'humanité* ends on a long close-up of its protagonist, and also the object of Pharaon's gaze—melancholic and blank as always—lies behind the camera's field of vision. His blue eyes are slightly tilted and turned toward our left, looking at, so we know from the previous shot, the white, diffuse light that shines through the windows of his chief's office. He is seated in a chair, wearing the blue jacket he is always wearing. For an instant his mouth is curling up, as if he is smiling at something, as if his eyes are seeing something. We see and hear him swallowing and breathing through his nose. Except for that his face is silent and motionless, like the shot itself, which lasts for about ten seconds. What we also know from the previous, equally static, twenty-second shot is that Pharaon is wearing handcuffs, which changes everything. Pharaon is guilty, but of what? Is he himself and not Joseph the violator of the little girl? Has Pharaon for all this time been the object of his own investigation? Many commentators have suggested this reading, often in interpretations that seek to fit Pharaon's undeniably peculiar appearance into a clear murderer profile. Kent Jones argues for example that "Pharaon's behavior (his glassy-eyed demeanor; his fixation on crotches and folds of flesh; his semi-autistic moments of upset . . .), his emotional specifics . . ." prove that he "is the murderer in the first place."⁸⁷

Of the three possible interpretations of *L'humanité*'s ending I consider this literal, straightforward reading, according to which Pharaon is reduced to a monstrous,

⁸⁷ Kent Jones, "*L'humanité*," *Film Comment* 36.3 (2000): 73.

psychopathic animal, the most unconvincing and certainly the most uninteresting one. Also the second possible reading of *L'humanité*'s ending starts from a literal, narrative understanding of the last two shots (Pharaon is *really* in the police office, he has *really* been arrested for murder). According to this reading, we can wrap up Pharaon's investigation as follows: first, Pharaon learns that Joseph is guilty of the girl's murder. He then goes to his allotment, where he stares into the void of the fields for a while, holding a bunch of flowers. Next, now in his maternal house, he consoles Domino, who is inconsolable, the flowers lying on the kitchen counter, after which he, out of his sincere love for Domino, takes Joseph's guilt upon him. It is a reading that already does slightly more justice to the film's Christian vocabulary, which manifests itself most obviously in the shot of a church entrance and the Royer piece we hear early in the film and that also accompanies the final credits. However, like the first reading, also this second reading still relies on our introduction of an external element into the gap that Dumont's film creates between the kitchen and the police office.

The third possible reading takes as its point of departure precisely this gap, which is the absence of a sign that in itself is a sign, a mute sign in the need of interpretation. In doing so this reading, which is the one that remains most true to the cinematic text and non-text, simultaneously acknowledges the possible truths of the first two readings, as well as the possibility that these readings, which in and by themselves are mutually exclusive of each other, are true at one and the same time. The film demands us to leave open the possibility that the diegetic absence that coincides with the cut between the second- and first-to-last shots is an ontological absence. Regardless of whether Pharaon is

the murderer, and of whether he is the “murderer” only in the eyes of the law or also because he has really killed the girl, he is now sitting in the police office, wearing handcuffs. Or more precisely, the film now *shows* him sitting there, first bent forward, then looking up to the window. What is the narrative voice with which *L’humanité* speaks here? Is this the same neutral, realist perspective as that of the preceding 138 minutes? And what is Pharaon seeing in the white, diffuse light that illuminates his face?

The seed of an answer to these questions is found in two earlier scenes. The first scene is the one in which Pharaon, standing in the door opening of Domino’s house, is seen spying on Domino and Joseph. Our eyes, guided by a sound close-up, rest on the couple’s intense kiss. The film itself, however, focuses on Pharaon’s gaze, which has a double presence here. First of all, the shot expresses Pharaon’s point-of-view, a narrative status that is in fact only established retroactively. Second, Pharaon’s gaze is present *in* the *mise-en-scène*. While Domino and Joseph stand in the middle of the room, a soft, white light shines through the drawn curtains. In front of these curtains, on the window sill, is a table lamp. The lamp switches on, burns for twelve seconds, and switches off, without any of the three protagonists operating the switch. Scene two: Pharaon is seen floating in his allotment, first in a shot in which his head is slowly rising into the frame, followed by a long shot that proves that he, his shoulders still sloping, his jacket still discolored, is not only gazing into but also standing in the void. Pharaon really is not normal, nor is the film itself. Beneath its naturalist, overaestheticized surface, Dumont’s film harbors a miraculous tension, a tension that becomes palpable in the narrative gap at the end but the seed of which is present throughout. In other words, the gap that appears

between the two final scenes is in fact always already present *within* each of the film's images, which thus mimic the double nature of its protagonist.

So what is Pharaon seeing in the light, illuminating his face, illuminating what his gaze is seeing, what it is seeing through him, through his human eyes? Is it just what it is, or is it also something else, the transcendent, bliss-inspiring, redemptive Other to and essence of humanity with a small "h"? According to this transcendent, religious reading, the film's title concept would function as an index of the gap internal to human existence, a gap that constitutes the driving force behind the all-too-human desire for redemption, for the elimination of this gap. This leads me back to my earlier discussion of Rancière's claim that *L'humanité* "affirms to make art and art only." As discussed, the first way that the film does so is through its explicitly aestheticized appearance. The second, not yet discussed, way through which the film's self-affirmation as art operates is its complex treatment of Pharaon's investigation, his quest for redemption. As was to be expected, the film's utterance of the question, "What makes the human 'human'?", is its only answer to this question. As Rancière argues, the film's narrative is a "march on place" whose only aim is to show that "there is nothing to search for" in the first place. *L'humanité* begins on this self-referential note and it ends on it. Rancière writes:

. . . the criminal and the victim, the judge and the witness are one and the same person: this suffering and enjoying [*jouissante*] "humanity." . . . This Schopenhauerian humanity Pharaon simultaneously represents and bears witness to: a criminal underneath his police outfit, an innocent idiot [*idiot-innocent*] carrying on his back the misery and the cruelty of the world, Christ or Muechkiné [the prince of Dostoyevski's *The Idiots* who is unable to face the evil in the

world] who gives to the guilty victims [*victimes-coupables*] of this perpetually innocent game the only possible cure: the gesture of compassion.⁸⁸

Pharaon is the mute Christ, the word become flesh that is given to humanity in order to redeem it from its sins, and simultaneously a rather slow man, perhaps even an idiot, who is lacking the word, unable as he is to express his all-too-human, all-too-normal desire. Less-than-human and more-than-human at once, Pharaon is his lack, his expressive inability to express himself, to translate his feelings into signs and to respond “normally” to the signs registered by his senses. It is this expressive speaking muteness of his gaze that we, through the film’s mediation of it, see reflected in the blissful light that Pharaon—his face growing calm, even smiling, to paraphrase the description of the curé d’Ambricourt’s final moments—is gazing at in the final shot. “Tout est grâce.” Even more than the crucifix in *Journal d’un curé*, the diffuse light that illuminates Pharaon’s face appears, like Pharaon himself, as an intrinsically Christian sign that is almost entirely hollowed out of its power to represent the master-signifier, leaving the latter’s existence ambiguous.

Pharaon is unable to express himself, and at the same time he is all expression. The muteness of his redemptive, miraculous gaze expresses his inability to be the promise he in the film’s eyes might be: a normal human being capable of negotiating and somehow giving expression to the lack that makes him human, in spite of himself. This recursive characterization of Pharaon, of what he is and is not, a characterization in which “normal” and “human” converge and perhaps even coalesce altogether, equally applies to

⁸⁸ Rancière, “Le Bruit du peuple,” 112.

Rosetta. Also Rosetta, as we have established earlier, fails to attain the object of her obsession. Her obstinacy prevents her from realizing the degree to which she already is what she aspires to be: normal. A normal, vulnerable girl: this is what we see in the final close-up, in which the film's mimetic and narrative powers, its non-mediated rendering of a real, acting body and its painstaking construction of a fictive, acted body, culminate in the protagonist's gripping presence. We have not yet been this close to Rosetta and we truly feel for this girl. Yet the closer we get to her, the more she eludes us.

There is still another dimension to this closing shot. Like *L'humanité*, *Rosetta* does not only end in the middle of a face-to-face encounter between the viewer and the affective hence elusive presence of a singular human life. Like many of the Dardennes' films, it also ends in the middle of the representation of a face-to-face encounter.⁸⁹ And like in Dumont's film, this diegetic encounter contains an overtly humanist, secular-religious dimension. "Your name is Rosetta . . ." The film wishes to believe in Rosetta and it wishes Rosetta to believe in herself. But Rosetta, unlike Mouchette, is not an angel. She is a very normal girl, which is the reason why she cannot die. Leaving unresolved whether Rosetta will escape her miserable situation and overcome her obstinacy, the film ultimately needs her presence in order to express its own hope in people's ability to face themselves and others. The film clutches to Rosetta, much like Rosetta herself clutches

⁸⁹ Several critics have pointed out the influence of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas on the Dardennes' representation of the face-to-face. See especially: Sarah Cooper, "Mortal Ethics: Reading Levinas with the Dardenne Brothers." *Film-Philosophy* 11:2 (2007): 66-87. Moreover, in his journal Luc Dardenne writes: "Emmanuel Levinas has died during our filming [of *The Promise*]. The film owes a lot to the reading of his books. . . . Without these readings, would we have been able to imagine the scenes of Roger and Igor in the garage, of Assita and Igor in the garage's office and in the station's stairways? The entire film can be seen as an attempt to ultimately arrive at the face-to-face." (Dardenne, *Au dos de nos images*, 56).

to the objects that she is barely able to lift and that in her eyes embody her minimum of human freedom: the bag of flour, the lockers in the opening scene, and, at the point in her struggle that suicide remains the only life-affirming tactic left to her, the gas canister. This is at least how I read the film's portrayal of Rosetta's open-ended acknowledgment of Riquet's presence, which simultaneously constitutes the acknowledgment of her guilt. Even though this ending does not guarantee anything, at least it contains the seed of a beyond-the-image, the not-yet-imaginable realization of Rosetta's dream, of her becoming-human.

Rosetta and Pharaon: On the one hand they are non-allegorical, non-conceptual characters whose humanity is strictly immanent to their individual lives. A large part of *Rosetta's* and *L'humanité's* affective power lies in their ability to, by means of their protagonists' obstinacy as well as the exploitation of their actors' "real" humanity, make us believe in their creations. On the other hand Rosetta and Pharaon serve as narrative vehicles for an idea of humanity that exceeds their singularity. Regardless of whether these two visions—the one realist and immanent, the other essentialist and, perhaps, transcendent—on "humanity" are mutually exclusive, the fact is that the Dardennes and Dumont ultimately let their protagonists live where they could have easily died, whether out of exhaustion or out of sacrifice. Rosetta and Pharaon live beyond their narratives, beyond the images calling them to life. And, crucially, they continue to live where the characters they have been partly modeled on—Mouchette, Donissan, the curé d'Ambricourt—do not.

Life, and more specifically *human life*. Such is therefore my answer to the question raised by Rancière, which is also the question that structures this first chapter, “what is it exactly that unites *Rosetta* and *L’humanité . . . ?*” Both films rigorously affirm the real physical life of their actors in order to affirm their protagonists’ affective presence as well as, though *L’humanité* probably more than *Rosetta*, an idea of human life. And in both films this triple affirmation culminates in a moving still life of a face in which we at one and the same time see: a documentation of an acting face, the fictional image of an acted face, and the concept of a face.

There are also some important differences between the ways the Dardennes and Dumont turn life into both their matter of creation and their subject of expression. First, although both *Rosetta* and *L’humanité* were largely made with amateur or first-time actors, the dialectic between the acting and the acted body-subject is very different in each them. Whereas in Dumont’s film the protagonists, and especially Pharaon, strongly correspond to their actors, including their real-life personalities, Dequenne’s real physical emotions during the shooting have been fully integrated into the character of Rosetta. Second, whereas *Rosetta* for most parts grounds its protagonist’s struggle in material reality and only takes an overt secular-religious turn at the very end, *L’humanité* transforms the material reality of the French North into a modeled, aestheticized setting for Pharaon’s, and by extension the film’s own quest for a much more abstract, much more Christian and specifically Jansenist idea of humanity. According to Rancière, in doing so Dumont’s aestheticism “substitutes ‘the humanitarian’ [*l’humanitaire*] for

politics,” and therefore “resonates a little too strongly with its time.”⁹⁰ In defense of *L’humanité* I argue though that the film, when read *very* closely, can be said to explore the dark undercurrents of the gentle, rippleless humanism that the Dardennes fish in.

The question that arises next is that of how we can explain that these two, in many ways very similar, in some significant ways different manifestations of a *cinema of life*, poignant interventions too into the long tradition of francophone, social-humanist realism, emerged from the part of the world (“le Nord”) and at the moment in history (the turn of the twenty-first century and the end of cinema’s first long century) that they did. That is the question that the three following chapters seek to formulate answers to.

⁹⁰ Rancière, “Le Bruit du peuple,” 112.

CHAPTER 2 | *Cinéma du Nord*: A Transnational Region and its Cinematic

Manifestations

Let me start my investigation of the French-Walloon Nord with two anecdotes that revolve around a short circuit between cinema and reality. The first is set in Belgium. In November 1999 the Belgian federal government accepted a law protecting the rights of young, low-paid workers that has been commonly referred to as the “Loi Rosetta,” or “Rosetta Law.”⁹¹ However, unlike this law’s unofficial name suggests, the Dardennes’ film had not been an effective cause for its creation. As Jean-Pierre Dardenne states in an interview: “It was pure chance . . . There was already a bill going through, and the minister [Laurette Onkelinx] took advantage of our award [at Cannes] to call it the Rosetta Law. But we never intended to get laws changed.” To which Luc Dardenne adds: “Of course, we always hope our films will speak to people, disturb them, but our hope was never to change the world.”⁹²

⁹¹ The goal with which Laurette Onkelinx, the then Belgian Minister for Employment, introduced her “youth unemployment plan” was to provide all young people with a job no later than six months after having completed their studies. Onkelinx’s original plan included the requirement for all private and public enterprises to hire one young person aged under 25 for every 25 employees. Upon criticism from the social partners, including employers and trade unions, the plan was amended. The bill that was adopted on November 12, 1999 included a hiring obligation for employers (though one that was less rigorous than in the original plans) and a financial incentive that ensured targeting of the least qualified individuals. See Catherine Delbar, “Rosetta Plan Launched to Boost Youth Employment,” *Eironline* (November 28, 1999), <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/1999/11/feature/be9911307f.htm> (accessed April 4, 2011).

⁹² Cited in Sheila Johnstone, “Filmmakers on Film: The Secret of the Dardenne Brothers’ Palme d’Or Success,” in Bert Cardullo ed., *Committed Cinema: The Films of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne: Essays and Interviews* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 102-4, p. 103.

The fact though is that “Rosetta” has become a point of reference in Walloon, and more widely Belgian, popular discourse, in a double respect. The film’s protagonist has become an icon for Wallonia’s economic hardship, as Rosetta’s quest bears witness to a socioeconomic reality in which for many unemployment is the norm. Once a major industrial center, at the turn of the twenty-first century Wallonia was trailing certain regions in Eastern Europe in terms of economic prosperity. In Wallonia’s major cities, and especially in Liège and Charleroi, unemployment rates have peaked at around 30 percent, and youth unemployment even at 40 percent. Simultaneously, with its success at Cannes *Rosetta* has also become a symbol for Wallonia’s attempt to reinvent itself after decades of recession. Illustrative in this respect is that a recent regional history—the publication of which in and of itself constitutes an affirmation of the Walloon identity—lists the Dardennes’ Palme d’or as one of the major events that have contributed to a renewed regional image.⁹³ In sum, *Rosetta* has both contributed to and challenged the narrative of “la Wallonie qui gagne” (“a Wallonia that wins”) that is promoted by Walloon politicians and media for whom poverty is a delicate talking point. As the Flemish journalist Pascal Verbeken writes in his travelogue *Arm Wallonië: Een Reis door het Beloofde Land* (*Poor Wallonia: A Journey through the Promised Land*, 2007): “For many Walloon politicians, the Dardennes embody an uncomfortable paradox: they are the most successful and well-known Walloons abroad, but at the same time they have been reproached of painting a one-sided, somber image of their region. *The Brothers Grimm*.

⁹³ Bruno Demoulin & Jean-Louis Kupper eds., *Histoire de la Wallonie: de la préhistoire au XXIe siècle* (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 2004), p. 343.

Supposedly their films do not show the ‘true Wallonia.’”⁹⁴ Let’s say for now that this true Wallonia is a region that for a long time has been torn between the ruins of its glorious industrial past and the future visions of those who are prepared to reconcile themselves with its predominantly postindustrial reality. This Walloon internal split is felt throughout the region. As Verbeken reports: “The Quartier des Sciences [in Louvain-la-Neuve] is light-years removed from *trailer country*, where Rosettas and Brunos try to scrape together their daily meals.”⁹⁵

The second anecdote comes from the other side of the French-Belgian border. On February 18, 2008 a specially chartered TGV arrived at the Lille-Flandres railway station. Among the passengers were the production team of Dany Boon’s comedy *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis*, which that night had its festive avant-première. This grand launch was financed by the Conseil Régional du Nord-Pas-de-Calais (Regional Assembly of Nord-

⁹⁴ Pascal Verbeken, *Arm Wallonië: Een Reis door het Beloofde Land* (Antwerpen/Amsterdam: Meulenhoff/Manteau, 2007). This travelogue frames itself as a response to the one the Belgian author Auguste de Winne wrote about Flanders in 1901, when Flanders was still poor, and Wallonia a place of hope. De Winne’s book, *A travers les Flandres*, appeared as a serial in the francophone, socialist periodical *Le Peuple*. In 1903 it was published in Dutch under the title of *Door Arm Vlaanderen*. Moreover, *Arm Wallonië* is part of a small yet symptomatic body of literary journalism and documentary television that is born out of a fascination with and the desire to testify to the existence of a region that is referred to in phrases such as “faded glory” and “the drain of Europe” (and I admit that my own project partly emerges out of a similar fascination). Other examples of such portraits of Wallonia include Guido Fonteyn’s *Afscheid van Magritte: Over het Oude en Nieuwe Wallonië* (2004), the 2010 TV-series *Arm Wallonië* (based on Verbeken’s book) broadcasted by the Flemish VRT, Richard Olivier’s documentary *Marchienne de vie* (1995), Patric Jean’s documentary *Les Enfants du Borinage: lettre à Henri Storck* (*Children of the Borinage: Letter to Henri Storck*, 1999), the reportage *Jong in . . . België (Wallonië)* (*Young in Belgium [Wallonia]*, 2008) that was aired on Dutch television, as well as the double page spread articles that from time to time appear in Flemish and Dutch newspapers and that carry titles such as “Last Gasp of the Illustrious Liège Steel Industry” (Petra de Koning, “Laatste Zucht van de Roemruchte Staalindustrie rond Luik,” *NRC Handelsblad* [October 28, 2011], pp. 30-1). In short, it is a body of crisis reportage in which Wallonia is generally represented as somewhat of a curiosity amidst the EU’s most prosperous parts.

⁹⁵ Verbeken, *Arm Wallonië*, 37.

Pas-de-Calais), the majority of which supported the idea of embracing the presentation of Boon's film as the start of a promotional campaign for the region. As the Conseil's President Daniel Percheron defended this choice: "Given the fact that the region annually spends €400,000 on [the] Paris-Roubaix [road cycling race] that valorizes the 'Hell of the North' ['l'Enfer du Nord'], why not an occasional €600,000 for a film that promotes it?"⁹⁶

Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis challenges the stereotypical image of the French North as a cold and rainy place that is overshadowed by its coal mining past, and whose inhabitants are less cultivated than those of the rest of the hexagon. The film tells the story of Philippe Abrams (Kad Merad), a post office administrator who is transferred from the French South to Nord-Pas-de-Calais. In one of the most notable scenes Philippe pays a visit to his wife's great-uncle (Michel Galabru), who spent his early childhood in the Nord. The ominously framed old man responds frankly to Philippe's inquiry about life up there, after which he recedes into the metaphorical darkness of his room: "Dur, dur, dur. Il y a que ceux qui sont dans le charbon qui vivent bien. C'est le Nord! Les autres, c'est que . . . des miséreux. Puisqu'ils se meurent jeunes, très jeunes . . ." ("Tough, very tough. Only the ones who work in the coal mines live well. The others live in misery. They die young, very young").

The old man also informs Philippe, and with him the viewer, about the significance of Ch'ti culture in Nord-Pas-de-Calais. The Ch'tis are those inhabitants of the French North who speak, or who culturally identify themselves with, the Ch'ti or

⁹⁶ Cited in Daniel Granval, *Les Tournages de films dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais* (Bouvignies: Les Editions Nord Avril, 2008), 37.

Ch'timi language, as Picard (Patois) is called in certain parts of French Flanders and Artois.⁹⁷ Other than in these areas, Picard is also spoken in the area around Valenciennes (Nord-Pas-de-Calais), in the French administrative region of Picardy, and in parts of Wallonia (around Tournai, in the North-West of Hainaut, which is also referred to as the province of Hainaut). Bergues, however, the picturesque town just South of Dunkirk where *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* is largely set and where the film was also largely shot, ironically belongs to a part of French Flanders where Picard is *not* spoken. Let's say though that this "anatopism" is part of the film's tactic of countering one clichéd image of the North with a positive yet equally clichéd image. According to that counter-cliché Nord-Pas-de-Calais is a region that, underneath its cold and rough surface, turns out to be a warm, culturally rich and hospitable place full of bell towers, *baraques à frites* and men who pat each other on the shoulder. Leaving aside the question of whether that strategy is revealing, humorous, or both, Boon's film has certainly put Nord-Pas-de-Calais on the map. With its 20.4 million visitors, the film became the second-biggest box-office hit in France ever, after *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997, US), and thus also the biggest box-office success of a French film in France (beating Gérard Oury's 1966 *La Grande varouille/Don't Look Know . . . We're Being Shot at*, FR/UK).⁹⁸ Moreover, the film unleashed a veritable "*Ch'timania*." "*Ça va biloute*," which means so much as "What's

⁹⁷ Around Lille and Douai, and around Béthune and Lens, respectively. In the area around Valenciennes Picard is called Rouchi.

⁹⁸ This record has since been broken by *Intouchables/The Intouchables* (Eric Toledano, 2011).

up dude?”, became a French expression. Bergues started to organize “Ch’tis tours.” And in the film’s opening week Ch’ti beer ran out of stock all across France.⁹⁹

These two anecdotes serve to illustrate the multifaceted relation between cinema and the French-Walloon “Nord,” a relation that stands central in both this and the following chapter. Together, these chapters argue that the Nord has not merely found expression in cinematic productions—whether in fiction or documentary films, and whether in features or shorts—but that the production of films in and about Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais has also been a significant agent in the endeavor of these regions to transform themselves from marginalized spaces within Europe to spaces located at both the continent’s and the European Union’s crossroads. Here it is good to briefly recall my definition of the *cinéma du Nord*. I think of this transnational regional cinema as one that both expresses the Nord and is rooted in the economies of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. While the following chapter defines the *cinéma du Nord* as the cultural, economic and political network of filmmaking and film production and funding in Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, this chapter defines it as the body of films that have both a textual and a production link to the material reality shared by these regions. Films “du Nord” have three things in common. First, they are films whose narrative is set or partly set in either Wallonia or Nord-Pas-de-Calais (or in both these regions). Second, they are all films whose production took place, or partly took place, in one or both of these regions. This may imply that these films were shot or partly shot in the Belgian South or French North, or that they were produced or coproduced by at least one organization (e.g.,

⁹⁹ See Granval, *Tournages des films dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais*, 36.

regional television, production company) established in either one of these regions. Third, they are all films that help me define the Nord as a transnational region.

What is a Region?

As explained in the introduction, the reason I add this third criterion, and thus define the cinéma du Nord recursively, is that the Nord is not a region *per definition* but one in need of definition. I define “region” broadly as a part of the earth’s surface (land or water, conveniently passing over the sky) that is set or that sets itself apart from its surroundings. A region may include other smaller regions, or it may itself belong or partly belong to other regions. And a region may or may not *also* be an administrative region, i.e. a territory whose borders delineate the field of influence of a political entity. The Nord is not an administrative region, which is the main reason why, unlike “*France*” and “*Wallonie*,” I do not translate “*Nord*.” The other reason why I call this transnational region by its French name is that one of its defining characteristics is precisely that it is located in northern francophone Europe. More precisely, the Nord is a transnational region in the north of that area of Europe where for the most part French is the dominant administrative language. This added precision is not only necessary because of the obvious fact that there live people in this region who do not speak French or who identify themselves with major or minor languages other than French. It is also necessary because the Nord can be said to include that part of Wallonia where German is the primary official language. Simultaneously, in my use of the term, Nord does not include the

Belgian administrative region of Brussels-Capital, where French is the official language alongside with Dutch.¹⁰⁰

As also discussed earlier, throughout most of these two middle chapters “Nord” equals the sum of two sub-national administrative regions: Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Wallonia (*Wallonie*) is the predominantly francophone, southern region of Belgium, where it is also referred to as “the south.” The name “*Wallonie*” goes back to 1844 when, fourteen years after the creation of Belgium as a sovereign nation state, the Belgian poet Joseph Grandgagnage substantiated the already existing adjective “*wallon*.”¹⁰¹ It was, however, not until 1970 that, under the instigation of the Walloon Popular Movement, the region officially entered the Belgian constitution as “*La Région Wallonne*.” Belgium’s two other regions are the Flemish Region, or Flanders (*Vlaanderen*), and the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region (*Bruxelles-Capitale/Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest*). In 1980 these three regions acquired decretal power as well as executive governments. In 1992 the noun “Wallonie” was added to the Belgian constitution.¹⁰² Since Belgium’s federalization in 1993, the Belgian regions can enter treaties with foreign regions and nations, including coproduction agreements, allowing

¹⁰⁰ By “minor language,” more commonly referred to as “dialect” (but also “slang”), I mean a language that, in spite of its active use in a particular region or by a particular community, is not legally recognized as an official, administrative language or holds an administrative status that is lower than that of the official language or languages.

¹⁰¹ In his 1844 collection of poems, which was published in the *Revue du Liège*, Grandgagnage writes: “*Mes chers wallons, par tous les Saints de la wallonie, je vous en conjure, soyez vous-mêmes.*” As Guido Fonteyn explains, it remains unclear whether Grandgagnage knew that jesuit and later also capucin monks (from 1616 onward) already referred to the southern part of their church provinces as “*Germania Inferior Provincia Walloniae*.” Guido Fonteyn, *Afscheid van Magritte: Over het Oude en Nieuwe Wallonië* (Antwerpen/Amsterdam: Meulenhoff/Manteau, 2004), pp. 19-21.

¹⁰² See Hervé Hasquin, “La Wallonie: d’où vient-elle?” in Freddy Joris, Natalie Archambeau eds., *Wallonie: atouts et références d’une région* (Gouvernement wallon, 1995), pp. 15-33, p. 17.

them a larger degree of autonomy in their participation in European, interregional collaboration structures.

With its 17 thousand square kilometers (10.5 square miles) Wallonia constitutes 55 percent of Belgium's land surface, yet with nearly 3.5 million people (2012) the region inhabits only 32 percent of the Belgian population. The Walloon capital is Namur, and the region has five provinces: Hainaut, Walloon Brabant, Namur, Liège, and Luxembourg. Although Wallonia shares most of its surface as well as its flag (a red rooster against a yellow background) with the French Community of Belgium (*Communauté Française de Belgique*), the capital of which is Brussels, these two entities are not identical. Whereas Belgium's federal regions are primarily political-economic entities, the communities—which besides the French Community are the Flemish community (*Vlaamse Gemeenschap*), which also has Brussels as its capital, and the German-speaking community (*Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens*), the capital of which is Eupen—are defined along linguistic lines and have a primarily cultural mission. This distinction is further expressed by the fact that the Walloon Region and the French Community of Belgium each have their own parliaments, this in contrast to the Flemish Region and the Flemish Community, which have unified their competences and which govern themselves through one parliament seated in Brussels. Finally, to make matters even more complex, in May 2011 the parliament of the French Community accepted a resolution stating that from that moment onward it would use the name “Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles” (Wallonia-Brussels Federation) for all its official communications. Up until today, however, this name has not been recognized by the Belgian constitution,

nor is it commonly used by the country's non-francophone politicians, many of whom have interpreted the name-change as an act of aggression, as it would reflect a Walloon claim on Brussels.¹⁰³

Nord-Pas-de-Calais, also spelled as “Nord-Pas de Calais,” is the northernmost of France's 27 administrative regions (22 of which are in Metropolitan, or continental, France). In France the region is commonly referred to as “*Nord*” or “*le Nord*.” Nord-Pas-de-Calais has a surface of about 12.5 thousand square kilometers (almost 8 square miles), which is about 2 percent of Metropolitan France, and populates a little over 4 million people (7 percent of Metropolitan France). The region's capital is Lille. Even though in all of France the main administrative language is French, in the rural areas around Dunkirk in French-Flanders parts of the population also speak Flemish or variations thereof. The French-Belgian border thus not only splits up the northern-European francophone community, but also the dutchophone community. Administratively, Nord-Pas-de-Calais is further subdivided into two departments, Nord and Pas-de-Calais. The contours of these departments date from 1790, when the revolutionary government substituted the provincial structure of the *Ancien Régime* for the departmental structure.¹⁰⁴ The regional divisional structure that joined Nord and Pas-de-Calais was introduced in 1956. Since 1982, when the French parliament passed the Decentralization

¹⁰³ The name “Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles” is used in broadcastings of the RTBF, which is controlled by the French Belgian Community. However, it is not used by the Flemish VRT. See “Ne dites pas ‘Federatie Wallonië-Brussel’ sur la VRT,” *7 sur 7* (September 29, 2011), <http://www.7sur7.be/7s7/fr/3007/Bruxelles/article/detail/1326587/2011/09/29/Ne-dites-pas-Federatie-Wallonie-Brussel-sur-la-VRT.dhtml> (accessed April 12, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ The historical provinces now included in Nord-Pas-de-Calais are: Artois, Boulonnais, Calaisis, French Flanders, French Hainaut, and part of Picardy.

Law, the regions' responsibilities have included infrastructure, education, and culture (including cinematic and other audiovisual productions).

The Nord equals Wallonia plus Nord-Pas-de-Calais. But it could also be argued that it consists of Nord-Pas-de-Calais and the French Community of Belgium, or of the intersection of these three regions (so Nord-Pas-de-Calais and francophone Wallonia), or of their union (Nord-Pas-de-Calais plus Wallonia plus Brussels-Capital). But why including Nord-Pas-de-Calais in its entirety, while excluding Picardy? After all, the borders between Picardy and Nord-Pas-de-Calais and between Picardy and Wallonia do not only artificially cut up linguistic communities, but also a shared history. (Like Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Picardy has a coal mining past.) The problem is of course that the Nord resists any unambiguous definition, precisely because a non-administrative region is characterized by the ambiguity and fluidity of its borders. Without a real, political power structure holding in place geographical and linguistic borders, any attempt to cut up geological, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, religious or other kinds of continuities remains an open-ended task that undermines itself per definition. The Nord itself does not exist. Only representations of the Nord exist, representations that partly overlap and partly contradict each other, but that in their combinations and juxtapositions render visible the amorphous and porous contours of a transnational region.

So while acknowledging this fundamental indefinability of the Nord, in most parts of this project I conceive of this region as consisting of Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Wallonia. I do so for three reasons. First, the Nord consists above all in the socioeconomic parallels

between Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. In pinning down the Nord, I therefore privilege representations, and in particular cinematic representations, that help me to conceive of this region along socioeconomic lines. To the degree that the distribution and redistribution of relations of production is the result of the politics of administrative organs that represent nationally and internationally recognized regions and nations, it is necessary to conceive of such relations, as well as of the communities that are defined by them, in terms dictated by administrative organs. As this chapter will make clear, my choice to conceive of the Nord as the transnational sum of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais is justified by these regions' shared histories of economic rise and decline, as well as by their recent political endeavor to reimagine themselves as innovative, European economies after decades of recession. A crucial role in this endeavor has been played by the recent interregional treaties between Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. These treaties acknowledge the fact that the challenges these regions have faced and continue to face cross the French-Belgian border, much like the coal reserves that fueled their industrial golden age crossed, and continue to cross, that border.

The second reason why I equate the Nord to Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Wallonia is that the cinéma du Nord is a francophone cinema. As I explain in the next chapter, for most parts Belgian cinema falls apart into a francophone and a dutchophone cinema. Without neglecting coproductions involving organizations from both the Flemish and the French communities, much more common are coproductions between francophone-Belgian and French organizations (e.g., *Rosetta*).

Third, as the next chapter demonstrates, one of the primary motors behind the blossoming of the cinematic industry in northern francophone Europe since the early 1990s has been the promotion of cinema, and of audiovisual culture at large, by the regional governments of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. The latter has developed a much more active audiovisual policy than its bordering French regions, Picardy and Champagne-Ardenne.

The following section maps the Nord by tracing the shared history of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, from their coal mining past to their European present. Subsequently, I turn productive, in both this and the third chapter, the unique “experimental” setup that the Nord constitutes for the cinema researcher. I do so by addressing the following questions: How and in what forms has the Nord found its way to the screen on each side of its internal border? Has, as one might expect, the series of socioeconomic crises that Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais have suffered during the long twentieth century, which is that of cinema, led to similar tendencies toward the real in each of their regional cinemas? Or are there also differences, caused by the fact that whereas Walloon cinema is a small and inherently transnational cinema that has developed gradually out of its documentary origins, northern-French cinema is a forerunner region that has emerged out of the partial decentralization of Europe’s largest and still very centralized national cinema?

The *Nord*: From *Pays Noir* to Euroregion

These last few days, for instance, it was an extraordinary sight, with the white snow in the evening around the twilight hour, seeing the workers returning home from the mines. These people are completely black when they come out of the dark mines into the daylight again, they look just like chimney-sweeps. Their houses are usually small and could better be called huts, scattered along the sunken roads and in the wood and against the slopes of the hills.

- Vincent van Gogh about the Walloon Borinage area, in a letter he wrote in 1878 to his brother Theo.¹⁰⁵

Une photo aérienne le montre à l'évidence: vues du ciel les agglomérations que constituent la métropole lilloise, les villes de Tournai, Coutraï et Mouscron n'en forment qu'une, ou presque. L'une est en France, l'autre en Belgique, dans deux provinces différentes. Les problèmes qui se posent à un ensemble aussi important sont à sa taille

- "Vu du ciel, il n'y a pas de frontière . . . ," from an informational brochure about the INTERREG collaborations between Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais.¹⁰⁶

I will now continue my investigation of the Nord by taking a close look at the border between France and Belgium. 620 kilometers (385 miles) in length, this border runs from the North Sea coast, about 50 kilometers northwest of the Channel (Pas-de-Calais), to the point where Belgium, France and Luxembourg meet. The French-Belgian border is a purely political construct. At hardly any part of its trajectory does it coincide with major physical delimitations such as mountains or rivers. As we already saw it only very partially coincides with the demarcation lines between linguistic communities. As the

¹⁰⁵ Vincent van Gogh, [Letter to Theo van Gogh. Wasmès, Thursday, December 26, 1878.] (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum; Huygens Institute-KNAW), <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let149/letter.html> (accessed December 12, 2011).

¹⁰⁶ Equipe technique INTERREG Nord-Pas-de-Calais, *Regards Transfrontaliers INTERREG 2, Hainaut, Nord-Pas de Calais, Picardie* (INTERREG Hainaut, Nord-Pas de Calais, Picardie, 1998).

French geographer Firmin Lentacker writes in his *La Frontière franco-belge* (1974): “Implanted almost three centuries ago and the result of contingencies of the politics of the European powers, the French-Belgian border, much like a pastry cutter, cuts up natural and human environments that at first sight cannot be distinguished from each other without its presence.”¹⁰⁷

The northern French border was approximately fixed in its current course by the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the War of the Spanish Succession between, amongst others, the France of Louis XIV and the Spanish Empire of Philip V. Up until this treaty the border had shifted numerous times. The largest part of the area that now forms Nord-Pas-de-Calais only became French territory over the course of the seventeenth century, while during a period spanning from the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century significant parts of what is now Belgium belonged to France. In 1794 the Low Countries, which included the Belgian provinces, were annexed by Napoleon’s Empire. This situation lasted until 1814, when the balance of powers shifted and the Belgian provinces became part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The recognition of this monarchy in 1815 by the Treaty of Vienna also meant a reconfirmation of the 1713 northern French border. In 1830, the predominantly francophone and Catholic population of the southern parts of the Netherlands rebelled against the Dutch king, William I, which led to the formation of a Belgian State in 1830. This state was fully recognized in 1839 and included the pre-1794 Belgian provinces, with the exclusion of parts of Flanders and Limburg as well as of the area that later became the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

¹⁰⁷ Firmin Lentacker, *La Frontière franco-belge: étude géographique des effets d’une frontière internationale sur la vie de relations* (Lille: 1974), p. 9.

During World War I Belgium was almost entirely occupied by German troops. Nord-Pas-de-Calais, at the moment of Germany's farthest advance in 1918, was occupied for more than two thirds. In 1920, in the aftermath of World War I, the former Prussian districts Eupen and Malmedy were annexed by Belgium. During World War II both Belgium and Nord-Pas-de-Calais entirely fell in German hands. Moreover, for strategic reasons, which included their proximity to England, the Germans united both regions into a single zone that fell directly under the rule of the German military administration located in Brussels.¹⁰⁸ This temporary secession of Nord-Pas-de-Calais from the rest of occupied France did, however, not leave lasting traces in the course of the French-Belgian border.

As stated, the French-Belgian border does not coincide with major physical delimitations. It cuts up a geological area of transition between the physical provinces of the Paris basin and the Rhine delta lands and traverses formations including the clays and other recent deposits of the Flanders plain and the old hard rocks of the Ardennes.¹⁰⁹ The border also intersects with several rivers, including the Lys, the Scheldt (*Escaut*), the Sambre and the Meuse, which all originate in France and which run northwards through Belgium and the Netherlands to drain in the North Sea via the estuaries of the Scheldt and the Dutch Maas. However, over the course of history the drainage pattern of Wallonia and the French North has been altered by the digging of canals and by the canalization of rivers. This modification of natural as well as digging of new watercourses has in fact increased the visibility of the French-Belgian border, as for protectionist reasons many

¹⁰⁸ The only exceptions were the districts of Eupen and Malmedy, which were reannexed by the Reich. This annexation was made undone again after World War II.

¹⁰⁹ Hugh Clout, *The Franco-Belgian Border Region* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 6.

French canals were left shallower than those north of the border, in order to prevent large barges from transporting goods from Antwerp and Rotterdam to France.¹¹⁰

Most significantly, the French-Belgian border divides into two almost equal parts the carboniferous layers that have been found in a strip running from the Lys in Nord-Pas-de-Calais to Liège, with an interruption around the Walloon city of Namur, where the coal layers have been eroded. This strip, which at its widest point measures fifteen kilometers, is the western segment of the so-called Austrasian field, which further extends to Dutch Limburg, the Aachen area and the German Ruhr district. Between the beginning of the seventeenth and the end of the twentieth century this subterranean presence has gradually become mirrored by the urban conglomeration stitching together the French North and the Belgium South. Seen from West to East, this conglomeration includes the French cities of Béthune, Lens, Douai, and Valenciennes, and the Walloon cities of Mons, La Louvière, Charleroi, Namur (though never a coal mining city), and Liège.

In the Walloon regions, the exploitation of coal goes back to at least the Middle Ages, as in certain parts of Hainaut and Liège the coal layers reached the earth's surface. The industrial mining of coal in these regions began in the early eighteenth century. In 1720 the first steam engine on the European Continent was installed at the mine of Jemeppe-sur-Meuse in Seraing (Rosetta's town), and Seraing was also the first place on the Continent to witness, in 1827, the opening of a coke-fired blast furnace, iron being one of Wallonia's other mineral treasures. This furnace had been constructed by John

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Cockerill, a British investor whose family had already been involved in the Verviers textile industry for some thirty years at that point. Soon after this birth of the Walloon steel industry, similar furnaces popped up like mushrooms, in Liège, but also in Charleroi. On the eve of the creation of the Belgian nation state in 1830, Wallonia thus laid the foundations for its industrial heydays, which besides coal and iron also had glass and textile as its pillars.¹¹¹ During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Walloon regions remained far in advance of nearby industrial areas, including the French North and the German Ruhr area. In the 1830s the Walloon regions even constituted the world's second industrial power in terms of industrial development, after England, ex aequo with the US, and before Prussia and France.¹¹² Together with the Manchester and Liverpool areas, the Walloon industrialized regions (Liège, Charleroi, the Borinage, La Louvière, Mons, Verviers) were thus among the cradles of the modern industrial society, in which a

¹¹¹ Between 1840 and 1880 the economy of the Walloon regions had an average annual growth rate of 4.4 percent (3.7 for Belgium). See Demoulin & Kupper, *Histoire de la Wallonie*, 252.

¹¹² Ibid., 246; Hervé Hasquin, "La Wallonie," 32. See also: Paul Bairoch, "Niveaux de développement économique de 1810 à 1910," *Annales: Economies, sociétés, civilisations* 20.6 (1965): pp. 1091-117. In this essay Bairoch lists Belgium as the second industrial power in terms of industrial development between 1810 and 1880 (ex aequo with the US and, in 1840, also with Switzerland). This classification forms the synthesis of some key indicators of industrialization that Bairoch analyzes for several countries. He distinguishes between direct indicators and indirect indicators. The direct indicators are: the consumption of raw cotton per capita (for which Belgium ranks fourth in 1840, 1860 and 1880, after the UK, the US and Switzerland); the production of cast-iron per inhabitant (for which Belgium ranks third in 1840, after the UK and Sweden, second in 1860 and 1880, after the UK). The indirect indicators are: the index of the development of railways; the consumption of coal per capita (for which Belgium ranks second, after the UK, in 1840, 1860 and 1880); and non-mobile steam engines. Finally, Bairoch writes about the industrial power of Belgium in the early nineteenth century: "Even though the data and the estimations are not sufficient in number, it is probable that Belgium—which since 1860 occupies the second place together with the US—situated itself in the beginning of the nineteenth century immediately after the UK in terms of its level of industrial development. It seems therefore that in this country the Industrial Revolution must have begun before the start of the nineteenth century and not in the years 1820-1830 as it has been generally supposed." (p. 1111)

small elite of captains of industry dominated the major industries.¹¹³ The Walloon labor movement started to take shape halfway the nineteenth century, with the creation in 1851 of the first *sociétés mutualistes* (cooperatives). The first Walloon labor unions saw the light toward the end of the nineteenth century, in the areas of Liège and the Borinage (in Hainaut). The Belgian Labor Party (Parti Ouvrier Belge) was founded in 1885.

On the other side of the border, in the area now known as Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the searching for coal started in the early eighteenth century, after France had lost control in 1713 of the coal basins around what is now the Walloon city of Mons. In 1716 the first coal was found north of Valenciennes, but it was not until the discovery in 1734 of the Anzin deposits also north of Valenciennes that the northern French coal industry really took off.¹¹⁴ The first coke furnace was installed in Ferrière-la-Grande near the national border and started operating in 1835.¹¹⁵ In 1850 the coalfield in the Nord department had an annual output of 1 million tonnes, still little in comparison to the 6.25 million tonnes the Walloon fields of Hainaut and Liège produced annually.¹¹⁶ During the second half of the nineteenth century the northern French exploitation area was extended westward, into the Pas-de-Calais department. By 1900 the joint coal production of Nord and Pas-de-Calais had risen to 20 million tonnes per year, an amount close to that of the Walloon

¹¹³ Besides Cockerill, some of Wallonia's other industrial dynasties are Warocqué (Mariemont), Simonis and Biolley (Verviers), and Huart-Chapel (Charleroi). See for example: Joris & Archambeau ed., *La Wallonie, atouts et références d'une région*,.

¹¹⁴ Clout, *Franco-Belgian Border Region*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Pierre Pierrard, *Histoire du Nord: Flandre, Artois, Hainaut, Picardie* (Paris: Hachette, 1992), p. 396.

¹¹⁶ E.A. Wrigley, *Industrial Growth and Population Change: A Regional Study of the Coalfield Areas of North-West Europe in the Later Nineteenth Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 12.

regions at that time.¹¹⁷ At the eve of World War I, Nord and Pas-de-Calais were responsible for about two thirds of the French national coal production.¹¹⁸ In parallel with the Walloon regions, besides coal mining and steel, textiles was the other thriving industry in the French North, as the application of steam power allowing Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing to develop into cloth capitals.

Another similarity between the Walloon and the northern French regions in this era was the ubiquity of Flemish workers. The industrial revolution had left rural Flanders in poverty, with the cities of Gent and Antwerp as only exceptions. As a result, many Flemish moved, either temporarily or permanently, to the Walloon regions or to France. In 1886 the French census counted 482 thousand Belgian immigrants, some 320 thousand of whom lived in Nord and Pas-de-Calais, making up ten percent of these regions' populations.¹¹⁹ One of the major dutchophone centers of France was Roubaix in French Flanders, whose population rose from 8 to 120 thousand during the nineteenth century, an increase that can be largely attributed to Belgian immigrants. As far as the Flemish migration to the Walloon industrial basins (Liège, Centre, Borinage, and the *Pays Noir* around Charleroi) was concerned, exact statistics are unavailable, for the reason that strictly speaking the Flemish workers and their families did not *e-migrate*. It is nevertheless certain that from the mid-nineteenth century onward, following a famine in rural Flanders, the migration of a nation within a nation commenced. This population

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁸ F. Codaccioni, "Une puissance industrielle arrivée à maturité," in Yves-Marie Hilaire ed., *Histoire du Nord-Pas-de-Calais: de 1900 à nos jours* (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 1982), pp. 65-103, p. 65.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Popelier, *Belges et Français du Nord: une histoire partagée* (Lille: La Voix du Nord Editions, 2009), p. 22; Fonteyn, *Afscheid van Magritte*, 139.

movement reached a second peak between 1880 and the beginning of World War I. It only really ended in the 1960s, when Wallonia definitively ceased being a promised land with an abundance of jobs.¹²⁰ (In 1967 the unemployment level was for the first time higher in the Walloon regions than in the Flemish regions, while the Flemish per capita income for the first time surpassed that of Wallonia.)

Other than Flanders, over the course of the twentieth century the Walloon and the northern French regions also received large migratory streams from eastern and southern Europe, and later also from North Africa. Especially in the period directly following World War II many Italians and Polish were recruited for the *bataille du charbon*, the coal battle. In 1946 Belgium and Italy signed an agreement that involved the migration of 50 thousand *operai* from rural Italy to industrial Wallonia, and simultaneously the annual transport of two to three million tons of coal in the opposite direction. This agreement, which further stipulated that Italian immigrants had to work “*du fond*” (underground) for five years before they were given a full work permit, left many Italian-Walloons with the feeling of having been sold for a few bags of coal.¹²¹ In 1956 the affluence of Italian immigrants ended abruptly, for the reason that the big mine catastrophe in Marcinelle (near Charleroi). More than half of the 262 victims were of Italian origin. This catastrophe led the Italian government to terminate its supply of men to the Walloon

¹²⁰ Fonteyn, *Afscheid van Magritte*, 138-9. Fonteyn also writes that the introduction in 1869 of a system of railway cards hardly slowed down the migration from the Belgian North to the Belgian South.

¹²¹ See Anne Morelli, “Les Italiens au Borinage: une longue histoire,” in *W’allons nous, Cinéma Wallonie Bruxelles: du documentaire social au film de fiction* (Virton: W’allons nous, 1989), pp. 98-110, p. 104.

mines, forcing Belgium to shift its orientation to other countries, especially Spain, Greece, Turkey, and Morocco.¹²²

In the era that these immigrants arrived, Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais had already entered their long path of economic decline. Following the end of World War I, both regions gradually fell victim to their one-dimensional economic structures. Michel Quévit and Vincent Lapage characterize interwar Wallonia as a “*colosse au pied d’argile*” (a clay-feet giant), a characterization that also applies to the French North of that period. Between 1918 and 1939 the northern French and the Walloon coal industries saw their competitive positions wane, for the reason that their coal reserves had become more expensive to exploit in comparison to those in Dutch Limburg or in the German Saar and Ruhr regions.¹²³ Especially the Walloon regions proved vulnerable. The Liège and the Borinage coal basins did not only have to compete with foreign industries, from the 1920s onward they also received competition from the newly discovered coal basins in the Flemish Campine (*De Kempen*) region. A similar development was visible in the Walloon glass industry, as the competition in Campine and other Flemish regions profited from its geographical advantages: the presence of coal and sand, and the proximity of the sea ports of Antwerp and Zeebrugge as well as that of the Albert

¹²² In 1959, according to statistics of the Fédération Charbonnière de Belgique, almost 17 thousand people were employed by the coal industry in the Borinage. About 8 thousand (47 percent) of these workers were foreign. From this group of foreign workers 97 percent worked underground.

¹²³ Pierrard, *Histoire du Nord*, 374. In the Nord and Pas-de-Calais departments the average yields per man shift in 1930 was 1,100 kg (1.2 tonnes). In the Walloon mines in 1930 this average was 572 kg (0.6 tonnes). (Dumoulin & Kupper, *Histoire de la Wallonie*, 292). By 1938, the average yields per man shift in northern France had remained stable at 1,100 kg. By comparison, in Dutch Limburg, the Saar and the Ruhr, these averages amounted to 2,400, 1,600 and 2,000 kg, respectively (Clout, *Franco-Belgian Border Region*, 14.)

Channel. In the meanwhile, the Walloon blast furnaces had become largely dependent on foreign, predominantly French, minerals. For example, in 1929, a “good year” for the Walloon steel production, nearly 90 percent of the 10.3 million tonnes of minerals processed had to be imported.¹²⁴

In the French North the economic situation was less grim during the first half of the interbellum. The region’s coal production continued to grow, reaching a record level of over 30 million tonnes in 1930. In that era also the region’s two other industrial pillars, steel and textile, experienced a golden age. This success, however, could not conceal the fact that the northern French economy showed the same structural weaknesses as that of the Walloon region: the concentration on the mining and heavy industrial processing of raw materials that became increasingly more difficult to extract, the exposure to international markets, and the sheer lack of industrial diversification and innovation. While surrounding nations or regions—including Germany, Flanders, The Netherlands, the Paris region and England—started to develop modern industries such as electronics, chemicals and the automobile industry, the French-Belgian Nord failed to keep pace with the twentieth century, and in fact continued living its nineteenth century past. As José Sporck writes, in an observation that also holds true for the French North: “[I]n 1947 the industrial areas of Wallonia had an out-dated industrial structure, almost identical to that at the beginning of the century.”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Dumoulin & Kupper, *Histoire de la Wallonie*, 292.

¹²⁵ J.A. Sporck, “L’Organisation de l’espace dans la métropole liégeoise,” *Travaux Géographiques de Liège* 159 (1972): 355-83. (Cited in Clout, *Franco-Belgian Border Region*, 14).

To return to the interwar period, in spite of the introduction of social legislation such as the eight-hour working day (1919 France, 1921 Belgium), for most of those who lived in the industrial areas, conditions remained extremely harsh. “Caves de Lille! On meurt sous vos plafonds de pierre” (“Caverns of Lille! People are dying underneath your stone ceilings”), Victor Hugo had already exclaimed in 1851, while in the early 1880s the Borinage had inspired Vincent Van Gogh to the painting of *The Potato Eaters* (*De Aardappeleters*, 1885).¹²⁶ A decade after World War I, and especially in the years following the Great Depression, little had changed in the Nord. In the first half of the 1930s the industrial production saw a vehement decline, forcing numerous factories to shut down and leading tens of thousands to lose their jobs.¹²⁷

We find some of the most poignant impressions of the crisis years in the novels by the French-Flemish writer Maxence van der Meersch, the “Christian Zola.” Among his most famous works is *Quand les sirènes se taisent* (*When the Looms are Silent*, but also *When the Sirens are Silent* would have been correct) from 1933, which is set in Roubaix during the strikes of 1931. In this novel Van der Meersch, through the third

¹²⁶ Van Gogh lived in the Borinage, in the town of Wasmes, between December 1878 and October 1880, where he worked as a protestant priest. Van Gogh painted *The Potato Eaters* in the Dutch town of Nuenen in April 1885. On 26 December 1878 Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo: “As far as I’m concerned, you surely understand that there are no paintings here in the Borinage, that in general they haven’t the slightest idea of what a painting is, so it goes without saying that I’ve seen absolutely nothing in the way of art since my departure from Brussels. But this doesn’t mean that this isn’t a very special and very picturesque country, everything speaks, as it were, and is full of character. . . . These last few days, for instance, it was an extraordinary sight, with the white snow in the evening around the twilight hour, seeing the workers returning home from the mines. These people are completely black when they come out of the dark mines into the daylight again, they look just like chimney-sweeps. Their houses are usually small and could better be called huts, scattered along the sunken roads and in the wood and against the slopes of the hills.” (Van Gogh, [Letter to Theo van Gogh].

¹²⁷ Between 1930 and 1935 coal production in the French North went down by 14.6 percent, that of cokes by 27.7 percent, that of steel by 36 percent.

person perspective of Laure, describes the *courées*, the small cottages built around a court yard that were typical for the region:

Elle regardait maintenant la “cour,” sa “cour,” où elle avait toujours vécu. Deux rangées de maisons basses se faisaient face, six de chaque côté. Peintes à la chaux, avec des soubassements vernis au goudron, elles eussent paru uniformes, identiquement sales, vétustes et branlantes, aux yeux d’un étranger. Mais Laure les connaissait depuis toujours, et l’habitude les faisait dissemblables à ses yeux. . . . Des fils de fer, en réseau dense, formaient à travers toute la courée, à deux mètres du sol, comme une nappe serrée. La lessive du samedi y pendait, un étalage de hardes pauvres et multicolores que gonflait le vent [She now looked at the court, her court, where she had always lived. Two rows of low buildings faced one another, six on each side. Whitewashed and with their foundation walls tarred with black pitch, they would all have looked alike to a stranger, all identically dirty, old and tumble-down, but Laure had known them all her life and long familiarity gave each of them an individuality in her eyes. . . . A close network of wires made a sort of awning over the entire court, six feet above the ground. The Saturday wash was hanging there, a display of miserable garments of many colors, puffed out by the wind]¹²⁸

And in a later chapter, right after Laure has discovered that she is pregnant:

Il semblait que pour la première fois elle vît l’infamie du quartier, toute la misère de ces maisons surpeuplées, de ces cabarets de débauche, de ces garnis envahis de Tchèques, de Polonais et d’Italiens, de ces courées pullulantes et empestées. Les gens, tous, lui paraissaient blêmes et sales, les gosses minables et dépenaillés, les bêtes même affamées et misérables. Qu’importe tout cela, tant qu’on est jeune, et qu’on attend Qu’importe, quand, plus tard, l’amour vient transfigurer ces laideurs, et vous apporte la sereine indifférence pour tout ce qui n’est pas l’être aimé. Mais après, le songe dissipé, combien douloureux le réveil, combien sinistre la réalité! [She seemed to take in all the sordidness of the district for the first time—the wretchedness of the overpopulated buildings, the drinking dives, the rooming houses invaded by Czechs, Poles and Italians, the swarming, foul-smelling inner courts. All the people looked sallow-faced and dirty, the children

¹²⁸ Maxence van der Meersch, *Quand les sirènes se taisent* (Douai: L’Imprimerie Nationale, 1960), pp. 5-6. The translation is partly based on *When the Looms Are Silent*, trans. Frederick Blossom (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1934), p. 6.

ill-kept and ragged, even the dogs and cats starving and miserable. What matters all that when one is young and full of hope? And what does it matter when, later, love comes along, transfiguring all the ugliness and bringing serene indifference to everything except the loved one? But afterwards, when the dream had been shattered, how painful is the awakening, how sinister the reality!]¹²⁹

The novel ends with the return of Laure's lover and the birth of her child. This family idyll is, however, partly offset by the fact of it being set in conditions in which child mortality is extreme and in which most people end up in communal graves.

In the same year that Van der Meersch published his novel, a very similar testimony to misery and class struggle saw the light right across the border: the documentary film *Borinage*, which in 1963 was renamed as *Misère au Borinage*.¹³⁰ A film made by the Flemish, Ostend-born Henri Storck and the Dutch Joris Ivens, *Borinage* has generally been considered to mark the birth of Walloon cinema. The film was initiated and produced by the Club de l'Écran, a leftwing cinéclub in Brussels that mainly screened Soviet films. After its secretary, André Thirifays, had received a pamphlet entitled *Comment on crève de faim au Levant de Mons? (How People Are Starving to Death East of Mons?)*, the cinéclub decided to ask Storck and Ivens—who at that moment was filming in the USSR—to produce a documentary on the subject. Supported by a 35 thousand Belgian franc (6,250 US dollar¹³¹) budget—25 thousand of which had been provided by an anonymous patron, the rest by the members of the Club—and with

¹²⁹ Van der Meersch, *Quand les sirènes se taisent*, 78-9; *When the Looms Are Silent*, 75-6, translation modified.

¹³⁰ The film's added commentary was written by the politician and filmmaker Jean Fonteyne and read by André Thirifays, founder of the Club de l'Écran, which had ordered *Borinage*, and co-founder in 1938, together with Storck and Pierre Vermeylen, of the *Cinémathèque de Belgique*.

¹³¹ Source: <http://measuringworth.com>

an extremely compact 35mm Kinamo camera and a petrol lamp as their only equipment, Storck and Ivens spent three weeks in the *pays noir*, trying to stay under the radar of the suspicious coal mine management and the police.¹³² The result was a partly staged, partly newsreel-like pamphlet-documentary whose depiction of the precarious living conditions and the 1932 strike reveals the influence of Anglo-Saxon social-realism (Flaherty, Grierson, Wright), Russian montage (Eisenstein, Vertov), and Van Gogh. As Joris Ivens writes in his memoirs: “Somehow, I could understand why after living in the Borinage Van Gogh stopped preaching and began to paint. My first impression of the district was its dark and colorless uniformity—no bright thing, no happy thing. Black, dusty—no whites. The lightest tone is gray. Even nature seems saddened by the district’s misery.”¹³³

Borinage captured this misery and in doing so gave face to a people, leading Walter Benjamin to, in his “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (1936-9), praise the film as an example of cinema’s potentially revolutionary power to transform “any man” into a “movie extra.”¹³⁴ *Borinage* opens with a montage sequence that depicts the “crise dans le monde capitaliste” (“crisis in the capitalist world”), as the later added voice-over states: “Des usines sont fermées,

¹³² Marc-E. Mélon, “Misère au Borinage [avec Joris Ivens, 1933],” in Philippe Dubois & Edouard Arnoldy eds., *Ça tourne depuis cent ans: une histoire de cinéma francophone de Belgique* (Brussels: Communauté Française de Belgique/Wallonie-Bruxelles, 1995), p. 56.

¹³³ Joris Ivens, *The Camera and I* (New York; Berlin: International Publishers; Seven Seas Books, 1969), pp. 83-4.

¹³⁴ In the third version of “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (1939) Walter Benjamin writes: “[T]he newsreel offers everyone the chance to rise from passer-by to movie extra. In this way, a person might even see himself becoming part of a work of art: think of Vertov’s *Three Songs of Lenin* or Ivens’ *Borinage*. Any person today can lay claim to being filmed.” (*Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, eds. Howard Eiland, Michael Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. [Cambridge; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006], p. 262). Note by the way that Benjamin only credits Ivens.

abandonnées. Des millions de prolétaires ont faim. La production ne rapporte plus assez (“Factories have been closed, abandoned. Millions of proletarians are hungry. Industry does not pay enough . . . ”). The film ends with a march of workers who are carrying with them a portrait of Karl Marx. This protest sparks a montage sequence that sums up the contradictions internal to capitalism in general and the situation in the Borinage in particular: a worker who has been on strike for fourteen weeks and whose six children are hungry and sick while elsewhere in the world people are throwing out oversupplies of food, and people who, “in the heart of the coal region,” are forced to glean substandard coal from the *terrils* (slag heaps) in order to heat their houses.

Though the strikes did not bring the “dictatorship of the proletariat” that *Borinage* calls for, in 1936 the Belgian and French labor movements, through new waves of massive strikes, managed to wrest structural reforms. In June 1936 representatives of Léon Blum’s newly installed *Front populaire* government—an alliance of France’s three main leftwing parties—convened with the employers trade union confederation (CGPF) and the general confederation of labor (CGT).¹³⁵ On June 8, Roger Salengro, Minister of Internal Affairs and former mayor of Lille, announced a package of legislation that would enter history as the Matignon Agreements.¹³⁶ These agreements stipulated the forty-hours work week, paid vacations, the right to strike, collective bargaining and compulsory

¹³⁵ The *Front Populaire* consisted of the French Communist Party, the French Section of the Workers’ International, and the Radical and Socialist Party. Together these parties received 63 percent of the votes in 1936 (80 percent of the votes in Nord, 67 in Pas-de-Calais).

¹³⁶ Four months after his signing of the Matignon Agreements, Salengro committed suicide, after having been accused by extreme right-wing groups of having deserted the French army during World War I, an accusation for which no evidence was ever found. The other politician from Nord-Pas-de-Calais in the Popular Front government was Jean-Lebas, Minister of Labor and the former mayor of Roubaix.

education until the age of fourteen. These developments in France accelerated similar developments in Belgium. At the country's first National Labor Conference employers, employees and the Belgian government—which consisted of socialists, Catholics, and liberals—decided on a set of legislative measures comparable to those introduced in France.

Following World War II, for many in France and Belgium social conditions ameliorated rapidly as the postwar economic boom went accompanied by the gradual construction of the welfare state. For the Walloon regions and the departments of Nord and Pas-de-Calais, however, the so-called “thirty glorious years” formed a mixed blessing. Major reservoirs of energy resources and producers of final and intermediary industrial products, both regions had a crucial role in their countries' post-war reconstruction efforts. Industrial processes were mechanized and rationalized, and production levels of coal, steel and glass skyrocketed. In the years directly following the war Belgium had the highest growth levels of all European countries, while combined the Nord and Pas-de-Calais departments formed France's second economic pole.¹³⁷ In this same period, however, and precisely because of the short-run indispensability of their industrial resources, little was done until the early 1960s to diversify these regions' economic structures. So even though the aftermath of the war meant a new golden age for the French-Belgian Nord, given the fact that its industrial expansion hardly went accompanied by structural reforms, its economy was bound to collapse.

¹³⁷ Demoulin & Kupper, *Histoire de la Wallonie*, 314; Eric Bussière, “Une renaissance économique fragile,” [Chapter XXIII in:] Alain Lottin & Eric Bussière eds., *Deux mille ans du “Nord-Pas-de-Calais”*: Tome II: *De la révolution au XXIe siècle* (Lille: La Voix du Nord, 2002), pp. 194-200, p 194.

The coal mines played of course the central role in the post-war industrial revival and decline of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. The Walloon mines had withstood the occupation relatively well and experienced a last boom in the years directly following the war. In France, where the pits had suffered more, the mines were nationalized in 1946, as the *bataille du charbon* exceeded regional and in fact also national proportions. As a French economist stated in 1954 about the Nord department: the region's coalfields "will be indispensable not only to the national economy but also to the economy of Western Europe."¹³⁸ Two years earlier France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxemburg, West Germany and Italy had created the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The main goal of this EU forerunner that involved a common market for coal and steel was, in the words of French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, to "make war not only unthinkable but materially impossible." However, for the northern French and Walloon coal industries this common market also meant a further confrontation with their relatively high production costs. In addition, these industries faced increasing competition from imported American coking coal, oil and, in the course of the 1960s, Dutch natural gas.

As a result of the increased rationalization and mechanization of the production process, in the French North coal output remained relatively stable throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and only started to radically decline after 1968, when the French government decided to halve national production. By 1971 the region's production had gone down to 15 million tonnes, compared to 29 million in the 1950s. Employment in the northern

¹³⁸ Cited in Clout, *Franco-Belgian Border Region*, 14.

French mines dropped much faster, from about 220 thousand positions in 1947 to 62 thousand in 1971. As far as Wallonia was concerned, coal production plummeted during the same era, in spite of the ECSC subsidies that the region received. During the period of 1955—1968 the collective annual production of the southern Belgian mines dropped from 20.5 to 6.3 million tonnes, while the number of people employed by the Walloon mines went down from almost 100 thousand to less than 21 thousand during the same period. By 1973, on the eve of the international oil crisis these figures had dropped further to 2.6 million and around 9 thousand, respectively.¹³⁹ On both sides of the border the coal battle thus marched toward its ineluctable conclusion: the shutting down of an industry that had determined the lives of seven generations. In Wallonia coal mining ended in 1984. Eight years later, the Houillères du Bassin Nord-Pas-de-Calais were liquidated.

For a long period the decline of coal mining, as well as that of these regions' other industrial poles, had relatively little impact on general employment levels. This drastically changed in the early 1970s, when the vulnerability of both regions was laid bare by the global economic recession spurred by the energy crisis. More than any other region in France, Nord-Pas-de-Calais was affected by this recession, and between 1973 and 1998 half of its 550 thousand industrial jobs went lost.¹⁴⁰ In Wallonia, unemployment exploded from 5.1 percent in 1971 to 14 percent at the end of the decade, before reaching a record level of 23 percent in 1985, with peaks of 30 percent in arrondissements like

¹³⁹ Ibid., 15-6.

¹⁴⁰ Jean Vavasseur-Desperriers, "Les Grandes forces politiques au temps de la reconstruction et de l'expansion," [Chapter XXIV in:] Lottin & Bussière eds., *Deux mille ans du "Nord-Pas-de-Calais,"* pp. 201-7, p. 208.

Charleroi.¹⁴¹ On both sides of the border people were thus thwarted in their hope that the conversion from an economic structure inherited from the nineteenth century to one that combines high-technological industry with a strong tertiary sector would be a smooth transitioning. This conversion began in the late 1960s and is still ongoing. Especially in Nord-Pas-de-Calais new large-scale industrial projects were initiated. As the result of the construction of a new production site by the French steel group Usinor, Dunkirk grew out to one of France's main port cities, and in 1970 Renault announced a car factory in Douai. In subsequent decennia Peugeot and Toyota opened factories near Valenciennes. This introduction of the automotive industry in the French North was strongly promoted by the French national government and helped alleviate the impact of the decline of coal mining.

In Wallonia, the introduction of such a grand-scale, low-skilled employment providing industry never happened. Also here though new sectors have developed, including agroalimentary, chemical and pharmaceutical industries. In the most recent decades the region has sought to actively present itself as a knowledge-based economy, as it has been manifested by its promotion of collaboration structures between universities and the commercial sectors, the creation of research and development parks, and the spread of *spin-offs*, companies that exploit scientific research commercially. Many of these activities have developed along the axis Louvain-la-Neuve-Namur-Luxembourg, which has replaced the coal basin axis as Wallonia's economic heart. As Bernadette Mérenne-Schoumaker observes, Wallonia's economic conversion thus

¹⁴¹ Demoulin, *Histoire de la Wallonie*, 328.

inscribes itself in “new tendencies of territorial development in which . . . a region’s comparative advantage supports less and less on tangible factors . . . but more and more on intangible factors . . . favored by networks between actors, the presence of performing institutions and an adequate government.”¹⁴²

Though it is certainly true that over the last forty years Wallonia’s economy, like that of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, has become increasingly less determined by its mineral resources, one of the main lines along which both regions have reinvented themselves in the face of crisis in fact *does* have a directly material basis, namely their unchanged strategic location in North-West Europe. This geographical capital has not always been self-evident, as it is illustrated by the skeptical responses that plans to improve both regions’ connectivity were met by in the first decades after World War II: “Why construct a highway between Paris and Lille when there are only fields?”, opponents of the A1 national highway argued, the construction of which was begun in 1954 and only finished in 1969. Similarly, the Belgian newspaper *La Libre Belgique* feared that one could “play marbles” on the East-West *route de Wallonie*, whose first block of concrete was placed in 1962. Yet as European integration has continued to progress, and especially since the inauguration of the Schengen Area in 1985—which created a free-trade zone initially consisting of France, West Germany and the then already “borderless” Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg)—Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais have literally sought to position themselves at the crossroads of North-West Europe. For example, over the last two decades Lille and Liège have grown into major

¹⁴² Bernadette Mérenne-Schoumaker, “Des défis majeurs pour le futur,” [Chapter 17 in:] Demoulin and Kupper, *Histoire de la Wallonie*, 379-88, 380.

TGV-hubs connecting the European and EU-centers of Paris, Cologne, Frankfurt, Brussels, Randstad Holland, and, since the opening of the Channel Tunnel in 1994, also London. A year earlier Lille's new international railway station was taken into use. This station—which briefly appears in *L'humanité*—has the ambitious name “Lille Europe.” A comparable European, future-oriented regional positioning speaks out of the newly renovated Liège-Guillemins train station, whose impressive glass and steel vault may simultaneously be interpreted as a monument to the city's industrial history.¹⁴³

While located at the intersection of the EU's economic and political centers, to a large extent the Nord is also a product of European integration in and of itself. More precisely, European integration has helped reveal the Nord as the transnational region it always already was. Starting from the inception of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in 1975, Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais have received structural European monetary aid in order to stimulate their economic transition. Since the early 1990s large parts of this aid have been allocated through the various Interreg programs that Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais (or parts of them) have participated in. Interreg is a EU initiative that promotes the transnational cooperation between regions in the EU. The first programming cycle, Interreg I, took off in 1989 and ended in 1993. The subsequent programming cycles have covered the following periods: 1994—1999 (II), 2000—2006 (III), and 2007—2013 (IV).¹⁴⁴ Interreg ought to be understood as part of the EU's self-image as not only being a collection of sovereign nation states but also a patchwork of

¹⁴³ The new Liège-Guillemins station was designed by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. Lille-Europe was designed by Jean-Marie Duthilleul.

¹⁴⁴ Moreover, Interreg is made up of three strands: strand A, cross-border cooperation; strand B, transnational cooperation; and strand C, interregional cooperation.

small, cross-border and often overlapping *Euroregions*. These Euroregions are constituted by transnational cooperation structures between two or more contiguous territories located in different countries. One of these Euroregions is the Cross-Channel Euroregion initiated by Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Kent in 1987 and joined by Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-Capital in 1991.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, the Belgian provinces of Limburg, Liège, and the German-speaking Community of Belgium are also part of the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, which comprises, furthermore, parts of the Netherlands and Germany.

The aim of the Euroregions and the Interreg initiatives is to confront economic, environmental and other challenges that exist across international borders. In the French-Belgian border region one of such challenges has been the pollution left behind by the coal mines. Under the aegis of the second Inttereg cycle, Hainaut and Nord-Pas-de-Calais have therefore, as part of their shared trajectory “from black to green,” called into existence the Outil de Contrôle des Anciens Sites Charbonniers (Control Tool for Former Coalmining Sites).¹⁴⁶ Other domains in which Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais—whether or not in combination with other Belgian and northern French regions—have cooperated include healthcare, university education, culture (including cinema, as we will see in the following chapter), and the development of the cross-border, binational

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of Euroregion, see for example: Odile Heddebaut, “The EUROREGION from 1991 to 2020: An Ephemeral Stamp,” in Olivier Kramsch & Barbara Hooper eds., *Cross-Border Governance in the European Union* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004), pp. 70-88.

¹⁴⁶ See Société de l’Industrie Minérale ed., *Gestion des anciens sites de carbochimie en Europe. Synthèse du programme Interreg II Ocasicha* (Douai: Les Fascicules de l’Industrie Minérale, 2001). Since 2007 the Interreg IV France-Wallonie-Vlaanderen is in operation. This program, which runs until 2013, focuses on a border area involving parts of Wallonia, Flanders and northern France.

metropolitan area around Lille. Illustrative in this regard is a statement that appears in one of the Interreg brochures: “[a]n aerial photograph shows the evidence: seen from the sky the agglomerations that constitute the metropolitan area of Lille and the towns of Tournai, Coutrai and Mouscron form, or almost form, only one agglomeration.”¹⁴⁷

Even clearer visual evidence of the existence of the French-Belgian continuity we find in maps that combine the aerial picture’s blindness for administrative borders with regional socioeconomic statistics. Such maps are relatively rare, as usually regional data are either gathered by national institutions (such as the French Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, or INSEE) or by subnational, regional institutions (such as the Walloon Institut Wallon de l’Evaluation de la Prospective et de la Statistique, or IWEPS). In the second half of the last decade, though, the INSEE has published an *Atlas transfontalier franco-belge*. This nine-volume cartographic investigation of Belgium, northern France and parts of Germany and The Netherlands was developed with the goal to “better understand the evolution of territories, and the physical, human, and the economical geography of this ensemble of 14 million inhabitants.”¹⁴⁸ As one of the maps in this “transborder atlas” demonstrates, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the French North and Belgian South had an average GDP per inhabitant that is significantly lower than in surrounding areas. According to the INSEE this difference is partly explained by the relatively low employment rates in these areas in

¹⁴⁷ Equipe technique INTERREG Nord-Pas-de-Calais, *Regards Transfontaliers INTERREG 2*, [no page numbers].

¹⁴⁸ André-Jean Pouille et al., *Atlas transfontalier: Tome 4: emploi-formation-taux de chômage* (Paris: INSEE, 2009). See also http://www.insee.fr/fr/regions/nord-pas-de-calais/default.asp?page=themes/ouvrages/atlas/ATLF_accueil.htm#Emploi-Formation (accessed September 10, 2011).

that year.¹⁴⁹ In turn these low employment rates are largely caused by the mismatch between availability of and demand for employment in the former coal mining axis. The maps also illustrate the unemployment and the youth unemployment rates in different regions in northern France and Belgium. We hardly need to squint our eyes in order to recognize in these maps the trajectory of the former French-Belgian coal mining axis.

These maps do not only reveal the commonalities between Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais in terms of these regions' restructuring efforts, they also reveal some differences. Observing that both regions have been "affected by unemployment and precarity,"¹⁵⁰ the INSEE also notes that the Walloon situation remains more "delicate" than that of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, where the unemployment rate revealed a relatively optimistic trend in the first half of the twenty-first century.¹⁵¹ This observation that in comparison to Nord-Pas-de-Calais Wallonia has been experiencing more problems in the process of overcoming its structural crisis is further confirmed by the fact that since 2007

¹⁴⁹ According to Eurostat, in 2000, the employment rate in the age range of 15-64 was 61.0 and 60.9 percent in France and Belgium, respectively, but only 51.8 percent and 56.7 percent in Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Wallonia, respectively. See André-Jean Pouille, *Atlas transfontalier: Tome 3: activités économiques—PIB par habitant* (Paris: INSEE, 2005).

See also http://www.insee.fr/fr/regions/nord-pas-de-calais/default.asp?page=themes/ouvrages/atlas/03_01_pib_habitant.htm (accessed September 10, 2011).

¹⁵⁰ Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, "Nord-Pas-de-Calais," (Paris: INSEE, 2010), <http://www.insee.fr/fr/regions/nord-pas-de-calais/default.asp?page=faitsetchiffres/presentation/presentation.htm> (accessed September 10, 2011).

¹⁵¹ Whereas over the period 2000—2004 in France on the whole unemployment went up by 0.9 percent, in Nord-Pas-de-Calais's former mine regions unemployment went down. In Wallonia, unemployment went up by 1.4 percent during the same period. See Pouille et al., *Atlas transfontalier: Tome 4*, http://www.insee.fr/fr/regions/nord-pas-decalais/default.asp?page=themes/ouvrages/atlas/04_07_part_des_jeunes_dans_le_chomage.htm (accessed September 10, 2011).

the Walloon province of Hainaut has been the only area in northwest continental Europe that continues to receive direct ERDF support.¹⁵²

In spite of these differences in the pace with which Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Wallonia have succeeded in catching up economically with their domestic and foreign neighbors, the commonalities that bind these two regions since the 1713 fixation of the northern French border continue to dominate. Having sketched these commonalities it is now time to resume my exploration of the ways that the geopolitical, socioeconomic and cultural-historical reality of the Nord has made its way to the screen. I began that exploration of the cinéma du Nord in the first chapter with the joint analysis of *Rosetta* and *L'humanité*. In this second chapter, this exploration has so far been continued by my discussions of *Rosetta*, *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* and *Borinage*. The remainder of this develops an answer to the following question: How can we explain the similarities and differences between the ways that the similarities and differences between Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais have been cinematically expressed on each side of the border, its border?

¹⁵² Direct ERDF aid is EU support not distributed through the Interreg IV programs (2007—2013). Hainaut is the only region in France and Belgium labeled by the ERDF as “Phasing-out” (the four categories being “Convergence regions,” “Phasing-out regions,” “Phasing-in Regions,” and “Competitiveness and Employment Regions.”) See “Cohesion Policy 2007—2013,” *Europa.eu* (European Union, 2007), http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/belgium/index_en.htm (accessed September 10, 2011).

Between Utopia and Distopia: Wallonia in the Cinema

Au début, chacun, seul, pensait que bientôt, ou un jour, il y aurait un second grève générale, peut-être même une révolution, bien que chacun savait aussi qu'en Belgique le mot "révolution" est toujours un abus du langage.¹⁵³
 - *Pour que la guerre s'achève les murs devaient écrouler* (d. Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, 1980)

In *Afscheid van Magritte* (*Farewell to Magritte*, 2004)—like Verbeke's *Arm Wallonië* a quest for Wallonia through Flemish eyes—Guido Fonteyn takes the reader on a tour through the streets of Châtelet, near Charleroi: "Black poverty rules the neighborhood. A shabby bar-hotel-B&B, half Walloon, half Turkish, forms the imagined setting for a neorealist film about the Borinage or *Le Centre*"¹⁵⁴ Wallonia's poverty-struck areas call to mind the urban wastelands of Italian neorealism, at least for this observer. Does this also mean that neorealism, broadly understood as a socially critical and stylistically minimalist mode of filmmaking, dominates in cinematic accounts of Wallonia and its century of crisis. The answer to this question is a clear "yes." Roger Mounèje argues that the Walloon films "that have most resisted time come forth out of the lived social experience of the Walloon population."¹⁵⁵ Frédéric Sojcher calls the "cinema of the real" "a certain tendency of Belgian cinema," a tendency he observes

¹⁵³ "At first, everyone, alone, thought that soon, or one day, there would be a second general strike, perhaps even a revolution, even though everyone also knew that in Belgium the word 'revolution' is always an abuse of language."

¹⁵⁴ Fonteyn, *Afscheid van Magritte*, 11.

¹⁵⁵ Roger Mounèje, "Note de l'éditeur," in *W'allons-nous?*, *Cinéma Wallonie Bruxelles*, pp. 5-6, p. 5.

particularly in the tradition of Walloon documentary cinema.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Léon Michaux states that “in Wallonia, documentary nourishes fiction while fiction films let transpire the concern with the real, the concern with documentary.”¹⁵⁷ Jacques Polet observes “a close link to the real” in Walloon cinema, a link he further describes as “the articulation of a social culture that is profoundly nourished by the history of Wallonia, in particular its economic history and its industrial mutations.”¹⁵⁸ Finally, the collection of essays *Cinéma et crise(s) économique(s): esquisses d’une cinématographie wallonne (Cinema and Cris(i)(e)s: Sketches of a Walloon cinematography*, 2011) identifies “the identity of . . . Walloon, Belgian and francophone cinema, while explaining its anchorage in a landscape of crisis and economic difficulty.”¹⁵⁹ In one of the contributions Bénédicte Rochet writes that “Wallonia’s filmmakers have in common that they advocate a cinema of the ‘real’ in which genres bump into each other, often on the tightrope between reality and fiction.”¹⁶⁰

As we have seen, Walloon cinema was inaugurated by Storck’s and Ivens’s partly scripted documentary *Borinage* (1933). Postponing a more detailed definition of Walloon cinema to the next chapter, it is important to note here already that even though Walloon cinema can be said to include many films that take place or that were shot outside of the region (e.g., Thierry Michel’s 2003 *Iran—sous le voile des apparences/Iran: Veiled*

¹⁵⁶ Frédéric Sojcher, *La Kermesse héroïque du cinéma belge: Tome I: 1896-1965: Des documentaires et des farces* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), p. 152.

¹⁵⁷ Léon Michaux, *Images et cinéma de Wallonie: une société en mutation* (Brussels: La Médiathèque de la Communauté Française de Belgique, 2000).

¹⁵⁸ Jacques Polet, “Un enracinement porteur d’universalité,” in *Louvain* 133 (2002): 23-5, p. 23.

¹⁵⁹ Anne Roekens and Axel Tixhon, “Avant-propos,” in Anne Roekens and Axel Tixhon eds., *Cinéma et crise(s) économique(s): esquisses d’une cinématographie wallonne* (Crisnée/Namur: Editions Yellow Now/Presses Universitaires Namur, 2011), pp. 7-13, p. 7.

¹⁶⁰ Bénédicte Rochet, “Esquisse d’une cinématographie wallonne,” in Roekens & Tixhon, *Cinéma et crise(s)*, pp. 15-28, p. 22.

Appearances or André Cauvin's 1953 *Bongolo*, which is set in Belgian Congo), it is not identical to francophone Belgian cinema at large, for the reason that francophone Belgium also includes Brussels-Capital. For example, Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman: 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) is part of francophone Belgian but not of Walloon cinema (even though its cast includes Henri Storck, who plays the role of Jeanne's first caller).

Other than *Borinage* (or *Misère au Borinage*) and *Rosetta*, an uncontested landmark of Walloon cinema is *Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre*, a 1960 fiction feature directed by Paul Meyer (1920—2007). This “pearl exuded from the coal”¹⁶¹ was one of the first Belgian fiction features that drew international attention. With the Belgian theaters dominated by Hollywood and French productions, the Belgian feature-length films that had been produced until the late 1950s consisted mainly of folkloristic or vaudeville comedies with little to no artistic pretension. The main reason for this long period of virtual nonexistence of a Belgian “quality” or “auteur” cinema—concepts to which I will return in the next chapter—is the longtime unavailability of sufficient production funds. As Théodore Louis writes: “Every filmmaker who toward the end of the 1950s dreamed about shooting, in our country, with Belgian money, outside of the accepted ‘norms,’ a fiction feature could expect to be treated as if he were either utopian or crazy.”¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Marc-E Mélon, “*Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre* [1960],” in Dubois & Arnoldy eds., *Ça tourne depuis cent ans*, p. 115.

¹⁶² Théodore Louis, “Ambiguïté de la fiction: les années 1958-1965,” in *W'allons-nous?, Cinéma Wallonie Bruxelles*, pp. 62-70, p. 63.

Meyer was utopian. His film emerged out of a project commissioned by the Belgian Ministry of Public Education that was supposed to sing praise of the smooth integration of newly arrived immigrants in the Borinage. Upon his own arrival in the Borinage, however, Meyer was confronted with precarity and strikes. Moreover, through his cameraman François Rents, who had earlier worked for Storck and Ivens, Meyer was introduced to *Borinage*. These and other sources of inspiration, including the writings of Bertolt Brecht, lead Meyer to radically deviate from the State propaganda he had committed himself to and instead make a film that is much more in line with his earlier *Klinkaart* (*The Brick-Layer*, 1955), a short that has been linked to the poetic realism of Bresson.¹⁶³ Soon exceeding the government budget, Meyer secured additional loans. He gathered a large cast of non-professional actors, including many children, whom he asked to perform their own lives. After having finished the editing of his film, he went to a studio in Paris in order to postsynchronize the dialogues, which were performed by French actors reading texts in Italian, Polish, French and Dutch. The film premiered at the festival of Porretta Terme in Italy, where it was awarded the Critics Prize award by a Jury including Michelangelo Antonioni, Roberto Rossellini and Luchino Visconti. These neorealist godfathers were joined in their praise by Vittorio de Sica and Giuseppe de Santis, as well as by the critics of *Cahiers du cinéma*. In Meyer's home country, the film won the *Grand prix d'excellence* at the Antwerp national film festival. Finally, in 1963 the film was selected for the Cannes film festival for the *Semaine internationale de la*

¹⁶³ *Klinkaart*, or *La Briquetterie*, tells the story of a girl who on the first day of her job as a brick layer is raped by her superior, who insists on his "droit de cuissage." The film shows affinities with especially *Mouchette* and *Au Hazard Balthazar*.

critique. Among those that did *not* share in this general acclaim was the Belgian government, which accused Meyer of having abused public funds. The payback of these as well as other funds nipped Meyer's career as a fiction feature auteur in the bud. After *Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre* Meyer mainly worked for Belgian public television (RTBF), and he only directed one more feature length film, *L'Herbe sous les pieds* (*Grass beneath the Feet*, 1977), and a handful of shorts.¹⁶⁴

Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre does not only offer the clearest-cut *néorealisme à la wallonne*, it must also be the most *Italian* neorealist film ever made outside of Italy. The film owes its title to a poem by Salvatore Quasimodo, "Già vola il foiore magro." During the opening credits, against the backdrop of clinking sounds evoking the mines, this poem is sung by an Italian woman with the French translation rolling by in the frame: "Je ne saurai rien de ma vie, sang obscure et monotone . . ." ("I will know nothing of my life, obscure and monotonous blood . . .").¹⁶⁵ *Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre* tells the story of

¹⁶⁴ *Borinage* (1961), *Le Temps* (1965), and *Ça va les parnajons?* (1975).

¹⁶⁵

Già vola il foiore magro	Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre
Non saprò nulla della mia vita, oscuro monotono sangue	Je ne saurai rien de ma vie, Sang obscur et monotone
Non saprò chi amavo, chi amo, ora che qui stretto, ridotto alle mie membra, nel guasto vento di marzo enumero i mali dei giorni decifirati.	Je ne saurai qui j'aimais, qui j'aime, Maintenant que replié, réduit à mes membres, Dans le vent gâté de mars J'énumère les maux des jours déchiffrés.
Già vola il fiore magro dai rami. E io attendo la pazienza del suo volo irrevocabile.	Des branches Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre Et moi j'attends La patience de son vol irrévocable.

the immigrant, and in particular the Italian immigrant population in the Borinage. The narrative spans a one-day timeframe and is structured around two opposed, intersecting trajectories: that of Domenico, who after 17 years of labor in Marseille, Paris and the Borinage returns to his childhood country (“Il faut que je rentre e[t] ritorno a casa”), and that of the young Luigi who, together with his mother and his siblings, has just joined his father in the *pays noir*. Staring out of the bedroom window of his new home away from home, Luigi overhears his parents quarrelling in the other room. “Pourquoi tu nous as fait venir?” (“Why did you ask us to come over?”), his mother reproaches his father, “Pourquoi lui [Geppino, Luigi’s older brother] faire apprendre le travail d’un chômeur?” (“Why letting him learn the profession of the unemployed?”) The film’s third protagonist is the black country itself, which through the wandering, dreamy gaze of Meyer’s camera evokes the volcanic earth of *Viaggio in Italia/Journey to Italy* (Rossellini, 1954), much like Luigi’s arrival by train is reminiscent of *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and his Brothers* (Visconti, 1960).

The film’s poetic climax is the encounter between Domenico and Luigi on the *terril*, a manmade mountain spit out by the industrial landscape stretching out at its foot. “Tout ce que tu vois d’ici du haut du terril, c’est le Borinage” (“All you see from here, from the height of the terril is the Borinage”), Domenico explains, the camera melting together the old man’s and the young boy’s points-of-view. “La miniera, charbonnage” (“Mining, unemployment”). Shots of kids sliding down the slope seated on steel disks. “Disoccupazione, chômage.” More shots of the children, whose is juxtaposed to the indiscernible movement of a bunch of snails, shown in close-up (a reference, perhaps, to

the Flemish word for terril: “slakkenberg,” which literally means snail mountain). The kids’ lighthearted descent also starkly contrasts with the struggling ascent of the priest in the scene that precedes Domenico’s and Luigi’s encounter. On his way to the crucifix on top of the terril, the priest loses his hat. The hat is returned by a boy, who also gives the priest one of the two herrings that he is carrying with him. The priest, who shares in the torment of the *curé* in Bresson’s *Journal d’un curé de campagne*, offers the boy half of the flowers he has just picked, asking him whether he ever goes to pray at the cross. “No,” the boy answers, upon which he throws away the flowers. The boy, like Luigi, and like all the other children, whether Belgian, Italian or Polish, know the truth about their world. They gather it from their parents’ quarrels, they hear it from men like Domenico, and they feel it in their stomachs. *Borinage*, *charbonnage*, *chômage*. Rather than combating this truth with the scrawny flowers of religion, they fight it with their own fables. They slide down the hill, they dance, they play in ruins—in citation of Rossellini’s *Germanio anno zero/Germany Year Zero* (1948)—and they eat, with dirty faces, Domenico’s imaginary bonbons. “Nous sommes tous des comédiens,” the old man teaches them, “Le terril ne sert plus à rien” (“We are all comedians, the slag heap no longer has a function”).

The terril is *the* icon of Walloon cinema, many of whose fictions and documentaries revolve around the region’s two industrial centers: the Borinage and the Liège basin. Either the terril functions as a narrative setting for struggle, wandering or play, as it does in *Borinage* and *Déjà s’envole la fleur maigre*, but also in for example *Pays noir, pays rouge/Black Country, Red Country* (Thierry Michel, 1975), *Les*

Convoyeurs attendent/The Carriers Are Waiting (Benoît Mariage, 1999), and *Ultranova* (Bouli Lanners, 2005). Or it appears in the background, looming as a black giant that towers above the brick houses, more often in passing, as a green or black-and-white hill that has seamlessly integrated itself into the horizon. Examples include *Jeudi on chantera comme dimanche/Thursday We Will Sing like Sunday* (Luc de Heusch, 1967), *Hiver 60/Winter 1960* (Thierry Michel, 1983), *Et la vie/And Life* (Denis Gheerbrant, 1991)—a French film that also contains a scene shot on a terril in Bruay, in Nord-Pas-de-Calais—*Marchienne de vie* (Richard Olivier, 1993), the Dardennes' *La Promesse*, and *La Raison du plus faible/The Law of the Weakest* (Lucas Belvaux, 2006).

Ranging from docudrama (*Hiver 60*) to socialist heist-film (*La Raison du plus faible*), all of the above films engage Wallonia's economic crisis. We find the most direct depictions of this crisis in the many social documentaries Walloon cinema has produced. A recurring theme in this tradition is the general strike of Winter 1960—1961, which paralyzed Belgium, and in particular Wallonia, for almost five weeks.¹⁶⁶ This “strike of the century,” as it was called by Belgian and international media, was organized by the Belgian Communist Party. Direct reason for the protests were the austerity policies, also known as the *loi unique* (single law), proposed by the center-right wing Eyskens government. In Wallonia, over the course of the strike the protestors' demands expanded to structural economic reforms as well as the federalization of Belgium. Though the government ultimately managed to, at the cost of four lives, crush the protests and

¹⁶⁶ One of the reasons the protests were less vehement in Flanders than in Wallonia was that the Belgian government exerted pressure on the Catholic trade union and the Catholic Church to discourage the Catholic part of the population from participating in the strike.

implement its policies, the strike left deep traces in Belgian politics. From that Winter onward such large-scale, violent confrontations between the Belgian State and the labor movement have belonged to history, and instead have made way for the so-called Rhineland model, a controlled market economy structure in which trade unions, employers and the government negotiate in order to reach consensus. Moreover, following the refusal of the Belgian Socialist Party and the General Federation of Belgian Labor (GFBL, Belgian's socialist national trade union federation) to let go of their unitary principles in favor of federalism, in the Spring of 1961 GFBL-leader André Renard launched the *Mouvement populaire wallonne* (Walloon Popular Movement). In 1970, and largely as the result of this movement's efforts, Belgium was reorganized into three regions (which were federalized in 1993).

The first cinematic account of the 1960—1961 strike was *Vechten voor onze Rechten/Fighting for our Rights*, a 1962 found-footage agit-prop film directed by the Flemish Frans Buyens. For this film Buyens combined the footage “of real people and events” that he had shot himself in the South of Belgium with footage that had been broadcasted by various European television channels. In the film's credits—which appear in the form of slogans written in Dutch, French and German on signs carried by street protesters—*Vechten voor onze Rechten* presents itself as a tribute to Joris Ivens and the Belgian working class. Both the film's visual and spoken language is that of the class struggle. The film consists of a montage of moving and still images whose content ranges from the protests to government officials, and from neon advertisements to Congo, which in June that year had obtained independence from Belgium. This visual montage is

supported by an auditory montage consisting of excerpts from newspapers, pamphlets and official documents that are read out loud by a male and a female voice-over. The film specifically targets the Eyskens government, denouncing the latter's "hypocrisy" and the "series of measures that they intend to force upon the country under the misleading name of 'Unity Law'." Like *Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre*, *Vechten voor onze Rechten* premiered at the festival of Porretta Terme in Italy, where it was awarded the Special Jury prize. And like Meyer's, Buyens's film explicitly inscribes itself in the tradition of Walloon social cinema, if only through its resonations with *Borinage*.

In subsequent decades the strike of the century has continued to inspire Walloon filmmakers. We find two more examples in the oeuvre of Thierry Michel, who before shifting his focus to other parts of the world portrayed his native Wallonia. First, he made the poetic documentary *Pays noir, pays rouge* (1975), which combines a portrayal of working class life and economic crisis in 1970s Charleroi with testimonies of workers who participated in the strike. The film includes footage from *Borinage* and opens with a homage to *Déjà s'envole fleur maigre*, showing shots of laughing children sliding down a terril, intercut with shots of people dancing at a street fair. In 1982 Michel returned to the big strike with *Hiver 60*, a docudrama that integrates footage from *Vechten voor Onze Rechten* in a reenacted account of the protests in the Belgian South.¹⁶⁷

The last two examples of films that capture the spirit of Winter 1960 are two of the militant videos Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne produced through their first production

¹⁶⁷ In 1981 also appeared *Chronique des saisons d'acier/Chronicle of the Seasons of Steel*, which Michel codirected with Christine Pireaux, a documentary that depicts the impact of the decline of the Seraing steel industry on the lives of four people from four different generations.

company Dérives: *Lorsque le bateau de Léon M. descendit la Meuse pour la première fois/When the Bark of Léon M. Went down the Meuse for the First Time* (1979) and *Pour que la guerre s'achève les murs devaient s'écrouler/For the War to Succeed the Walls Had to Come Down* (1980).¹⁶⁸ Both films alternate archival footage with testimonies by Cockerill employees who were involved in the strikes. In *Pour que la guerre . . .*, Edmond, the former editor of a clandestine newspaper, retraces his and his comrades' footsteps, explaining how in the early days of the strike they, while singing the International, and while being supported by people leaning out of their windows singing the International, peacefully breached a police cordon. Similarly, in *Lorsque le bateau Léon* recalls the "unequaled sense of fraternity" that the strike brought about in "people who were not used to assume responsibility." The men's nostalgia definitively spills over into the Dardennes' own narration, but both videos also explicitly relate the memory of "1960" to a reflection about the present, a "*fin du siècle* deprived of history" in need of "the myth of revolution." This speculation about the persistence of a revolutionary potential is articulated most forcefully in *Lorsque le bateau . . .*, which follows the first voyage of the boat Léon built in his garage. In the Dardennes' black-and-white account, this boat becomes "le bateau des derniers survivants de langage révolutionnaire condamné à mort par l'histoire" ("the boat of the last survivors of a revolutionary language that is condemned to death by history"). The narrator wonders out loud by means of conclusion:

¹⁶⁸ *Dérives* was founded in 1975 and has since produced about 60 documentaries as well as some fiction films. The Dardennes' first film was *Le Chant du rossignol/The Chant of the Nightingale* (1978), which has gone lost.

Quel est le langage révolutionnaire non condamné à mort par l'histoire? . . . Quel est à faire le bateau lorsqu'au appel de sa sirène ne répondaient que les appels d'autres sirènes? . . . Allait-il pour suivre son voyage parce que les ailes de la mouette continuent de desiner dans le ciel les rivages de l'Utopie? [What is the revolutionary language that has not been condemned by history? . . . What would the boat do if other sirens were the only to answer to its sirens? . . . Would it continue its journey because the wings of the seagull keep on drawing the banks of utopia in the sky?]

In this same light of the quest for a new language that speaks utopia we also have to understand the “appel au réalisme” the Dardennes make in *Pour que la guerre . . .* . . . This call for realism does not only inscribe itself in the Walloon social documentary tradition from Storck to Michel, it also demonstrates an experimental touch clearly inspired by the films Jean-Luc Godard made in collaboration with Jean-Pierre Gorin under the name of the Dziga Vertov Group (e.g., *Tout va bien/All is Well*, 1972). While *Pour que la guerre . . .* opens with three ways “to begin the film,” *Lorsque le bateau . . .* emphasizes the skills and gestures that connect Léon's thirty-three years at Cockerill to his construction of the boat. Moreover, both films let their found-footage go accompanied by a reflection on its use-value, i.e. the ability of this footage to express the historical moment and its potential to rekindle glimpses of utopia in the present: “. . . accumuler des image mythiques, devenus peut-être des faux images qui empêchent de voir . . . simulacres d'une histoire qui a disparu” (“accumulating mythical images, which have perhaps become false images that make it impossible to see . . . simulacrums of a history that has disappeared”).

In the final chapter I will return to the Dardennes' transition from documentary to fiction, and from the banks of utopia to Rosetta's precarious quest. Here I will continue by contrasting the above testimonials of those weeks that utopia seemed within reach and perhaps even already tangible to the more recent tendency in Walloon cinema to document the region as a dystopian space of crisis. Examples are: *Du beurre dans les tartines/Bread and Butter* (1980) (a TV-documentary directed by Manu Bonmariage about a small company in crisis), *Et la vie* (a series of vignettes representing life in times of crisis from Charleroi to Bruay in Pas-de-Calais, and from Roubaix to Marseille), *Les Enfants du Borinage: lettre à Henri Storck* (Patric Jean, 1999) (which shows that at the end of the twentieth century misery has all but disappeared from the Borinage), and Richard Olivier's *Marchienne de Vie* (which reveals the social discontent in the multiethnic Marchienne-au-Pont, one of the poorest parts of Charleroi).¹⁶⁹

The broadcasting by the RTBF of this last documentary created some commotion in Belgium, as it gave voice to the populist, xenophobic sentiments existing amongst part of the Walloon population. As Verbeken writes, *Marchienne de vie* touched "on the most intimate self-image of Wallonia: that of a straightforward, warm, cosmopolitan immigration-region where all of Europe came together."¹⁷⁰ It is instructive here to

¹⁶⁹ *Du beurre dans les tartines* is part of a television series named *Strip-Tease*, which was produced and broadcasted by the RTBF.

¹⁷⁰ Verbeken, *Arm Wallonië*, 89. In 1996 the private TV-station RTL commissioned Olivier to make another documentary in Charleroi. In *Au fond Dutroux* (1996) he goes in search of the habitat of Marc Dutroux, the man who in 2004 was found guilty of having kidnapped and sexually abused six girls during 1995 and 1996, and of having murdered four of them. As suggested by his film's title—which can also be understood as "at the bottom of the hole [*trou*]"—Olivier partly attributes the crimes of Dutroux to a failed society. In 1999, the event of Dutroux's escape in April 1998 and the police's capturing of him a few hours later, inspired Bouli Lanners to make *Travellinckx*, a fictive documentary in which the protagonist reacts as follows when he

contrast *Marchienne de vie* to *Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre*, which forty years earlier had also courageously engaged with the hidden reality behind the idealized image of Wallonia as a melting pot of cultures. The means by which both films confront their contemporary realities are very different. Whereas Meyer's film dreams up an ephemeral utopia embodied by a magic mountain on which children from various cultural backgrounds are united in their misery, Olivier's film is much more direct in its approach and exposes Wallonia's economic malaise as the driving force behind the social division between different culturally defined groups. For example, one of Olivier's interviewees, a man who migrated in 1972 from Algeria to Charleroi, sketches the gradual degradation of the "big family" that he felt part of in the first days as follows: "There was tons of work . . . and money, too much money. In those days there was no racism. But since the closing down of the mines we have started to feel that people became aggressive . . . because of the lack of work."

There are also similarities. Both *Marchienne de vie* and *Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre* are driven by the same ethics of representation, in that they rendered visible a precarious Walloon population that had remained underexposed by the news media. This realist drive to extend the domain of the visible characterizes much of Walloon cinema. As stated before, the Walloon *cinema of the real* originated around 1930 with the appearance of the first Walloon social documentaries, and since the early 1960s has been enriched by a fiction cinema that blends the categories "documentary" and "fiction" (and

hears this news on his car radio: "C'est impossible, c'est une blague . . . Qu'est-ce qu'ils foutent les imbéciles là-haut? . . . Le seul mec, le seul mec qui ne pouvait pas échapper. . . Belgique, un pays de cons. J'ai honte d'être belge."

according to Storck “a good fiction is first of all a good documentary”).¹⁷¹ Walloon cinema is a strongly rooted cinema. Its films are almost always shot on location, its narratives mostly take place in the historical present, and many of its actors, whether professionals or amateurs, are from or are living in the region.¹⁷² In some cases these actors play “themselves,” like in *Déjà s’envole la fleur maigre*. In other cases their Walloon identities form, like in *Rosetta*, the raw material for their fictional characters.

Regionally rooted, Walloon cinema, and especially Walloon fiction cinema also tends to touch upon notions and tap into sentiments that transcend its immediate settings. In a neorealist vein, many Walloon films employ the particularity of their landscapes, towns and people in order to construct images and narratives that seek to appeal to a wider audience and express a more universally human condition. As Jacques Polet argues, this “rootedness pregnant of universality” (“un enracinement porteur d’universalité”) is the dialectical fundament of the Walloon cinema of the real:

[The Walloon cinema is] a particular cinema that is nonetheless capable of universalization: a regional cinema (that wholeheartedly assumes its object), yet not so much a regionalist cinema (that succumbs to the temptation of the painterliness of the local). Ultimately it is a cinema that, in its expression of Wallonia, testifies to the fact that the true universal is always concrete.¹⁷³

More specifically, the recurring theme in Walloon cinema is that of the small man or woman’s struggle for the good, or at least a better life in the face of economic

¹⁷¹ Cited in Polet, “Un enracinement porteur d’universalité,” 25.

¹⁷² Exceptions are for example the performance of Jeremy Irons in *Australia* (Jean-Jacques Andrien, 1989), or that of Isabelle Huppert in *Nue propriété/Private Property* (Joachim Lafosse, 2006).

¹⁷³ Polet, “Un enracinement porteur d’universalité,” 25.

hardship. This concern with precarious human existence often takes the form of a partly goal-driven, partly wandering narrative structure that combines elements of drama, documentary and a social critique of the secular-religious, humanist kind that André Bazin, in relation to Italian neorealism, describes as a “love and rejection of the real.”¹⁷⁴ In Walloon cinema this humanism generally manifests itself in the expressed belief in an idea of humanity according to which people have the power to act ethically and to retain their human dignity, however understood, even when their material conditions of existence are dehumanizing. In line with this moral stance, many Walloon fiction films are therefore marked by a poetic, lighthearted, tragicomic or otherwise redemptive touch, and end on an at least somewhat hopeful note.

This intertwined engagement with a particular regional and a more universally human experience is fundamental to what earlier I have called a cinema of life: a mode of cinematic expression that while depicting, employing, or even exploiting the particularity of the people and social environments it expresses, makes understood and felt the question, “what is humanity in a time and space of crisis?” We have already seen the examples of *Déjà s’envole la fleur maigre*, which alchemically transforms the harsh reality of “Borinage, charbonnage, chômage” into the fragile flower of Quasimodo’s poem, and *Rosetta*, in which the Dardennes’ earlier longing for utopia gives way to their protagonist’s fight for a “normal,” working-class, exploited life. Some other noteworthy examples are: *Jeudi on chantera comme dimanche* (Luc de Heusch, 1967) (another film set in Liège during the strike of 1960, and in which a saleswoman’s and a factory

¹⁷⁴ Bazin, *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*, 263.

worker's pursuit of *bonheur* ends on a "happy ending" in the form of a commercially sponsored marriage),¹⁷⁵ *Le Grand paysage d'Alexis Droeven/The Wide Landscape of Alexis Droeven* (Jean-Jacques Andrien, 1981) (which tells the story of a young farmer who sees his newly inherited livelihood threatened by EU policies),¹⁷⁶ *Les Convoyeurs attendent* (Benoît Mariage, 1999) (a poetic, black-and-white tragicomedy about a family in Charleroi who, in spite of everything, make it to the new millennium),¹⁷⁷ *La Raison du plus faible* (Lucas Belvaux, 2006) (a heist film set in Liège in which a group of men take what they deserve), *Eldorado* (Bouli Lanners, 2008) (a road movie through the promised land), and finally *Illégal* (Olivier Masset-Depasse, 2010) (a fierce critique of Belgium's and the EU's immigration policies). Some of these films aestheticize the black- and bleakness of their industrial setting in high contrast, black-and-white photography (*Jeudi on chantera*, *Les Convoyeurs*).¹⁷⁸ Another transforms the Walloon landscapes into a Wild West (*Eldorado*). Yet others testify to the consequences of the region's integration into

¹⁷⁵ *Jeudi on chantera comme dimanche* was one of the first feature films that received financial aid from the Ministry of Belgian Francophone Culture, the importance of which I will return to in the next chapter. The film was based on a script by the Flemish Hugo Claus.

¹⁷⁶ In this context another film worth mentioning is Jean-Jacques Andrien's *Australia* (1989), which narrates the decline of the Verviers glass industry.

¹⁷⁷ Moreover, *Le Grand paysage d'Alexis Droeven* crosscuts this story with documentary images of the clash over the political belonging of six francophone villages at the border with Flanders. The film owes its title, which literally translates as "the carriers are waiting," to a Walloon expression used in pigeon racing.

¹⁷⁸ In a number of shots, *Les Convoyeurs attendent* cites the works of famous photographers, including Robert Doisneau, Bruce Davidson and Henri Cartier-Bresson. For example, Mariage's film quotes Cartier-Bresson's 1963 photograph of a young Mexican girl who is carrying with her a framed painting of a woman. In *Les Convoyeurs attendent* the dusty shantytown of Mexico City is replaced by the streets of Charleroi, while the painting is transformed into an Yves Saint Laurent billboard stating "In love again." See also: Jean-Benoît Gabriel, "La Wallonie révélée: esthétique du paysage industriel chez Benoît Mariage et Bouli Lanners," in Roekens & Tixhon, *Cinéma et crise(s)*, pp. 67-88.

the EU, into this union as fortress (*Illégal*, the Dardennes' *La Silence de Lorna*) and into its common market (*Le Grand paysage d'Alexis Droeven*).

In their critique of “Europe” these films could not contrast more starkly with the European ideal expressed by Storck in his only, and commercially not very successful, fiction feature, *Le Banquet des fraudeurs/The Smugglers' Banquet* (1952, BE/DE). Set in a fictive town that is traversed by the borders between Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands, this film actively pleads for a borderless Europe, for a Europe as utopia.¹⁷⁹ And what about that other border? While the regional and linguistic border between Wallonia and Flanders returns in, for example, *Le Grand paysage d'Alexis Droeven* and Alain Berliner's *Le Mur/The Wall* (1998), the French-Belgian border rarely appears in Walloon cinema. With that I arrive at the first difference between the two halves of the cinéma du Nord.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ *Le Banquet des fraudeurs* was based on a scenario by Charles Spaak and inspired by the formation of the Benelux in 1948. Originally the film, which was partly financed with Marshall plan funds, was planned as a documentary. In reality, the point where the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium meet is the border point connecting the Dutch town of Vaals (and its “mountain”), the Belgian plateau (or *pays*) of Herve, and the fields around the German city of Aachen.

¹⁸⁰ Exceptions are *Passeurs d'or* (1948) and *Les Filles des fraudeurs* (1962), both directed by E.G. de Meyst.

At the Margins of France: Nord-Pas-de-Calais in the Cinema

Une route qui va de Paris qui va jusqu'au Calais, après c'est la mer et puis l'Angleterre.¹⁸¹

- *Rosine* (d. Christine Carrière, 1994)

Many films set in the French North depict French-Belgian relations. First of all, there are several films that depict smuggling communities in the French North, the most famous of them being Georges Lampin's 1951 *La Maison dans la dune/The House on the Dune* (which was based on Van der Meersch's 1932 novel of the same title and which has been adapted two more times for the screen).¹⁸² Second, we have the various adaptations of Zola's *Germinal*, in which at one point the northern French mines import Belgian workers in order to break up a strike. Zola's novel has been consecutively adapted by Albert Capellani (1913), Yves Allégret (1963), and Claude Berri (1993). This last *Germinal* was produced on a 160 million French franc budget (about 28 million US dollars), which makes it one of the biggest productions in French cinema ever. Third, the French-Belgian border plays a role in Jean Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange/The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (1936), which ends with the protagonist's escape to Belgium. And finally, Dany Boon's 2010 *Rien à déclarer/Nothing to Declare* portrays, in the vein of his earlier *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, the mutual prejudices between the French of the North and the Belgians of the South (who are played by well-known Belgian actors

¹⁸¹ "A road that goes from Paris that goes until Calais, after that the sea and then England."

¹⁸² These other adaptations are by Pierre Billon (1934) and the Flemish Michel Mees (1988, a Belgian production). Another film based on a novel by Van der Meersch, and that also depicts the northern French smuggling community is *L'Empreinte du dieu/Two Women* (Léonide Moguy, 1940).

including Benoît Poelvoorde, Bouli Lanners, and Olivier Gourmet). The film is set in 1993, the year in which, as per the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the customs control at the French-Belgian border was abolished.

This series of examples might give the impression that Nord-Pas-de-Calais has always been a significant presence in French cinema. The opposite, however, is true. As François Baudinet argues in the collection *Le Nord et le cinéma* (1998): “The history of the North in the cinema is first of all an interrogation of the question of the unseen, of the ‘disappearance’ of the North on the screen, of the ‘unfilmable’.”¹⁸³ Likewise, Alexandrine Dhainaut observes:

The camera of filmmakers [has] often prefer[red] the light of the [French] South to the capricious sky of the North. The films that have been shot in the region (those in which the North is clearly identifiable) can be counted on the fingers of one hand. As far as the directors who have chosen the region are concerned, they have essentially come there to film *malheur*, moroseness or social decay.¹⁸⁴

This claim that Nord-Pas-de-Calais has hardly seen any film crew at all is a little exaggerated. In *Les Tournages des films dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais* (2008) Daniel Granval actually lists over two hundred films that were shot or partly shot in the region, including all of the films mentioned in the beginning of this section, with the exception of

¹⁸³ François Baudinet, “Chronique du Nord à l’écran: l’histoire du Nord sous le regard de son cinéma des origines à 1958,” in L’Association Jean Mitry, *Le Nord et le cinéma*, pp. 154-76, p. 154.

¹⁸⁴ Alexandrine Dhainaut, “Le Nord au cinéma, victime de ses clichés?” *Il était une fois le cinéma* (2008), <http://www.iletaitunefoislecinema.com/chronique/1802/le-nord-au-cinema-victime-de-ses-cliches> (accessed February 10, 2012).

Allégret's *Germinal*, which was shot in Hungary.¹⁸⁵ Still, Dhainaut raises the two facts that are observed in practically every study dealing with cinematic production in and about Nord-Pas-de-Calais. The first is that up until very recently the region has remained relatively underrepresented in French national cinema. Second, in the films that *do* represent the region, it is often caricaturized as an *enfer du Nord*, a northern Hell.

There are four reasons for the relatively low number of cinematic productions that were made in Nord-Pas-de-Calais up until the mid-1980s.¹⁸⁶ The first reason is the negative stereotypes of the French North that for long have existed elsewhere in France, and which also *Bienvenu chez les Ch'tis* has not fully taken away. As discussed in relation to this film, most of these stereotypes revolve around the region's history of coal mining and its climate. That climate, though perhaps not as arctic as it has sometimes been represented, is in fact the second reason why many filmmakers for a long time have avoided the French North. With its high precipitation rates and capricious skies, Nord-Pas-de-Calais forms a challenging and potentially expensive shooting location, especially for directors and producers who wish their films to reflect a consistent light and landscape appearance. Consequently, for many decades the outdoor shooting for historical dramas that are set or partly set in the French North was done elsewhere, mostly in eastern Europe. For example, the siege of Arras in *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1990) was, like Allégret's *Germinal*, shot in Hungary. Another reason for this displacement of "location shooting," and the third reason for the relative

¹⁸⁵ Granval, *Tournages de films dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais*, 11.

¹⁸⁶ I largely base these four reasons on those presented in Baudinet, "Chronique du Nord à l'écran," 154-5.

invisibility of the North in French cinema is the ironic fact that many of the region's old quarters and historic sites evoked in historical dramas were destroyed during the very events narrated by those films. Fourth and finally, for a long time, and certainly in the first half of the twentieth century, the concentration of the French film industry in only a few cinematic centers hindered the emergence of regional French cinemas, including a northern French cinema. Until the beginning of the Nouvelle Vague almost all French films were shot and edited in the studios of Nice (Studios de la Victorine), Marseille (Pagnol) and Paris. This situation only gradually and partially changed with the rise of location shooting and, as we will see in the following chapter, the emergence of regional production companies and TV-channels. However, also with these changes, the proximity of Nord-Pas-de-Calais to Paris and its vast cinematic infrastructure—to its film schools, its production and distribution companies, and its cinéclubs—for a long time continued to slow down the development of a northern French regional cinema.

Such a regional cinema only really took off in the 1990s. Since these years, and for many of the same reasons that prevented generations of filmmakers from making films in the region, Nord-Pas-de-Calais has developed into one of the most significant filmmaking sites in France after Ile-de-France. René Prédal gives a good characterization of the cinema of the French North. Referring to Bruno Dumont and Xavier Beauvois, the region's two most acclaimed directors, as well as to Maurice Pialat, who situated three films in the North, Prédal writes:

These filmmakers have found [in the North] places, people, a temporality and a light that paradoxically gives their stories a universal impact: they show *this*

region while addressing all spectators. This anchoring situates things in working class and farmers' milieus whereas in Paris the cinema tends to only speak of the bourgeoisie. The province imposes new behaviors and in particular a bigger role for the body instead of tightening up everything with the word, an "evil" endemic to the Parisian film The North, in particular, offers characters who resist much more to intellectual analysis and, because of that, touch the audience differently. In sum, their silences, an empty everydayness, permit the arrest of the essence of even the human being who has been completely obscured by the perpetual movement of Paris [*l'essence même de l'homme complètement occultée par le mouvement perpétuel de Paris*].¹⁸⁷

Prédal's characterization of this recent tendency in films made in Nord-Pas-de-Calais strongly resonates with my earlier characterization of the Walloon cinema of the real as a regionally rooted cinema that taps into more universal, human sentiments. Much like their Walloon colleagues have done and continue to do so in relation to the Belgian South, French filmmakers, including those that are *not* from Nord-Pas-de-Calais (e.g., Pialat), have sought to combine their embrace of the places and people of the French North with an appeal that transcends their particular subject matters and settings. In the previous chapter we have already encountered the examples of Dumont's *L'humanité*, *La Vie de Jésus* and *Flandres*, Pialat's *Sous le soleil de Satan* and in fact also Bresson's *Journal d'un curé de campagne*. Moreover, also Dumont's *Hors Satan/Outside Satan* (2011) is set in Nord-Pas-de-Calais (the film tells the relation between a never named "She" and a Christ-like "Guy" in a hamlet near Montreuil-sur-Mer), like Pialat's *L'Enfance nue/Naked Childhood* (1968) and *Passe ton bac d'abord/Graduate First* (1978). Further examples of the northern French cinema of the real are: *Pierre et Djemila* (Gérard Blain, 1987), *Nord/North* (Xavier Beauvois, 1991), *Faut-il aimer*

¹⁸⁷ René Prédal, *Le Cinéma français des années 1990: une génération de transition* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2008), pp. 76-7.

Mathilde?/Should Mathilde Be Loved? (Edwin Baily, 1993), *Rosine* (Christine Carrière, 1994), *En avoir (ou pas)/To Have (or not)* (Laetitia Masson, 1995), *Chacun pour soi/Every Man for Himself* (Bruno Bontzolakis, 1998), *La Vie rêvée des anges* (Erick Zonca, 1998), *Karnaval/Carnival* (Thomas Vincent, 1999), *Rien à faire/Empty Days* (Marion Vernoux, 1999), *Sauve-moi/Save me* (Christian Vincent, 2000), and *Quand la mer monte* (Yolande Moreau & Gilles Porte, 2004). Before exploring these films' central themes, it is important to raise the question of to what extent the engagement with the real in northern French cinema has directly emanated from the region's reality. Does the province, and in particular the French North, "impose," as Prédal suggests, a certain aesthetic in which affective encounters with bodies and landscapes naturally prevail over the long, philosophical digressions of a cinema "tightened up with the word"? In other words, is this regional rootedness a regional or an imported product?

These are difficult questions to answer. Though it is tempting to understand the appeal to a regional essence—in itself, of course, a contestable notion—that unites the above listed films as the inevitable result of such an essence, it is crucial to keep in mind that the marriage between the French North and a regionally rooted realism is still fairly young. In order to retrace the origins of this marriage, we need to go back in the history of French national cinema at large. Up until the Nouvelle Vague, French cinema showed a tendency toward psychological, studio-shot realism, to invoke François Truffaut's 1954 pamphlet "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" ("A Certain Tendency in French

Cinema”).¹⁸⁸ Partly this tendency was caused by the fact that film scripts, including the ones taking place or partly taking place in the French North, were often adapted from literary classics set in a remote past. Other than those by Zola and Van der Meersch, two major novels whose northern French narratives have inspired filmmakers are Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (1862) and Alexandre Dumas’s *Les Trois mousquetaires* (*The Three Musketeers*, 1844). The plot in *Les Misérables* partly unfolds against the backdrop of the industrialized town of “M. sur M.,” the initials of Montreuil-sur-Mer. The fact that in reality the Industrial Revolution had passed by this town should be understood in the light of the Hugo’s adage that “l’important n’est pas qu’une histoire soit véritable, mais qu’elle soit vraie” (“it is not important that a story is realistic, but that it is true”).¹⁸⁹ The first of the many adoptions of Hugo’s novel is a 1912 film by, again, Capellani.¹⁹⁰ Also *Les Trois mousquetaires* has been adapted numerous times, including in non-French productions. Dumas’s novel is largely set in the region between Paris and Calais, a provincial area that it depicts as one that is full of dangers. For example, in George Sidney’s 1948 *The Three Musketeers*—a film starring Gene Kelly and Lana Turner—this region is even transformed into a Technicolor “Wild West” complete with canyons and rivers.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ François Truffaut, “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 31 (1954): 15-29.

¹⁸⁹ Cited in Baudinet, “Chronique du Nord à l’écran,” 164.

¹⁹⁰ Other adaptations of *Les Misérables* include: Henri Fescourt, 1925, FR; Raymond Bernard, 1934, FR; Richard Boleslawski, 1935, US; Ricardo Freda, 1947, IT (*I Miserabili*); Lewis Milestone, 1952, US; Jean-Paul Le Chanois, 1958, FR/DD/IT; and Robert Hossein, 1982, FR/DE.

¹⁹¹ The pre-*Nouvelle Vague* French adaptations of this film include those directed by Henri Diamant-Berger (1932, FR) and André Hunebelle (1953, FR/IT). Other adaptations of *Les Trois mousquetaires* are: *The Three Musketeers* (Fred Niblo, 1921, US), *Les Trois mousquetaires* (Bernard Borderie, 1961, FR/IT), *The Three Musketeers* (Richard Lester, 1973, SP/US/PA/UK), *The Four Musketeers: Milady’s Revenge* (Richard Lester, 1975, SP/PA/US/UK), *The Return of*

Another film set in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, and a perfect example of what Truffaut in his essay deridingly calls the “tradition de la qualité” (“tradition of quality”), is *Mollenard/Hatred* (1938), directed by Robert Siodmak. Based on a novel by the Belgian author Oscar-Paul Gilbert, *Mollenard*, like Renoir’s earlier discussed *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, seeks to capture the spirit of the *Front Populaire*. The novel does so, however, merely on the level of narrative and not so much on that of style. Similarly, the various adaptations of *La Maison dans la dune* and of *Germinal* (including Berri’s 1993 version) are only selectively faithful to Van der Meersch’s and Zola’s naturalist, documentary-like descriptions of northern French reality (which in the case of Zola had been based on lengthy observational visits to mining towns, which included a descent into an operational coal pit in Denain).¹⁹² As Paul Renard argues:

While reactualizing and reinvigorating the stereotypical images of the North, [these films] almost always water down the realism of the novelists by which they are inspired, whether it is the epic realism of Zola, the satirical realism of Gilbert, or the melodramatic realism of Van der Meersch. They attenuate, for example, the Zolalian violence. Capellani and Allégret suppress the episodes in which the grocer is castrated by the starving women¹⁹³

True, *Mollenard*, as well as the various screen adaptations of *Germinal* and *Les Trois Mousquetaires* trade the regionally rooted realism of their literary sources for a more psychological realism. For example, Berri’s *Germinal* has been rightfully critiqued

the Musketeers (Richard Lester, 1989, UK/FR/SP), *The Three Musketeers* (Stephen Herek, 1993, AT/UK/US), and *The Three Musketeers* (Paul Anderson, 2011, DE/FR/UK/US).

¹⁹² See Guy Dubois & Jean-Marie Minot, *Histoire des mines du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais: des origines à 1939-45* (1991), p. 22.

¹⁹³ Paul Renard, “Les Adaptations cinématographiques des romans,” in L’Association Jean Mitry ed., *Le Nord et le cinéma*, pp. 216-27, p. 225.

by left-wing critics for deliberately omitting the Marxist and anarchist discourses present in Zola's narrative.¹⁹⁴ And still, some of these films also ought to be considered as part of the long trajectory of socially critical realism and neorealism that runs through the history of French cinema. This especially holds true for Capellani's 1913 *Germinal*, which is one of the first feature length films that was largely shot on location.¹⁹⁵ Only some of this film's interior scenes, including the ones that are set underground in the mines, were shot in a studio. All its other scenes were shot in the streets or at the mining site of Auchel (near Lille), where a crowd of local extras supported a professional cast consisting of actors from the Comédie Française. Daniel Granval writes about the film's shooting: "[t]he collaboration with the inhabitants of Auchel was very precious to the film crew[.] . . . [I]n the evenings the actors joined the real miners in their card games."¹⁹⁶

Though not quite yet a neorealist "spectacle of reality"—to invoke both Bazin's and Cesare Zavattini's essays on Italian neorealism¹⁹⁷—Capellani's *Germinal* stands at the cradle of the long lineage of the northern French cinema of the real. Two other noteworthy feature-length fiction films that are part of this lineage, and that, like

¹⁹⁴ Will Higbee, "Towards a Multiplicity of Voices: French Cinema's Age of the Postmodern: Part II—1992—2004," [Chapter 5] in Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema (second edition)* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 293-327, p. 301.

¹⁹⁵ Capellani's *Germinal* runs for about 150 minutes.

¹⁹⁶ Granval, *Tournages de films dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais*, 48.

¹⁹⁷ In his essay "Bicycle Thief" Bazin characterizes De Sica's film as follows: "It is a spectacle, and what spectacle! However, in nothing does *Bicycle Thieves* depend on the mathematical principles of drama, the action does not preexist as an essence, it ensues from the preliminary existence of the narrative, it is the 'integral' of reality." (Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, 309). Similarly, in his manifesto "Some Ideas on the Cinema" (1953) Cesare Zavattini writes: "All we have to do is to discover and then show all the elements that go to create this adventure, in all their banal 'dailiness,' and it will become worthy of attention, it will even become 'spectacular'." (In Richard Dyer McCann ed., *Film: A Montage of Theories* [New York: Plume, 1966], pp. 216-28, p. 217.)

Germinal, constitute a witness report of the life and hardship in and around the mines, are the 1931 German-French sound-film *Kameradschaft/La Tragédie de la mine* (*Comradeship/The Mine Tragedy*), directed by Georg Wilhelm Pabst, and Louis Daquin's 1949 *Le Point du jour*. *Kameradschaft* was inspired by the dust explosion in 1906 in a mine pit in Courrières, near Lens, which killed 1,099 miners, including many children, making it the worst mine disaster in European history. Though the film's narrative is set around as well as "underneath" the French-German border, parts of it were filmed in Noeux-les-Mines, in Pas-de-Calais. Originally Pabst wanted to end the film on a pessimistic note, with the separation of German and French mining communities by nationalist sentiments. Censors, however, imposed a more optimistic ending. The style of the film is quasi-documentary and expresses, as Tangui Perron argues, the director's "humanist and internationalist philosophy."¹⁹⁸ This aesthetic was largely the result of Pabst's supplementing of his professional cast with many non-professional actors that he recruited from the local population. As a French journalist observed after his visit to the set:

[T]he extras play a[n] . . . active part. With a charming patience. Pabst explains what they need to do as occasional actors. . . . I expected hesitations, laughter, discomfort. I was surprised by the sincerity, the truth with which a young man and an old woman in the foreground played their roles. The woman did not feel like laughing: she is a widow and her husband died in the mine. The young man goes down into the pits every day. They were told: "Act like there is a fire in the pit." They understood.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Tangui Perron, "Nitrates et gueules noires ou le filon minier II," L'Association Jean Mitry ed., *Le Nord et le cinéma*, pp. 177-89, p. 181.

¹⁹⁹ Cited in *ibid.* (from an article originally published in *Pour vous* on September 24, 1931).

Similarly, also *Le Point du jour* was shot with a cast that consisted of both professional and amateur actors. The film reports the everyday life of miners and their families in Liévin, near Lens, where it was also shot. Whereas Allégret's *Germinal* and *La Tragédie de la mine* depict or are based on events in the region's recent past, Daquin's film engages with its contemporary present. While shooting his film Daquin, a member of the Parti Communiste Française and the Confédération Générale du Travail (the first major confederation of trade unions in France), was closely monitored by the mine management. Forbidden were all references to class struggle, silicosis—which then had just been recognized as a miner's disease—and “Courrières.” This is the reason why *Le Point du jour* refers to this disaster by the name of “Ostrevent,” adjusting the number of victims to “more than 300.” “A film without strike or dust explosion, and devoid of all miserableness,” as Perron writes, *Le Point du jour* was a commercial failure, but it meant “the departure point for France of a social, or socialist, neorealism.”²⁰⁰

As I stated before, the long lineage of the northern French cinema of the real only began blossoming into a truly regionally rooted northern French cinema in the 1980s, around the time that French cinema in general began to turn toward the regions. Other than the first *Germinal*, *La Tragédie de la mine*, *Le Point du jour*, and Bresson's *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, the foreshadowing of such a cinema of Nord-Pas-de-Calais we find in the work of Pialat. The contemporary of Nouvelle Vague directors such as Godard, Truffaut and Chabrol, Pialat only made his first film, *L'Enfance nue*, in 1968, when the Nouvelle Vague proper was already over. *L'Enfance nue* is one of the three

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 184.

films Pialat shot in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the two others being *Passe ton bac d'abord* and *Sous le soleil Satan*. Both *L'Enfance nue* and *Passe ton bac d'abord* are set in and around Lens, in the heart of the coal mining area. While the former tells the story of the ten-year-old François (Michel Terrazon) who is placed in the hands of the social services, the latter revolves around a group of adolescents who, in a milieu of unemployment and disillusion, are asked to invest in their future. With these two films Pialat vehemently rejected the French New Wave, its modernism, and above all the distorted image of childhood that this movement had created in his eyes.

This stance, however, did not prevent Pialat from collaborating with Truffaut, who coproduced *L'Enfance nue*, which is all the more interesting given the fact that Pialat's film may be read as a critical response to *Les 400 coups/400 Blows* (1959). Both films tell the story of a boy adrift, and both do so in a stripped-down cinematic language. Here, however, the parallels end. The portrait of French childhood that is *L'Enfance nue* opposes itself diametrically and explicitly to the one we find in Truffaut's New Wave landmark. Pialat's film is simultaneously much more negative and much more positive than Truffaut's. On the one hand, whereas Antoine (Jean-Pierre Léaud) wages his struggle against the old France in the epicenter of the Nouvelle Vague, François's (Michel Terrazon) childhood unfolds in a forgotten France, a France that is truly naked and devoid of play. On the other hand, whereas the initial lightheartedness of Truffaut's film runs aground in the dead-end of its final freeze frame, *L'Enfance nue* concludes its overall bleakness with the sincere expression of a spark of faith in its protagonist's future. These differences also find expression in these films' aesthetics. In spite of being as

playful and restless as Antoine, ultimately Truffaut's handheld camera and sparkling black-and-white images remain at a deliberate emotional distance from their protagonist, who as a result remains somewhat of a mystery to the viewer. In contrast, as much as the long takes and long shots of *L'Enfance nue* are grey despite their colors, they are intimate in their Bresson-inspired stasis, a quality that largely results from Pialat's delicate use of the "humanity" of his non-professional actors (and of the limitation of their acting skills). There is not much mystery in what drives François: he just needs love.

L'Enfance nue, but also *Passe ton bac d'abord* and *Sous le soleil de Satan*, are the most direct forerunners of the regional cinema of Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Like Walloon cinema, northern French cinema displays a tendency toward the real. Many of its films engage the region's economic crisis, whether explicitly (*L'Enfance nue*) or implicitly (*L'humanité*). And many of its films balance on the divide between documentary and fiction. They share, moreover, in the humanism that we find in Walloon cinema. However, it would be a mistake to conclude from these parallels that from the 1960s onward the increasingly burgeoning regional cinemas of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais gradually joined forces before melting together in a cross-border regional cinéma du Nord. The two reasons why this did not happen are in fact embodied by the example of *L'Enfance nue*, by this film's self-positioning against Paris and its Nouvelle Vague, and by the fact that this film is a fiction feature. Starting with this first point, whereas the emergence of a Walloon cinema of the real coincided with that of Walloon regional cinema as such, the development of a regionally rooted northern French realism needs to be seen within the larger history of French national cinema. On the one hand, and in spite

of the long-time underrepresentation of the French North as a subject matter and filming location in the history of French cinema, forms of socially critical realism that engage this region go back to the 1910s. On the other hand, the emergence of a northern French regional cinema, that is to say of a cinema that takes to heart the specificity of the region *and* that is that region's product, has been a very recent development that only took serious form in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Given its immanence to the partial decentralization of French national cinema, as well as the emancipation of the French regions in general (a topic to which I will return in the next chapter), it is not surprising that this northern French regional cinema is also a *regionalist* cinema, much more at least than its Walloon counterpart. In some cases this regionalism becomes very explicit, as for example in *Bienvenu chez les Ch'tis* or *Emmenez-moi* (*Take Me Along*, Edmond Bensimon, 2005), a road movie through Nord-Pas-de-Calais. In other cases, such as *L'Enfance nue* and *Nord*, it manifests itself more subtly, in the presentation of the North as "not Paris."

Directly connected to this is the second reason why the Walloon and the northern French part of the cinéma du Nord have developed relatively independently of each other. Whereas the former emerged as a documentary movement and, following the slow birth of the Walloon fiction feature since the early 1960s, has remained strongly interwoven with that documentary tradition, northern French fiction cinema has developed relatively independently from its documentary component.²⁰¹ As we will see in the third chapter,

²⁰¹ Most of the documentary films produced in Nord-Pas-de-Calais are either made-for-TV productions or small productions that have only had a very limited theatrical distribution, if any at all. First of all, there are numerous documentary films that testify to the coal mining industry in

this difference in development between Walloon and northern French cinema has especially been a matter of funding structures, or more precisely the long-time absence thereof.

In the remainder of this section I will further characterize the northern French cinema of the real by highlighting three of its recurring thematics. The first thematic I already touched on, namely the position of Nord-Pas-de-Calais within France. Many films in recent French cinema that are set or partly set in Nord-Pas-de-Calais implicitly or explicitly depict the region as differing from more southern parts of France, in terms of geography, climate and culture. Though many of these alleged differences have an essence of truth, they generally also contain a stereotypical, essentialist dimension. It is not even so much that many films depict the French North in an overly negative or positive fashion (as is the case with *Bienvenu chez les Ch'tis*), but more that the region's landscapes, towns and people are often depicted as giving rise to narratives or situations, whether tragic or comic, that could as well have been set in a different place and with

the region. One recent example we have already encountered with Denis Gheerbrant's 1991 *Et la vie*. Another noteworthy example is *Mémoires de la mine* (1979-1981), directed by Jacques Renard and produced and broadcasted by TF1. Through testimonies of mineworkers and former mineworkers, this series of four TV-documentaries (*La Mine, La Mémoire, Le Coeur, Le Corps*) covers the history of coal mining in Nord-Pas-de-Calais between 1920 and 1980. Moreover, in 1985 a sequel to *Mémoire de la mine* appeared, *Blanche et Marie*, a fiction feature set in 1941 that centers on two young female resistance fighters, who are played by Miou-Miou and Sandrine Bonnaire. Second, there are several militant films depicting the working conditions of women in the textile industry of Roubaix, including *La Fille de la route* (Louis Terme, 1962) and *Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent?* (Coline Serreau, 1977), which also depicts the role of women in the labor movement elsewhere in France. Finally, there are various films engaging the lives of immigrants and their children in Nord-Pas-de-Calais. An early example is *L'Affiche rouge* (Frank Cassenti, 1976). More recently, and especially since the early 1990s, a substantial body of small productions made by "second generation" immigrants has developed. Some of these films, many of which border on the divide between documentary and fiction, are *Le Maboul du quartier* (Riquita, 1991), *Au pays des mille et un puits* (Youssef Essiyedali & Louissette Faréniaux, 1991), and the animated *Une vie de chacal* (Djamel Sellani, 1994).

different people. In this respect the rootedness of northern French cinema is of a less dialectical nature than that of its Walloon counterpart.

Let me emphasize that I do not consider this essentialism problematic per se. A first example we in fact already encountered with *L'humanité*, which explicitly presents the French North as a space remote from Paris and its authorities. Though Dumont's film strongly relies on the particularity of Nord-Pas-de-Calais and its locally cast actors, the film ultimately dehistoricizes the region by transforming it into a stage for the struggle between a primordial, mute nature and an omnisignifying idea of humanity. Similarly, *Nord*, directed by Xavier Beauvois, uses the French North as the narrative site for a universal tragedy. Had the film been titled differently, we could have still interpreted its retelling of the Oedipus legend as one that merely *happens* to be set in the French North. Because of its title, however, the protagonist's path to darkness appears as one that was always already predestined by his northern French identity. Finally, both Masson's *En avoir (ou pas)* and Vincent's *Karnaval* set up an opposition between the North and more southern parts of France. The former juxtaposes a cold and windy Boulogne-sur-Mer to a warmer and jazzier Lyon, the latter the rain of Dunkirk to the sun of Marseille.

Karnaval merits closer attention. The film brings together the two other recurring themes in northern French cinema: the region's popular culture and its French-Maghreb population. *Karnaval* depicts the impossible relation between Larbi (Amar Ben Abdallah) and Béa (Sylvie Testud) during the Carnival of Dunkirk. Larbi is a French-Arab youth who is tired of being exploited by his father. Béa works in a supermarket and lives with her husband. When they first meet they kiss, but when Larbi goes looking for Béa the

next day she tells him that “hier c’était Carnaval, c’était un baiser du Carnaval” (“yesterday it was Carnival, it was a Carnival kiss”). Larbi and Béa’s encounter is one between two intertwined, marginalized cultures, captured in a minimalist yet exuberant cinematography. While delighting in the Carnival spectacle—in its procession of giants, in its songs, and in its costumed participants—*Karnaval* also captures the exclusionary or even downright xenophobic sentiments by which a society’s strong community sense can go accompanied. In doing so the film combines regionalism with a critique thereof. Other than *Karnaval*, examples of films that express the history of immigration in Nord-Pas-de-Calais are Gérard Blain’s *Pierre et Djemila*, Christian Vincent’s *Sauve-moi*, Dumont’s *La Vie de Jésus*, and Christine Carrière’s *Rosine*. Both *Pierre et Djemila* and *Sauve-moi* are set in Roubaix, which has the largest French-Arab population in Nord-Pas-de-Calais. The former is a modern, bicultural *Romeo and Juliet*. The latter constitutes an exploration of Roubaix, including its “parts moches” (“seedy parts”), and shows the encounter between the French-Arab Mehdi (Roschdi Zem) and the Romanian Agatha (Rona Hartner). *La Vie de Jésus* is, like *L’humanité*, set in Bailleul and depicts the racist sentiments among a group of unemployed youth toward a French-Arab family. *Rosine*, finally, tells the story of the friendship between the fourteen year old title character (Eloïse Charretier) and the French-Maghreb Yasmina (Aurélie Vérillon).

Like *Karnaval*, both *La Vie de Jésus* and *Rosine* combine their depictions of the French-Arab population with a reference to the region’s popular culture. In *La Vie de Jésus* some of the protagonists are musicians in a marching band. *Rosine* ends on a slightly absurdist tracking shot of a similar marching band, parading through the outskirts

of a small industrial town, alongside “une route qui va de Paris qui va jusqu’au Calais” (“a road that goes from Paris that goes to Calais”), as the protagonist, in voice-over, situates the narrative during the opening sequence. Finally, one of the most complex depictions of popular culture and folklore in Nord-Pas-de-Calais we find in *Quand la mer monte . . .*, a social-realist fairytale codirected by the respectively Belgian and French filmmakers Yolande Moreau and Gilles Porte. The film’s title is a reference to a song by Raoul de Godewarsvelde, a popular singer from Lille. In addition, the film’s male protagonist, Dries (Wim Willaert), is a maker and carrier of processional giants, which appear in the streets and squares of Nord-Pas-de-Calais during Carnival and other local and regional holidays.²⁰²

Of Giants, Angels and Humans

These giants, who we also encounter in *Karnaval*, deserve some closer attention, because their periodical appearance remains not restricted to Nord-Pas-de-Calais, but is also found in Belgium, in Wallonia and in Flanders, as well as, though to a less extent, in francophone Belgian cinema (e.g., Storck’s *Les Fêtes de Belgique/Belgian Holidays*, 1972). Made of wicker frames covered with papier-mâché and textiles, these processing giants can be up to 9 meters (29 feet) in height and weigh up to 350 kilograms (770 pounds). They represent biblical figures, local heroes or traditional professions such as those of fisher, miner or lacemaker, and often they are related to each other through family ties. The giants are carried through the streets of towns and cities—including

²⁰² In 1982, five years after his suicide, Godewarsvelde reincarnated, when in his native city a giant in his likeness joined the parade.

Douai, Cassel, Brussels and Mons—during local and regional holidays such as Carnival and street fairs.

This ritual originated on the Iberian Peninsula and dates back to the late Middle Ages, when the humanlike and grotesque figure of the giant joined—and simultaneously represented the taming of—the processional figure of the dragon, which first appeared in pagan rites in late twelfth to early thirteenth century Portugal. Whereas the dragon represented the negative pole of Manichaean thought, the human giant personified the strength of the city. As Henry de Lumley writes: “Symbolically, the citizens, aided by noble or ennobled giants, have conquered their independence on sinister creatures coming out of the sea, forests or deserted land that manage civilized life.”²⁰³ With the spread of the Spanish Empire during the sixteenth century, this ritual traveled to other parts of Europe, including the southern, Catholic-minded parts of the Seventeen Provinces in the Low Countries (one of them being Flanders, which in that period also included the “burgraviates” of Lille and Douai, as well as Tournai, now in Wallonia). In 2005, the UNESCO recognized the “Processional Giants and Dragons in Belgium and France” as one of the world’s “masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity.”²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Henry de Lumley, “De la fête à l’identité,” in Jean-Pierre Ducastelle et al., *Géants et dragons: mythes et traditions à Bruxelles, en Wallonie, dans le nord de la France et en Europe* (Tournai: Casterman, 1996), p. 7. De Lumley further explains the appearance of the dragon figure: “The processional dragon appears in Western Europe towards the twelfth or the thirteenth century. Once conquered, this fantasy animal . . . becomes a benevolent animal. . . . Associated with the power of water, with sources, marshes and rivers, the dragon is submitted to a patron saint or a local hero, who is often assimilated to Saint Georges, the dragon tamer par excellence. The Walloon festivities enrich this battle with the presence of savages dressed in ivy leaves, devils and coated horses [*chevaux-jupons*]. A famous festivity is the *ducasse* of Mons.” (Ibid.)

²⁰⁴ See http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/05eur_uk.htm (accessed March 1, 2012). In the rationale for its including of these traditions on its heritage list the UNESCO states: “Although these expressions are not threatened with immediate disappearance, they do suffer

The persistence of these and related traditions, such as Carnival, is yet another factor that strengthens the notion of the French-Walloon *Nord*. This notion is immanent to the shared cultural practices and the material conditions of existence that bind the people of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. On both sides of the border this shared reality has found expression in recent cinematic productions. However, whereas in most Walloon films the socioeconomic crisis dominates, many films set or shot in the French North tend to portray the region primarily along cultural and geographical lines. To a large extent this difference can be attributed to the fact that, more than Walloon cinema, northern French cinema, from its social realism to its blockbusters, shows a tendency toward genre films, and especially toward lighter genres such as melodrama and (tragi)comedy. This difference is in turn largely explained by the fact that whereas, as we will see in the next chapter, Walloon cinema is part of a francophone regional cinema that operates as a small national cinema in and of itself, northern French cinema is only a small part of the colossus that is French national cinema.

Elements of a regionalist, northern French essentialism are not limited to the family film though. We also encounter them in more heavy-handed productions such as *Nord* and *L'humanité*. The latter, as we have seen earlier in this and in the previous chapter, turns the region's landscape and towns into the stage for a struggle between the primordial forces of human nature, on the one hand, and a Christian notion of humanity

from a number of pressures such as the major changes to the town centres, the increase in the number of performance attractions that are unrelated to the giants but which do attract tourists to the detriment of the popular, spontaneous nature of the festival. The success of these other attractions and the lack of proper management slow down the processions and disturb the festival's structure, harming its vitality and dynamism.”

that seeks to contain and redeem those forces, on the other. In this abstracted and explicitly artificial engagement with its narrative setting, *L'humanité* strongly differs from *Rosetta*, the film that is emblematic for the Walloon cinema of the real.

In spite of this difference, as argued in Chapter 1 both films have in common the fact that they employ a Christian, humanist vocabulary in order to express a world in which secular and religious life-shaping institutions have significantly waned in power. In line with this strategy, two films that explicitly deal with the Christian heritage in northern French culture are Zonca's *La Vie rêvée des anges* and *Rosine*. Among the angels of Zonca's film is Isa (Elodie Bouchez). But is she really an angel? Isa is a twenty-something-year-old drifter washed ashore in Lille. She gets by working factory jobs and selling handmade postcards. She fails to save one life (that of her friend Marie, but she is able to save another (Sandrine). Is that enough in order for her to be considered an angel? More than human and less than divine, angels herald the event. They announce life, they guard life, sometimes they fight and sometimes, perhaps, they fail. But do they dream? If there were a God, Isa would be an angel. However, as Rosine toward the end of her film writes to the curé, in a letter in which she resigns from her position in the church choir: "je crois toujours pas en votre Dieu, parce qu'il n'est pas disponible. Il s'occupe pas de filles comme moi. . . . En attendant je fais chanteuse" ("I still don't believe in your God, because he's not available. He doesn't look after girls like me. . . . In the meanwhile I become a singer.")

Rosine's dream is Isa's dream is Rosetta's dream (and we may speculate, moreover, as to whether we hear an echo of *Rosine* in *Rosetta* . . .). It is the dream of a

different, better life, a dream that is shared by all the female factory employees in *La Vie rêvée*'s closing tracking shot that halts for a couple of seconds on each of the women's faces it frames. This tracking shot is telltale of the cinéma du Nord. Like the final close-ups of *Rosetta* and *L'humanité*, or the shots of children in *Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre*, or of the parade in *Karnaval*, it makes felt the presence of *these* people and *their* precarity. Simultaneously these shots express the belief in an idea of humanity to which these particular lives are immanent. Moreover, like the shots in these other films, the ending of *La Vie rêvée* testifies to a belief in cinema's potential to express this dialectical humanism by investing the single shot with a simultaneously affective and conceptual power. It is a belief that, as I will argue in more detail in the final chapter, ruptures—and perhaps naively so—with critiques of representation and realism as they have been raised since the 1960s onward, in cinema but also in philosophy.

The cinéma du Nord renders visible, intelligible and affective the reality of the Nord, including the fact that this region is cut through by the French-Belgian border. This border appears explicitly in films such as *Germinal* (1913). Implicitly, it has become visible through the differences between the ways that the commonalities between Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais have been expressed in each of their cinemas. Though both Walloon cinema and northern French cinema display a strong tendency toward a socially critical and aesthetically austere realism that in its regional rootedness expresses an idea of human life that transcends its particular settings, the northern French cinema of the real, much more than its Walloon counterpart, also is a *regionalist* cinema. To a large extent this difference can be explained through the differences in development between

these two cinemas. While Storck's and Ivens's 1933 *Borinage* marked the simultaneous emergence of the Walloon cinema of the real and of Walloon regional cinema as such, a truly regional northern French cinema did not take off until the early mid 1980s, even though the lineage of films that engage with the socioeconomic reality of Nord-Pas-de-Calais goes back to Allégret's location-shot adaptation of Zola's novel. Moreover, whereas Walloon fiction cinema, since its birth in the early 1960s, has always retained strong ties with the region's documentary tradition, in northern French regional cinema the traffic between a fiction-feature auteur cinema and documentary cinema has remained comparatively small.

The reasons for these differences stand central in the next chapter. While this second chapter has mapped the Nord and analyzed the ways this transnational region has become visible cinematically, the third chapter examines the structures that have facilitated the production of films in and about the Nord.

CHAPTER 3 | *Cinéma du Nord*: A Transnational Regional Cinema

Le cinéma belge, c'est bon pour l'économie!

- Alain Jennotte in *Le Soir*

Tout en restant exigeants sur la qualité artistique des films, nous augmentons encore notre impact économique: les tournages soutenus par le CRRAV ont généré plus de 11 millions d'euros de dépenses en région.

- CRRAV Nord-Pas-de-Calais, *Rapports d'activités 2010*²⁰⁵

Reading the closing titles of *Rosetta*, we learn that the film is a Belgian-French production whose main partners are: Les Films du Fleuve (the production company the Dardennes founded in 1996 in Liège on the banks of the Meuse), the RTBF (Radio Télévision Belge Francophone, the public broadcasting organization of the French Community of Belgium), and ARP Sélection (a French production and distribution company). The film was further supported by: the Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Communauté Française de Belgique (or CCA, a public agency that promotes the production of films and other audiovisual media in the French Community of Belgium), the Télédistributeurs Wallons (a public organization uniting television distributors in Wallonia), the Société de Développement du Secteur de l'Édition et de l'Audiovisuel (SODEDI, a branch of the Société régionale d'investissements de Wallonie [SRIW], which in turn is an investment unit of the Walloon regional government²⁰⁶), and the at that time still state-owned Belgian Loterie Nationale (National Lottery). In addition, also

²⁰⁵ Alain Jennotte, "Le cinéma belge, c'est bon pour l'économie," *Le Soir* (February 3, 2010), p. 36; Centre Régional de Ressources Audiovisuelles du Nord-Pas-de-Calais [CRRAV], *Rapport d'activités 2010* (Tourcoing: CRRAV, 2011), p. 5.

²⁰⁶ See <http://www.sriw.be> (accessed June 25, 2011).

the two following organizations participated in *Rosetta*: Canal Plus, a French private pay television channel, and the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), which is the French agency of the Ministry of Culture that is responsible for the promotion of the cinematic and audiovisual arts in France (in 2009 renamed as the Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée).

I am mainly interested in the support that was provided by the Walloon region. This support was in fact accorded only *after Rosetta's* success in Cannes. As Philippe Reynaert states, in the transcription of a series of four roundtable conferences organized in 2011 by the Commission Nationale du Film France, which is a portal for film production in France, on the role of the French regions in audiovisual productions:

From the moment the Dardenne brothers obtained this Palme d'or at Cannes onward, the majority of Walloon representatives wanted to jump on the bandwagon. And the Dardennes had the courage to say: you didn't help us, you don't jump on anything. And we arrived at the very surrealist situation, which is also a Belgian invention, that the Walloon region coproduced the film *Rosetta* after its Palme d'or. It's one of the least risky investments that we have ever made, because the film had been finished. The only thing that rested to be done was to change the closing titles in order to list the Walloon region among the coproducers. At that moment we had a core to mobilize ourselves around, and to tell ourselves: let's strike while the iron is hot; this event will help us to gear up.²⁰⁷

Reynaert spoke these words in his function as managing director of Wallimage, an SRIW affiliated investment fund created by the Walloon government in February 2001, so less than two years after the release of *Rosetta*. Wallimage is subdivided into

²⁰⁷ Cited in Commission Nationale du Film France, *Les Collectivités territoriales et la production cinématographique & audiovisuelle: compte-rendu, quatre tables rondes en région* (Paris: Commission Nationale du Film France, 2001), p. 143.

Wallimage Coproductions, which finances individual productions (and which in 2012 operated on an annual budget of 4.5 million euro), and Wallimage Entreprises, which supports the development of audiovisual service companies.²⁰⁸ Wallimage is primarily an economic and less a cultural fund. Unlike the CCA, which accords financial aid to cinematic projects based on their cultural merit, Wallimage is part of the strategy of economic development of the Walloon government. Reynaert:

We try to let live the producers in the region, by investing money in their films, or in the films of foreign producers And we ask the coproducers of these films to spend one and a half time as much [in the region] than we invest ourselves. The regional spendings aren't a pure and strict matter of territorialization. We absolutely don't insist on the film being shot in Wallonia, where we do not have the variety of landscapes that you are lucky to have in the French regions. We simply say: when we invest €200,000 in a film, we want that €300,000 is spent in the region, on the hiring of technicians and of actors, on the artistic rights, on a scenario, etc. Spendings that we consider equally eligible include hotel and restaurant costs We have an entire range of eligible spendings.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ A 2011 report from the Walloon Parliament lists Wallimage as one of the “*Activités et interventions de la S.R.I.W.*” See Parlement Wallon (session 2011—2012), *Budgets des recettes et des dépenses de la Région wallonne pour l'année budgétaire 2012: exposé général: deuxième partie* [4-III a/ 4-III bcd] (November 21, 2011), pp. 99-103.

²⁰⁹ Cited in Commission Nationale du Film France, *Les Collectivités territoriales*, 143-4. In its regulations Wallimage states that, in order for a cinematographic or television product to be considered for support, it needs to fulfill at least four out of the ten following criteria:

- a) The action of the screenplay mainly takes place in Wallonia, in Brussels, in Belgium, in another member state of the European Economic Space or in a member state of the European Free Trade Association;
- b) The director and/or the screenwriter has his official address in Wallonia, in Brussels, in Belgium, in another member state of the European Economic Space or in a member state of the European Free Trade Association;
- c) One of the leading actors or 3 actors in a supporting role are born in Belgium or possess the Belgian nationality.
- d) At least one of the main characters has a privileged link with Belgian culture (For example, the character possesses the Belgian nationality like Hercule Poirot in the films based on Agatha Christie's work or is based on a comic book hero such as Tintin);
- e) The original screenplay is mainly written in and the characters express themselves in one of the official or vernacular languages in Belgium;

Reynaert thus contrasts the funding policy of Wallonia to similar policies that have been in effect in the French regions. The latter, in their support of cinema but also television productions, tend indeed to place more emphasis on cultural promotion as well as on the potential positive spin-off effects of films or television programs on tourism.²¹⁰

For example, like most of the French regional organizations administering audiovisual funds, the Centre Régional de Ressources Audiovisuelles (CRRAV) of Nord-Pas-de-

f) The screenplay is an adaptation of an original literary work or is inspired by another culturally recognized creation;

g) The main theme of the audiovisual work is art and/or several artists;

h) The audiovisual work is mainly about historical characters or events;

i) The audiovisual work mainly tackles societal themes, which are pertinent for Belgium or for another member state of the European Economic Space or of the European Free Trade Association, and concern current events, cultural, social or political aspects (for example the theme of underemployment and its consequences as addressed by the Dardenne brothers or Ken Loach);

j) The audiovisual work contributes to the promotion of the Belgian or European audiovisual patrimony (for example, a documentary dealing with the colonial period in Africa which would be based on films shot at the time by Belgian or English film makers)

(Wallimage Coproductions, *Regulations* (2010), [p. 5],

<http://www.wallimage.be/downloads.php?lang=uk> [accessed April 3, 2012].)

²¹⁰ Reynaert also states in an interview: “J’ai fait le tour de tous les fonds régionaux européens et, en réalité, il y a une rupture entre le Sud et le Nord de l’Europe. Dans le Sud, les fonds régionaux fonctionnent par subventions et trouvent leurs crédits budgétaires qui pourraient relever du tourisme. Curieusement, ce mode de fonctionnement est calqué sur les fonds régionaux américains. À Boston, la responsable du tourisme expliquait à l’un de nos administrateurs qu’ils ont arrêté depuis dix ans d’investir de l’argent dans les brochures administratives pour investir dans le cinéma. Parce que chaque fois qu’un film se tourne à Boston, ça génère des visites de la ville. Les gens veulent voir l’endroit qui figure dans le film qu’ils ont vu. Les Italiens et les Français fonctionnent un peu comme ça. Nous, on fonctionne davantage sur le modèle nord-européen qui est brillamment illustré par les Allemands, chez qui ce sont des incitants financiers qui sont mis en place, incitants dont on espère un effet régional - tant mieux si les sites locaux sont mis en valeur - mais dont on recherche surtout un effet structurant sur l’audiovisuel dans la région. C’est une démarche très différente. L’aspect régional, au sens touristique, est quelque chose qu’on ressentira comme un plus, comme un bonus qu’on sera content d’avoir, mais il n’est pas la clé de la démarche.” Cited in Jean-Michel Vlaeminckx, “Wallimage” [interview with Philippe Reynaert], *Cinergie.be: Webzine* 48 (2001), <http://www.cinergie.be/webzine/wallimage> (accessed April 1, 2012).

Calais stipulates in its guidelines that, in order to qualify for funding, a film needs to be either made by a production company established in the region, or shot, for at least “an important part” (i.e. 50 percent), in the region.²¹¹

Though Nord-Pas-de-Calais has shown itself more invested in stimulating its own visibility, and in that respect has been more “regionalist” than Wallonia, also this French region approaches cultural politics as part of a broader, mainly economic vision. This becomes clear in the third of the four roundtable conferences discussed earlier.²¹² At that conference, which took place in Valenciennes and which was coorganized by the CRRAV, the vice-president of the Conseil Régional du Nord-Pas-de-Calais Jean Cortois and the CRRAV president Christian Vanneste presented the region’s strategy with respect to the promotion of individual productions and the audiovisual sector at large.²¹³ The region’s first objective, they explain, is to stimulate the industrial infrastructure for film and television productions. In this context Vanneste also discusses his region’s collaboration with the Walloon region and Wallimage under the aegis of the EU’s Interreg program (see Chapter 2). Second, the CRRAV plays a facilitating role for organizations, whether for-profit or non-for-profit, that research or implement new audiovisual recording and distribution technologies. In doing so, the two men explain, Nord-Pas-de-Calais seeks to integrate its support for the audiovisual industry into the

²¹¹ Atelier de Production Centre Val-de-Loire (APCVL), *Politiques territoriales de soutien à la production cinématographique et audiovisuelle: guide: mode d’emploi* (Château-Renault, 2001), p. 66.

²¹² The conference in Valenciennes took place on November 23, 2001. The three other conferences were held in Hourtin (Aquitaine), Strasbourg (Alsace), and Vendôme (Centre).

²¹³ In 2002 Vanneste, who belongs to the center-right UMP, was elected as a member of the French Parliament. In 2006 and 2012 he became the subject of critique for having publicly made homophobic statements.

region's broader strategy of economic development, and to reach a "synthesis" between culture and economy.²¹⁴ For example, the region supports a regional association of digital content producers. This *arc numérique* (digital portal), Cortois states, strives to stimulate new forms of employment "in a region that has severely suffered from an industrialization based on a few heavy industries."²¹⁵

As examples of individual productions that the CRRAV supported Vanneste mentions Zonca's *La Vie rêvée des anges* and Dumont's *L'humanité*, two films that, like *Rosetta*, were successful at Cannes, in 1998 and 1999 respectively (*La Vie rêvée* was nominated for the Palme d'or, while the film's two main actresses split the prize for best actress). In the closing titles of *L'humanité*, the CRRAV, which invested 112 thousand euro in the film,²¹⁶ is even listed as one of the main coproducers, alongside 3B Productions (a small French production company), and Arte France Cinéma (the production division of the French-German TV network that programs in the areas of culture and the arts). The other organizations that participated in the production of *L'humanité* are: the CNC, the French Ministry of Culture, and Canal Plus. Finally, the credits acknowledge the Nord-Pas-de-Calais Region (so separately from the CRRAV), Procirep (a French organization that protects the copyrights of film and television

²¹⁴ Commission Nationale du Film France, *Les Collectivités territoriales*, 88-9.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

²¹⁶ Source: CRRAV, <http://www.crrav.com/fichefilm.php?id=290&page=1&perpage=10> (accessed June 19, 2012).

producers), and the Prix Jean Vigo (a prize for young French filmmakers that Dumont won in 1997 for his *La Vie de Jésus*).²¹⁷

This impressionistic account of funding and production structures in Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais serves as an introduction to this chapter's perspective on the cinéma du Nord. The central question is the same as in the previous chapter: What is the relation between Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, and in particular these regions' post-World War II socioeconomic development, and the remarkable stream of cinematic productions that have emerged out of and rooted themselves in these regions, especially since the early 1990s? In the previous chapter I addressed this question by analyzing the ways that the geopolitical, cultural-historical and socioeconomic realities of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais have been expressed in films set and shot in these regions. In this chapter I focus on the structures of film production, funding, and, though more indirectly, distribution and consumption. In other words, whereas the previous chapter approached the cinéma du Nord from a textual analysis standpoint according to which films are aesthetic objects, this chapter approaches it from an economic standpoint according to which films are primarily the products of an industry. I will explore the existence of a causal link between the uneven socioeconomic transition of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-

²¹⁷ Except for *Twentynine Palms* (2003, FR/DE/US), which was shot in California, all of Dumont's film have been coproduced by or with the financial support of the CRRAV. Details about the financial support that the French regions have accorded to cinematic productions since 2003 can be found on the website of CICLIC (L'Agence Régionale du Centre pour le Livre, l'Image et la Culture Numérique, the equivalent of the CRRAV in the Centre region). From this database we learn that Nord-Pas-de-Calais supported *Flandres* (FR) with 180,000 euro, *Hadewijch* (FR) with 200,000 euro (in addition to the 300,000 euro accorded by the Ile-de-France region, where the film was largely shot), and *Hors Satan* (FR) (which is still listed under its original title *L'Empire*) with 175,000 euro. See CICLIC, *Production Guide*, http://www.centreimages.fr/production_guide.php (accessed April 3, 2012).

Calais, on the one hand, and the fact that, toward the turn of the twenty-first century, cinema has become one of the, and perhaps even the most privileged, medium for expressing this transition, on the other. I will contend that to a significant extent these regions' blossoming as cinematic sites cannot be separated from their endeavors to reimagine themselves as European centers after decades of recession. To make this connection is to demonstrate the cinéma du Nord's existence as a *transnational regional cinema* that is really "du," i.e. from and of, the Nord.

What is a Cinema?

Before I commence to validate this hypothesis, I would like to dwell for a moment on the question of what constitutes "a cinema." What factors bind films, as well as the practice of producing films, to "their" geopolitical, socioeconomic and cultural-historical (including linguistic) spaces? What makes a cinema regional, national or transnational? Let's first consider the spatial identity of individual films. Also in the age of global capital, the nation state continues to be the main legal referent for the origin of cinematic productions, like it does for most other industrial commodities that circulate on a supranational scale. Generally speaking, a film derives its primary national identity from the company that had the largest financial share in its production, and that as a result is the main owner of its proprietary copyrights (which in most countries are differentiated from the moral copyrights, which nowadays are generally owned by a film's main authors, including the director or directors, the scriptwriter, and the music composer). And yet, there actually exist no universally accepted international or even European

guidelines determining a film's country of origin.²¹⁸ As a result it may happen that different film databases report a film's nationality differently. For example, though generally listed as a Belgian-French coproduction, according to the Internet Movie Database (in 2012 at least), *Rosetta* is a French-Belgian coproduction. Similarly, though *L'humanité* is generally listed as a 100 percent French production, according to the Lumière Database (which was developed by the European Audiovisual Observatory, in collaboration with the EU's MEDIA program) also Belgian parties were involved in the film's production.²¹⁹

Based on these film's credit sequences (and on the Film Index International) it is safe to say that "BE/FR" and "FR" are *Rosetta*'s and *L'humanité*'s most accurate country-of-origin designations. That said, my treatment in the previous chapter of these films as examples of Walloon and northern French cinema, respectively, would not have been substantially different had their countries of production been slightly different, for two reasons. The first is that this project presents *Rosetta* and *L'humanité* as the products of a transborder reality. The other reason is of course that production nationality is only one among the many factors that determine the spatial identity under which a film—simultaneously understood as an industrial product, a branded commodity, and the fruit of an artistic process—circulates in the festival and theater circuits, or is discussed by journalists, scholars, and other audiences. Some other main factors that determine a

²¹⁸ In conformity to the rationale behind the identification criteria used in the Lumière Database (on admissions of films released in Europe), which is the result of a collaboration between the European Audiovisual Observatory as well as the MEDIA Program of the EU. See Lumière Database on Admissions of Films Released in Europe, "Identification of Films in the Lumière Database," <http://lumiere.obs.coe.int/web/sources/astuces.html> (accessed April 8, 2012).

²¹⁹ See http://lumiere.obs.coe.int/web/film_info/?id=12112 (accessed April 8, 2012).

film's cultural identity are the identity of its director and screenwriter (especially in the case of the so-called auteur film), the identity of its actors, its shooting locations, and the languages spoken in it (or in which it speaks itself, because also images are culturally coded).

To give an illustration: in academic discourse the Belgian-French-British-German production *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel* (Michel Khleifi & Eyal Sivan, 2003) has generally been discussed as a Palestinian film, because of Khleifi (a Palestinian who in 1970 moved from Israel to Belgium), and because of the film's thematic concerns (traveling along the border between Palestine and Israel that was established by the United Nations in 1947, the film documents a series of conversations between its authors and Israeli and Palestinians whose lives are marked by this border). In *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* (ed. Hamid Dabashi, 2006) neither Joseph Massad nor Bashir Abu-Manneh mention the film's countries of production, while also in the selected filmography of Palestinian cinema that concludes the volume the film's production identity remains unlisted. (Here it is important to note that despite the fact that the Occupied Palestinian Territories do not form an internationally recognized nation state, the International Organization for Standardization [ISO] does list a "country" code, namely "PS," for these territories, which makes it possible to identify Palestinian productions and coproductions in the regular way.)²²⁰ This does not mean that *Dreams of a Nation* leaves Khleifi's Belgian, and more generally European, connection

²²⁰ International Organization for Standardization, "FAQs—Answers to Questions Relating to Codes and Names of Specific Countries," http://www.iso.org/iso/country_codes/iso_3166-faqs/iso_3166_faqs_specific.htm (accessed April 8, 2012).

entirely undiscussed. Khleifi himself briefly discusses his work for Belgian television in the late 1970s. Omar Al-Qattan recalls his first encounters with Khleifi in the mid 1980s at the Institut National Supérieur des Arts du Spectacle (INSAS), the film and theater school in Brussels where Khleifi taught in that period, after having been a student there himself. And both Al-Qattan and Hamid Naficy discuss the funding history of Khleifi's 1987 *Urs al-jalil/Noce en Galilée* (*Wedding in Galilee*, 1987), a Palestinian-French-Belgian production and the first Palestinian feature film that received major international acclaim (the film won the International Critics' Prize at the 1987 Cannes film festival).²²¹

Khleifi's work is part of Palestinian cinema, but it is also part of Belgian, and more specifically francophone Belgian cinema, in all possible respects. Khleifi, who obtained Belgian nationality in 1980, has described himself as "a Palestinian Arab who was born in a Christian family, who grew up in Israel, and who lives in Belgium."²²² His *L'Ordre du jour/Order of the Day* (1993, FR/BE/LU) is an adaptation of a novel by the Belgian author Jean-Luc Outers and presents a parable of Belgian bureaucracy. And the filmmaker's work has been discussed in various studies of Belgian cinema. Emmanuel d'Autreppe describes *Noce en Galilée* as a film that "incarnates a big success of an

²²¹ Joseph Massad, "The Weapon of Culture: Cinema in the Palestinian Liberation Struggle"; Michel Khleifi, "From Reality to Fiction—From Poverty to Expression"; Bashir Abu-Manneh, "Towards Liberation: Michel Khleifi's *Ma'loul* and *Canticle*"; Hamid Naficy, "Palestinian Exilic Cinema and Film Letters"; Omar Al-Qattan, "The Challenges of Palestinian Filmmaking (1990—2003)," [chapters 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8, respectively] in Hamid Dabashi ed., *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), pp. 32-44, 45-57, 58-69, 90-104, 110-30.

²²² Cited in Emmanuel d'Autreppe, "Noce en Galilée [1987]," in Philippe Dubois & Edouard Arnoldy eds., *Ça tourne depuis cent ans: une histoire du cinéma francophone de Belgique* (Brussels: Communauté Française de Belgique, 1995), p. 107.

ecumenical and cosmopolitan cinema.”²²³ A special magazine that was issued on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the CCA selection committee lists Khleifi as one of the filmmakers who have put Belgian francophone cinema on the map, among Akerman, Andrien, the Dardennes, and André Delvaux.²²⁴ And Frédéric Sojcher states in relation to Khleifi’s first feature length film, *La Mémoire fertile/Fertile Memory* (1980, BE/NL/PS/DE), that the Palestinian-Belgian filmmaker “has an approach of reality that paradoxically brings him close to a Belgian documentary gaze, the ‘documented point of view’ he has learned at the INSAS and that derives in a straight line from Henri Storck.”²²⁵

Both cinemas Khleifi belongs to are named after communities that have been, and continue to be, contested, albeit of course with very different means and with very different stakes. Francophone Belgian cinemais primarily connected to the French Community of Belgium, which as we saw earlier in 2011 changed its name to the Wallonia-Brussels-Federation. However, outside of this community itself, this name change has remained largely unacknowledged. Palestinian cinema is the cinema of an imagined or dreamed nation, as the title of Dabashi’s book states. It is an exilic cinema, a cinema of a nation without a nation state. And what about the cinéma du Nord? The

²²³ See for example: Autreppe, “Noce en Galilée,” 107. For other discussions of the position of Khleifi’s work in Belgian cinema see Marianne Thys et al., *Belgian Cinema/Le Cinéma Belge/De Belgische Film* (Brussels: Royal Belgian Film Archive; Ghent: Ludion; Paris: Flammarion, 1999), p. 641; Frédéric Sojcher, *La Kermesse héroïque du cinéma belge: Tome III: 1988-1996: Le Carrousel européen* (Paris: L’Harmattan), pp. 84-5; and Philip Mosley, *Split Screen: Belgian Cinema and Cultural Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 143, 185; Paul Thomas, *Un siècle de cinéma belge* (Ottignies: Editions Quorum, 1995), 267-8.

²²⁴ [?], “La Commission de sélection a 25 ans,” *25 Ans de films en Communauté Française de Belgique: 1967—1992* [special issue of *Pour le cinéma belge*] (1993).

²²⁵ Frédéric Sojcher, *La Kermesse héroïque du cinéma belge: Tome II: 1965-1988: Le miroir déformant des identités culturelles* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), p. 193.

cinéma du Nord is and is not a stateless cinema, because the space and community that it is rooted in and that it expresses does not really amount to a nation, and therefore also not to a nation in lack and dreaming of a state. Rather, the cinéma du Nord is intertwined with a simultaneously material and imagined reality shared by two region states that exist across and in spite of the border between two nation states. Moreover, the cinéma du Nord exists across the border between two regional cinemas, and thereby also across the border between the two national cinemas of which these regional cinemas are subsets.

This chapter proceeds as follows: the two following sections examine the emergence of the regional cinemas of Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Wallonia within their national contexts. As we will see, whereas northern French cinema is a forerunner region in an only very partly decentralized national cinema, Walloon cinema is a substantial subset of a regional cinema that functions largely as a small national and inherently transnational cinema within an internally split national cinema. This difference between Walloon and northern French cinema creates a certain imbalance within the cinéma du Nord, especially insofar as the production of fiction features is concerned. Whereas almost all Walloon, and more in general francophone Belgian features, are coproductions with France, most films set and shot in Nord-Pas-de-Calais are 100-per-cent-French productions, even though since the early twenty-first century Belgium has become France's most important coproducing partner. The reason is of course that "Paris" is the financial heart of not only French national cinema, but also of francophone cinema at large, including francophone Belgian cinema, which over the decades has become partly assimilated by its big neighbor. That said, during the 1990s and 2000s Wallonia and

Nord-Pas-de-Calais have developed into small yet significant sites of film production. As I will demonstrate in the final section, “*Cinéma du Nord : A Euregional Cinema*,” this development has for a large part been driven by the active, and in recent years increasingly collaborative, promotion of the audiovisual industries by Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, efforts that in turns form part of these regions’ broader, “European” endeavor to reinvigorate and reimagine themselves, economically and culturally. In sum, this chapter traces the factors that have laid the conditions for, and contributed to the self-realization of, the cinéma du Nord as a cinema that at once expresses and is driven by the Nord’s socioeconomic transition. It presents the cinéma du Nord as a transnational regional cinema that forms the short-circuit between economy and culture, fiction and reality, and dreams and material reality.

“*Terre d’Images*”: Northern-French Cinema within French National Cinema

Films have been made in and about Nord-Pas-de-Calais since the beginning of the twentieth century. However, for a very long time the region played a marginal role in French cinema. As discussed earlier, one of the reasons for this long-time non-existence of a practice of film production that is both expressive of the French North and rooted in its economy is the region’s proximity to Paris. Illustrative here is that the first northern French production company, Nord Film, created in 1932, established itself in Paris.²²⁶ In 1950 RTF-Télé-Lille—the forerunner of both France 3 Nord-Pas-de-Calais and France 3

²²⁶ Among the company’s output were films such as *Vouloir* (André Jaeger-Schmidt, 1931, FR), and *La Chanson du lin* (George Monca, 1931, FR), both of which depict the Roubaix textile industry.

Picardie—and the first TV-studios appeared in the French North.²²⁷ This introduction of regional television production and broadcasting facilities gave a small boost to film production in Nord-Pas-de-Calais. However, it was not until the late 1980s and the early 1990s that the region saw the emergence of a truly regional cinema. As I will demonstrate later in this section, the main motor behind this emergence has been the CRRAV, which was created in 1985 and which in 1990 instituted a regional aid fund for film and other audiovisual productions. The CRRAV is largely responsible for the fact that during the 1990s and 2000s Nord-Pas-de-Calais has become a forerunner province in the partial, and much necessary, decentralization of French culture, including French national cinema.

In order to understand that process, it is necessary to first look at some key chapters in the history of post-World War II French national cinema, and in particular at the role that the French State has played in that history. In 1946, the French government created its Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), an overseeing body for the French film industry that largely replaced the Vichyite Comité d'Organisation de l'Industrie Cinématographique (COIC). Before it was transferred in 1959 to the Ministry of Culture, the CNC was attached to the Ministry of Information and, between 1947 and 1959, to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. In 1948 the CNC laid the basis for its *Fonds de soutien*—which in 1959 was renamed as the *Compte du soutien*—by creating a system of “*soutien automatique*.” Spurred by the tide of American imports, this “automatic support” consisted of a subsidy that benefited all, or at least almost all, French productions and coproductions. The system was financed by a levy on box-office receipts

²²⁷ France 3 Nord-Pas-de-Calais and France 3 Picardie resulted from the split in 2010 of France 3 Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie.

in France, including those of foreign productions, while the amount of the subsidy that a producer received was pro-rated according to the box-office sales of its previous production. During the 1950s, when the subsidy ranged from 15 to 25 percent of a film's production costs, this system of market regulation was relatively effective in meeting its goal of supporting the French film. The system also had its limitations, however. First, as a result of its financing method the *soutien automatique* was partly offset by the pressure higher ticket prices put on sales. Second, the subsidy tended to favor established, risk-averse producers over younger, more experimental producers, while it excluded first-time producers altogether.²²⁸

In other words, the *soutien automatique* mostly came to the benefit of the *Tradition de la Qualité* and less to the auteur film. I am ventriloquizing here François Truffaut who, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, in his 1954 “Une certaine tendance du cinéma française” derided the studio produced psychological realism that dominated the French cinematic landscape of that era. Truffaut wrote this pamphlet as a critic of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which had been founded in 1951 by, amongst others, André Bazin. Together with fellow critics such as Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Jean-Luc Godard, and Claude Chabrol, Truffaut proclaimed the “politique des auteurs” (author politics), according to which cinema is an art rather than a mere form of entertainment, and directors creators rather than mere technicians. Supported by a general climate of burgeoning cinephilia, the *Cahiers* critics revolutionized the discourse around cinema. As

²²⁸ Hayward, *French National Cinema*, 38. Hayward also points out that more recently the rising costs of film production has led to the regressive use of the subsidy, which means that producers use the subsidy in order to pay outstanding debts from the previous production.

Godard triumphed in 1959, in response to the selection of Truffaut's *Les 400 coups* as France's submission to the Cannes film festival, only a year after Truffaut had been refused a press pass to Cannes: "We have won by having created the acceptance for the principle that a film by Hitchcock, for example, is as important as a novel by Aragon. Thanks to us, film auteurs have once and for all entered the history of art."²²⁹ (Moreover, two years earlier the French parliament had passed a law that recognized the "moral rights" of authors to their creations).

In the same years that the *jeunes turcs* laid the basis for the Nouvelle vague, the French national government laid the basis for its system of *aide sélective* (selective aid), a type of financing that, unlike automatic aid, is attributed to producers and filmmakers on the basis of their projects' artistic qualities. In 1953 the CNC started to experiment with a *prime à la qualité* (reward for quality) for short films, the allocation of which was decided on by a committee of government representatives, critics, short-filmmakers, and producers. In 1955, due to pressure of the so-called Groupe de Trente—a group of filmmakers including Alain Resnais and Alexandre Astruc—and the increasing success of French films at international festivals, the *prime à la qualité* was extended to feature-length productions. As Resnais stated in the late 1950s, "thanks to the *prime à la qualité*" young talents have started to make films.²³⁰ Simultaneously, also already established filmmakers like Bresson—whose *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé/A Man Escaped*

²²⁹ Jean-Luc Godard, "Exclu l'an dernier du Festival Truffaut représentera la France à Cannes avec *Les 400 coups*," *Arts* 719 (1959): 5.

²³⁰ Cited in Frédéric Depétris, *L'Etat et le cinéma en France: le moment de l'exception culturelle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), p. 65.

(1956, FR) was awarded 50 million French francs (143 thousand dollars)—benefited from this system.²³¹

In 1959 Minister of Culture André Malraux replaced the prime à la qualité by the *avance sur recettes* (advance on receipts) regulation for feature-length films. This still-existing regulation is an interest-free loan that is awarded to filmmakers or producers for artistically promising projects. The loan is only to be repaid insofar as a film's box office revenues permit. The *avance* regulation arrived at a strategic time, because with the releases of films such as *Les 400 coups*—which won the Palme d'or—Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (FR/JP), and Chabrol's *Les Cousins/The Cousins* (FR), 1959 was also the year that the Nouvelle vague swelled to full force. In subsequent years, the *avance sur recettes* certainly helped intensify the New Wave, though this observation needs to be qualified by the fact that many films associated with this movement and its immediate aftermath were entirely produced on private funds. As Truffaut reassured Rohmer, after the latter's *Ma nuit chez Maud/My Night at Maud's* (1969, FR) had been declined CNC funding: "You can make it without the *avance sur recettes*. I'll take care of it. I ask some friends to put money into it."²³²

While constituting a full-fledged continuation of the State's earlier, more tentative display of interest in a French "quality cinema," the *avance* regulation also needs to be understood within the context of the politics of cultural exceptionalism implemented by

²³¹ Loredana Latil, "Une métaphore du cinéma français: les sélections du festival de Cannes et la prime à la qualité," <http://www.cg06.fr/document/?f=decouvrir-les-am/fr/rr168-cinema.pdf> (accessed May 20, 2012).

²³² Rohmer citing Truffaut. Cited in "Marie-Christine Barrault: Eric Rohmer [Film *Ma nuit chez Maud*]," <http://comediennes.org/video/marie-christine-barrault-rohmer-maud> (accessed May 17, 2012).

Malraux and Charles de Gaulle in those years. De Gaulle inaugurated this politics in February 1959, four months after the foundation of the Fifth Republic, when he created the Ministry of Culture with Malraux at its head. De Gaulle's and Malraux's vision on the role that culture ought to play in French society was patriotic and centralist, but also modern and emancipatory, at least in its intentions. Distancing themselves from the in their view elitist *Beaux Arts* politics of the Fourth Republic, they favored a democratization of the access to "*la culture*," with an emphasis on the definite article. In order to spur this dissemination of Parisian culture all over the hexagon, Malraux in 1959 initiated the *maisons de la culture* (culture houses). He did so in the following terms: "There is only one democratic culture that counts, which means something very simple. It means that it is necessary that through these maisons de la culture the things we are trying to make in Paris will spread to each French department, and that every 16-year old, however poor, can have a true contact with his national patrimony and with the glory of the human spirit."²³³

Cinema played a pivotal role in this combination of cultural patriotism and paternalism, because of the medium's inherent potential to reach the masses, but also because Malraux and De Gaulle, in their ambition to strengthen France's international prestige vis-à-vis the United States, found legitimization in the discourse around auteurism. Vice versa, the auteurs recognized allies in the General and the author of *La Condition humaine* (*The Human Condition*, 1933). As Frédéric Depéris argues, "the universalist pretensions of the 'auteur-filmmakers' of the New Wave [recognized] an

²³³ Cited in Assemblée Nationale, "Le Ministre et le Parlement," http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/andre-malraux/ministre_et_parlement.asp (accessed May 21, 2012).

echo, or a political ‘translation,’ in Malraux’s and De Gaulle’s positions and interventions. Also their wish to inscribe French cinema, which at that moment was considered a minor mode of expression, in the history of art [occurred] through universalist self-positionings.”²³⁴ The parallels between auteurism and chauvinism are further illustrated by some remarkable statements by two prominent New Wave filmmakers. While in Chabrol’s opinion De Gaulle equated revival (“The General arrives, the Republic changes, France is reborn”²³⁵), Rohmer once confessed that “the most beautiful American films” awoke in him “the regret that France . . . [had] let extinguish the torch of a certain idea of man in order for it to be lit again across the ocean, in short that France [had] to admit its defeat on a terrain of which it is the legitimate owner.”²³⁶

Many of the New Wave auteurs did indeed manage to secure their places among the Pleiades. Yet in this period of artistic rejuvenation, in commercial terms the country’s film culture was sailing into turbulent waters. Following the postwar “golden age,” between 1957 and 1969 annual box office entries plummeted from 411 million to 180 million, a decline that can be partly attributed to the spread of television.²³⁷ During the same period, and in spite of the two hundred or so first films that the New Wave generated, also the annual production of feature-length films “à l’initiative française”—a category that includes both 100 percent French productions and international coproductions in which French companies hold a majority share—dropped, from 142 in 1957 to 86 in 1967. These developments spurred a discourse of crisis in which producers,

²³⁴ Depéris, *L’Etat et le cinéma*, 55.

²³⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, 66.

²³⁶ Cited in *ibid.*, 55.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-9.

distributors and theater owners urged for protective measures in order to safeguard a national cinema and cinema culture. Although the government initially refused the tax relieves the French film world was calling for, in 1967 it did sharpen the eligibility criteria for the soutien automatique, now strictly earmarking the Fonds de soutien for films à l'initiative française. (Until that year also non-French companies who were involved in a coproduction in which French parties had a minority share were eligible for the fund.)²³⁸ This protective measure did, however, not lead to an increased investment in the French auteur film. Whereas in the early 1960s avances sur recettes made up almost half of the total funds distributed by the CNC (soutien automatique plus aide sélective), in the 1970s this percentage dropped to less than 25 percent, a sign of the fact that France was leaving its national film production more and more up to the market.

This tendency was partly countered in the 1980s and the early 1990s, when culture became again the affair of the state that it had been under Malraux and De Gaulle, and the era that the conviction that “cinema and television [*l'audiovisuel*] are not commodities like others”²³⁹ took firm root. That phrase was the one with which France, from the mid-1980s onward, rallied other European countries for its position that, in order to prevent a further *cocacolonisation* of national cultures, film and television productions should remain excluded from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). In 1993, this “culture war” even spilled over to the box offices, when French politicians pitched Berri's *Germinal*—with its 160 million French franc budget France's biggest production to that date—against *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, US). France

²³⁸ Hayward, *French National Cinema*, 49.

²³⁹ Depéris, *L'Etat et le cinéma*, 199.

lost this symbolic battle, but in the international political arena it largely succeeded, as it received support from other countries, including Belgium (which presided the EU at that moment). In 1992 the notion of cultural exception was confirmed by the treaty of Maastricht, while in the GATT negotiations it was decided to postpone the issue, meaning that individual nation states could continue to protect their cultural industries.²⁴⁰

The main instigator of France's renewed politics of cultural exceptionalism was Jack Lang, Minister of Culture between 1981 and 1986 and Minister of Culture and Communication between 1988 and 1993, and like then President François Mitterrand a member of the Socialist Party.²⁴¹ Starting with his decision in 1981 to raise the culture budget to one percent of the total national budget,²⁴² during his two terms Lang implemented an interventionist politics that in some people's eyes came close to a nationalization of culture. Lang's measures especially effected the film and television industries. On the side of distribution and exhibition, Lang put in place an anti-trust policy in order to dissolve the large Pathé-Gaumont group and to grant more space to independent distributors and exhibitors. Second, he stimulated the decentralization of distribution and exhibition structures through a special aid fund, as well as through the creation of the Agence pour le développement régional du cinéma (ADRC) (a still existing agency that also facilitates the construction and renovation of theaters in the French regions). Third, along these same decentralizing lines, Lang transformed the *maisons de la culture* from the "modern cathedrals" that Malraux had envisioned them as

²⁴⁰ Yann Darré, *Histoire sociale du cinéma français* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2000), p. 107.

²⁴¹ Between 1992 and 1993 and between 2000 and 2002 Lang also was the Minister of Education.

²⁴² This budget was lowered in 1986, when the right-wing François Léotard became Minister of Culture. In 1988 Lang restored the cultural budget to 1 percent of the total national budget.

into more culturally diverse and popular *centres culturels* (cultural centers) and *centres de recherche et d'action culturelle* (centers of cultural research and activity).²⁴³

Also in terms of funding Lang's reforms were drastic. As Susan Hayward writes, "Lang had 'a certain idea' of French cinema; . . . he believed fervently that it was the State's responsibility to facilitate the filmmakers' task."²⁴⁴ Above all Lang wanted to achieve an increase in audience numbers, especially for the French film. In order to achieve that goal he doubled the avance budget and, in the hope that it would foster new talents, split the CNC's selection committee into a division that deals with projects by established filmmakers and one that decides on the funding of first or second films.²⁴⁵ Second, he created a tax shelter in order to encourage private investments. This structure allowed, and continues to allow, companies to invest in film productions (for a maximum of 25 percent of the production costs and for a minimum period of five years) through intermediation of a so-called Société pour le Financement du Cinéma et de l'Audio-visuel (SOFICA). In return for such an investment a company received a tax break of 50 percent of the invested amount. (In more recent years the EU competition laws have obliged France to weaken these benefits.²⁴⁶) Fourth, Lang instituted a financing mechanism directed at big-budget productions (around 50 million French francs) as a counterweight

²⁴³ Susan Hayward, "State, Culture and the Cinema: Jack Lang's Strategies for the French Film Industry 1981-93," *Screen* 34.4 (1993): 380-91, pp. 382-3.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 382.

²⁴⁵ In addition, in 1983 Lang established the Institut pour le Financement du Cinéma et les Industries des Programmes (IFCIC), which facilitates the financing of cinema and audiovisual productions.

²⁴⁶ Another limiting condition was that this form of financing could not exceed 50 percent of a film's production costs.

to US blockbusters.²⁴⁷ Fifth, he installed an export aid for French films that had proven themselves either at the national box-offices or at the main film festivals. Finally, Lang developed several policies that intervened in the relation between the television and the film industries.

Let's briefly zoom in on this relation between cinema and television. Starting in the early 1980s France began deregulating its television market. In 1984 the subscription channel Canal Plus started broadcasting, followed shortly by the free private channels La Cinq and TV6. Subsequently, in 1987 the government privatized TF1, leaving Antenne 2 and France Régions 3 as the only public channels. In the meanwhile, amidst this privatization wave the State kept exerting its influence on French television and in fact, as Depétris argues, "has never been as interventionist as during [this] period of privatization."²⁴⁸ As far as television's interface with cinema is concerned, all channels were bound to quota of French films and French television productions. Moreover, after he had already made the CNC responsible for state funding to television productions, in 1986 Lang created a *taxe audiovisuelle*, and thereby obliged television channels to contribute around 5.5 percent of their annual turnover to the *compte de soutien*. As a result television's contribution to the *compte* increased from 8 percent in 1985 to 53 in 1989.²⁴⁹ Finally, in 1991 the Assemblée Nationale voted in a law mandating TV channels to invest at least 3 percent of their annual turnover in film productions.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Hayward, "State, Culture and the Cinema," 388.

²⁴⁸ Depétris, *L'Etat et le cinéma*, 100.

²⁴⁹ As a result, the budget of the *Fonds de soutien* went from 65 million French francs in 1985 to 548 million in 1987.

²⁵⁰ Hayward, "State, Culture and the Cinema," 387-8; Depétris, *L'Etat et le cinéma*, 119.

Initially Lang's measures seemed to turn the tide. Audience figures stabilized and French cinema saw the birth of a new movement of spectacular, high production value films that has become known as the "*cinéma du look*" (e.g., Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* [1981, FR/US], and Luc Besson's *Subway* [1985, FR]). However, after a brief upheaval, French cinema returned to its state of crisis. Despite the abundance of funds generated by Lang's measures, the number of French films produced and coproduced dropped to 1960s levels (from 208 in 1981 to 89 in 1994), a paradox that is largely explained by the tendency of SOFICAS and television channels to concentrate their investments to a small number of high profile productions. In the same period also audience numbers resumed their free fall, a development that can be almost entirely attributed to the shrinking of a domestic audience for French cinema in that period (35 million in 1994 compared to 95 million in 1981). As a result, in 1991 French productions only had a share of 28 percent of their domestic market (compared to 50 percent in 1981), while the market share of American productions rose to 61 percent (35 percent in 1981).²⁵¹

At this moment that the culture war seemed to have gone lost, the strategy of controlled deregulation of France's audiovisual industries started to yield its fruits, at least in quantitative terms. Even though the presence of American films on French screens has remained strong, more than half of the increase in audience numbers between 1994 (124 million) and 2011 (216 million) can be attributed to French productions and coproductions. During the same period, the annual production of films à l'initiative française more than doubled, from 89 to 207. Noteworthy in this context is the large

²⁵¹ Here audience numbers in France for French films include audience numbers for international coproductions in which France parties had a minority share.

share of films by young or first-time filmmakers in this development. Since the early 1990s first films have made up a good one third of the annual production of feature-length films in France, with extremes of above 40 percent, while on average the share of first and second films has been over 50 percent.

Before we turn to the dominant reception of this stream of new filmmakers as the proof for the unaltered innovatory force of French cinema, it is instructive to briefly relate this development to recent debates about the increasing precarization of the conditions of film production in France. After all, about half of the French filmmakers who manage to find the funds for a feature-length film do not direct a second feature-length film. As Michel Marie writes, there exists “a privilege to youth and to the ‘first time’ [in French cinema], and it is certainly not easy to become old in [it].”²⁵² The reasons for this state of affairs have been analyzed convincingly by the Club des 13, a collective that includes the directors Pascale Ferran and Jacques Audiard. In its 2008 manifesto, *Le Milieu n’est plus un pont mais une faille* (*The Center Is no Longer a Bridge but a Fault*), this collective argues that France produces too many films, while the quality of films declines. The authors express their concern about the “bipolarisation” of French cinema, by which they mean the development in which, mainly as the result of the increasing influence of television companies (in particular Canal Plus), France’s cinematic output is increasingly split between big budget productions (over 10 million euro) and films made on a small budget (between 800 thousand and 3 million euro). In

²⁵² Michel Marie, “Vous n-avez rien contre la jeunesse?”, in Michel Marie ed., *Le Jeune cinéma français* (Paris: Nathan, 1998), pp. 3-4, p. 3.

this development the “films dits ‘du milieu’” (“so-called mid-range films”), “nonetheless the life of cinema and its renovation,” are under increasing threat.²⁵³

This new discourse of crisis contrasts starkly with the jubilant embrace by many French critics of the early 1990s flood of first films. “The new cinema has arrived,” *Cahiers du cinéma* exclaimed in 1993, baptizing it the “*jeune cinéma*.” In a tentative characterization of this new New Wave, the *Cahiers* authors stress that “not every first or second film is *jeune cinéma*.” Instead, this category should be thought of as one that directly emanates from a “country that is spontaneously inhabited” by filmmakers whose work displays the “sort of immediate affinity between the decisive moment that one throws oneself in the water in order for the film to exist and the prolonged adolescence of a group or an individual in the state of apprenticeship.”²⁵⁴ Some of the filmmakers the *Cahiers* authors associate with this alleged revival of French auteur cinema are: Arnaud Desplechin, Laurence Ferreira Barbosa, Cedric Kahn, Patricia Mazuy, Manuel Poirier, Eric Rochant, and Hervé le Roux. In subsequent characterizations of young French cinema this list has been extended with filmmakers such as: Olivier Assayas, Jacques Audiard, Xavier Beauvois, Christine Carrière, Bruno Dumont, Pascale Ferran, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Matthieu Kassovitz, Gaspard Noé, François Ozon, Sandrine Veysset, and Christian Vincent.²⁵⁵ Most of these filmmakers were born around the beginning of the New Wave and all of them have been inscribed in that movement’s auteurist legacy. It is

²⁵³ Le Club des 13, *Le Milieu n’est plus un pont mais une faille* (Paris: Stock, 2008), p. 12.

²⁵⁴ Thierry Jousse, Nicolas Saada, Frédéric Strauss, Camille Taboulay, Vincent Vatrican, “Dix places pour le *jeune cinéma*,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 473 (1993): 28-30, p. 28.

²⁵⁵ See Claude-Marie Trémois, *Les Enfants de la liberté: le jeune cinéma français des années 90* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); Marie ed., *Le Jeune cinéma français*; René Prédal, *Le Jeune cinéma français* (Paris: Nathan, 2002); Daniel Serceau, *Symptômes du jeune cinéma français* (Paris: Cerf, 2008).

hard, nevertheless, to pin down factors that unify these young filmmakers into one clearly defined cinematic movement. For some critics this has been reason to dismiss the label “jeune cinéma” altogether. Will Higbee, for example, calls it a “catch-all term” that displays “a fetishistic approach to ‘youth’ . . . and an excessive reverence for the myths and the legacies of the nouvelle vague.”²⁵⁶ I partly agree with this critique, but I would also argue that since the early 1990s French cinema has displayed a number of tendencies that, in an era in which, as Dudley Andrew writes, “new waves will no longer form, at least not with the power and frequency they once did,”²⁵⁷ in fact do exceed the nostalgia for a New Wave that will never happen again.

I will return to these tendencies in the final chapter. In the remainder of this section I will concentrate on one of them: the increased involvement and visibility of the French regions in French cinema. This development started in the late 1990s, when several “regional” directors broke through in Cannes. As Thomas Bauder writes in *Le Jeune cinéma français* (ed. Michel Marie, 1998):

Without debate, 1997 was the year that witnessed . . . the emergence of a cinema deliberately anchored in the regions: Robert Guédiguian finally acclaimed in Marseille and in Cannes thanks to his social story from the town of Estaque [a fishing village near Marseille]; Manuel Poirier hailed on the Croisette with his tribulations of a Spaniard and an Italian Russian in the Bigouden region [in Bretagne]; and finally, Bruno Dumont, giant of the North, newly arrived at the Riviera, descending straight from the hills of Flanders with his *Vie de Jésus*. That is how it goes with the topography of French cinema, expanding to the South, to the West, to the North.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Higbee, “Towards a Multiplicity of Voices,” 314.

²⁵⁷ Dudley Andrew, “Time Zones and Jetlag: The Flows and Phases of World Cinema,” in Durovičová & Newman eds., *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, pp. 59-89, p. 82.

²⁵⁸ Thomas Bauder, “Les Toiles du Nord,” in Marie ed., *Le Jeune cinéma français*, p. 80.

The historical conditions for this partial decentralization of French national cinema are first of all found in the partial decentralization of the country's administrative structure. Since the 1982 passing of the Defferre laws by the national government, the French regions have held a significant degree of autonomy, including on the terrains of infrastructure, education and culture. This increased autonomy has allowed the regions to develop their own cinema and television politics. Even though the vast share of the funds, whether public or private, available for films à l'initiative française has continued to be administrated by Ile-de-France, and especially Paris-based institutions, by the end of the 2000s all of France's 22 metropolitan regions (and three of its five overseas regions) dedicated a part of their budget to cinema and television. All but two of them (Champagne and Picardie, which happen to be the two regions closest to Nord-Pas-de-Calais) coproduced or sponsored at least one feature-length production. The regions that invested most in film productions are, unsurprisingly, Ile-de-France (which has become France's second public entity, after the CNC, in terms of financing of film and television productions), and Rhône-Alpes (whose capital is Lyon, France's second-largest metropolitan area). The region that throughout most of the 1990s and 2000s has been third in terms of its support for cinema and television, and that in the 2010s continues to be among France's primary cinematic regions, is Nord-Pas-de-Calais.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ In more recent years also Centre and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur have developed substantial policies of support for cinema and audiovisual productions. See Centre Images (Agence Régionale du Centre pour le cinéma et l'audiovisuel), *Soutiens à la production cinématographique et audiovisuelle: régions, départements, villes* (Château-Renault: Centre Images, 2011); Agence France Press, "La Région Ile-de-France, 2e financier du cinéma derrière

Nord-Pas-de-Calais is one of the first French regions that introduced a policy for the funding of audiovisual productions. In the first years of Lang's period as Minister of Culture the region became part of a pilot project in which the ministry, via the CNC, financially supported the emergence of production companies in the French regions. In 1985 this resulted in the creation of the Centre Régional de Production Cinématographique et Audiovisuel (CRPCA), also known as Cercle Bleu, in Villeneuve d'Asq (near Lille, where the founding president Michel Vermoesen ran a *salle art et essai*). In the first five years of its existence Cercle Bleu had the legal entity of an *association* (non-profit organization) and received subsidies from both the CNC and the Conseil Régional du Nord-Pas de Calais. In 1990 the association was dissolved and replaced by a private structure, after which, between 1993 and 2003, the ownership of the company largely transferred to La Voix du Nord, the regional newspaper of Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Cercle Bleu coproduced several feature-length films, among which *Pierre et Djemila* (Gérard Blain, 1987, FR), *Peaux de vache* (*Cow Skins*, Patricia Mazuy, 1989, FR)—starring Sandrine Bonnaire, two years after her performance in *Sous le soleil de Satan*—and *Inséparables* (*Inseparables*, Michel Couvelard, 1999, FR).²⁶⁰

This last film was also coproduced by the CRRAV, which like Cercle Bleu was founded in 1985. In 1990 the CRRAV instituted a regional aid fund for film and television productions. One of the first productions supported by this fund was Berri's 1993 *Germinal*. Instead of shooting his film in a cheaper, Eastern-European location,

le CNC," *L'Express* (May 4, 2011), http://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/culture/la-region-ile-de-france-2e-financier-du-cinema-derriere-le-cnc_989257.html (accessed June 7, 2012).

²⁶⁰ Granval, *Tournages de films dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais*, 99-100.

Berri wanted to make it in the area that its narrative is actually set in, which is why he approached the Conseil Régional du Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Recognizing the economic opportunities for his unemployment struck region, then president of that institution Marie Christine Blandin pushed for an extraordinary 10 million French francs (1.8 million dollars) avance sur recettes for Berri's film.²⁶¹ The investment turned out profitable: not only did the film's box-office success allow for the restitution of the avance, its production also generated around 40 million francs of expenses in the region (20.5 million francs in restaurant costs for the ten thousand regionally casted extras, 10 million francs in hotel costs, etc.), and many unemployed found temporary work (even though the extras were paid only 200 French francs—about 35 US dollars—per day).²⁶²

Following its participation in *Germinal*, the CRRAV has developed into a significant non-executive, minority coproducer that has served as a model for other French regions. In 2011 the organization had a budget of about 5 million euro, almost 3 million of which it invested in 78 productions, including fiction features, shorts, animated films, documentaries, TV dramas, and art videos.²⁶³ Other than *Germinal* and the earlier discussed *Bienvenu chez les Ch'tis*, *La Vie rêvée des anges*, *Quand la mer monte . . .*, and Dumont's films, examples of CRRAV coproductions that have drawn national and international attention are: *Ça commence aujourd'hui/It All Starts Today* (Bertrand Tavernier, 1999, FR), *Carnages* (Delphine Gleize, 2002, FR/BE/SP/CH), *Entre ses*

²⁶¹ Florent Leclercq, "A quoi rêvent les Lillois," *L'Express* (March 4, 1993), http://www.lexpress.fr/informations/a-quoi-revent-les-lillois_593598.html (accessed June 8, 2012).

²⁶² Granval, *Tournages de films dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais*, 49-50.

²⁶³ Source: CRRAV, http://www.crrav.com/crrav_qui.php (accessed June 8, 2012).

mains/In His Hands (Anne Fontaine, 2005, FR/BE), *Joyeux Noël* (Christian Carion, 2005, FR/BE et al.), *Le Scaphandre et le papillon/The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (Julian Schnabel, 2007, FR/US), *Un conte de Noël/A Christmas Tale* (Arnaud Desplechin, 2008, FR), and *Welcome* (Philippe Lioret, 2009, FR).

Many of the films supported by the CRRAV were directed by filmmakers from, or who identify as from, Nord-Pas-de-Calais (e.g., Dumont, Desplechin, Baily, Carrière). (It should be noted that there are also northern French filmmakers who have made films in the region without that they—as far as I have been able to find out—have ever received financial support from the CRRAV. The most notable example is Xavier Beauvois.) Others were made by filmmakers from elsewhere in France (Berri, Zonca), or from other countries, in particular Belgium (Masset-Depasse, Moreau). The cinema of Nord-Pas-de-Calais is thus not only a regionally rooted cinema. It is also a *cinéma d'accueil*, an open crossroad cinema fertilized by the funds and facilities available in the region, a characterization that, as we will see, also holds true for Walloon cinema. Had it not been for the CRRAV, like *Germinal*, films such as *Entre ses mains* and *La Vie rêvée des anges* would have probably been shot and—unlike Berri's film—also set elsewhere in France. As Granval points out about these two films whose narratives seem so anchored in the region's reality: while Fontaine, before he got involved with the CRRAV, just had the idea to situate her film's narrative "in the provinces," Zonca "didn't know Lille before filming there." "For [Zonca] the subject of his film [was] universal. He could have shot it anywhere."²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Granval, *Tournages de films dans le Nord et le Pas-de-Calais*, 104.

Northern French cinema thus results from the desire of Nord-Pas-de-Calais to manifest itself as a “terre d’images,” a country of images, as is the CRRAV’s slogan. The regional images that have ensued from this desire do not univocally cast the region in a favorable light. Such, however, has also never been the region’s intention. As Christian Lamarche from the CRRAV stated in 1999, after the success of *L’humanité*: “We don’t focus so much on anti-miserabilist shorts nor on tourism leaflets, but on art works. . . . Together we debated whether we should endorse *L’humanité*. . . . The region decided that it was a great film.”²⁶⁵

I will return to the region’s economic investment in cinema and other audiovisual media. First I will turn to Belgium, and to the emergence of Walloon francophone Belgian cinema within a national cinema that is not one.

“Yes We Cannes”: Francophone Belgian Cinema in its Walloon Manifestation

Several recent studies of French cinema include substantial discussions of the Dardennes.²⁶⁶ The borders between French and francophone Belgian cinema are indeed porous and many of the Dardennes’ films were coproduced by French parties. In this respect the appropriation by those studies of the two-time winners of the Palme d’or for French cinema seems justified. Yet most of these studies pay little to no attention to the

²⁶⁵ Sophie Grassin, “Le Nord fait son cinéma,” *L’Express* (October 21, 1999), http://www.lexpress.fr/informations/le-nord-fait-son-cinema_635346.html (accessed June 19, 2012).

²⁶⁶ See for example: Freddy Buache, *Vingt-cinq ans de cinéma français: parcours croisés 1979—2003* (Lausanne: L’Age d’homme, 2005), p. 416; Martin O’Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema: Commitment in French Film since 1995* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007, passim); Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema: An Introduction* (2nd edition) (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 229-31.

specificities of film production in Belgium, and more specifically in francophone Belgium. To this one could add that the reverse situation—i.e. the discussion in a study of Belgian cinema of French-Belgian coproductions à la majorité française directed by French directors and with strictly French casts—would simply appear as odd. The reason is of course that Belgian cinema is French cinema’s small neighbor. A consequence of this smallness of Belgian cinema is that studies on the topic often open by theorizing the identity of Belgian cinema. What is Belgian cinema? Does it exist in the first place? The best example is *Ça tourne depuis cent ans: une histoire du cinéma francophone de Belgique* (1995), edited by Philippe Dubois and Edouard Arnoldy. The editors open this study with an anecdote about a 1990 exhibition in the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, entitled “L’Art en Belgique—Flandres et Wallonie au XX^e siècle—Un point de vue” (“Art in Belgium: Flanders and Wallonia in the Twentieth Century, a Perspective”). The cinema section of this exhibition was curated by Dominique Païni, who was the president of the Cinémathèque Française between 1993 and 2000. As Dubois and Arnoldy recall, Païni concluded his inauguration of this exhibition section on the following note: “Le cinéma belge, ça existe; je l’ai rencontré” (“Belgian cinema exists: I have encountered it”). Dubois and Arnoldy consider this statement symptomatic for the “mirror stage” that Belgian cinema still found itself in the early 1990s. Belgian cinema, they argue, was a cinema in need of affirmation, in particular by its French “mother”:

Not only does [Païni’s statement] express the functioning of an external gaze (French, moreover, but that’s alright) on our cinema (really? it exists? surprising!), but fundamentally it also testifies to certain realities of the gaze Belgian cinema casts upon its own cinematographic identity: its timidity . . . , its

embarrassment . . . , its uncomfot, . . . , its insecurities . . . , its flotations Are we sure of this existence? Why do we doubt it? Is it the “cinema” or the “Belgian” that poses the problem?²⁶⁷

With this last question Dubois and Arnoldy refer to the longstanding socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic tensions between francophone Belgium and Flanders. During the last decades these tensions have largely been spurred by the economic disparities between Wallonia and Flanders, as well as by the position of the Brussels area in the Belgian political landscape. In the political crisis that ensued from the 2007 federal elections and that lasted until after the 2010 elections, there were two main issues that divided the Flemish and francophone Belgian political parties. The first was the question of which path of socioeconomic reform the country had to take in the face of the late 2000s financial crisis. Whereas most Flemish parties proposed strong cutbacks on government spending, the francophone parties also insisted on significant tax increases. The second issue was the controversy about the electoral district of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV), which up until 2011 was the only district where both francophone and Flemish parties participated in the federal elections, a controversy that dated back to the fixation of the internal language border in 1963.²⁶⁸ In December 2011, Belgian

²⁶⁷ Philippe Dubois & Edouard Arnoldy, “Ici et ailleurs,” in Dubois & Arnoldy eds., *Ça tourne depuis cent ans*, p. 7.

²⁶⁸ While Flemish parties generally favored the splitting of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde district, the francophone parties favored the status quo. The Flemish political parties objected to the fact that in BHV francophone parties from Brussels could obtain votes from francophone Belgians living in the province of Flemish Brabant. In 2003 the Court of Arbitration (now the Constitutional Court of Belgium) decided that BHV violated the “equality principle” of the Belgian constitution, and thus necessitated a political solution. In September 2011 it was decided to split BHV into the electoral district of Brussels, which includes the 19 bilingual municipalities of Brussels, and the electoral district of Flemish Brabant. The BHV conflict was finally resolved in July 2012, when the Belgian Chamber of Representatives officially voted in favor of the

politics finally entered calmer waters, when after a formation period of 541 days (beating the record formerly held by Iraq) a new government was sworn in with at its head Elio di Rupo, a son of Italian immigrants, and the political leader of the francophone Parti socialiste.

Inevitably, the Flemish-francophone divide has left its traces in the history of filmmaking in Belgium. To return to Dubois's and Arnoldy's reflections: implicit to the debate about the identity of Belgian cinema is the debate about Belgian identity at large. What holds Belgium together, except for the bilingual enclave of Brussels and internal conflicts that are almost impossible to follow, also for many Belgians themselves (illustrative in this regard is the "BHV-quiz" that appeared on the website of the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard*)?²⁶⁹ I will only engage with the question of Belgian identity indirectly, to the extent that I will examine the impact of transformations in Belgium's political structure on the development of Belgian cinema. As we will see, Belgian cinema can largely be subdivided into a Flemish and a francophone Belgian part. In addition, we can distinguish between francophone Belgian cinema at large and Walloon cinema, or, in the words of Jacques Polet, the "*cinéma belge francophone . . . dans sa manifestation wallonne*" ("Belgian francophone cinema in its Walloon manifestation").²⁷⁰ Two decades after Païni's statement, and in the era that Belgium, in proportion to its size, has become

splitting of the district. See "Overzicht: Hoe Wordt BHV Gesplitst?", *De Standaard* (September 15, 2011), http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20110914_184 (accessed April 21, 2012); Dirk Vandenberghe, "Vier Vragen en Antwoorden over 'BHV'," *NRC Handelsblad* (September 24, 2009), http://vorige.nrc.nl/buitenland/article2421833.ece/Vier_vragen_en_antwoorden_over_BHV (accessed April 21, 2012).

²⁶⁹ "De BHV-Quiz," *De Standaard*, <http://www.standaard.be/extra/bhvquiz/> (accessed April 21, 2012).

²⁷⁰ Jacques Polet, "Un enracinement porteur d' universalité," 25.

one of the best-represented countries at the main international film festivals, this internal split remains the reason that some critics continue to call into question the existence of Belgian cinema. For example, in a 2009 special dossier in the French film magazine *Positif* entitled “Le Nouveau cinéma belge et ses environs” (“New Belgian Cinema and its Environments”) Yolande Moreau observes that “Belgian cinema” only exists insofar as “[t]here is a Flemish cinema and a Walloon cinema,” while filmmaker Joachim Lafosse states that in his eyes “cinema doesn’t really have a nationality . . . there is no Belgian cinema.”²⁷¹

A good place to start examining this national cinema that is not one is the 1952 royal decree that gave birth to the first Belgian program of government funding for cinematic productions. As Sojcher writes in his three-tome *La Kermesse héroïque du cinéma belge* (1999), this decree arrived at a moment when “Belgium’s unitary flame still sparkled with all its force” and constituted “the first and last effort of the [Belgian] state to create and develop a *national* cinema.”²⁷² Inspired by the French aide automatique, and administered by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, this program consisted of a bonus scheme for Belgian producers of features, shorts and newsreels. “As long as [the government’s] budgetary limits permitted,” a Belgian feature was good for a subvention of 13 percent of its gross box office sales following the first five years after its release. For shorts and newsreels the percentages were 5 percent (for three years) and 3 percent, respectively. In 1957 the decree was slightly altered, in order to prevent hastily produced

²⁷¹ Yann Tobin, “Entretien avec Yolande Moreau: on n’a rien à perdre,” *Positif* 576 (2009): 107-9, p. 109; Elise Domenach, “Entretien avec Joachim Lafosse,” *Positif* 576 (2009): 98-102, p. 102.

²⁷² Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque I*, 60, emphasis in original.

shorts that were attached to successful, foreign produced features from guzzling the budget. From then on the subvention accorded to a short could not exceed its production costs. Moreover, the new law called into existence a selection committee that, basing itself on subjective quality criteria, had to determine whether a production was entitled to a subsidy. This selection process remained, however, very rudimentary and in reality the majority of Belgian productions continued to be eligible for government support.²⁷³

Before I turn to the reasons why this subvention program failed in its mission to create a national, unified Belgian cinema, let me give a selective overview of the history of Belgian film production in the half century that preceded the royal decree. Especially in the first two decades of the twentieth century Belgium hardly saw any structural investments, whether public or private, in the development of a national film industry.²⁷⁴ As Dubois writes, in these decades “[t]he steel industry and the colonial expansion [had] all priority and no-one [wanted] to really invest in cinema.”²⁷⁵ By consequence, in the silent era and in the decades immediately succeeding it, the Belgian market was almost completely dominated by foreign and in particular American and French productions. In these decades most Belgians interested in a film career left the country, most of them to Paris, some also to Hollywood (e.g., the actors Eve Francis and Victor Francen). Among the Belgian screenwriters who moved to France especially Albert Valentin and Charles Spaak—who co-wrote Jean Renoir’s *La Grande illusion/The Great Illusion* (1937, FR)—left their mark on French cinema. The most celebrated member of the “Belgian

²⁷³ Cited in Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque I*, 60-1.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁷⁵ Philippe Dubois, “Partir, (ne pas) revenir,” in Dubois & Arnouldy eds., *Ça tourne depuis cent ans*, p. 33.

connection” in Paris was the director Jacques Feyder, who became most famous for his *La Kermesse héroïque/Carnival in Flanders* (1935, FR/DE). Based on a screenplay by Spaak and full of references to Flemish painting (Breughel, Rubens), this film tells the story of a small town in Flanders under Spanish occupation. Despite that it is a French-German coproduction (the film’s German version, *Die Klugen Frau*, was praised by Joseph Goebbels) and that it was entirely shot in French studios, Feyder’s meticulously-crafted period piece is his most Belgian film and also the first Belgian auteur feature *avant la lettre*.²⁷⁶

Though directly following the introduction of the talkie a national Belgian fiction feature industry continued to remain virtually nonexistent, in the early 1930s Belgian cinema entered its so-called “heroic period.” Three tendencies characterize this period. The first was that of a popular cinema without much artistic pretensions (e.g., the comedies of Gaston Schoukens, many of which made fun of the Brussels accent). Second, Belgian cinema saw the emergence of a small *cinéma d’essai*, or art film movement (e.g., the films by Edmond Bernhard and Paul Haesaerts). Third, there was the documentary tendency.²⁷⁷ Besides Storck, the other main pioneer of that tradition was Charles Dekeukeleire, whose films (e.g., *Impatience*, 1928, BE; *Visions de Lourdes/Visions of Lourdes*, 1932, BE) were much inspired by the French avant-garde. Many of their films Storck and Dekeukeleire made on public funds. Though the Belgian government did not actively promote a national film industry, it did support pedagogical

²⁷⁶ See Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque I*, 114-5.

²⁷⁷ René Michelems, “Les Trois tendances des années héroïques,” in Dubois & Arnoldy eds., *Ça tourne depuis cent ans*, p. 47.

and tourist films, mostly through its *Commisariat au Tourisme*. This tourism department started to commission films in the mid 1930s, mainly from already established filmmakers. As Sojcher writes, “the goal was always to distribute a ‘postal card’ image of folklore and national landscapes. It was up to the filmmaker to find a way to transform the commissioned project into a cinematographic *mise-en-scène* worthy of its name.”²⁷⁸

Other than the tourism department, the government institution that invested in positive, “pedagogical” images was the *Fonds Colonial de Propagande Economique et Sociale* (Colonial Fund for Economic and Social Propaganda), which was one of the driving forces behind the creation of a Belgian colonial cinema. The main representatives of that colonial cinema were André Cauvin and Gérard de Boe (but also Dekeukeleire and Storck participated in productions shot in Belgian Congo). Finally, in this context we cannot leave undiscussed the Film Guild (*Gilde du Film*), which was created in 1943. In collaboration with the German authorities, this organization controlled the production, distribution, and exhibition of films in Belgium during the last years of the war. One of the filmmakers most prominently involved in the guild was Storck, who in September 1943 became the president of the production section of this organization. A year earlier Storck had started working on his five-part *Boerensymphonie* (*Farmer’s Symphony*, BE, 1942—1944), a virgilian eulogy on rural Belgium cofinanced by the National Corporation of Agriculture and Alimentation, which had been created in 1940 by Flemish nationalists. Though it would go too far to call Storck a collaborator, I agree with Sojcher that it is hard to unite the portrait of the father of Walloon cinema and the Marxist

²⁷⁸ Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque I*, 30.

militant of *Misère au Borinage* with that of the opportunist who showed himself willing to make films at all costs.²⁷⁹

Directly after World War II the newly created Service Cinématographique within the Ministry of Public Instruction replaced the Tourism department as the primary public source for film funding. However, the only type of films that qualified for support remained the documentary, in particular the pedagogical documentary.²⁸⁰ Because of this continued lack of interest on the Belgian State's part in the emergence of a national film industry,²⁸¹ in 1947 the Belgian filmmaking community united itself into the Comité National des Travailleurs du Film (National Committee for Film Workers). Vice-president of this Committee was, again, Storck, who in the publication *Cinéma belge, où en es-tu? (Belgian Cinema, Where Are You at?)* formulated the virtual absence of Belgian cinema as follows: "Our country is the victim of the exiguity of its domestic market. . . .

²⁷⁹ Frédéric Sojcher, *Pratiques du cinéma* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2011), p. 199. In his discussion of Storck's questionable role during the years of Belgium's occupation, Sojcher also mentions Storck's letter from 4 March 1941 in which he offers his services to the Belgian branch of the German distribution company Tobis Bruxelles, as well as the filmmaker's involvement in the Institut National de Radiotechnique de la Cinématographie, a film school that was created under German occupation. In relation to Storck's involvement in the Film Guild Sojcher makes reference to the *pro justitia* that Storck wrote on 27 June 1947. In this document Storck claims to have been nominated for the Film Guild function without having been consulted. In addition, Storck claims to have protested against this nomination and "to have officially resigned in March 1944," without having ever received an official response to his resignation. (Sojcher, *Pratiques du cinéma*, 199, 290.) See also: Bruno Benvindo, *Henri Storck, le cinéma belge et l'occupation* (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2010).

²⁸⁰ Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque I*, 52.

²⁸¹ The Belgian government did provide a substantial contribution (10 million Belgian franc) to the Festival Mondial du Film et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, which took place in Brussels in June 1947. This support was, however, discontinued two years later, when the festival was organized in Knokke (with the municipal administration and the casino of Knokke as the principle donors). (Ibid., 55-6)

Only the State is able to oppose the protective measures that foreign producers benefit from in their home countries with similar measures to the benefit of Belgians. . . .”²⁸²

Under the pressure of this Comité National des Travailleurs du Film the Belgian government introduced in 1952 its bonus scheme. Though this scheme constituted a paradigm shift in the history of filmmaking in Belgium, it failed to accomplish its main objective, i.e. the creation of a national Belgian film industry. First of all the budget allocated for this scheme proved much too small. More fundamentally, in a small country a system of automatic aid is much less effective than in countries with large domestic markets, such as France and Italy. As the Belgian producer and cinema economist Jean-Claude Batz writes: “In the case of a small country, too small even to effectively set up a quota protection system, the automaticity of aid, through lack of the necessary support (the market), constitutes the most illusory, the most deceiving of solutions.”²⁸³

Batz made this statement in 1963, at a colloquium he had organized at the Free University of Brussels on the theme of the problems of film production in Belgium. This colloquium was held at a strategic moment. First, a year earlier the INSAS had opened its doors in the Belgian capital.²⁸⁴ Second, since their inception in 1953, the public broadcasting organizations Radio Télévision Belgique (RTB) and Belgische Radio- en Televisieomroep (BRT) had developed into important platforms for Belgian filmmakers.

²⁸² Henri Storck, “Cinéma belge, où en es-tu,” *Vouloir un cinéma belge* [special issue of the *Bulletin du Comité National des Travailleurs du Film*], June 1949. Cited in Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque I*, 57.

²⁸³ Jean-Claude Batz, *Colloque sur “le problème de la production de films en Belgique”: rapport sur le sous-développement de la production de films en Belgique et l’assistance financière et administrative de l’Etat* (Brussels: Institut de Sociologie de l’Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1963), p. 60.

²⁸⁴ The other main Belgian film school, the Institut des Arts de Diffusion (IAD), was founded in 1959 in Louvain-la-Neuve.

Third, from the mid-1950s onward several Belgian features had received international acclaim, including *Meeuwen Sterven in de Haven/Seagulls Die in the Harbor* (Rik Kuypers, Ivo Michiels, Roland Verhavert, 1955, BE)—the first Belgian film that was officially selected for the Cannes film festival—and of course *Déjà s’envole la fleur maigre*.²⁸⁵ The colloquium led to the publication of a *Rapport sur le problème du sous-développement de la production des films en Belgique et l’assistance financière et administrative de l’Etat* (*Report on the Problem of the Underdevelopment of Film Production in Belgium and the Financial and Administrative Support of the State*), written by Batz. His conclusion: “[T]he point is not to ‘help’ cinematographic production [in Belgium]—which is practically inexistent—but to create it.”²⁸⁶

Batz’s appeal for state intervention was honored, but in a different way than he had envisioned. Even though the report breathed a Belgian unitary spirit and called for the creation of an Institut Belge du Film, it also favored international, and in particular Belgian-French coproductions, a future vision that was of course especially promising for *francophone* Belgian cinema. Such was also the concern of Renaat van Elslande, the Flemish Minister of Culture. (Since 1961 Belgium had one Flemish and one francophone Minister of Culture, both of whom operated from within a single Ministry of National

²⁸⁵ Two other examples are: *Si le vent te fait peur/If the Wind Frightens You* (Emile Degelin, 1960, BE), and *Il y a un train toutes les heures/A Train Leaves in Every Hour* (André Cavens, 1961, BE).

²⁸⁶ Jean-Claude Batz, *Rapport sur le problème du sous-développement de la production des films en Belgique et l’assistance financière et administrative de l’Etat* (Brussels: Institut de Sociologie, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1963), p. 67.

Education).²⁸⁷ In 1964 Van Elslande successfully pushed for the creation of a Selection Committee, in order to administer a system of selective aid for Flemish-language films.²⁸⁸ Following the split in 1968 of the Ministry of National Education into two separate ministries, the French Belgian community created its own system of selective aid, which, like the one in France, took the form of an *avance sur recettes* regulation.

Conventionally the period 1964—1968 has been considered to be the watershed in the history of Belgian cinema, because of the simultaneous creation and *communautarisation* of government support for the Belgian auteur film, and because of the release in 1965 of André Delvaux's pivotal *De Man die Zijn Haar Kort Liet Knippen/The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short* (1965, BE), which had been cofinanced by the BRT and the Ministry of National Education.²⁸⁹ However, since the earlier discussed 1990 “L’Art en Belgique” exhibition in Paris and the related launch of the *Encyclopédie des cinémas de Belgique (Encyclopedia of Belgian Cinemas)*, there has been a polemic in Belgian cinema historiography about the question of how to periodize Belgian cinema. In his introduction to the *Encyclopédie* Patrick Leboutte proposes an alternative periodization that distinguishes between three periods: the pre-1958 period or the “gestation years,” 1958—1974 or the “Knokke years” (named after the EXPRMNTL

²⁸⁷ In 1961 the francophone Victor Larock was appointed as Minister of National Education and Culture, while the Flemish Renaat Elslande was appointed as Minister of Culture, adjunct in the Ministry of National Education. In 1963 Larock was replaced by Henri Janne.

²⁸⁸ Van Elslande made this decision largely on the basis of a report by the film critic and BRT programmer Joz van Liempt. In turn, Van Liempt had been much inspired by the subvention system that already was in place in The Netherlands, the Productiefonds voor de Nederlandse film. Van Liempt also became the Selection Committee's first president (Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque II*, 12).

²⁸⁹ Initially Delvaux's film was very badly received in Belgium. However, in 1966, upon the film's success at various international festivals, the film was rereleased in Belgium and subsequently overloaded with compliments from the Belgian press. (Ibid., 16-7)

film festival in Knokke-le-Zoute²⁹⁰), and the post-1974 period or the “commission years.” The second of these periods Leboutte characterizes, moreover, as one of a “cinema consisting of examples [cinéma fait d'exemples],” an expression he borrows from Païni.²⁹¹ The latter, in his own introduction to the *Encyclopédie*, uses this expression in order to indicate a certain “dilettantism” that the longtime absence of a developed infrastructure of film production had stirred in Belgian filmmakers: “[It is] as if the Belgian filmmakers had adapted themselves to this situation made of administrative difficulties and indifference, by adopting an excessively proud viewpoint: ‘We could do it if we wanted. The proof? We do it once but only once.’ There is a tendency to the *unique* in Belgian cinema.”²⁹²

Sojcher disagrees with this alternative periodization and instead defends the conventional periodization, while he also extends it. The three periods he distinguishes between, and that organize the volumes of his *Kermesse héroïque*, are: 1896—1965 (“documentaries and farces”), 1965—1988 (“the deforming mirror of cultural identities”), and 1988—1996 (“the European carousel”). Sojcher takes serious issue with the notion of “a cinema of examples.” In his view, Païni and Leboutte too much fetishize the long-time improvised state of film production in Belgium, and in doing so ignore Batz’s economic lessons. “Leboutte and Païni,” Sojcher writes, “want to ‘rehabilitate’ an

²⁹⁰ This festival was organized five times between 1949 and 1974. In 1949 the festival was called Festival International du Film Expérimental et Poétique. The 1958 edition was organized in Brussels.

²⁹¹ Patrick Leboutte, “Un cinéma inimaginable,” in Guy Jungblut, Patrick Leboutte, Dominique Païni, *Une encyclopédie des cinémas de Belgique* (Paris: Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Yellow Now, 1990), pp. 12-3, p. 13.

²⁹² Dominique Païni, “Le Cinéma belge, ça existe, je l’ai rencontré,” in Jungblut et al., *Encyclopédie des cinémas de Belgique*, pp. 9-11, p. 9, emphasis in original.

exceptional cinema, made with little means, in commercially unexploitable formats or lengths. Is there not a dangerous snobbism here, one that would like to make us believe that one acquires cinematographic successes independently of all financial constraints?”²⁹³

Underneath this quarrel about the question of how to periodize Belgian cinema is always the discussion of whether one can actually speak of *a* Belgian cinema, and implicitly of one Belgian culture. To take 1964—1968 as a watershed does not only mean to periodize but also to divide Belgian cinema spatially. As Sojcher argues, “since the installment of the ‘Selection Committee’ of Flemish film, one can no longer really speak of a ‘national production’.”²⁹⁴ In contrast to this stance, the *Encyclopédie* presents itself as an endeavor to un-think the internal divide of Belgian cinema, the plural “*cinémas*” in its subtitle referring to the different stages of development of one and the same national cinema. This unitarist position on Belgian cinema is endorsed by the other, trilingual encyclopedia of Belgian cinema, *Belgian Cinema/Le Cinéma Belge/De Belgische Film*, which was edited by Marianne Thys and published by The Royal Belgian Film Archive (which in 2009 was renamed as Cinematek, a Dutch-French neologism). This book, as Delvaux writes in the preface, “focuses on films with a significant proportion of home-grown investment, preserving the author’s autonomy and a specific Belgian character,” and simply divides its object into “the silent era” and “the sound era.”²⁹⁵ (It would have

²⁹³ Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque II*, 18-9.

²⁹⁴ Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque I*, 88.

²⁹⁵ Marianne Thys ed., *Belgian Cinema*, 9.

been even more unitarist of course to have chosen German instead of English as the third language.)

Belgian cinema exists, as also Sojcher affirms through his study's subtitle. It exists as a split cinema, but it also exists beyond that split. It does so because, first of all, both before and after Belgium's communitarization there have been Belgian filmmakers who made films in both French and in Flemish, as well as with both Flemish and Belgian francophone funds. The best examples are: Storck (whose documentary *Les Fêtes de Belgique/Feesten in België* [1972, BE] is a true Flemish-francophone-Belgian coproduction²⁹⁶), Delvaux (e.g., *Belle* [1973, BE/FR] and *Vrouw tussen Hond en Wolf/Woman between Wolf and Dog* [1972, BE/FR]), and Marion Hänsel (*Sur la terre comme au ciel/Between Heaven and Earth* [1992, BE/FR/SP/NL] and *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* [1995, BE/FR/UK]).²⁹⁷ Second, in a modest attempt to spur the development of all-Belgian productions, since 2006 (and formally since 2009), the CCA and the Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds (VAF, Flemish Audiovisual Fund) have committed themselves to collaborate on a limited number of annual intranational coproductions.²⁹⁸ Third, I do agree with Païni, Leboutte and Delvaux that there is a certain Belgian cinematic affect, a *belgitude*, that, however hard to pin down, is felt in both Flemish and Belgian francophone productions, an affect that is of course related to Belgian national

²⁹⁶ The main producer of this film was Storck's own fund. Among the other donors were both the Flemish and the Belgian francophone ministries of education, and the RTB.

²⁹⁷ Sojcher, *Pratiques du cinéma*, 221.

²⁹⁸ Since 2009 the VAF and the CCA have each reserved an annual 450,000 euro in their budgets in order to function as a minor partner in the coproduction of a feature length film (fiction and animation) primarily financed by the other community. See Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, *Jaarverslag 2011* (Brussels: Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, 2012), p. 47.

identity, which is equally hard to pin down.²⁹⁹ That said, as already implicated by this chapter's emphasis on the relation between cinema and the State, I largely follow Sojcher in his argument that the presence of an adequate funding structure is a prerequisite for the emergence and sustainability of a fiction feature auteur cinema. This especially holds true for nations, or other geographical entities, with small domestic markets. For that reason I argue that the communatarization of the film funding structure in Belgium the moment it emerged also meant the communatarization of Belgian cinema, and that from the mid-1960s onward Belgian cinema has predominantly continued to exist and develop as two separate small cinemas.

In the remainder of this section I will focus on the francophone branch of Belgian cinema, and in particular on its "Walloon manifestation." Toward the end of the era that traditional European film producing countries saw their cinemas rejuvenate in new waves, francophone Belgium saw the birth of a new cinema. For an important part that cinema owes its identity to the fact that it was born as a modern auteur cinema. Other than the filmmakers listed earlier, in this or in the previous chapter (Delvaux, Akerman, Hänsel, the Dardennes, Berliner, Michel, Khleifi, De Heusch, Lafosse, Andrien, Moreau), the main exponents of this "post-heroic" and post-unitary francophone Belgian auteur cinema are Jaco van Dormael, who became known with *Toto le héros/Toto the Hero*

²⁹⁹ Though I present Delvaux here as in agreement with the *Encyclopédie* editors, it should be noted that there has been some controversy about the entry about him in this work. This entry states that "[i]nstead of having progressed towards the essential, after *L'Homme au crâne rasé* the filmography of Delvaux takes on the appearance of a slow, more and more sterile descent towards the hells of academism" (Marc Holthof, "Delvaux, André," in Jungblut et al, *Encyclopédie des cinémas de Belgique*, pp. 91-2, p. 91). See also: Olivier Lecomte, "André Delvaux: le cinéma belge a atteint sa maturité," *Webzine Cinergie.be* 38 (2000), retrieved May 5, 2012 from: http://www.cinergie.be/webzine/andre_delvaux_le_cinema_belge_a_atteint_sa_maturite.

(1991, BE/FR/DE), and Rémy Belvaux, André Bonzel, and Benoît Poelvoorde, who made the cult classic *C'est arrivé près de chez vous/Man Bites Dog* (1992, BE).

These last two films constitute the early landmarks of the era that Sojcher labels as the “European carousel.” Sojcher locates the start of this period in 1989, the year that the Council of Europe created its Eurimages fund for coproduction, distribution, exhibition, and now also digitization of European cinematographic works (defined as films coproduced by at least two European Community [EC], and since 1991 EU member states, and whose credit roll or script display sufficient “European elements”³⁰⁰). Two years later the EU launched its first MEDIA program, which was aimed at the strengthening of the audiovisual industries in Europe. *Toto le héros* was one of the first films supported by both these initiatives. Winner of the *Caméra d’or* at Cannes 1991 and Belgium’s “film event of the decade,”³⁰¹ *Toto le héros* would have probably not existed had it not been backed by these two European funds, because only after they had received this European support Van Dormael and his Belgian producers managed to secure additional funds in France and in Germany. Following its success, *Toto le héros* was embraced by many as the breakthrough of a European cinema. Sojcher writes: “soon the Toto-mania exceeded the simple Belgian framework, and the European programs, Eurimages and especially MEDIA I, always presented it as the living proof of their

³⁰⁰ In order to qualify as “European” a cinematographic works needs to either score 15 out of 19 points on a list of “European elements” (e.g., a European director yields 3 points, as does a European actor in the first role; a European studio or shooting location is good for 1 point), or have a screenplay that, as judged by the “competent authorities,” “nonetheless reflects a European identity.” (Council of Europe, *European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production* [ETS no. 147] [Strasbourg, 1992], <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/147.htm> [accessed June 15, 2012].)

³⁰¹ Thys ed., *Belgian Cinema*, 808.

actions.”³⁰² Leaving aside the question of whether Eurimages and the subsequent MEDIA programs have indeed managed to contribute to a European cinematographic identity—and here it is necessary to take into account the fact that the average Hollywood production is made on a budget that is about the double of Eurimage’s 21 million euro annual budget³⁰³—the fact is that since *Toto le héros* Belgium has become the country that, in proportion to its size, participates most in international coproductions, thus becoming a “laboratory of European cinema.”³⁰⁴ For example, some of the other films that I discussed earlier in this or in the previous chapter that were cofinanced by either one or both of the European funds are: *Les Convoyeurs attendent* (Benoît Mariage, 1999, FR/BE/CH), *La Raison du plus faible* (Lucas Belvaux, 2006, BE/FR), *Eldorado* (Bouli Lanners, 2008, BE/FR), *Illégal* (Olivier Masset-Depasse, 2010, BE/FR/LX), and many of the Dardennes’ films (though not *Rosetta*).

In the final section I will return to the European identity of francophone Belgian cinema, and more in general to that of the cinéma du Nord. Here I will zoom in on francophone Belgian cinema’s Walloon manifestation, or simply: Walloon cinema. Does such a distinctly Walloon regional cinema exist? “All depends on the definition that one wants to give it,” Sojcher states in response to this question. “Are we speaking about a cinema *of* and *from* Wallonia [*de Wallonie*], or about a specifically Walloon identity

³⁰² Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque III*, 189.

³⁰³ Sojcher, *Pratiques du cinéma*, 25.

³⁰⁴ Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque III*, 189. Between 1989 and 1995 Belgian parties participated in 84 of the 443 features supported by Eurimages. Of these 84 films 21 had majority Belgian financing (Mosley, *Split Screen*, 200).

translated into cinema?”³⁰⁵ Departing from the second definition, two of the earliest Walloon feature-length films are: *Déjà s’envole la fleur maigre* (1959) and *Jeudi on chantera comme dimanche* (1967). The former, however, left its director financially ruined, while the latter was based on a screenplay by a Flemish author (Hugo Claus) and directed by a filmmaker from Brussels (Luc de Heusch). Furthermore, *Jeudi on chantera* is one of the first features cofinanced by the Ministry of French Belgian Culture, which makes it a francophone Belgian film set in Wallonia rather than a Walloon film.

It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that a Walloon cinema made by Walloons and “purposely expressive of [Wallonia’s] own history and culture,”³⁰⁶ began to take shape. The two films that have been saluted as the landmark films of this development are Andrien’s *Le Grand paysage d’Alexis Droeven* (1981)—“the first grand film of a Walloon cinema” according to *Le Monde*³⁰⁷—and Michel’s *Hiver 60* (1982) (despite the fact that this film was almost entirely shot in Brussels).³⁰⁸ In the 1990s two production companies were founded in Liège: the Dardennes’ Les Films du Fleuve (1994) and Versus (1999). Subsequently, in 2001 the Walloon region launched Wallimage. As discussed earlier, technically the mission of Wallimage is economic and not cultural. However, even though in its funding policy the organization, which in 2010 operated on a 10 million euro budget, is bound to its economic mission, in its public presentation it clearly does affirm a Walloon cultural identity. This is evidenced for

³⁰⁵ Sojcher, *Kermesse héroïque III*, 198.

³⁰⁶ Mosley, *Split Screen*, 105.

³⁰⁷ Cited in Michaux, *Images et cinéma de Wallonie*.

³⁰⁸ Bénédicte Rochet, “Esquisse d’une cinématographie wallonne,” in Roekens & Tixhon, *Cinéma et crise(s)*, pp. 15-28, p. 20.

example by the red t-shirts with the printed slogan “Wallonia, yes we Cannes!” that the organization distributed at the 2001 Cannes festival.

This implicit embrace by Wallimage of a Walloon cinematic identity has to be understood within the broader context of the relatively late emergence of a cultural self-awareness in a region that constitutionally is not a cultural region. As the Walloon historian Jean Pirotte writes:

Initially looked upon with some sulkiness by Walloons nostalgic for a unitary Belgium, Wallonia exists more and more in the facts. For this region, recently called into existence and constrained in its emergence by a difficult economic context, the identity question raises itself with acuity: it is a matter of mobilizing all actors—not only the political ones, but also the social, cultural and economic ones—around a Walloon project. In order to do so, the Walloon region certainly has weapons, but it is also seriously lacking some: the cultural domain does not belong to the regions but to the communities.³⁰⁹

Because of this divide of competencies between the Walloon region and the French Belgian community, it is impossible to identify a fully distinct Walloon cinema within francophone Belgian cinema at large. This is illustrated for example by the promotional document *10/10* that the Ministry of the Francophone Belgian Community copublished together with Wallonie-Bruxelles International (which manages the international relations of Wallonia and the French Belgian Community). In this originally English document geared toward Anglo-Saxon and North-West European distributors,

³⁰⁹ Jean Pirotte, “Une image floue,” *Louvain* 133 (2002): 26-8, p. 28.

the “Walloon” Bouli Lanners, Joachim Lafosse, and Fabrice du Welz figure among seven other emerging francophone Belgian filmmakers.³¹⁰

In the 2000s, francophone Belgian cinema, but also Belgian cinema at large, has experienced a surge in funds. Apart from the continued investments by the Ministry of the French Belgian Community, Wallimage and the RTBF—which in Sojcher’s opinion could still do more for the francophone Belgian film, especially in its programming³¹¹—since 2009 also Brussels-Capital has had its own regional fund, named Bxlimage, which in turn has a cooperation agreement with Wallimage.³¹² In addition, in 2003 the Belgian federal government launched a Tax Shelter (Incitant Fiscal) similar to, but also more generous than the one that was already in place in France. This “Loch Ness monster of Belgian cinema” is a system of fiscal exemption that incites private parties not operative in the audiovisual industry to invest in Belgian audiovisual productions and in Belgian

³¹⁰ The two other copublishers are Wallonie-Bruxelles Images and Wallonie-Bruxelles International, which are both associated with the Ministry of the Francophone Belgian Community. The other filmmakers that are presented in this document are: Sam Gabarski, Dominique Abel & Fiona Gordon, Micha Wald, Olivier Masset-Depasse, Stéphane Aubier & Vincent Pater, Ursula Meier, and Nabil Ben Yadir. See Boyd van Hoeij, *10/10* (Brussels: Ministère de la Communauté Française de Belgique; Wallonie-Bruxelles International; Wallonie-Bruxelles Images, 2010).

³¹¹ Sojcher writes: “The televisual logic is not the same as the cinematographic logic. TV remains the domain of consensus, especially on prime time. Speaking more broadly, TV could better assure the defense of our cinema. In the majority of countries in the world, national films are programmed at a popular hour on the first channel. In the French Belgian community, when one proposes to the television representatives to once a month schedule a Belgian film on prime time, they take you for an alien.” Cited in Olivier Lecomte, “Nos cinéastes sont-ils heureux? Berliner, Lafosse, Lannoo, Malandrin, Renders, Sojcher répondent à Olivier Lecomte,” *Cinergie.be: Webzine* 109 (2006), http://www.cinergie.be/webzine/nos_cineastes_sont_ils_heureux_berliner_lafosse_lannoo_malandrin_renders_sojcher_repondent_a_olivier_lecomte (accessed May 9, 2012).

³¹² In 2009, the committee received 451 requests, which were divided over three categories: feature film, short, and documentary. See Dimitra Bouras, “Dan Cukier, président de la Commission de sélection,” *Cinergie.be: Webzine* 149 (2010), <http://www.cinergie.be/webzine/wallimage> (accessed May 9, 2012). For the Wallimage/Bruxellimage cooperation see <http://www.wallimage.be/lignemixte.php?lang=fr> (retrieved May 9, 2012).

production companies.³¹³ Although EU competition laws stipulate that this system has a cultural and not an economic objective—which means that it should only support projects that would be financially unviable otherwise—also in this context cinema-as--industry and cinema-as-art blend into each other. In fact, when first introduced some feared that the Tax Shelter would only stimulate “commercial” productions and harm “auteur” productions. Partly, this fear has been justified by the tendency among some of the intermediary investments companies (which are comparable to the French SODEDIs) to circumvent production companies altogether. As a reaction to that tendency, in 2005 Versus and Les Films du Fleuve, together with two other production companies, created their own intermediary organization, Inver Invest, which seeks to convince investors to also support films that are less likely to become box office hits.³¹⁴ At the same time,

³¹³ The specific regulations of the tax shelter are as follows: it only applies to companies whose economic sector of activity is not related to the audiovisual industry. It only applies to the following production types: feature-length fiction, documentary or animated films produced for theatrical distribution, television documentaries with a minimum length of 52 minutes, or an animated television production with the same minimal length. Moreover, the production needs to have been approved as “European” as defined by the *Television without Frontiers* guidelines. In order to benefit from the Tax Shelter the privately owned party can invest up to 50 percent of its taxable profit, with a maximum of 750,000 euro; the invested amount has to give rise to expenses in Belgium or expenses profiting Belgians equaling at least 150 percent of the invested amount; in return the investor is allowed to reduce its taxable income for an amount of 150 percent of the actually transferred amount; the investing party is allowed to spread its investment over multiple productions or multiple production companies, like a production company can receive investments from multiple parties (though the Tax Shelter part of a production is limited to 50 percent of the total investments in it; on the condition that the investing party is not a financial institution the Tax Shelter investment may also take the form of a loan (with a maximum of 40 percent of the total amount invested in the production), or a coproduction investment (with a minimum of 60 percent of the total amount invested in the production). See “Tax Shelter: le monstre du Loch Ness du cinéma belge sort la tête de l’eau,” *Cinergie.be: Webzine* 64 (2002), http://www.cinergie.be/webzine/tax_shelter (accessed May 9, 2012).

³¹⁴ Dimitra Bouras & Jean-Michel Vlaeminckx, “Tax Shelter, quatre ans d’existence: le point avec Patrick Quinet et Luc Jabon,” *Cinergie.be: Webzine* 118 (2007), http://www.cinergie.be/webzine/tax_shelter_quatre_ans_d_existence_le_point_avec_patrick_quinet_et_luc_jabon (accessed May 9, 2012).

others such as Henry Ingberg are of the opinion that the Tax Shelter has actually benefited the Belgian auteur film: “The real capital of the cinematic industry is originality and creation. Our best commercial successes are also our auteur films! In our country it is the auteurs who carry cinema.”³¹⁵

The second reason why economy and culture are per definition entangled in the Tax Shelter structure is that it strictly applies to investments in Belgium, much like Wallimage promotes investments in the Walloon region. The Tax Shelter thus links the protection of a Belgian cultural identity, a *belgitude*, to economic protection. The Tax Shelter is much more generous, and as such much more protective, than similar regulations in neighboring countries, including the one in France. Clearly, not everyone is happy with this: even after the French government in 2004 expanded its own tax regulations in order to prevent the delocalization of too many French films to Belgium, the CRRAV continues to consider the Belgian Tax Shelter to be a form of “slightly unloyal competition in the production of feature-length films.”³¹⁶

Leaving aside the question of whether in the age of global capital a country or region can promote its cultural identity without some degree of economic protectionism, Belgium’s favoring of a homemade Belgian cinema contrasts with the fact that francophone Belgian, and by extent Walloon cinema, still has stronger ties to French than to Flemish cinema. The Belgian language border, the continuing communatarization of Belgium’s advance on receipts, the communatarization of Belgian public television, the

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ CRRAV, *Rapport d’activités 2010*, 5.

2004 co-production agreement between France and the French Belgian community,³¹⁷ the rising costs of cinematic productions, EU regulations stipulating that a cinematic production can be financed by public funds for only a maximum of 50 percent of its total costs,³¹⁸ the presence of resourceful parties in France such as Canal Plus, Arte, and the CNC, the big French distribution market, the relatively low appeal of francophone films in Flanders (even a box office hit like *Bienvenu chez les Ch'tis* had a late and an only very limited success in the region³¹⁹), the magnet that is the Cannes film festival, the fact that Belgian's most important film schools are primarily francophone: these are all factors that contribute to the fact that, seventy years after the emergence of the Belgian connection in Paris, and in spite of the tentative collaborations between the VAF and the CCA, the cinematic border between francophone Belgium and France continues to remain more porous than the one internal to Belgian cinema.

The *Cinéma du Nord*: A Euregional Cinema

This porosity of the French-Belgian border becomes evident when we look at the role French-Belgian coproductions play in both francophone Belgian and French cinema. France having always been the most important coproducing partner of the French Belgian Community, since the beginning of the twenty-first century French-Belgian coproductions have even made up more than two thirds of all feature length productions

³¹⁷ In 2012 the French Belgian Community (or Wallonia-Brussels-Federation) had signed coproduction agreements with Portugal, Tunisia, Morocco, Italy, France, Chile, Switzerland, and Chine, as well as a cooperation agreement with the SODEC in Quebec.

³¹⁸ Sojcher, *Pratiques du cinéma*, 45.

³¹⁹ Ivo de Kock, "Bienvenu Chez les Français: Franse Films op Zoek naar een Vlaams Publiek," *Filmmagie* 590 (2008): 46-7, p. 46.

endorsed by the French Belgian community. Vice versa, over the course of the 2000s Belgium has also become the most important coproducing partner of France, before Italy and Germany. During the period of 2002—2011 there were 277 international French-Belgian coproductions in which either French or Belgian parties held a majority share (so not including coproductions in which both France and Belgium had a minority share), which amounts to 28 percent of all coproductions France was involved in over this period. 193 of these films were à l’initiative française, 84 of them were primarily Belgian.³²⁰

Since 2005 these French-Belgian films have been produced under the new coproduction agreement that France and the French Belgian community signed in 2004 in Cannes. In two important respects this “*Accord cinématographique*” differs from the 1962 agreement between France and Belgium that it replaces (though French-Flemish coproductions are still regulated by the original agreement). First, whereas the original agreement stipulated that the proportion of the financial input of each of the country’s coproducer(s) must amount to at least 20 percent, in the new agreement this percentage is only 10 percent. This is especially important for Belgian producers, for whom up until 2004 it was nearly impossible to find the funds necessary for a minority share in coproductions of over 10 million euro. The reduction of this lower limit is therefore one of the factors that explain the recent increase of high-budget French-Belgian coproductions with a financing structure “*très majoritairement française*” (“with a very

³²⁰ Centre National du cinéma et de l’Image Animée, *La Production cinématographique en 2011: bilan statistique des films agréés en 2011* (Paris: CNC, 2012), p. 22.

large French majority share”).³²¹ In such coproductions the Belgian part is almost always financed through the Tax Shelter. The second major difference between the 1962 and 2004 agreements is that the latter requires that coproductions involve an artistic collaboration between the French and Belgian parties. Concretely, the minor coproducing country has to minimally provide: 1) an author (director, scriptwriter, etc.) or an executive technician; *and* 2) an actor in a primary role, *or* two actors in secondary roles, *or* a second author or a second executive technician.³²²

This artistic component, which is much more specific than comparable paragraphs in other coproduction agreements France or Belgium have signed with other countries, is simultaneously a symptom of, and helps perpetuate, the blurring of the border between French and francophone Belgian cinema. This partial, mutual integration of Europe’s largest national cinema and one of the world’s most visible small cinemas has manifested itself in the cinéma du Nord. This especially holds true for the Walloon part of this transnational regional cinema, because almost all of the films that in the previous chapter I discussed as products of Walloon cinema were coproduced by French parties, especially the CNC, Canal Plus and Arte. In contrast, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais component of the cinéma du Nord largely consists of all-French productions and contains only very few films coproduced with Belgium.

³²¹ Centre du Cinéma et de l’Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, *Production, promotion et diffusion cinématographiques et audiovisuelles: le bilan 2011* (Brussels: Centre du Cinéma, 2012), p. 9.

³²² Centre National du cinéma et de l’Image Animée, *Bulletin officiel du Centre National du Cinéma et de l’Image Animée: accords de coproductions* (Paris: CNC, 2011), p. 50-1.

The first reason for this unbalance is of course that it is much easier to find the sources for a 100-percent-domestic production in France than in Belgium. The second reason is that the main Belgian funding sources only invest in films that have an economic or cultural link to Belgium, or to one of its regions or communities. Similarly, also the CRRAV requires a production connection to Nord-Pas-de-Calais. As a result, for a long time there were only very few film productions that were cofinanced by parties from both Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Starting in the early 2000s, however, collaborations between the regions in the domain of film and other audiovisual productions have taken root. In 2003 the CRRAV and Hainaut Cinéma—which promotes the film and audiovisual industry in the Walloon province of Hainaut—embarked on the three-year project “*Audiovisuel Wallonie-Nord-Pas-de-Calais*.” Initiated under the aegis of the Interreg III structural aid program (see Chapter 2), and financed for 40 percent with EU funds, this project sought to stimulate the emergence of a cinematic and audiovisual “Euroregion” that crosses the French-Belgian border. As CRRAV president Christian Lamarche states, the goal of this collaboration was to “arouse synergies in [the] two regions by permitting for example a producer from Nord-Pas-de-Calais who wants to make films on both sides of the border to work with a Belgian director.”³²³ In order to achieve that goal, one of the measures the participating parties took was the creation of a

³²³ Cited in Valéry Saintghislain, “Un partenariat Hainaut-Nord-Pas de Calais construire [*sic*] une ‘eurorégion’ du cinéma et de l’audiovisuel,” *Le Soir* (April 11, 2003), p. 22. The partners in “Audiovisuel Wallonie-Nord-Pas-de-Calais” were the CRRAV, which contributed 1,79 million euro (of which 40 percent financed by the EU), and the Bureau d’Accueil d Tournage Cinéma Hainaut, or BATCH, which contributed 615,000 euro (also for 40 percent subsidized by European funds).

transnational fund for shorts, which cofinanced for example *Dans l'ombre/In the Dark* (2004, BE/FR/CH) by the Belgian Olivier Masset-Depasse.

Another film by Masset-Depasse, his feature *Cages* (2006, BE/FR), was the first fruit of the collaboration between the CRRAV and Wallimage, which started in 2004.³²⁴ As stated earlier, the reason that this seemingly obvious collaboration only took off years after both Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais had already become flourishing cinematic regions is that initially both their funds seemed incompatible. This was so because of their differences in structure, but ironically also because of their similarities. As Vincent Leclercq from the CRRAV states about the negotiation process between his organization and Wallimage: “We discussed some interesting projects and decided to do something together. At first it seemed impossible— . . . the criteria of both funds were that more than half of the shooting had to take place in the region—which makes it an equation impossible to solve But if there is one thing that is necessary in international coproductions it is flexibility.” For example, originally *Cages* was set in Wallonia, but since Nord-Pas-de-Calais lacked the necessary post-production facilities the organizations agreed to change the shooting location and the narrative setting to the Belgian-Flemish North Sea coast. That way half of the shooting could be done in Nord-Pas-de-Calais and half in Belgium, with a partly French, partly Belgian crew. Finally, in order to solve the equation, Wallimage and the CRRAV agreed to make the Walloon

³²⁴ Before the introduction of this official collaboration agreement, both organizations had already jointly invested in the 2002 feature *Va Petite!* (Alain Guesnier, BE/FR/MA).

investment higher than that of the French North (250 and 150 thousand euro, respectively, on a total budget of almost 2 million euro).³²⁵

Following *Cages*, Wallimage and the CRRAV have collaborated on two more feature length films: the earlier mentioned *Entre ses mains* (2005) and *La Cantante de tango* (Diego Martínez Vignatti (2009, AR/BE/FR/NL). In addition, there are several features on which the CRRAV participated together with one of the other main institutional actors in francophone Belgian cinema, especially the RTBF. Finally, since 2009 the CRRAV, Wallimage and the Flemish VAF have been involved in the CASPER initiative (Creative Animated Series in the Euro Region), which stimulates the production of animated projects, “while approaching them, from the beginning, from a euroregional vision.”³²⁶ Though it is likely that the still expanding partnerships between the CRRAV and Wallimage will yield more Walloon-northern-French coproductions, it is important to emphasize here that the *cinéma du Nord*, in the way I define it, is more than a collaboration structure between Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Rather, these collaborations form yet another piece of evidence for the existence of the northern-French-Walloon *Nord*. The *Nord* exists in relation to the border it crosses and negates and that it is intercut and negated by. The existence of the *Nord* is real, but its existence is also internally split. It is therefore only logical that, however porous the cinematic border between Belgium and France may have become, the *cinéma du Nord* is an internally split

³²⁵ Cine-regio, “‘Cages’ by Olivier Masset-Depasse,” <http://www.cine-regio.org/co-production/case-studies/cages/> (accessed June 16, 2012).

³²⁶ Wallimage, “Casper, the Friendly Animated Project” (October 16, 2009), <http://www.wallimage.be/newsfile.php?lang=uk&id=173> (accessed June 20, 2012).

cinema, in terms of industrial infrastructure, and, as argued in the previous chapter, in terms of the types of cinematic expressions that it has given rise to.

Formulated differently, the *cinéma du Nord* exists in spite of its internal split. It expresses and, moreover, is the product of the many factors that bind Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, and that bind Walloon cinema—or more precisely francophone Belgian cinema in its Walloon manifestation—and northern French cinema. Like these regional cinemas individually, the *cinéma du Nord* is simultaneously a rooted cinema and an open *cinéma d'accueil* whose emergence can largely be ascribed to the structural investment of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais in regional cinematic infrastructures. For a significant part these politics have been economically motivated, which is the reason why Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais only fund films that are largely produced in the region. “Belgian cinema is good for the economy,” the francophone Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* headed in 2010 at the occasion of the cooperation agreement between Wallimage and Bxlimage. It substantiated this claim as follows: “In 2009 the ‘historical’ investment line of Wallimage, which exists since 2001, registered a record fall-out. [On average] each of the 3.6 million euro invested generated expenses of 3.69 euro for the totality of the concerned productions, amounting to fifteen films.”³²⁷ Similarly, in its 2010 annual report the CRRAV states: “While remaining exigent about the artistic quality of films, we still augment our economic impact: the shootings supported by the CRRAV yielded more than 11 million euro of expenses in the region. On average each euro that is invested in a

³²⁷ Jennotte, “Le cinéma belge,” 36.

film induces four euro, of which three euro in audiovisual expenses, essentially in salaries for technicians and actors.”³²⁸

Not included in these direct yields are the indirect effects that the development of these regions into prominent cinematic sites has had on their economies, nor the effects on their self-image and their national and international visibility. It is safe to state, nevertheless, that cinema has played and continues to play an important role in these regions’ more general efforts to restructure and reprofile themselves, including their efforts to self-position themselves as Euro-regions. This claim is further supported by the fact that in recent years Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, both individually and collectively, have expanded their cinema and television strategies to newer forms of audiovisual media. In 2006 Wallonia saw the birth of a Pôle Image de Liège, which “firmly planted in the heart of Wallonia, Belgium and Europe” unites audiovisual service companies in the Liège region (such as EVS Broadcast Equipment, the world’s leading producer of digital broadcast video production systems).³²⁹ Since 2010 this structure has become associated to Wallimage. In turn, both Wallimage and the Pôle Image fall under the umbrella of the Technologies Wallonnes de l’Image, du Son et du Texte (TWIST) cluster. Financed by the Walloon Region, this cluster stimulates synergies between companies operating in the audiovisual sector. Similarly, in 2009 Nord-Pas-de-Calais, in collaboration with Wallimage and the VAF, founded its own Pôle Images. Established in three locations in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, this structure unites cinema, digital video, gaming

³²⁸ CRRAV, *Rapport d’activités 2010*, 5.

³²⁹ Wallimage, “The Pôle Image de Liège Grows with Wallimage Entreprises” (December 20, 2010), <http://www.wallimage.be/newsfile.php?lang=uk&id=382> (accessed June 20, 2012).

and virtual worlds, and represents about two hundred companies, schools, research teams and professional organizations in the region.³³⁰ In 2012 the Pôle Images and the CRRAV announced their merger. “We need more force to exist beyond the regional borders . . . ,” CRRAV president Michel-François Delannoy formulated these ambitions, “we need to give perspectives of international development to regional actors.”³³¹

It remains waiting for the full integration of the cinematic and audiovisual infrastructures of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Wallonia, and perhaps also Flanders, and thus for an even more unified cinéma, or perhaps even *audiovisuel*, du Nord, including digital media projects. Yet also in its internally split state the cinéma du Nord is an innovative, euregional cinema. It is a cinema of transition that expresses and, moreover, contributes to the shared ambitions of Wallonia and Nord-Pas-de-Calais to relocate and reimagine themselves at the crossroads of Europe after decades of recession.

³³⁰ Technologies Wallonnes de l’Image, du Son et du Texte, “Launch of the Nord-Pas de Calais Image Pole,” <http://www.twist-cluster.com/cms/en/news/market-news/248-la...> (accessed June 20, 2012).

³³¹ Cited in Anne Courtel, “Le CRRAV et le Pôle Images se marient . . . pour le meilleur de l’image,” *La Voix du Nord* (January 18, 2012), <http://www.lavoixdunord.fr/region/le-crrav-et-le-pole-images-se-marient-pour-le-meilleur-de-l-image-ia26b0n241279> (accessed June 19, 2012).

CHAPTER 4 | A Cinema of Life: New Realism

On February 12, 1997, *Le Monde* published a letter in which 59 French filmmakers distance themselves from a law proposed by the French government that would oblige citizens to denounce *sans papiers*, illegal immigrants: “We, French filmmakers We are all guilty, everyone of us, of having recently sheltered clandestine foreigners. We have not denounced our foreign friends.”³³² The letter spurred similar public statements by other groups and helped create the momentum for a large-scale demonstration in Paris on February 22. Following these protests, the French government saw itself forced to retract the law proposal, leading the newspaper *Libération* to triumph that the filmmakers’ off-screen actions had shown the Left was still alive in France.³³³

Many of the petitioners of this *appel à la désobéissance* (call to disobedience)—including the filmmakers Arnaud Desplechin, Olivier Assayas, Sandrine Veysset, Pascale Ferran, and Matthieu Kassovitz—were part of the flood of young, first-time filmmakers that French cinema had seen since the early 1990s. This is one of the reasons that the

³³² The entire statement reads as follows:

“Voici le texte de l’appel lancé par cinquante-neuf réalisateurs de cinéma. La liste des signataires, arrêtée au 11 février, devrait s’allonger dans les jours à venir:

Nous, réalisateurs français, déclarons:

Nous sommes coupables, chacun d’entre nous, d’avoir hébergé récemment des étrangers en situation irrégulière. Nous n’avons pas dénoncé nos amis étrangers. Et nous continuerons à héberger, à ne pas dénoncer, à sympathiser et à travailler sans vérifier les papiers de nos collègues et amis.

Suite au jugement rendu de Mme Jacqueline Deltombe, ‘coupable’ d’avoir hébergé un ami zaïrois en situation irrégulière, et partant du principe que la loi est la même pour tous, nous demandons à être mis en examen et jugés nous aussi. Enfin, nous appelons nos concitoyens à désobéir pour ne pas se soumettre à des lois inhumaines.

Nous refusons que nos libertés se voient ainsi restreintes.” (“59 réalisateurs appellent à ‘désobeir’,” *Le Monde* [February 12, 1997], p. 9.)

³³³ See Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema*, 223-4.

jeune cinéma has become associated with a “return of the political.” The other reason for this link is that, following the dominance in the 1980s and early 1990s of high-budget spectacles, many of the “young French” films share in a *new realist* tendency.³³⁴ In an essay on Veysset’s *Y’aura-t’il de la neige à Noël?/Will it Snow for Christmas?* (1996) Martine Beugnet defines this tendency as follows:

[T]he new realism is characterized by its provincial locations, its use of non-professional actors and its documentary feel. Some writers have called it a *cinéma des petites gens*, literally, “the cinema of the small people”—the homeless, the unemployed, the manual workers and small shopkeepers, the inhabitants of the suburbs, of provincial towns and villages, groups of individuals neither particularly beautiful nor glamorous, who are rarely seen in major roles on screen.³³⁵

Some other major examples of this new realism in young French cinema—which broadly understood also includes the francophone Belgian cinema that began flourishing in the early 1990s—we have already encountered in previous chapters: *Faut-il aimer Mathilde?* (Baily, 1993), *Rosine* (Carrière, 1994), *En Avoir (Ou Pas)* (Masson, 1995), *Karnaval* (Vincent, 1999), *La Vie rêvée des anges* (Zonca, 1999), as well as the Dardennes’ fiction work. Other often cited examples are: *L’Age des possibles* (Pascale Ferran, 1995), *La Haine* (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995), *Marius et Jeannette* (Robert Guédiguian, 1997), *Western* (Manuel Poirier, 1997), *Ressources humaines/Human Resources* (Laurent

³³⁴ See for example: Phil Powrie, “Heritage, History and ‘New Realism’,” [Chapter 1] in Phil Powrie ed., *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-21.

³³⁵ Martine Beugnet, “Y’aura-t’il de la neige à Noël? Will it Snow for Christmas; Sandrine Veysset, France, 1997,” in Phil Powrie ed., *The Cinema of France* (London; New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), pp. 247-54, pp. 247-8.

Cantet, 1999), and *Nadia et les hippopotames* (Dominique Cabrera, 1999). The filmmaker I have not included in this list is Dumont. Is Dumont, definitively the most Bressonian of all young French filmmakers, a new realist? Let me say for now that Dumont's all-too-human miracles form a problem for new realism, much like De Sica's *Miracolo a Milano/Miracle in Milan* (1951) were a problem for neorealism.

To return to the *jeune cinéma*: while many hailed it as a revival of the auteur tradition, this new New Wave has also drawn some severe criticism. One of the most poignant attacks—and simultaneously one of the most astute analyses—of the young French cinema, is a 1998 essay that appeared in the short-lived journal *Balthazar* (named after Bresson's film). In that essay, "Petits arrangements avec le jeune cinéma français"—an allusion to Pascale Ferran's *Petits arrangements avec les morts* (1994)—the young critics Mathias Lavin and Stéphane Delorme pin down the "dominant tendency" in French cinema of the 1990s: "The common denominator, the big affair of the young French cinema is not cinema but *life*. Cinema is absolutely not interrogated in its form. It is envisioned as a mold that has already acquired its perfect and definitive form, the most *minimalist* form, in order to receive within itself 'life,' the only object worthy of this name."³³⁶ Though Lavin and Delorme admit that films such as *Mange ta soupe* (Mathieu Amalric, 1997) and *La Vie rêvée des anges* provide "agreeable entertainment," and though they praise Dumont's *La Vie de Jésus* for its treatment of bodies, in their opinion too many of the recent auteur films get stuck in intimist,

³³⁶ Mathias Lavin & Stéphane Delorme, "Petits arrangements avec le jeune cinéma français," *Balthazar* 3 (1998): 24-32, pp. 24-5, emphasis in original.

anecdotal accounts of their protagonists' private affairs: "me, me, me, the little me."³³⁷ The result of this psychologism, Lavin and Delorme argue, is that "cinema" is rendered subordinate to a preoccupation with the "real," to the attempt to render every image and screen event legible and transparent. The authors reproach the young French filmmakers *mimetism*. From Assayas to Beauvois, and from Kahn to Cantet: their films are all too concerned with capturing preexisting ideas of contemporary reality, instead that they create new cinematic worlds. "Cinema is no longer thought. It is conceived of as an illustration of a psychological history, of a discourse that would do very well without images."³³⁸ In other words, Lavin and Delorme lament the revival of a realist aesthetic that grounds itself in what they refer to as a Bazinian ontology of cinema. At the same time they mourn the disappearance of the idiosyncrasy and aesthetic boldness of the "great filmmakers" of the 1960s and 1970s and above all those who "launched themselves on the route traced out by Bresson," including Straub, Eustache, and Garrel. "One can very well imagine a character of Ferran enter into a film by Lvovsky," they write, "but how to imagine a character of Rohmer in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* [*Last Year at Marienbad*, Alain Resnais, 1961] or *Les Carabiniers* [*The Carabineers*, Jean-Luc Godard, 1963]?"³³⁹

Lavin and Delorme thus show themselves little convinced by the return of the political that young French cinema would imply. About the appel à la désobéissance they state that "the generosity of the gesture does, unfortunately, not take away the perfect

³³⁷ Ibid., 28.

³³⁸ Ibid., 32.

³³⁹ Ibid., 31.

nullity of this act.”³⁴⁰ In their 2001 follow-up essay, “Nouvelles arrangements avec le jeune cinéma français,” Lavin and Delorme extend this reproach of ethical hollowness to French cinema’s onscreen intensified political agenda. In their view, films such as *Ressources humaines* and *Nadia et les hippopotames* get, by lack of a radical aesthetics, bogged down in class caricatures and clichéd allegories. One of the defining characteristic of young French cinema Lavin and Delorme specifically target is the ubiquity of the handheld camera. Unlike as in the work of John Cassavetes, they complain, in 1990s French cinema the “coming and going of the camera is accompanied by a . . . minimal montage contenting itself with linking up shots.”³⁴¹ They give the examples of Desplechin’s *Ester Kahn* (2000) (“even in the only scene worthy of interest . . . the camera is trembling and films the actors half crouched over, as if the operator was shivering with cold. Eric Gautier, buy a scarf!”) and Assayas’s *Fin août, début septembre/Late August, Early September* (1998) (“the camera seems to play hide-and-seek with the bodies, struggling to find the most ugly framing possible: a piece of shoulder here, the back of a head there”).³⁴² The “most funny example” they consider to be *Rosetta*: “When the warrior has (finally) calmed down (it’s mealtime), the camera continues to hop on its place, and in order to provide a little bit of action hides itself behind the gate, letting the corner of the wall navigate into the frame. One inevitably has to think of bad fantastic films, when the monster hides itself behind its victim.”³⁴³

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 27.

³⁴¹ Stéphane Delorme & Mathias Lavin, “Nouveaux arrangements avec le jeune cinéma français,” *Balthazar* 4 (2001): 2-10, p. 7.

³⁴² Ibid., 8.

³⁴³ Ibid.

To a large degree I follow Lavin and Delorme in their critique. Many of the auteur films produced in France since the early 1990s do create very similar universes and indeed lack the innovatory force of the New Wave and its immediate aftermath. Yet in their sweeping dismissal of a cinema that, in Bazin's words, puts its faith in reality, and their simultaneous longing for a return to Bresson, Lavin and Delorme overlook the influence of Bresson on the Dardennes (and on Dumont), and more generally display a very reductive understanding of cinematic realism. First of all, they ignore the dialectic of Bazin's thought. Realism in art, according to Bazin, goes beyond mimesis and "can only come forth out of artifice."³⁴⁴ This is why Bazin saw his cinematic ideal not only realized in a film such as *Ladri di biciclette/Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica, 1948), but also in *Journal d'un curé de campagne*. While *Ladri di biciclette* achieves this realist ideal through its "perfect aesthetic illusion of reality" created by the disappearance of actors, story, and sets, Bresson's "triumph of cinematographic realism" Bazin sees in his film's ultimate handing back of "the screen, free of images . . . to literature." The result is the same in both cases: "no more cinema."³⁴⁵

Second, by juxtaposing realism and its revival in young French cinema, on the one hand, to a notion of a radical, modernist aesthetics that joins Bresson with New Wave and post-New Wave directors such as Godard and Eustache, on the other, Lavin and Delorme oversimplify the triangulation between Italian neorealism, the New Wave, and the long tradition of "Bazinian" realism and humanism—from Vigo and Renoir, *via* Bresson and Pialat, to Dumont and the Dardennes.

³⁴⁴ Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, 269.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 124, 309.

That triangulation is the subject of this chapter, which explains the re-emergence of a “Bazinian” realism in the wake of modernism in French and francophone Belgian cinema. Building on Beugnet’s definition, I characterize new realism as an ethics and aesthetics of filmmaking that: 1) reinvents earlier socially critical and especially neorealist practices of depicting the everyday lives of ordinary people for the globalized age; and 2) revives a belief in the mimetic promise of the cinematic image, and in doing so shows the influence of television as well as mobilizes the haptic and affective potential of new image and sound technologies, whether analog or digital. The object of new realism is life, so I agree with Lavin and Delorme. As stated in the first chapter, I conceive of “life” as at one and the same time the biological life that a human being is, and the social-cultural trajectory, from cradle to grave, that he or she is involved in. I argue that in its most compelling forms, new realism engages both these notions of “life.” New realism does so if it produces a cinema that makes intelligible and affective the following question: How does a society’s transition from a strong industrial to a more precarious and diversified post-industrial economy affect the social fabric, down to the structures of people’s quotidian lives?

In other words, new realism, when realized in its full conceptual and affective potential, is a cinema of life. It is what realism becomes in the wake of “the modern cinema,” as Deleuze refers to the cinema of the thought-provoking time-image. New realism constitutes the partial undoing of the time-image in that it restores the narratively driven action-image to the “soul of the cinema.”³⁴⁶ But it also transforms the action-

³⁴⁶ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 210.

image into what we could call the acting/acted image, or simply the life image, the vibrant and colorful image typical for a cinema that turns the tension between the real performing acting bodies in front of the camera and the diegetic performed acted bodies the viewer witnesses on the screen into its simultaneous subject and object of its art. However, before diving deeper into the esoteric waters of a Deleuzian and post-Deleuzian classification of cinematic images, let's first concentrate on the following question:

What is Realism?

In "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics" (2006), Daniel Morgan makes it his task to redeem Bazin from what he argues has become the standard reading of the critic in Anglophone film studies. According to that reading cinema is realist for Bazin "insofar as it comes closest to or bears fidelity to our perceptual experience of reality."³⁴⁷

That reading, Morgan argues, rests on two propositions. The first is that Bazin argues for a determinate relation between the ontology of the photographic image and cinematic realism. Second, Bazin's ontology of the photographic image would posit that the image constitutes a trace of a past, profilmic reality, i.e. of a reality that once was in front of the

³⁴⁷ Morgan refers in this context to the work of Dudley Andrew, Christopher Williams, and Peter Wollen: "Dudley Andrew speaks of Bazin's aesthetic as oriented around a 'deep feeling for the integral unity of a universe in flux' [from: *André Bazin*] and elsewhere of realistic styles as 'approximations of visible [or perceptual] reality.' [from: *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction*] Christopher Williams argues that, for Bazin, film has 'the primary function of showing the spectator the real world,' which he, like Andrew, glosses as the aesthetic equivalent of human perception.' [from: *Realism and the Cinema: A Reader*] Peter Wollen goes so far as to assert that this realism constitutes an anti-aesthetic, the very negation of cinematic style and artifice: 'the film could obtain radical purity only through its own annihilation.' [from: *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*]" Daniel Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics," *Critical Inquiry* 32.3 (2006): 443-81, pp. 444-5.

camera. This second proposition Morgan also refers to as the “index argument,” because it is in line with the parallel—first suggested by Peter Wollen—between Bazin’s account of the nature of the photographic image and Charles Sanders Peirce’s notion of the indexical sign, the type of sign that stands in a direct physical connection to its object.³⁴⁸ Morgan rejects both of these propositions and instead argues that Bazin’s claim that the photograph is “the object itself, freed from the conditions of time that govern it”³⁴⁹ is in fact much stronger than the index argument allows. Furthermore, distancing himself from the idea that Bazin favored directors such as Orson Welles, Jean Renoir and the Italian neorealists because of their films’ verisimilar qualities, Morgan proposes an understanding of Bazinian realism that goes beyond a mere idea of verisimilitude. Bazin, Morgan writes, “not only rejects verisimilitude as an essential component of *realism* at various points coming close to directly opposing it to realism. He is also explicit that perceptual or psychological realism is an inadequate criterion for realism.”³⁵⁰ Instead Morgan proposes to understand Bazin’s ideal of realism as one that refers to an open set of styles that have in common their *acknowledgment* of photographic media’s privileged relation to reality, but without that they necessarily mimic reality. To do so, Morgan

³⁴⁸ Opposing himself against Christian Metz’s attempt to construct a theory of cinematic language on the basis of Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiology, in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969) Wollen grounds his understanding of signification in the cinema in the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce. Wollen argues that over the course of cinema’s history, different directors and theorists have emphasized different semiotic dimensions of the cinematic image. Whereas formalists such as Eisenstein privileged the iconic qualities of the cinematic image, in the realist tradition the indexical aspect of the cinematic image gained dominance. Wollen sees Bazin as the theorist most emblematic of the realist tradition, for the reason that Bazin “repeatedly stresses the existential bond between sign and object.” (Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972], p. 125.)

³⁴⁹ Bazin, *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*, p. 14.

³⁵⁰ Morgan, “Rethinking Bazin,” 458.

reasons, allows us to account, for example, for Bazin's appreciation of *Journal d'un curé de campagne*. "Bazin," he writes, "will argue that the spiritual existence Bresson is interested in cannot be shown What Bresson does, as Bazin sees it, is give us this spiritual state, and at the same time acknowledge the ontology of the medium, by *negating* the visual dimension of the image."³⁵¹

Before I will return to Bazin's ideal of realism, I first have a closer look at the theorist's ontology of the photographic image. Though Morgan acknowledges that part of Bazin's argument lines up with an understanding of photography and cinema as indexical media, as stated he ultimately rejects the "index-argument." For Bazin, Morgan reasons, objects in photographs exist in the present, with a positive value.³⁵² The photographic image is not just a sign that refers to its object. It is an object in and of itself that partakes in the reality of the object that it *re*-presents. The photograph *is* its object, *minus* the latter's temporal contingency, and therefore surpasses mere indexicality. After all, Morgan reasons, "no one argues that a footprint *is* a foot or that the barometer *is* the air pressure, despite the fact that there is a direct, non-subjective causal relation between them."³⁵³ I agree with Morgan's claim that for Bazin the photographic image is not a trace of a past profilmic reality but a reality in and of itself. Yet Morgan ignores that in its original context of Peirce's semiotics the index has a more general connotation than that of trace. Whereas Morgan invokes the footprint, as per Lev Manovich's much cited phrase that "cinema is the art of the index; it is an attempt to make art out of a

³⁵¹ Ibid., 473, emphasis in original.

³⁵² Ibid., 448-9.

³⁵³ Ibid., 450.

footprint,”³⁵⁴ Peirce’s own privileged example of indexicality is the pointing finger, a sign that affirms the existence (“there!”) of its object without that it necessarily stands in a direct physical contact with it.³⁵⁵

Does the “index argument” hold true when we take index in this broader connotation? In order to answer this question we need to turn to Peirce’s semiotics. Peirce was a monist thinker and as such he was a fervent critic of the Cartesian mind-body dualism. In his early essay “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man” (1868) Peirce rules out the existence of an epistemological ground formed by a first intuitive thought. For Peirce every cognition is part of a process of determination. All thoughts are connected to earlier thoughts, and the only cognizable thoughts are thoughts in signs, thoughts being signs themselves, thought-signs. Peirce writes: “To say [...] that thought cannot happen in an instant, but requires a time, is but another way of saying that every thought must be interpreted in another, or that all thought is in signs.”³⁵⁶ Signs are ubiquitous. They operate in, through, and around us. In a later essay Peirce even goes as

³⁵⁴ Lev Manovich, “What is Digital Cinema?” in Peter Lunenfeld ed., *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 172-92, p. 174.

³⁵⁵ Morgan is not alone in this regard. In recent debates about the implications of the digital turn several theorists have invoked the index in order to posit an ontological distinction between moving images recorded on celluloid film and moving images that are stored digitally. Whereas the former would have a physical, indexical bond to the objects they are representations of, the latter would not and therefore lead a virtual existence. (See for example: D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007]). This reductive invocation of the index has been critiqued by Mary-Ann Doane, who proposes to distinguish between the index-as-trace (e.g., a footprint) and the index-as-deixis (e.g., a pointing finger), and Tom Gunning, in whose opinion the claim that digital images are non-indexical is “nonsense,” an argument with which I fully agree. (Mary Ann Doane, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” *differences: a journal of feminist cultural studies* 18:1 [2007]: 129-152; Tom Gunning, “Moving Away From the Index,” *differences* 18:1 [2007]: 29-52, p. 31.)

³⁵⁶ C.S. Peirce, “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man,” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings Volume 1 (1867-1893)*, eds. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 24.

far as pondering whether not the entire universe is composed “exclusively of signs” (a position that would bring him very close to Spinoza’s equation of God and Nature).³⁵⁷

For Peirce a sign is “an object which stands for another to some mind.”³⁵⁸ There are three elements in this definition: the sign itself, the object it stands for, and a mind or interpretant to which that sign stands. In his most well-known categorization of signs Peirce distinguishes between three types: the icon, the index, and the symbol. The first type, the icon (e.g., images and diagrams), connects to its referent or object through resemblance, whether or not that referent has an actual existence in reality. The third type, the symbol (e.g., words and traffic signs), denotes or signifies its object by virtue of habit or association and for its signifying nature depends on the presence of an interpretant who recognizes it as a sign.³⁵⁹ The index, as we have seen, stands in a direct physical connection with its object, but without that it resembles or describes that object. Unlike the icon, the index depends on the actual existence, whether in the past or the present, of its object. Unlike the symbol, it does not depend on a third term, the interpretant: “An *index* is a sign which would, at once, lose the characters which make it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that characters if there were no interpretant.”³⁶⁰ The three categories of signification do not mutually exclude each other. For example, “that footprint that Robinson Crusoe found in the sand . . . was an Index to

³⁵⁷ “The Basis of Pragmatism” in *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic*, ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1991), p. 258.

³⁵⁸ “On the Nature of Signs,” in *Peirce on Signs*, 141.

³⁵⁹ “Sign,” in *ibid.*, 240.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 239-40, emphasis in original.

him that some creature was on his island, and at the same time, as a Symbol, called up the idea of a man.”³⁶¹

Another example of such a “perceptible” that functions “doubly as a Sign” is the photograph. In “What Is a Sign?” (1894) Peirce writes, in a passage that has become canonical in film studies:

Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs, those by physical connection.³⁶²

A photograph is an index, but “in certain respects” it is also an icon. A photograph is both an image and an object. It is an image with a certain thickness that forms the “footprint” of the object it represents (or more precisely of the light reflected by that object when it was photographed). Yet to complicate matters, does the photograph not also point at “nature” precisely because of its unrivaled mimetic and thus iconic qualities, which would contradict the definition of the index as a sign that gives no insight into its object? And does the fact that our recognition of a photograph’s indexicality depends on our prior knowledge about the “circumstances” under which it was produced not contradict Peirce’s earlier claim that the index-object dyad exists strictly independently of the interpretant? Peirce never really resolved this paradoxical status of

³⁶¹ Ibid., 251-2.

³⁶² C.S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings Vol. 2 (1893-1913)*, ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 5-6.

the photograph, which, I would argue, has to do with the potential contradiction between his premise that every sign is a sign *to an interpretant*, on the one hand, and his claim that the index-object bond exists independently of an interpretant, on the other. This contradiction can only be avoided when we posit that an object's indexicality is only known through mediation of that object's iconic or symbolic qualities. In the case of the photograph this would imply that our perception of the bond between the photograph and its profilmic object is always mediated by our recognition of a photograph as a product of the technology and cultural practice of photography. Only by way of that recognition, which may be triggered by the photograph's likeness to an existing object as well as by the context in which it appears, does the photograph become an *index to thought*.³⁶³ This reasoning would allow us hold on to the distinction between the photograph's indexical and iconic dimensions.

In contrast, in Bazin's account of the photograph, the index-icon distinction collapses. Bazin writes in his "Ontology" essay:

This automatic genesis [of photographic images] has overturned the psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a power of credibility absent from all other pictorial work. Whatever the objections of our

³⁶³ For an interpretant to perceive a non-mediated index would imply that the interpretant is the object of an indexical relation with its own reflection, an instantaneous moment of self-recognition that Peirce rules out: "thought cannot happen in an instant, but requires a time" (Peirce, "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man," 24). For the person in the mirror is not "me," the interpretant; and "I" am not "here," the "I" being the narcissist misrecognition of the subject. In the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who was a monist too: "[I]t is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh." (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible [Followed by Working Notes]*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968], p. 142, emphases in original).

critical spirit may be, we are forced to believe in the existence of the object represented, actually *re*-presented, rendered present, that is to say, in time and space. Photography benefits from a certain transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction.³⁶⁴

Starting off as a historical-phenomenological argument about the way photographs appear to, and have changed, human perception, this passage gradually slips into the ontology promised by the essay's title, an ontology that integrates a phenomenology of the photograph. The photographic image, by its very nature, instills in its beholder the belief that the representation it contains is in fact more than a representation and that this representation actually partakes in the reality of the object it mimics. Bazin thus goes one step further than Peirce, and in fact goes where Peirce could not go without contradicting his monist principles. However, Bazin is a monist too, ultimately, perhaps, even though his humanist ontology often flirts with the blissful revelation of the things in themselves that Bresson's curé is so much longing for. Formulated in Peirce's terminology, for Bazin the photograph is an index precisely because it is an icon. It is a sign that stands in a direct physical relation to the object it mimics, thereby offering the viewer a non-mediated and perhaps even redemptive glimpse of a fragment of objective reality: "That reflection on a wet sidewalk, that gesture of a child . . . Only the impassivity of the lens, stripping its object of all those habits and preconceptions . . . was able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love."³⁶⁵

Now, how does Bazin move from this aesthetics of reality as it is revealed by the photographic image to his aesthetics of cinematic realism, considering the fact that

³⁶⁴ Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, 13-4, emphasis in original.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

cinema is not only photographic objectivity in time but “also a language”?³⁶⁶ As we have seen, Morgan argues that for Bazin realism is a heterogeneous set of styles that acknowledge the photograph’s ontology but that do not necessarily mimic reality. To this I would add that even more than an aesthetic category, realism for Bazin refers to an ethics according to which cinema, in its “purest” manifestations, has the quality to redeem our perception in a way that surpasses the photograph’s mummification of “facts.” Realism in cinema, Bazin emphasizes over and over again, is only achieved through artifice. It is a practice that, by narrative means, returns more to reality than what it takes from it.³⁶⁷ That “added measure of reality” may take different forms and it may even exceed the domain of representation, as it is the case in *Journal d’un curé de campagne*, in which the black cross, “the only visible trace left by the assumption of the image,” bears witness to “that whose reality was only a sign.” The passage is instructive, because like Bresson’s film itself it employs a Catholic vocabulary while expressing a materialist-existentialist worldview according to which there is nothing beyond the mundane existence of things. Cinema’s promise is to melt these positions, and to orient our gaze downward, to people and material reality, rather than at the phantasmagoric sky, while keeping up our hopes for salvation. Cinema fulfills that promise if it lets us see that, in the words of the curé, “all is grace.”

It was in Italian neorealism above all that Bazin saw the ideal of pure cinema incarnated. Indissolubly associated with the shoestring, newsreel-like aesthetic that characterized the movement’s emergence in the 1940s, neorealism, so Bazin would have

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 14, 17.

³⁶⁷ I owe this reading of Bazin to Cesare Casarino.

agreed with Rossellini, “is above all, a moral position from which to look at the world. It then became an aesthetic position, but at the beginning it was moral.”³⁶⁸ In line with the critic’s appreciation of Bresson, Bazin defines this moral stance as a “fundamental humanism” that expresses a simultaneous love and rejection for reality, but that is not reducible to a specific political or religious agenda. “The recent Italian films are at least prerevolutionary,” Bazin writes, “they all reject, implicitly or explicitly, through humor, satire or poetry, the social reality they are using, but they know, even when taking a clear stand, to never treat this reality as a means to an end. . . . They do not forget that before being something to be condemned, the world *is*, quite simply.”³⁶⁹

Bazin praises films such as *Roma: città aperta/Rome, Open City* (Rossellini, 1945), *Ladri di biciclette*, and *Le Notti di Cabiria/Nights of Cabiria* (Fellini, 1957) for not subjugating their events to preexisting dramatic structures, but instead presenting them as documents of lived existence.³⁷⁰ In doing so the neorealist films, many of which are melodramas, establish in Bazin’s eyes a synthesis between the psychological laws of the theatrical spectacle and cinema’s anti-theatrical, “novel-like potential” to give

³⁶⁸ Cited in David Overbey, “Introduction” to David Overbey ed., *Springtime in Italy: A Reader on Neo-Realism* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1978), p. 1.

³⁶⁹ Bazin, *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*, 263-4.

³⁷⁰ In *Theory of Film* Siegfried Kracauer develops a very similar argument about neorealism. Kracauer introduces the notion of the episode, a story “whose common property it is to emerge from, and again disappear in, the flow of life, as suggested by the camera.” What sets the episode apart from other categories of fiction cinema is that it does not present itself as a self-contained story but instead remains “full of gaps” and thereby permeable to the “flow of life out of which it rises.” Often the episode film is set in the street, “that province of reality where transient life manifests itself most conspicuously.” “From *Open City* to *Cabiria*, *The Bicycle Thief* to *La Strada*,” Kracauer writes, “they are literally soaked in the street world; they not only begin and end in it but are transparent to it throughout.” (Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* [London: Oxford University Press, 1960], pp. 251-6).

primacy “to events over actions, to succession over causality.”³⁷¹ As Bazin famously writes about De Sica’s film: “It is a spectacle, and what spectacle! However, in nothing does *Bicycle Thieves* depend on the mathematical principles of drama, the action does not preexist as an essence, it ensues from the preliminary existence of the narrative, it is the ‘integral’ of reality.”³⁷²

In *Cinema 1* Deleuze develops a very similar argument about *Ladri di biciclette*: “there is no longer a vector or line of the universe which extends and links up the events . . . ; the rain can always interrupt or deflect the search fortuitously; the voyage of the man and of the child.”³⁷³ Inspired by Bazin, Deleuze places Italian neorealism at the center of the transition from a classical cinema of movement to a modern cinema of time that structures his film-philosophy. Deleuze theorizes this transition as the liberation of cinema’s expressive potential from the sensory-motor schema, i.e. the linkage between character perception and movement that subjugates the cinematic image to a Cartesian space-time. This link is particularly strong in the “action-image,” the type of narrative cinema that became dominant before World War II, especially through Classical Hollywood (but arguably also through other classical cinemas such as the Italian *Telefoni bianchi* and the French *tradition de la qualité*). While it still holds on to an idea of cinema as a window on a self-contained diegesis, and while it generally respects the main rules of continuity editing, neorealism, Deleuze argues in the final pages of *Cinema 1*, loosens up the sensory-motor link without that it fully breaks it. Among neorealism’s

³⁷¹ Bazin, *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*, 308-9.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 309.

³⁷³ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 216.

main strategies in this regard is the transformation of its narrative spaces into “any-spaces-whatever” (*espaces-quelconque*), which unlike the qualified spaces of the “old realism” do “not yet appear as . . . real setting[s].”³⁷⁴ A space of wandering and aimless traveling, the any-space-whatever stands in a relation of mutual determination with its protagonists’ indeterminacy, with their sense of loss or being lost, with their lack of clear coordinates.

The *Cinema* books have played a crucial role in the rehabilitation of Bazin in the wake of structuralist and feminist film theory of the 1960s and 1970s. But does Deleuze also follow Bazin in his fundamental humanism? When we look at the pages that constitute the narrative hinge between *Cinema 1* and *2*, the answer to this question seems negative. Deleuze opens the first chapter of *Cinema 2* by stating that “[a]gainst those who defined Italian neo-realism by its social content, Bazin put forward the fundamental requirement of formal aesthetic criteria.”³⁷⁵ I agree with the last part of this observation, but I would also argue that what makes the vague but persistent longing for redemption that speaks from Bazin’s notion of pure cinema so compelling is precisely that it, at the risk of a humanist essentialism, integrates an aesthetics of reality with an ethics of representation that *also* depends on neorealism’s social content. “Neorealism” for Deleuze is thus not exactly the same as what it is for Bazin, at least not if we concentrate on Deleuze’s discussion of the trajectory from the movement-image (*Cinema 1*) to the time-

³⁷⁴ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 216. Elsewhere, in relation to Bresson’s *Pickpocket*, Deleuze defines the any-space-whatever as “a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its own parts, so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways.” (213)

³⁷⁵ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 1.

image (*Cinema 2*). (As I will discuss later in this chapter, later in *Cinema 2* Deleuze's theory of cinema in fact does line up with Bazin's secular-religious humanism.) Whereas the any-space-whatever is an ontological category, a cinematic glimpse of the "plane of immanence" that can really be invoked by *any* space, the spectacle of reality, a concept Bazin borrows from Cesare Zavattini, is simultaneously a phenomenological and a socio-historical category. On the one hand it refers to the contingency of the present moment as it is experienced by human consciousness. On the other hand it refers to an historical social reality, and specifically to the everyday reality of the street and the workplace, of the insignificant, of people and events in sum that in themselves are not very "cinogenic," but that filmmakers such as Rossellini, De Sica, Visconti and Fellini transformed into both the diegetic and profilmic subjects of art. Of course, "ordinary" men and women have been part of cinema since the Lumières' very first films and appear prominently in genres such as the Western and the melodrama. However, especially in the modes of narrative cinema that became dominant in the first half of the twentieth century (the cinema of the action-image), the representation of the lower classes remained much restricted by written and unwritten codes. Characters were rarely portrayed in their everyday lives, in their routines and misery, and in their struggles for a better life. In its choice of narratives, settings, shooting locations and actors, Italian neorealism was the first large-scale cinematic movement that broke with this representational paradigm. To cite Cesare Zavattini, the neorealists "were bored to death with heroes more or less imaginary" and instead sought to establish an encounter with "the real protagonist of

everyday life.”³⁷⁶ We may therefore say that the neorealist spectacle of reality constituted a doubly mimetic revolution. It created an aesthetic rupture with pre-World War II psychological realism, and it constituted a democratization of the cinematic image.

In order to understand the significance of the neorealist engagement with the ordinary and the everyday, it is instructive to briefly look at a similar revolution that took place in literature about a century and a half earlier, because we may argue that neorealism reiterated for cinema the transformation in the *distribution of the sensible* (*partage du sensible*) Jacques Rancière identifies in the early nineteenth century novel. By the distribution of the sensible Rancière means the way certain subjects and modes of artistic representation are connected to certain social groups. Under the representative regime tragedy and the *beaux-arts* were reserved for the noble, while comedy and genre painting dealt with the profane. In contrast, the aesthetic regime shatters such representational hierarchies and turns all and everything into potential subject matters for art.

The emergence of the aesthetic regime, Rancière argues, coincided with that of literature itself. Literature constituted “a new sensorium,” a more democratic way of “linking a power of sensory affection and a power of signification.”³⁷⁷ Rancière disagrees with interpretations of the crisis of representation in art as a transition from realism to non-figural expression, as in his view it was precisely the realist novel that emancipated resemblance from representation. Rancière sees himself corroborated by the critics who

³⁷⁶ Zavattini, “Some Ideas on the Cinema,” 225.

³⁷⁷ Jacques Rancière, “Politique de la littérature,” in *Politique de la littérature* (Paris: Galilée, 2007), pp. 11-40, p. 23.

denounced Flaubert at the time for, under the heading of realism, making everything “equal, equally representable.”³⁷⁸ Other than Flaubert and his “Bovary-effect” (see Chapter 1), the author Rancière considers emblematic for the new aesthetic sensorium is Balzac. “Perhaps Balzac’s and Flaubert’s sentences,” Rancière argues in “The Politics of Literature” (2007), “were mute stones, but those who uttered this judgment also knew that, in the age of archeology, of paleontology, and of philology, stones speak too.”³⁷⁹ This determination to give voice to “the mute witnesses of communal history,” is the principle upon which “the novel called realist” is based.³⁸⁰ This is why in Balzac’s stores all things—art and kitsch, prose and poetry, old stuff, new stuff, useful and useless objects, “an Indian pipe, a pneumatic machine”—intermingle into “a poem without ending.”³⁸¹ In this treatment of objects, persons and situations that previously would not have been deemed worthy of literary treatment resides the politics of the modern novel. “One does not consume in Balzac’s stores, one reads in them the symptoms of the new times, one recognizes in them the debris of a collapsed world, one encounters in them the equivalent of defunct mythological divinities.”³⁸²

Rancière’s claim that Balzac was one of the first who breached representational hierarchies is not entirely original. In *Mimesis* (1946) Erich Auerbach already presented Balzac, together with Stendhal, as the “creator of modern realism,” precisely because of

³⁷⁸ Jacques Rancière, *Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 120.

³⁷⁹ Rancière, “Politique de la littérature,” 23.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 29.

their detailed descriptions of contemporary, everyday reality.³⁸³ Auerbach points out, furthermore, that Balzac's mimetic descriptions are not mere potpourris of persons and objects liberated from their anonymity, but renderings of the organic and often demonic unity of the milieu of which they are part.³⁸⁴ Every milieu in Balzac, Auerbach argues, "becomes a moral and physical atmosphere which impregnates the landscape, the dwelling, the furniture, implements, clothing, physique, character, surroundings, ideas, activities, and fates of men, and at the same time the general historical situation reappears as a total atmosphere which envelops all its several milieus."³⁸⁵

Balzac's "atmospheric realism," he emphasizes, focuses primarily on the middle and lower bourgeoisie, whether Parisian or provincial, and pays relatively little attention to the lower strata of society.³⁸⁶ Nevertheless, in spite of its romantic and social-conservative undertones the work of Balzac, the shopkeeper and self-declared "secretary" of modern reality,³⁸⁷ contains the seed of a critique of capital. Rancière writes: "When Marx invites the reader to descend [*s'enfoncer*] with him into the hells of capitalist production like in the way science discovers them hidden underneath the banality of mercantile exchange, his textual reference is borrowed from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. But the hermeneutic gesture he accomplishes, that, is borrowed from the poetics of the Balzacian *Human Comedy*."³⁸⁸

³⁸³ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 468.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 472.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 473.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 473, 497.

³⁸⁷ Honoré de Balzac, "Society as Historical Organism," in Richard Ellmen ed., *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 248.

³⁸⁸ Rancière, "Politique de la littérature," 31.

In *Le Père Goriot* (1835) Balzac himself, by voice of his narrator, states the following about his explorations of the netherworld: “Paris est un véritable océan. Jetez-y la sonde, vous n’en connaîtrez jamais la profondeur. Parcourez-le, décrivez-le! . . . il s’y rencontrera toujours un lieu vierge, un antre inconnu, des fleurs, des perles, des monstres, quelque chose d’inouï, oublié par les plongeurs littéraires” (“Paris is a true ocean. Throw in your plumb, you will never know its depth. Traverse it, describe it! . . . you will always come across a virgin spot, an unknown cavern, flowers, pearls, monsters, something unheard of, forgotten by the divers of literature”).³⁸⁹ To traverse and describe, to narrate and expose: Following its protagonist in his furious quest to *parvenir*—from the provinces, via a sordid Quartier Latin boarding house, to the top of the world—the novel shows the reader around in the department store that is Paris while at the same time mapping the city’s socioeconomic structures.

According to Georg Lukács, by providing us with such slices of modern life, with an “infinitesimal fraction . . . of the incommensurable reality of its time,”³⁹⁰ Balzac’s oeuvre testifies to the *totality* of a capitalist system whose economic and ideological structures are ever closer integrated. Balzac, and “great realism” in general, manages to do so in Lukács’s view when it does justice to the “dialectical unity of appearance and essence” and penetrates the “surface of capitalism [that] appears to ‘disintegrate’ into a series of elements driven towards independence.”³⁹¹ Lukács’s position was severely

³⁸⁹ Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 34.

³⁹⁰ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 141.

³⁹¹ Lukács, “Realism in the Balance,” in Theodor Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 32-3.

critiqued by Theodor Adorno, who accused him of delimiting the notion of political literature to social realism while defying the autonomy of the artwork. In Adorno's view, Lukács thus remains "indifferent to the philosophical question of whether the concrete meaning of a work of art is in fact identical with the mere 'reflection of objective reality'."³⁹² For these same reasons Adorno did not share Lukács's love for Balzac. The "entire *Comédie humaine*," Adorno writes, "stands revealed as an imaginative reconstruction of the alienated world, i.e. of a reality no longer experienced by the individual subject."³⁹³

Regardless of who was right in this quarrel, I would argue that every practice called realist in the critical sense of the term predicates itself on a notion of totality and, concomitantly, the belief to bear witness, in an at least somewhat objective manner, to the socioeconomic relations that structure the desires and experiences of the modern subject. This also holds true for Italian neorealism. Like the realist novel, most neorealist films integrate their documents of everyday life into allegorical narrative structures that map the power relations shaping that everyday. Take again the example of *Ladri di biciclette*. Though I agree with Bazin and Deleuze that Antonio's and Bruno's search for the bike appears as a series of chance events, this does not prevent the protagonists' increasingly aimless wanderings from also having a clear function: to show us as much of Rome as

³⁹² Adorno, "Reconciliation under Duress," in Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, 153. Adorno mourns the disappearance of the Lukács of the *Theory of the Novel* (1916), in which the latter presents the novel as "the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God." By this Lukács means that the novel, as a product of the modern-capitalist era, is intrinsically expressive and thereby also redemptive of modern man's state of alienation. See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), p. 88.

³⁹³ Adorno, "Reconciliation under Duress," 163.

possible within the time-span of a feature-length film, including the city's internal contradictions and the institutions that help sustain or lack the power to change them. From the family to the trade union, from the pawn shop to the *Porta Portese*, and from the church to the fortune teller: *Ladri di biciclette* traverses and describes, to paraphrase Balzac, the Italian capital, in order to render visible the power relations that determine the indeterminacy of so many of its citizens.

Other than that they map social relations, the neorealists also express their hope for social and political change. Far from Balzac's ironic, at moments God-like outlook on his scale-model of contemporary France, the neorealists sought to imagine a new and more ethical Italy. As we have seen, Bazin characterized this endeavor as a humanism that expresses a simultaneous love and rejection of reality. Bazin wrote these words in 1948, at a moment when De Sica still had to create Toto's and his comrades' departure for a place where "good morning really means good morning" or Maria's morning routine, scenes in which the neorealist humanism arguably reaches its greatest heights. Simultaneously, precisely these two films by De Sica have been said to mark the ending of neorealism proper, for the reason that they would take flight from reality, whether literally and diegetically (*Miracolo a Milano*) or aesthetically and technically (the partially studio-shot *Umberto D*, which with its polished image strays far from aesthetic austerity, or the illusion thereof). Of course neorealism did not end with these films, but it certainly underwent a transformation from the early 1950s onward, if only because Italy, "the economic miracle," did. From films such as Rossellini's *Europa '51* (1952) and *Viaggio in Italia* (1954) onward, over the course of the decade and continuing into the

early 1960s, the neorealists increasingly focused on characters drawn from Italy's new bourgeoisie, while their outlook became increasingly bleak. Other than Rossellini, two "second-generation" neorealist directors who had a large role in this ongoing revolution of Italian cinema in the face of their nation's rocket launch into modern capitalism are Michelangelo Antonioni and Pier Paolo Pasolini.³⁹⁴ While films such as Antonioni's *Cronaca di un amore/Story of a Love Affair* (1950) and *L'Eclisse/Eclipse* (1962) present a critique of bourgeois boredom and alienated desire as vitriolic as the ones we find in Flaubert, Pasolini's *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962)—which star the neorealist icons Anna Magnani and Lamberto Maggiorani, respectively—carry the neorealist dream of a new Italy to its symbolic grave.

The kind of realism that resurged in 1990s young French cinema is in many respects the humanist, "Bazinian" neorealism of the immediate post-war period. It is a realism made on modest budgets and shot on location that combines dramatic—and often melodramatic—narrative structures with a documentary feel, that is characterized by a "natural" style of acting, whether by professionals or amateurs, and that is mainly concerned with the "small" people while it also explores, or at least hints at, larger structures. There are also differences. First, much more than in neorealism, the plot presentation in French new realism is motivated by character action and psychology. Second, even more than in neorealism, the new realist image is characterized by an intimist or affective texture. Other than the frequent use of handheld cameras and the haptic cinematography usually resulting from that practice, an important factor is the use

³⁹⁴ Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 9-10.

of direct sound and the general absence of nondiegetic music. In sum, whereas in many neorealist films the camera presents its protagonists from a certain, simultaneously literal and figurative distance, from where it bears witness to their wanderings in space, the new realist camera tends to depict its protagonists from up close. Formulated in Deleuze's terminology, on the one hand, new realism creates a less loosened-up, more conventional form of the action-image than neorealism. On the other hand, some of the new realist films can also be said to challenge the sensory-motor link of the action-image in different ways, by overstretching it until it bursts, or almost bursts, like it is the case in *Rosetta*, a film that like its protagonist has no time to wander and therefore repeatedly disorients its viewer, for example by skipping establishing shots. Later in this chapter I will return to the question of how the sensuous, haptic images of young French new realism can be related to Deleuze's categorization of cinematic images. First I will explore the main reasons for the emergence of this new realism in French cinema.

From Neo to New: Realism after the Modern Cinema

As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the young French new realism is part of a more general tendency toward intimate forms of narration, toward a cinema concerned with "life." To a significant degree this intimist turn can be attributed to the increased influence of television on cinematic production in France and Belgium. The *jeune cinéma* is also a *jeune ciné-télé*, as Will Higbee observes.³⁹⁵ From the late 1980s onward French cinema has become increasingly dependent on funds provided by terrestrial television

³⁹⁵ Higbee, "Towards a Multiplicity of Voices," 315.

channels. As the result of the audiovisual tax initiated by Jack Lang between 1985 and 1989, the share of contributions by television companies to the *Compte de soutien* rose from 8 to 53 percent (see Chapter 3). By the early 2000s the majority of French cinematic productions was coproduced by a French television channel (63 percent in 2004), even though the average share of television channels in productions à l’initiative française remained very minimal (only 0.07 percent in the same year).³⁹⁶ This paradox is explained by the advantages coproducing a cinematic production yields for French TV-channels. For example, by coproducing a French film a channel gains the right to broadcast that film two instead of the regular three years following its theatrical release.³⁹⁷ Inevitably this fact that television has become French cinema’s principal producer and consumer has had influence on the types of films made. As Susan Hayward argues, “many films . . . are overdetermined in favor of televisual rather than cinematographic practices. Thus considerations of pacing, sound track and narrative are patterned around the exigencies of broadcasting rather than screening. . . . Obviously, this progressive normalization of the product for the small screen leads to a hegemonic style that has little to with cinematic writing.”³⁹⁸

Hayward’s critique resonates with Lavin’s and Delorme’s critique of young French cinema. Leaving aside for now whether these critiques are justified, the *mariage forcé* between television and film has definitely had its impact on French auteur or art cinema. Since the early 1990s, two channels in particular have become major actors in

³⁹⁶ Hayward, *French National Cinema*, 67.

³⁹⁷ The exception is the specialized movie channel Canal, which only has to wait one year before it is allowed to broadcast a French production.

³⁹⁸ Hayward, *French National Cinema*, 67.

French art cinema. The first is the subscription and specialized movie channel Canal Plus. The other is the French-German network ARTE (Association Relative à la Télévision Européenne), which was founded in 1992. Like non-encoded French channels, Canal Plus is legally obliged to invest at least 3.2 percent of its budget in cinema productions. In addition to this, and unlike other channels, Canal Plus has to comply with a diversity clause that stipulates that 45 percent of its cinema budget is invested in productions with a low budget (up until about five million euro).³⁹⁹ By consequence, Canal Plus has become the principal coproducer of French cinema,⁴⁰⁰ including the *cinéma d'art et essai*. For example, as we have seen, both *Rosetta* and *L'humanité* were co-financed by Canal Plus.⁴⁰¹

Whereas the commitment of Canal Plus to a diverse French cinema is primarily driven by the legal stipulations regulating its commercial imperative, that of Arte forms an integral part of the channel's more general commitment to the diffusion of culture and the arts. The company has played a significant role in the emergence of the young French cinema, through its production arm La Sept Cinéma, as well as through its programming policy. In 1994 the channel produced and broadcasted the series *Tous les garçons et les filles de leur âge . . . /All the Boys and Girls of their Age*, which, together with the Appel à la désobéissance, has been considered a crucial event in the rejuvenation of French auteur cinema. This series consists of nine TV-films of about an hour each that engage

³⁹⁹ *Accord Canal+ 2005*, <http://www.larp.fr/dossiers/?p=631> (accessed August 15, 2012). Being a specialist movie channel, unlike other French channels, Canal Plus is allowed to screen French films only one year after their theatrical release.

⁴⁰⁰ During the 1990s the channel invested in 75-80 percent of all films à l'initiative française.

⁴⁰¹ Hayward, *French National Cinema*, 69.

post-war France from a youthful perspective. ARTE commissioned these films from a mixture of established and new auteurs, including Claire Denis, Olivier Assayas, Patricia Mazuy, André Téchiné, Cédric Kahn, and Chantal Akerman. Most of these films also had a longer cinema version. For example, Assayas's *La Page blanche* formed the basis for *L'Eau froide*. In subsequent years ARTE has co-produced films such as *Beau travail* (Claire Denis, 1999) and *Ressources humaines* (Cantet, 1999), both of which premiered on TV before they were shown in the French theaters. In 2000, in the vein of *Tous les garçons et les filles*, ARTE broadcasted a series of six TV-films under the title *Gauche/droite (Left/Right)*, including Erick Zonca's *Le Petit voleur (The Little Thief, 2000)* and Cabrera's *Nadia et les hippopotames*. Though both films only had a very limited theatrical run, especially the latter has become a much cited example in discourses about the renewed political engagement of French auteur cinema.

To a significant extent the product of the marriage between television and cinema, young French cinema has ruptured with the two tendencies that dominated French cinema during the 1980s and the early 1990s. The first is the spectacular *cinéma du look*, the French answer to the Hollywood blockbuster (e.g., Besson's *Subway*, and Leos Carax's *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf/The Lovers on the Bridge* [1991]). The other is the nostalgic heritage film (e.g., *Le Retour de Martin Guerre/The Return of Martin Guerre* [Daniel Vigne, 1982], and of course Berri's 1993 *Germinal*). In contrast to these two big-budget, high-production-value tendencies, the new filmmakers of the 1990s returned to the auteur model of the New Wave.

At the same time, however, young French cinema has also clearly distanced itself from the New Wave and its aftermath. Stylistically, by returning to more conventionally realist modes of storytelling, cinematography and editing, young French cinema has ruptured with the modernist, self-reflexive aesthetics that characterizes much of the work of filmmakers associated with the New Wave. Instead, young French cinema, especially in its new realist manifestations, has restored the faith in cinema's potential to offer a window on our world. Thematically, in their choice of protagonists, the French new realists have moved away from the tendency in 1950s—1980s French auteur cinema to mainly draw their protagonists from the Parisian middle-class or artistic circles. Furthermore, as argued in the previous two chapters, in its frequent choice of provincial locations, new realism, and young French cinema in general, has partially decentralized French cinema, a centrifugal move from Paris to the margins of the hexagon that has been directly linked to the development of funding programs for film and television productions in regions such as Rhône-Alpes and Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

In order to grasp how the young French new realists relate to the New Wave, it is necessary to understand the influence of Italian neorealism—as well as Bazin's writings on neorealism—on the New Wave. This revolution that took place in French cinema in the late 1950s was largely kindled on the same *Cahiers du cinéma* pages where Bazin developed his ideal of pure cinema. Bazin died the day after Truffaut had started shooting *Les 400 coups* and we can therefore only speculate as to whether Bazin would have been willing to modernize his ideal in order for it to include the more self-reflexive, less redemptive aesthetics of Godard and Truffaut. What is certain is that the *Cahiers*

filmmakers were much inspired by Bazin, even though as Dudley Andrew writes in his preface to *Opening Bazin* (2011), the *exact* way how they were is difficult to determine:

The phrase “Nouvelle Vague” should be read as a play on words, a historical inversion that transforms the first term into a noun and the second into an adjective. Thus “New Wave” becomes “vague news,” or uncertain gospel.” Indeed what the New Wave directors received in the transmission from Bazin can only be called vague. Truffaut, Godard, Rohmer, Chabrol—all of them disagreed with the Bazinian criteria for cinematic value: don’t they champion “small subjects,” set against the “important topics” their master had always believed went hand in hand with great cinema? Still, they absorbed his lessons about Renoir and Rossellini (the play of amateurism, the mixture of actors and ordinary people), and they generally agreed with the key principles of his ontological realism.

But how can one stick to so-called Bazinian ideas and yet oppose their historical, sociological, and political consequences? Failing to apply the general idea of cinematic realism in their treatment of individual films, one after the next, the New Wave critics had to remain “vague” if they were to remain Bazinian in any sense at all. This was especially true as their own films moved further from rendering a conception of the world, becoming increasingly focused on a conception of cinema (although Bazin preached that one should not divorce these). Still a larger transmission occurred, larger because much more vague: the transmission of a philosophical idea, which does not personally belong to Bazin, though he knew how to phrase it properly: the idea of mimesis.⁴⁰²

The last part of Andrew’s argument could be specified further. The idea of mimesis that the New Wave generation took from Bazin was only a deliberately *vague* idea. Like the neorealists, the New Wave directors sought to capture the indeterminate, fleeting nature of the present moment, and render character movement immanent to narrative space. The New Wave was, however, not so much concerned with remaining faithful to the reality of everyday life, certainly not in the way the first neorealist

⁴⁰² Dudley Andrew, “A Binocular Preface,” in Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin eds., *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and its Afterlife* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. ix-xvi, p. xv.

generation was. As in opposition to Bazin's "doubly mimetic" ideal of a practice of cinematic writing that puts its cinematographic impressions of profilmic life in the service of a simultaneously ontological and historical idea of reality, the ideal that connects the major New Wave films integrates the sense of the street into a *l'art pour l'art* approach to filmmaking that is primarily concerned with "cinema." In other words, at its most modernist the New Wave does away with the Bazinian idea of reality as the external referent for cinematic value and instead emphasizes its own artificiality.

Deleuze welcomes this rupture as one that affirms life, "life" understood in a Nietzschean sense, that is to say as an all-expressive, preindividual will-to-power: "The neorealist resolution still retained a reference to a form of the true, although it profoundly renewed it, and certain authors were freed from it in their development. But the New Wave deliberately broke with the form of the true to replace it by the powers of life, cinematographic powers considered to be more profound."⁴⁰³ According to Deleuze, the New Wave thus completed the crisis of action initiated by neorealism, in that it liberated the cinematic image from the already loosened-up sensory-motor link. Deleuze recognizes in films such as *Tirez sur le pianiste/Shoot the Pianist* (François Truffaut, 1960), *Paris nous appartient/Paris Belongs to Us* (Jacques Rivette, 1961), and *Les Carabiniers* "the sign of a new realism." Opposing itself to the "old" realism of narrative-driven cinema, this new realism is concerned with "making-false" (*faire-faux*) rather than

⁴⁰³ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 131.

“making-true.” As Deleuze writes, “clumsy fights, badly aimed punches or shots, a whole out-of-phase of action and speech replace the too perfect duels of American Realism.”⁴⁰⁴

The new realism Deleuze embraces in the *Cinema* books is in almost all respects the opposite of the one this chapter is concerned with. It is the *expressive* realism of a cinema of time, “time” understood as a “new pure present,”⁴⁰⁵ rather than the representational realism of a cinema of movement. Let’s have a closer look at the philosophical underpinnings of this transition from movement to time that structures Deleuze’s project. In *Reading the Figural; or, Philosophy after the New Media* (2001) David Rodowick draws a convincing parallel between this transition and the emergence of poststructuralist theory in France. “Only in France was this experimentation philosophically possible.” Rodowick writes. “From *The Order of Things* to *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, there runs a Nietzschean thread that passes between philosophy, film theory, and film practice as an extraordinary examination of time and history both in philosophy and in cinema.”⁴⁰⁶

We can further specify this Nietzschean thread as the endeavor to envision, in concepts and images, the shattering of what Foucault calls the modern episteme, an episteme being the substratum of the way the visible is linked to the utterable. In *Les mots et les choses (The Order of Things)*, which was published in 1966 (four years after Deleuze’s *Nietzsche et la philosophie*), Foucault argues that the modern episteme became dominant in Western culture around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The modern

⁴⁰⁴ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 217-8.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ David Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after the New Media* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 187-8.

episteme is characterized by a crisis of representation and succeeds the classical episteme, which gained dominance during the early Renaissance. Whereas under the classical episteme there exists a distance between human discourse and things, allowing people to classify the world around them into representations from which they themselves remain absent, under the modern episteme the fundamental difference between discourse and things disappears. Everything becomes a sign, including the human subject who is revealed in his or her finitude, “a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but the [limitation of man’s] own existence as fact.”⁴⁰⁷

In the final pages of *The Order of Things* Foucault unveils the drive behind his “archaeology of the Same,” which is to reach beyond this all-too-human finitude and to confront the unthought he calls man’s “double.” It is a dangerous expedition, because as we know from doppelgänger legends, to literally encounter oneself means to stare into the face of death. This death of the human form is precisely what Foucault heralds. After all, “man” is only a recent invention. With the modern episteme nearing its end, man’s face, “drawn in sand at the edge of the sea,” will soon be engulfed by the waves of Time, or what Deleuze calls the “new pure present” of the time-image. As Deleuze emphasizes at the end of his study of Foucault, which appeared in 1986 (one year after *Cinema 2*), this death of man and the concomitant arrival of the “superman” (or overman) implies a change of concept rather than the actual disappearance of living men. “It is the advent of

⁴⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 315.

a new form that is neither God nor man and which, it is hoped, will not prove worse than its two previous forms.”⁴⁰⁸

Though cinema was born in the modern era, the kind of narrative cinema that Deleuze refers to as the action-image still corresponds to the classical episteme. According to Deleuze cinema only became truly modern when it started to transition from movement to time, liberating both camera and spectator from their “invisible” positions. Some of the most poignant reflections on this reiteration of the crisis of representation in cinema we find in Godard’s *Les Carabiniers* and *Le Mépris/Contempt*, both from 1963 (so three years before the publication of *The Order of Things*), and both films that bear the mark of Rossellini. *Les Carabiniers* was based on a screenplay by the Italian filmmaker, who in turn had based it on a 1945 play by Beniamino Joppolo. *Le Mépris*, besides being an adaptation of Alberto Moravia’s *Il Disprezzo* (1954), is a variation on *Viaggio in Italia*. (Godard credits Rossellini’s film implicitly, through the inclusion of a poster on the front of the movie theater his protagonists visit.)

To start with *Les Carabiniers*: a gritty black-and-white, newsreel-style neorealist film sliced up with Rembrandt reproductions, fashion ads and World War II footage, *Les Carabiniers* is a film about war, representation, and the representation of war in film. In the beginning, Ulysse (Marino Masé) and Michel-Ange (Patrice Moullet) enlist themselves to fight in name of the king, and it is the name of the king, so they are assured toward the end of the film, that guarantees that they will be duly compensated for their heroic deeds once the king has won the war. Until then, however, they will have to

⁴⁰⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 132.

content themselves with images, literally. Ulysse and Michel-Ange bring home piles of postcards corresponding to categories and subcategories of things. Monuments, antiquity: the pyramids, the Parthenon, the Colosseum. Means of transport, rail transport: diesel engine, BB-9003, and so on for seven more minutes. Representations: that is what Ulysse and Michel-Ange have fought for, *plus* the firm belief that representations have a direct referent in reality, and perhaps even partake in the existence of that referent and thus, not unlike the photograph according to its Bazinian ontology, cease to be representations.

The epistemological enclave the protagonists of *Les Carabiniers* inhabit is, as emphasized by their names, a combination of what Foucault refers to as the classical *and* the pre-classical episteme. Unlike as it is the case under the classical episteme, under the pre-classical episteme there is no fundamental difference between words and things. Culture and nature still form an organic whole, so that discourse has no need for representations and simply speaks the single language of things. It is the world of *The Odyssey* for example. As Fritz Lang explains in *Le Mépris*: “Le monde d’Homer est un monde réel. Le poète appartenait à une civilisation qui se développait en accord et non en opposition avec la nature. Et la beauté de L’Odyssée réside justement dans cette croyance en la réalité comme elle est” (“The world of Homer is a real world. The poet belonged to a civilization that developed in harmony with and not in opposition to nature. The beauty of the *Odyssey* lies precisely in this belief in reality as it is”). Lang speaks these words to Paul (Michel Piccoli) who in the director’s eyes makes the mistake of projecting his own modern, neurotic odyssey (his relationship trouble with Camille [Brigitte Bardot]), onto the one he is adapting for the screen. Shot in Technicolor and Cinemascope, *Le Mépris*

opens with a long take filmed at location at the Cinecittà studios in which we see a film crew working on a tracking shot. With the diegetic camera slowly moving into our direction, a male voice-over recites the credits, famously concluding: “‘Le cinéma,’ disait André Bazin, ‘substitue à nos regards un monde qui s'accorde à nos désirs.’ *Le Mépris* est l’histoire de ce monde” (“‘Cinema,’ André Bazin said, ‘substitutes for our gazes a world that accords itself to our desires.’ *Le Mépris* is the story of that world”). The quotation Godard attributes to Bazin is in fact a misquotation of a different *Cahiers* critic, but, nevertheless, captures Bazin’s cinematic ideal fairly well.⁴⁰⁹ As we have seen, for Bazin cinema, at those moments it creates the illusion of its own disappearance, has the redemptive power to, in our eyes, free reality of its contingencies. Godard does not seem to share in this idealism. In contrast, in correspondence with Michel’s claim in *Le Petit soldat*—Godard’s third film that saw the light in 1963, after having been banned in France for three years—that “cinéma, c’est vingt-quatre fois la vérité par seconde” (“cinema is truth twenty-four times a second”), Godard self-consciously inscribes himself in a modern paradigm in which signs and images have lost their intrinsic value and the classical distance between observer and representation has been shattered.⁴¹⁰ As Raould

⁴⁰⁹ This critic is Michel Mourlet, who wrote: “Le cinéma est un regard qui se substitue au nôtre pour nous donner un monde qui s’accorde à nos désirs.” (“Sur un art ignoré,” *Cahiers du Cinéma* 98 [1959]: 23-37, p. 34)

⁴¹⁰ This line has frequently been cited as if it were Godard’s own aphorism about cinema. Maybe it indeed was when he made *Le Petit soldat*, and maybe it has always been in a way, even after his digital turn in *Film socialisme/Socialism* (2010) and *Adieu and langage* (2013, expected). After all “cinema” and “truth” are very malleable concepts. The point is that it was not Godard, but his protagonist that makes this statement. Michael Haneke, not known for his sense of irony, has put it nicely: “My perspective on that, my article of faith, is that I’ve adapted Godard’s observation to read, ‘Film is a lie at twenty-four frames per second in the service of truth.’ Film is an artificial construct. It pretends to construct reality. But it doesn’t do that—it’s a manipulative form. It’s a lie that can reveal the truth. But if a film isn’t a work of art, it’s just complicit with the

Coutard's diegetic camera emphasizes at the end of the opening sequence of *Le Mépris*: *We*, modern viewers, are the subjects of the film's microscopic analysis of modern love.

Speaking about love: What has happened to the neorealist "love" that forms the fundament of the coming into being of "the new image"? Deleuze raises this question in conclusion to *Cinema 1*, expressing his worry that in a modern, falsifying cinema all images have come to resemble the clichés they seek to expose, with the result that images do not really express anything except for their being part of a world of images. Deleuze sees his concern shared by Godard: "We will find in Godard formulas which express the problem: if images have become clichés, internally as well as externally, how can an Image be extracted from all these clichés, 'just an image,' an autonomous mental image?"⁴¹¹ Deleuze finds the answer to this problem in the time-image, which in its liberation of cinematic expression from the last, modern shackles of representation offers a glimpse of the "death of man." As Deleuze writes in relation to the crystal image, the type of time-image that expresses time most directly: "[I]t is time that we *see in the crystal* . . . the perpetual foundation of time, Cronos and not Chronos. This is the powerful, non-organic Life which grips the world."⁴¹²

When considered from the perspective of the narrative thread running through

process of manipulation." Cited in Richard Porton, "Collective Guilt and Individual Responsibility: An Interview with Michael Haneke," *Cinéaste* 31.1 (2005): 50-1, p. 51.

⁴¹¹ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 218-9.

⁴¹² Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 79, emphasis in original. Deleuze also writes: "The crystal is expression. Expression moves from the mirror to the seed" (72). This passage resonates with one from *Expressionism in Philosophy (Spinoza et le problème de l'expression)*, the other place that Deleuze's expressive turn finds its clearest formulation: "Expressionist philosophy brings with it two traditional metaphors: that of a mirror which reflects or reflects upon an image, and that of a seed which 'expresses' the tree as a whole." (Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p. 80.)

Cinema 1 and *Cinema 2*—from a classical, representational cinema that depends on a “form of the true” to a modern or even post-human, expressive cinema that creates its own truths—the return of a more conventional and often overtly humanist form of realism in young French cinema can only be considered a regression, a development that leads the art of cinema back to a more naive, less skeptical state. As already stated in relation to Lavin’s and Delorme’s critique of young French cinema, I would not completely disagree with such a verdict. Young French cinema has not revolutionized the art of cinema in the way neorealism and the New Wave did and it certainly lacks those movements’ aesthetic diversity. In the final two sections I will argue though that new realism, when developed in its fullest affective and conceptual potential, becomes a cinema of life, a cinema that challenges, and that has remained somewhat repressed by, the “modern cinema.”

Before doing so, I would like to make a short *sur place* in this chapter that gravitates toward French and young French cinema, in order to once again cross the border and zoom in on francophone Belgian cinema. As we have seen in previous chapters, Belgian fiction cinema was born as a modern auteur cinema. Whereas in France the notion of auteurism was launched by critics and filmmakers as part of their oedipal struggle against their country’s cinematic tradition, francophone Belgian cinema, in its absence of such a dominant *cinéma du papa*, has been much less iconoclastic in its modernity. As Philippe Dubois writes, “[i]f modernity feeds itself on rupture and

rejection, Belgium clearly lacked nourishment. Whence, perhaps, a less ‘reactive’ but also a more positive modernity. Nothing to destroy, everything to build.”⁴¹³

Belgian, that is to say francophone Belgian but increasingly also Flemish, cinema is characterized by a certain lightness, a lack of pretension, and above all a sense of humor, “a mischievous or biting humour that,” as Maryline Laurin puts it, “foregrounds a self-mockery, a strong ability to make fun of oneself without self-denigration.”⁴¹⁴ We encounter this *belgitude* in international successes such as *C’est arrivé près de chez vous*, *Ma vie en Rose* (Alain Berliner, 1997), *Une liaison pornographique/A Pornographic Affair* (Frédéric Fonteyne, 1999), *Nue propriété/Private Property* (Joachim Lafosse, 2006), *Ex-Drummer* (Koen Mortier, 2007), and *De Helaasheid der Dingen/The Misfortunates* (Felix van Groeningen, 2009). We also find it in the films that, in previous chapters, I discussed as part of the Walloon cinema of the real, including for example *Déjà s’envole la fleur maigre* (“Nous sommes tous des comédiens”), *Jeudi on chantera comme dimanche* (and its commercially sponsored happy end), and *Les Convoyeurs attendent* (in which a father goes lengths to have his son break the world record of walking through a door). Moreover, in response to Luc Dardenne’s worry following the release of *Rosetta* that “people may even start to accuse us that we have no humor,”⁴¹⁵ I object that even that film has its sparse moments of lightness. Think of Riquet’s poor

⁴¹³ Philippe Dubois, “De la modernité et de ses nuances belges,” in Dubois & Arnoldy eds., *Ça tourne depuis cent ans*, p. 83.

⁴¹⁴ Maryline Laurin, “Il était une fois le cinéma belge (4/4): le verdict!”, *Cinevox* (March 11, 2012), <http://www.cinevox.be/il-etait-une-fois-le-cinema-belge-44-sans-pretention> (accessed March 24, 2013).

⁴¹⁵ Cited in Vincent Thabourey, “Les Nouvelles saisons du cinéma belge,” *Positif 576* (2009): 92-3, p. 92.

gymnastic skills, which make even Rosetta smile. Finally, the above characterization of the Belgian cinematic spirit applies to the other tendency that, together with the Walloon cinema of the real, has been dominant in francophone Belgium, and which we may refer to as the *cinéma de l'imaginaire*. This cinema of the imaginary unites the magic realism and surrealism of Delvaux to films such as *Toto le héros* (Van Dormael), *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Hänsel, 1995), *Eldorado* and *Les Géants/The Giants* (2011) by Bouli Lanners, *Quand la mer monte...*, *Home* (Ursula Meier, 2008), and also the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the “*cinéaste de l'absurde*” who has only made very low-key productions.

As is clear from the fact that some of the above listed examples of the *cinéma de l'imaginaire* I discussed earlier in the context of the Walloon *cinéma du réel*, these two tendencies are closely intertwined. Vincent Thabourey writes: “This [Belgian] cinema defines itself by a surprising pendular movement between the social observation and a pure fantasy that inscribe themselves in a historicity that is perfectly taken on. It finds its singularity in a permanent provocation, a facetious rebellion that never forgets to accord a tender and consoling benevolence to the human being [*l'être humain*].”⁴¹⁶ A crucial determinant factor of this unity in diversity of francophone Belgian cinema is its smallness. Many of its filmmakers attended the same film schools (INSAS, IAD), and onscreen we often encounter the same faces. For example, two of the actors the Dardennes have frequently worked with, Patrizio Rongione (Riquet) and Jérémie Renier (e.g., Bruno in *L'Enfant*), also appear in the films by Lafosse (*Ça rend heureux* [2006]

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 93

and *Nue propriété*), while another “Dardennes actor,” Olivier Gourmet (e.g., Olivier in *Le Fils*, and the trailer park janitor in *Rosetta*), also appears in Meier’s *Home* (alongside the French Isabelle Huppert, who we also encounter in *Nue propriété*) as well as in *Quand la mer monte...* This last film’s cast also includes Bouli Lanners, who also appears in *Toto le héros*, *Les Convoyeurs attendent* and his own *Eldorado*.

The other reason for this frequent encounter between the real and the imaginary is that the struggle for the good, or at least a better, life is often best expressed in images imbued with dreams and fantasies. In the spirit of *Miracolo a Milano*, francophone Belgian, and in particular Walloon, neorealism and new realism often redeem raw reality with everyday magic. We may think again of *Déjà s’envole la fleur maigre* and *Les Convoyeurs attendent*, as well as of *Le Gamin au vélo*, the Dardennes’ predominantly sunny take on *Ladri di biciclette*. In addition, many Walloon films that are not directly crisis-oriented still make felt the region’s historical reality. For example, even though in his films Lanners transforms the region’s fields and forests into widescreen, almost North-American settings for an absurdist road movie (*Eldorado*) or a summer vacation fairytale (*Les Géants*), their big plains and Arcadia remain unmistakably Walloon, while the time of their “once upon” is stamped by the historical present.

This excursus to Belgian cinema and its inherently idiosyncratic intimism forms a minor narrative within the genealogy of young “French” new realism that this chapter aims at. It is a narrative that partly contrasts with, and that somewhat mitigates the major, predominantly French narrative thread—“realism after modern cinema”—that I have developed in this section and that I will now rejoin.

The Life-Image

This is the narrative of a realism that, by distancing itself from the modernist, bourgeois, literary-minded and Parisian-centered tendencies of the New Wave, reclaims the neorealist heritage, including its humanism, in order to render visible the margins and the marginalized at the turn of the twenty-first century. New realism restores, moreover, the neorealist belief in the truth of the image, a faith that seemed to have been crushed by modern forms of cinema, including the ones we find in the New Wave. However, new realism does not simply react to and succeed the New Wave. First of all, as discussed earlier the young French filmmakers have inherited from the New Wave the production practices and the “idea of mimesis” that the New Wave on its turn inherited from Italian neorealism. Second, in many films by directors from the New Wave generation, we already find elements of what we might call a new realist engagement with contemporary France. One can think here of Claude Chabrol’s chronicling of provincial life and Agnès Varda’s depictions of marginalized characters and population groups in *Sans toit ni loi/Vagabond* (1985)—with Sandrine Bonnaire—and *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse/The Gleaners & I* (2000). Third, to yet another extent new realism is the continuation of the long French tradition of socially critical, humanist, in short Bazinian realism, a tradition that during the New Wave and post-New Wave years was kept alive by, above all, Bresson—whose *Pickpocket* came out in 1959—and Pialat, who as discussed in the second chapter was of the same generation as many New Wave auteurs, but only started to make films when the New Wave proper was over.

Bresson is present throughout in the *Cinema* books. Pialat, however, who by the

time of *Cinema 2* (1985) had already made seven feature length films, is entirely absent from them. Is this absence accounted for by Deleuze, or does it perhaps reveal a blind spot in his narrative? As Deleuze explains from the outset, his project “is not a history of the cinema” but “an attempt at the classification of images and signs,” of cinematic forms of life we may add.⁴¹⁷ Much like in Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, the narrative that runs through *Cinema 1* and *2* is at once linear and non-linear. At some points Deleuze comes very close to a presentation of the transition from movement to time as a historical trajectory: “around 1948, Italy; about 1958 France; about 1968 Germany.”⁴¹⁸ At other moments he emphasizes that the “direct time-image” is not a post-World War II invention, but “a phantom which has always haunted the cinema [that] it took modern cinema to give a body to.”⁴¹⁹ In the same vein, Deleuze shows himself aware that also with the promise of the time-image having become flesh, the action-image continues to be around: “the greatest commercial successes always take that route, but the soul of the cinema no longer does. The soul of the cinema demands increasing thought.”⁴²⁰

May we conclude from this that in Deleuze’s view films such as *L’Enfance nue*, *La Gueule ouverte/The Mouth Agape* (1974) and *A nos amours/To Our Loves* (1983) remain excluded from cinema’s soul in the form it had actualized itself in post-New Wave France? For Deleuze, the post-new-wave French cinema that *mattered*, that continued the materialization of cinema’s soul, is a cinema of bodies: “Since the New

⁴¹⁷ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, xix.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴¹⁹ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 40.

⁴²⁰ *Cinema 1*, 210. The first sentence actually reads: “People continue to make SAS and ASA films.” Here “S” refers to “situation” and “A” to “action,” “SAS” and “ASA” indicating the respective logics that structure the large and small form of the action-image.

Wave, every time there was a fine and powerful film, there was a new exploration of the body in it.”⁴²¹ Deleuze lists the examples of Chantal Akerman, Jean Eustache, Jacques Doillon, and Philippe Garrel. In his view these directors enriched the modern cinema that had been constructed on the “ruins . . . of the action-image” with a voyeurism of “postures” and “attitudes” (Jeanne Dielman’s real-time peeling of potatoes, the infinite *pas-de-trois* between Alexandre, Marie and Veronika in *La Maman et la putain/The Mother and the Whore* [1973], etc.), a voyeurism in which postures and attitudes undergo an “imperceptible passage” to “gesture.” Generalizing Bertolt Brecht’s notion of it, Deleuze defines gesture or gest as a “link or knot of attitudes” that instead of depending on a preexisting story, on an action-image, “carries out a direct theatricalization of bodies, often very discreet, because it takes place independently of any role.”⁴²² Other than the ones mentioned, the filmmaker Deleuze considers emblematic for this passage to gesture is John Cassavetes (as we saw, also a favorite of Lavin and Delorme):

The greatness of Cassavetes’ work is to have undone the story, plot, or action, but also space, in order to get to attitudes as to categories which put time into the body, as well as thought into life. When Cassavetes says that characters must not come from a story or plot, but that the story should be secreted by the characters, he sums up the requirement of the cinema of bodies: the character is reduced to his own bodily attitudes, and what ought to result is the gest, that is, a “spectacle,” a theatricalization or dramatization which is valid for all plots.⁴²³

Pialat’s cinema of bodies has often been compared to that of Cassavetes. The difference between the two is even more revealing though, as it allows me to infer why

⁴²¹ *Cinema 2*, 189.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 185, 189-90.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 185.

Deleuze passes over Pialat in his treatment of the French post-new-wave. Philippe Lubac formulates this difference as follows: “John Cassavetes’ actors *perform* unpredictability, whereas, in Pialat, actors such as Monsieur and Madame Thierry [in *L’Enfance nue*] are unpredictable.”⁴²⁴ Similarly, Kent Jones writes:

Where the breaks in a Cassavetes film are strictly behavior-oriented, getting at the essential unpredictability of people, Pialat’s often feel like frayed-edge manifestations of Tarkovsky’s “pressure of time.” The exquisite agony of the moment, which must always come to an end, the transience of experience, eternally invigorating and just as frustrating—few filmmakers have ever come as close to capturing it on film.⁴²⁵

Pialat brought to great heights the dialectic between the real bodies acting in front of his camera and the fictional, acted bodies that ended up on the screen. At their most powerful, his films achieve a short-circuit between the acting and the acted. By such a short-circuit I do not mean the mere coincidence between actor and character, whether that coincidence results from the becoming-character of an actress whose performance is so virtuous and convincing that it becomes eerie (e.g., Juliette Binoche/Anne in *Code inconnu/Code Unknown* [Michael Haneke, 2000]), or takes the form of an amateur acting himself as good or bad as he can (Lamberto Maggiorani/Antonio in *Ladri di biciclette*). In both examples the character appearance is highly affective, but also somewhat one-dimensional, and, in the case of *Code inconnu*, even a little cold and clinical (affects, it should be noted, that very much befit Haneke’s ruthless vivisection of the Western

⁴²⁴ Philippe Lubac, “Maurice Pialat and John Cassavetes,” trans. Inge Pruks, *Senses of Cinema* 35 (2005), http://sensesofcinema.com/2005/feature-articles/pialat_and_cassavetes/ (accessed March 1, 2013), emphases in original.

⁴²⁵ Kent Jones, “Lightning in a Bottle: Maurice Pialat Profile,” *Film Comment* 40.3 (2004): 32.

bourgeois subject). No, by the acting/acted short-circuit I mean that *je ne sais quoi* that occurs when the tension between the acting and the acted reaches such levels that acting almost but not quite breaks down and starts to give way to the acting that is acting through the body struggling to keep hiding itself in the act. At such instances, the acting and the acted body appear at one and the same time, separate yet held together by the real, sparkling non-acted joy of acting that has taken possession of the person who is acting that she's not acting, and that somehow, in all its colors, has transferred itself to the other side, the screen, the site of the acted. What we see in that flash that is the acting/acted-body is not merely the becoming-human of the onscreen character but above all the becoming-actor of the person in front of the camera.

Pialat knew what he wanted, sort of, intuitively, but that is the point, and his challenge was to bring it about in his casting and directing. Kent Jones recalls an anecdote he was told by an actress (Else Zylberstein) who played a prostitute in *Van Gogh* (1991): “Working with Pialat was like trying to walk a straight line in a funhouse after downing a quart of vodka. Lightning in a bottle—a motto, a working principle, an instinct, a way of life. ‘Stop—what you’re doing now, that’s exactly what I want,’ he would tell Elsa. ‘What?’ she would ask. ‘You just lost it!’ ‘What did I just lose?!?’”⁴²⁶ The more talented the actor, whether experienced or not, the more powerful the result of those *pas-de-deux*, which holds especially true for the films in which they are carried out right in front of the camera’s eye. Let me concentrate on the example of *A nos amours*. The film revolves around the coming-of-age of the fifteen-year old Suzanne inasmuch as

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 32.

it revolves around the becoming-actress of Sandrine Bonnaire, who was sixteen at the time of the film's making and who Pialat "discovered" through a call for extras. As it is often the case with Pialat, *A nos amours* is an explicitly imperfect film with ellipses that do not get accounted for, and loose ends that are never really tied up. The film was based on a script by Arlette Langmann, but during the shooting Pialat also frequently deviated from the script, and many of its scenes are the result of improvisation. This method of working made Pialat the veritable inheritor of Jean Renoir. As Alain Bergala writes in *Cahiers du cinéma*: "Like Renoir, Pialat must be convinced that the search for perfection has never made the force of an artwork and that cinema's worst enemy is a plan [*plan*, which also means shot in French] to be carried out, the architect's blueprint that Renoir has always hated. Like Renoir he prefers to paint the bouquet from the side he has not prepared it."⁴²⁷

In *A nos amours* this strategy of the making-impromptu of staged situations reaches its apogee in the family dinner scene toward the end, a scene through which Pialat shows his allegiance to the French realism of the 1930s, to Renoir but also to Marcel Pagnol. Pialat had not written out this fifteen minute scene, nor had he prepared his actors for the return of the never-named father, a role he had reserved for himself.⁴²⁸ After a diatribe with Jacques, his diegetic son's brother-in-law, about the position of auteur cinema in France—a dialogue that picks up on the actual polemic Pialat had at the time with the film magazine *Cinématographe* for which the actor who played Jacques

⁴²⁷ Alain Bergala, "Maurice Pialat: un marginal du centre," *Cahiers du cinéma* 354 (1983): 20-1, p. 21.

⁴²⁸ See Ginette Vincendeau, "Therapeutic Realism: Maurice Pialat's *A nos amours*," in Ginette Vincendeau and Susan Hayward eds., (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 258-68, p. 262.

(Jacques Fieschi) wrote⁴²⁹—the father and the camera turn toward Suzanne, the only person in this crazy family who still loves him. “N’est-ce pas mademoiselle Suzanne?” (“Right Miss Suzanne?”), he asks her. Suzanne/Bonnaire, remains silent for a second, pensive, biting her finger nail, on her guard. “T’es comme eux?” (“Are you like them?”), her father continues. “Non mais . . . ,” she responds. “Mais en ce moment,” Pialat steps up the pressure, the camera still framing her, seated between her possessive brother and her rather dull fiancé, “qui a raison, eux ou moi? Où tu es?” (“But who is right now, they or I? Where do you stand?”) “Elle a pas à choisir?” (“She doesn’t have to choose”), Jacques, off-screen, jumps in. “Ah, pourquoi” (“Why?”), Pialat ignores him, upon which the camera cuts to the father before panning back toward her, “Où tu es-toi?” (“Where do you stand?”). “Moi je suis là” (“I’m here”), and finally Suzanne’s *tristesse* gives way to her disarming smile, acted or not.

This scene could hardly stand in starker contrast with the alienating obsession with bodies Deleuze saw and wished to see in post-new-wave cinema. In difference with the voyeuristic, thought-inciting, and distant outlook on postures and attitudes that in their passage to gesture express the preindividual, prehuman power of the false, the kind of obsession with bodies we find in Pialat, but also in the Dardennes and Dumont, produces an intimate, affective cinema that affirms but also examines a notion of individual human life. We might refer to the kind of image that this cinema produces as

⁴²⁹ Pialat’s rendering of this on-screen attack is not entirely fair game, not only because Fieschi had not been able to prepare himself for this prepared attack, but also because in the shot-reverse-shot between them only Fieschi’s responses were actually recorded during this dinner “itself,” whereas the shots of Pialat were, necessitated by the demands of continuity editing, recorded later, making them doubly rehearsed. (See Vincendeau, “Therapeutic Realism.”)

the acting/acted-image, or simply the life-image.⁴³⁰ Like the time-image, the life-image is not a recent invention. Aspects of it are found everywhere that cinema gives the impression of integrating into its staged realities, whether fictional or documentary, immediate traces of “humanity,” and go as far back as that film in which we see workers acting that they are not acting that they are leaving the Lumière factory. Nor is the life-image the equivalent of a “Cinema 3.” To present it as such would mean to pass over other recent developments in the medium, whether or not they have been spurred by the digital revolution. (One may think here for example of the “mind-game film,” a category coined by Thomas Elsaesser that includes works such as *Memento* [Christopher Nolan, 2000], *Mulholland Dr.* [David Lynch, 2001], and *Caché/Hidden* [Michael Haneke, 2005]⁴³¹).

Instead, the concept of the “life-image” helps us to identify Deleuze’s blind spot for post-World War II forms of cinema, and especially French cinema, that without necessarily relying on the methods of “old,” psychological realism appeal to affect rather than thought, in order to express and affirm an at least somewhat classically humanist

⁴³⁰ In the essay “Three Theses on the Life-Image (Deleuze, Cinema-Bio-politics)” Cesare Casarino defines the life-image as “what the time-image becomes under a fully realized regime of bio-political production.” Casarino further writes that “the life-image emerges from within the time-image—without, however, ever leaving it behind, and, on the contrary, by incorporating it—at the moment in which such a regime of bio-political production comes to its full fruition and realization.” Cesare Casarino, “Three Theses on the Life-Image (Deleuze, Cinema, Bio-politics),” in Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell eds., *Releasing the Image* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 156-67, pp. 156-7.

⁴³¹ Elsaesser defines the mind-game film as a category of films that “implicate the spectator in ways that can no longer be accounted for by classical theories of identification” (Thomas Elsaesser & Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* [New York; London: Routledge, 2010], p. 155). See also Thomas Elsaesser, “The Mind-Game Film,” in Warren Buckland ed., *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 13-41.

idea of the human. That blind spot manifests itself most clearly in the hint of a progress narrative we find woven through Deleuze's presentation of the transition from movement to time, and in particular the transition from neorealism to the New Wave and the post-New Wave. In his discussion of neorealism Deleuze mainly concentrates on the movement's proto-modernist aspects, while underscoring its "fundamental humanism." Second, in his discussion of the French New Wave and post-new-wave Deleuze mainly concentrates on those films and those aspects of films in which he finds a corroboration for his own posthumanist agenda inspired by Nietzsche and Spinoza. As we have seen, there indeed exists such a parallel between Deleuze's thinking, on the one hand, and the audiovisual philosophies of the New Wave directors, and in particular Godard's, on the other. However, to draw this parallel too strictly leads one to ignore the diversity of the New Wave and post-New Wave, in particular their intimist, non-falsifying, and sometimes plainly humanist sides. Because we do not only find the life-image in Pialat's work, we also find it in certain films by Varda, Rivette, Rohmer, and perhaps even Truffaut (think of the largely improvised interview with François/Jean-Pierre Léaud in *Les 400 Coups*, a scene cited by Pialat in *L'Enfance nue*).

New realism, in its most accomplished form, integrates the life-image into what I have called a cinema of life, a cinema that renders affective and intelligible the question, "what is a normal, human life at the turn of the twenty-first century?" Over the course of this study we have encountered a range of factors that have contributed to, or created the conditions for, the emergence of new realism as a dominant ethics and aesthetics of filmmaking in French and francophone Belgian cinema since the early 1990s. These

factors are: French cinema's long tradition of "Bazinian" realism, from Pagnol and Renoir to Bresson and Pialat; Wallonia's long documentary tradition; the French New Wave legacy, its neorealist-inspired practice of shooting on location and on low budgets, its more general philosophy of auteur cinema, but also its tendency to focus on the Parisian bourgeoisie; directly related to this New Wave legacy, the structures of funding for a "cinéma de qualité" that have been in place since the late 1950s in France and since the mid 1960s in Belgium; the small size of francophone Belgian cinema, and its partial integration into French cinema; the partial decentralization of French cultural production, including film production, since the late 1980s; and, finally, the increasing influence of television on the production and distribution of auteur cinema in France and Belgium.

Largely the product of these factors particular to French and francophone Belgian cinema, the young French new realism has not emerged in isolation. It is also part, and has helped spur, a global wave of new realism, "less a style than an impulse," in Anthony Scott's words, that "surfaces, with local variations," all over the world.⁴³² Other than young French cinema, some of the major cinemas where the new realist wave has come ashore are: post-communist Romanian cinema (e.g., Cristi Puiu's *Moartea domnului Lazarescu/The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* [2005, RO], Christian Mungiu's *4 Luni, 3 saptamâni si 2 zile/4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days* [2007, RO/BE]), post-revolutionary Iranian cinema (Jafar Panahi's *Dayereh/The Circle* [2000, IR/IT/CH], and arguably also some of Kiarostami's films), contemporary Italian neorealism (Gianni Amelio's *Il Ladro di bambini/The Stolen Children* [1992, IT/FR/CH], Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra* [2008,

⁴³² A.O. Scott, "In Toronto, Sampling Realism's Resurgence," *New York Times* (September 10, 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/11/movies/11fest.html> (accessed March 10, 2013).

IT]), sixth generation Chinese cinema (Wang Xiaoshuai's *Shí qī suì de dān chē/Beijing Bicycle* [2001, FR/TW/CN], Jia Zhangke's *Xiao Wu/Pickpocket* [Jia Zhangke, 1998, HK/CN]), new Austrian cinema (Jessica Hausner's *Lovely Rita* [2001, AT], Ulrich Seidl's *Import/Export* [2007, AT/FR/DE]), and American independent cinema (Ramin Bahrani's *Chop Shop* [2007, US], So Yong Kim's *In Between Days* [2006, US/CA/KR]), and Kelly Reichardt's *Rosetta*-inspired *Wendy and Lucy* [2008, US]).⁴³³

In this listing I hold on to a national cinema terminology, but one main reason for the emergence of new realism as a global tendency is of course the increasing transnationalization of cinemas, understood as both aesthetic movements and infrastructures of film production, distribution and exhibition. Most of the films in the above list are international coproductions that premiered at one of the three major European festivals (Cannes, Venice, Berlin).⁴³⁴ Furthermore, as the two “Chinese” examples illustrate, Bazinian realism has become a worldwide heritage. To an important extent the emergence of new realism as a global phenomenon has thus to be attributed to the globalization of the art and industry of cinema.

Simultaneously, to some degree new realism may also be understood as a tendency that expresses the increasing integration of local, regional, and national communities into global networks. It is on that second dimension that the following, concluding section concentrates.

⁴³³ *Rosetta*, and in particular its camera feel, also inspired Darren Aranofsky in his making of *The Wrestler* (2008).

⁴³⁴ Here it is worth mentioning that Les Films du fleuve, the Dardennes' production company, coproduced Christian Mungiu's *Dupa dealuri/Beyond the Hills* (2012, RO/FR/BE).

Miraculous Realism

In his concluding remarks to the *Aesthetics and Politics* collection that also includes the earlier cited essays by Lukács and Adorno, Fredric Jameson writes:

Under these circumstances, the function of a new realism would be clear; to resist the power of reification in consumer society and to reinvent that category of totality which, systematically undermined by existential fragmentation on all levels of life and social organization today, can alone project structural relations between classes as well as class struggles in other countries, in what has increasingly become a world system.⁴³⁵

Jameson makes this call for a new realism in relation to the literary novel, but elsewhere, in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1995), he makes a similar statement in relation to cinema.⁴³⁶ In that study Jameson raises, moreover, the question, “under what circumstances can a necessarily individual story with individual characters function to represent collective processes?” His answer: “Allegory thereby fatally stages its historic reappearance in the postmodern era . . . and seems to offer the most satisfactory (if varied and heterogeneous) solutions to these form-problems.”⁴³⁷ In difference with Jameson, I would argue though that allegory also has its limitations when it comes to the expression of the world system, the third stage of capitalism. This becomes evident when we compare for example Michael Haneke’s *Code inconnu* (2000), Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Babel* (2006), and Jia Zhangke’s *Shijie/The World* (2004). Of these three films, which all seek to map global networks and in order to do so all employ a “mosaic”

⁴³⁵ Fredric Jameson, “Reflections in Conclusion,” in Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, 212-3.

⁴³⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 82.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

narrative structure that switches back and forth between multiple story lines, I only consider *The World* a success. The reason is precisely that Jia's film—which is set in and around a theme park near Beijing that features scaled replicas of global landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower and the Taj Mahal—is only allegorical to a certain degree, and may in fact be taken as a commentary on the insufficiency of allegory in our age. Whereas *Code inconnu* and *Babel*, in their almost Balzacian endeavor to piece together story fragments from all over the world, ultimately subject those fragments to the grand, somewhat moralizing statements about the disconnection between groups of people already suggested by their titles, *The World* limits its scope to examining the small world in which its protagonists struggle for and fantasize about a better life. In doing so the film manages to grasp the immanence of global networks (tourism, women trafficking, the clothing industry) to the more immediately visible structures that determine people's quotidian lives.

Jia's films are among the most powerful examples of a new realism that reinvents the neorealist love and rejection of reality for the global, digital era. It is a new realism that, even more than neorealism, and without doing away with allegory altogether, bears witness to what Martin O'Shaughnessy's describes as "the fragments left behind once globalization has passed through the social terrain."⁴³⁸ Similarly, as Lauren Berlant observes in *Cruel Optimism* (2011) in relation to Cantet's *Ressources humaines* and *L'Emploi du temps/Time Out* (2001):

⁴³⁸ Martin O'Shaughnessy, "Eloquent Fragments: French Fiction Film and Globalization," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 23.3 (2005): 75-88.

Even the most local perspective in these films is an outcome of globalization and neoliberal restructuring: none of these dramas would occur without shifts in state tax, labor, and welfare policy that promote the disempowerment of unions, a corporate culture that suppresses wages, benefits, and workers' rights, and the concomitant expansion of production systems scattered across spaces in Europe, Korea, and elsewhere.⁴³⁹

Berlant characterizes global new realism as a “cinema of precarity,” a witnessing mode of the contemporary capitalist “fraying” of socioeconomic structures all over the globe and across classes. By “precarity” Berlant understands the politico-affective condition that human existence is reduced to once the “good-life” fantasy is no longer available. Scraping by and grimacing, the precarious subject lacks, above all, a narrative, and is forced to constantly adapt and readapt him- or herself to the challenges posed by the historical present. Documenting this solitary struggle, films such as Cantet’s and the Dardennes’, Berlant argues, help explore new forms of community. “The cinema of Precarity,” she writes, “attends to the proprioceptive—to bodies moving in space performing affectively laden gestures—to investigate new potential conditions of solidarity emerging from subjects not with similar historical identities or social locations but with similar adjustment styles to the pressures of the emergent new ordinariness.”⁴⁴⁰

The Precariat, a global class beyond class, that Berlant sees the tentative seeds of in new realist cinema is conceptually tangential to what autonomous Marxists have referred to as “multitude.” Like “Precariat,” “multitude” is a notion born out of the wish to conceptualize and imagine forms of collective resistance beyond traditional notions of collectivity such as “the people” and “proletariat.” Whereas “the people,” for example in

⁴³⁹ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 194-5.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 201-2.

Hobbes's notion of it, invokes a stable, homogeneous group that can be contained and governed, and whose interests can be spoken for by representative institutions such as political parties, the Church, and trade unions, "multitude" exposes the democratic lack of those institutions and instead seeks to express—rather than represent—a heterogeneous, self-expressive swarm of singularities involved in the same, non-teleological movement. It is an attempt, in other words, to, in line with Deleuze's project, grasp difference and identity at one and the same time. Second, whereas "proletariat" presupposes a traditionally Marxist vision on society, "multitude" cuts through the class categories of the industrial, Fordist capitalist society, and in doing so disconnects people's potential to challenge the institutionalized powers that oppress, constraint and exploit them from their precarious position in, or exclusion from, the labor process.

"Multitude" is a category that wants to be simultaneously historical and ontological, that wants to simultaneously express a mode of communal existence particular to our globalized, post-Fordist age, and a confrontation with the fundamental precarity of the human animal. As Paolo Virno writes in *A Grammar of the multitude* (2003):

That which has always been true, is only now unveiled. The multitude is this: a fundamental biological configuration which becomes a historically determined way of being, ontology revealing itself phenomenologically. One could even say that the post-Fordist multitude manifests *anthropogenesis* as such on a historical-empirical level; that is to say, the genesis itself of the human animal, its distinguishing characteristics.⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴¹ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles; New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 98, emphasis in original.

A class beyond class, and a community beyond the people, the multitude is also a mode of collective, human life beyond humanity, a humanity after the Death of Man. Whenever the multitude actualizes itself, however ephemerally and locally, whenever it manifests itself as *a* multitude, one can speak of a miracle, an *immanent* miracle that is to say. Alessia Ricciardi introduces this concept in relation to *Miracolo a Milano*, which, she writes, “may be said to allegorically depict, in the final flight of the poor, the paradoxical capacity of neorealist film to convert pessimism into an act of immanent faith, as a miracle can only emerge from a contingent and immanent perspective.”⁴⁴² This non-theological, immanent faith in the emergence of a new world for which we do not yet have a model, or grammar, Ricciardi also sees at work in Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (2000), which itself briefly invokes the utopian conclusion of De Sica’s film. At the same time, Ricciardi expresses some dissatisfaction with *Empire*’s own equally utopian conclusion. There, Hardt and Negri catch the reader off guard by, seemingly out of the Blue, comparing the communist militant prophesied by their project to Saint Francis of Assisi, thereby disrupting, according to Ricciardi, “the book’s otherwise ecumenical spirit.”⁴⁴³

Though I agree with Ricciardi’s observation that *Empire*, through the “lightness” of its final paragraph, ultimately takes flight from its fields of immanence, I do not see this as a problem per se. Instead I read this non-mystical visitation of the patron saint of ecology—though perhaps “domesticated nature” would have been a more precise

⁴⁴² Alessia Ricciardi, “Immanent Miracles: From De Sica to Hardt and Negri,” *Modern Language Notes* 122 (2007): 1138-65, p. 1157.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1158.

description of Francis’s portfolio—who during his lifetime “posed a joyous life, including all of being and nature, the animals, sister moon, brother sun, the birds of the field, the poor and exploited humans, together against the will of power and corruption,”⁴⁴⁴ as an implicit acknowledgment on the authors’ part that a belief in the multitude involves a minimum of humanism, that is to say a small remainder of belief in the possibility of an ethical subject who acts out of care for his or her environment and neighbors.

This minimum of humanism as it appears at the end of *Empire* is of a slightly different—because more classical—nature than the “humanism after the death of Man” that, earlier in their book, Hardt and Negri identify in the late Foucault, in particular in his writings on the care of the self in *The History of Sexuality*. “How is it possible,” they ask, “that the author who worked so hard to convince us of the death of Man, the thinker who carried the banner of antihumanism throughout his career, would in the end champion these central tenets of the humanist tradition?”⁴⁴⁵ Their solution to this paradox is that rather than that it constitutes a departure from his earlier Nietzschean project, Foucault’s posthuman humanism forms a logical continuation of it. “Once we recognize our posthuman bodies and minds,” Hardt and Negri explain, “once we see ourselves for the simians and cyborgs we are, we then need to explore the *vis viva*, the creative powers that animate us as they do all of nature and actualize our potentialities.”⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (London; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 413.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

That sounds all rather utopian though. Let's first ask what it actually means to recognize ourselves as posthuman, and whether such a recognition is possible in the first place. Let it be clear that I do not believe in the existence of a human essence that transcends the particular beings partaking in it. I share the Deleuzian-Foucauldian posthumanist outlook on being and beings that what we refer to as "human" is nothing but a particular unfolding of life-in-general, which in turn is a particular unfolding of what Spinoza means by God, or Nature. I therefore also share the principle that thought has the task to confront the "nonthought" within itself, "the most intimate within thought and yet the absolute outside,"⁴⁴⁷ because if it does not capitulate, that it is to say if it has not always already done so, in its perpetual quests for new outsides. Yet are "we," who are not yet posthuman, able to live this principle? Discourse being humanity's nature, a true passage to the posthuman requires a practical philosophy that renounces discourse, that says *adieu au langage*, to invoke the title of Godard's film-in-the-making (2013, expected),⁴⁴⁸ and that—rather than joining Rosetta in her *identity* struggle for some idea of a good, normal, human life in the face of a world in which such a life is increasingly less normal—embraces precarity, humanity's becoming-animal or life-in-general. Are we prepared to fully empty out the notion of "life" insofar as it applies to the "living men"—which, again, as Deleuze emphasizes in the last sentence of *Foucault*, would not necessarily disappear with the "death of man"—from a notion of the human? In other

⁴⁴⁷ Deleuze & Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 59.

⁴⁴⁸ As Godard stated in 2010, the film is "about a man and his wife who no longer speak the same language. The dog they take on walks then intervenes and speaks." Cited in Aaron Souppouris, "Jean-Luc Godard Will Produce New Film, 'Adieu au langage,' in 3D," *The Verge*, <http://www.theverge.com/2012/5/11/3013768/jean-luc-godard-adieu-au-language-goodbye-to-language-3d> (accessed March 12, 2013).

words, in our search for an immanent, non-prescriptive ethics, can we escape a remainder of humanism, a humanism from before the Death of Man that has yet to happen?

As argued in the first chapter, one place Deleuze addresses such questions head-on, and, perhaps, comes very close to affirm a minimum of human identity is his late essay “Immanence: A Life.” Another place he does so is *Cinema 2*. In the chapter on “Thought and Cinema” Deleuze comes very close to Bazin’s “pure cinema,” by speculating about cinema’s “Catholic quality” to help us to restoring our belief in the “link between man and the world, in love or life,” a belief that “makes the unthought the specific power of thought.”⁴⁴⁹ The rupture of that sensory-motor link defines the transition from the classical to the modern paradigm, and, as we have seen, is reiterated in cinema’s transition from movement to time. Moreover, something else happened during that transition from a classical to a modern cinema: the disappearance of the people. Deleuze writes:

In [classical] American and in Soviet cinema, the people are already there, real before being actual, ideal without being abstract. Hence the idea that the cinema, as art of the masses, could be the supreme revolutionary or democratic art, which makes the masses a true subject. But a great many factors were to compromise this belief: the rise of Hitler, which gave cinema as its object not the masses become subject but the masses subjected; Stalinism, which replaced the unanimism of peoples with the tyrannical unity of a party; the break-up of the American people, who could no longer believe themselves to be either the melting-pot of peoples past or the seed of a people to come In short, if there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet . . . *the people are missing*.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 164-5.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 208, emphasis in original.

A modern political cinema can no longer take for granted the existence of the people, a homogeneous mass that can be represented—artistically and politically—and that can be collectively addressed, educated and revolutionized. Instead a political cinema that seeks to restore belief in the world, in *this* world, has to contribute to the “invention of a people,” thus joining the *multitudes* of missing people, the *peuples mineur*, in their self-invention, “in shanty towns and camps, or in ghettos, in new conditions of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute.”⁴⁵¹ Deleuze acknowledges the existence of 1960s and 1970s third cinema movements, which, in the words of Fernando Solanas’s and Octavio Getino’s manifesto, presented a guerilla cinema as the alternative third to both the first cinema of Hollywood and the second cinema of European auteurism.⁴⁵² Filmmakers such as Glaubert Rocha and Youssef Chahine, Deleuze writes, could still believe for a while in the existence of a unified and unifiable proletariat, as well as in cinema’s potential to bring that proletariat to self-consciousness and liberate its minds from new forms of cultural colonialism. Yet in doing so, Deleuze argues, these filmmakers still participated in “the classical conception, so slow, imperceptible and difficult to site clearly.”⁴⁵³

Mainly associated with the “third world,” third cinema also manifested itself in the heart of postcolonial and second cinema powers, including France. Let me concentrate on the example of the Dziga Vertov group that Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 209.

⁴⁵² Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, “Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experience for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World,” in Michael Chanan ed., *Twenty-five Years of the New Latin American Cinema* (London: BFI/Channel Four, 1983), pp. 17-27.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 211.

formed in 1968, and which produced Brechtian agit-prop films such as *Le Vent d'Est/Wind from the East* (1969) and *Tout va bien* (1972). The group was disbanded in 1973 out of disillusionment with precisely the classical remainder Deleuze points out. That disillusionment is the subject of *Ici et ailleurs/Here and Elsewhere* (1976), a film about a failed film. *Ici et ailleurs*, which Godard codirected with Anne-Marie Miéville, is a critical reflection on the earlier unfinished Dziga Vertov project *Jusqu'à la Victoire/Until Victory* that Godard and Gorin made in collaboration with a group of militants from the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Most of these militants, however, were murdered in September 1970 by the Jordanian army, after which Godard and Miéville used the existing footage to make another film. "En 1970 ce film s'appelait *Victoire*," Miéville states in *Ici et ailleurs*, "En 1975 il s'appelle *Ici et ailleurs*. *Ici*, une famille française qui regarde la télé. *Ailleurs*, des images de la révolution Palestinienne" ("In 1970 this film was called *Victory*. In 1975 it is called *Here and Elsewhere*. Here, a French family watching TV. Elsewhere, images of the Palestinian revolution"). *Ici et ailleurs* thus takes the route Godard had gone earlier with *Les Carabiniers* and *Le Mépris*, by expressing the inherently *modern* gap between our consumption of representations and the world behind them. The film is an attempt to visualize and make felt the irrational interval that connects and separates "ici" and "ailleurs," as is emphasized by the recurring shots of a three-dimensional carved "ET." Or as Rodowick argues, "in their incommensurability the images of *Ici et ailleurs* return in ever more

differentiated series that interrogate the mass media's crowding out of both the memory and actuality of revolutionary struggle."⁴⁵⁴

A different kind of engagement with cinema's crisis to, in our age, express and address a people we find in the Dardennes' oeuvre. As discussed in the second chapter, inspired by both Storck and Godard, in their early career the Dardennes made two documentary films, *Pour que la guère s'achève les murs devaient s'écrouler* and *Lorsque le bateau de Léon M. descendit la Meuse pour la première fois*, in which they look back at the Walloon solidarity that once was, while expressing the hope for a new revolutionary language-to-come. Yet the tone of these films is all but agitating and much too nostalgic, for the reason that the language, including the cinematic language, in which it seeks to envision the people-to-come is that of a worn-out Marxism. The Dardennes found their language as soon as they turned their gazes toward and began documenting, in fiction narratives, the precarious lives of the Igers, Rosettas and Sonias that populate the streets of their own Seraing, and resisted their all-too-classical impulse to search the sky for "the banks of Utopia." Yet to take precarity as the ground for a new ethics of thinking the missing people, a reference to a form of the true is needed, so films such as *La Promesse* and *Rosetta* suggest. Much like the cinema of the time-image encourages us to think the post-human, the Dardennes' films, and a cinema of life in general, help us to think that sticky concept of "humanity." A cinema of life is what new realism becomes when it is realized in its full affective and conceptual potential. A cinema of life is an impossible realism, because it sets itself the task to salvage the remnants of

⁴⁵⁴ Rodowick, *Reading the Figural*, 199.

“representation” and “humanity” from the smoldering fires of critique. The more crystallized, layered, ambiguous and minimal, in other words the less essentialist the human face that it affirms, the more a cinema of life lives up to its name, and the more useful and challenging it becomes to philosophy. But a degree of affirmation is needed. Do we hear such an affirmation in Deleuze’s longing for a restored belief “in love or life”? Only if “life” here is minimally different from the “powers of life” beyond good and evil that Deleuze saw expressed in the falsifying time-image of the New Wave, that is to say if “life” in this context contains a “reference to a form of the true,” “the love which is necessary for the birth of the new image” that the New Wave ruptured with.⁴⁵⁵

Let’s return once more to the dramatic and ambiguously human heights that *Miracolo a Milano* takes us, the Ascension, on stolen broomsticks, of Toto and his fellow poor to “a little land to live and die in.” Had De Sica had the disposal of twenty-first century technologies, he would have likely shot the film digitally and used CGI for its special effects (which were done by the American specialist Ned Mann). Like in Italian neorealism, in new realism special effects—and more in general images or image elements that disrupt the mimetic, documentary gaze—are rare. The most notable exceptions we find in the work of Dumont and Jia. As far as the latter’s work is concerned, I am thinking of the instances of realism turning magic in *Sanxia haoren/Still Life* (2006) (the flying saucer, the sudden launching of the memorial structure), and the moving animated sequences in *The World* in which the young protagonists are seen day-dreaming away in text messages and fairytale fantasies. Catching the viewer by surprise,

⁴⁵⁵ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 131, 164; *Cinema 1*, 218.

these are moments of pure cinema that, much like the endings of *Miracolo a Milano* and *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, disrupt the mimetic surface in order to reveal reality's ambiguity more clearly. As Andrew writes in *What Cinema Is!* (2010) in relation to the animated sequences in *The World*: they “celebrate and contribute to the intoxicating freedom of the digital, and yet . . . they are circumscribed by the human and social drama which they interrupt like holes in cheese. Jia Zhangke is, it turns out, a modernist, devoted to the kind of discovery that the neorealists made their mission.”⁴⁵⁶

Having shot his first works on film (*Xiao Wu* was shot on 16mm, the 2000 *Zhàntái/Platform* [2000] on 35mm), Jia used digital video for the first time for his 2001 short *Gōng gōng cháng sǔo/In Public*. Jia's reason for his digital turn was the simultaneous sense of physical proximity and observational distance toward the world that characterizes the digital: “It is as if multiple persons were walking in procession along a river. The digital camera allows you to discretely insert yourself into the procession, while at the same time maintaining a certain distance with respect to it, to follow its rhythm, its pulse, without stopping to look at it, to continue that way, and to enter a mental study.”⁴⁵⁷ Another often heard reason for the choice of digital cameras is that they would allow for more flexibility, especially when working with amateur actors. This is the reason that for example Cantet switched to digital for his shooting of *Entre les murs/The Class* (2008):

⁴⁵⁶ Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 60.

⁴⁵⁷ Cited in Cécile Lagesse, “*Still Life* de Jia Zhang-ke: le réalisme à l'âge numérique,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 640 (2008): 79-81, p. 80.

I wanted the recording to follow the improvisation work done in studios [*ateliers*], with the same liberty. For that reason HD video was indispensable. I had noticed it when making *Ressources humaines*, the cost and the heaviness of 35mm leave little room for improvisation. Moreover, things got a little fossilized at the moment of shooting. For *Entre les murs*, in contrast, I wanted to shoot continuously for twenty minutes [with three cameras] without interruption, even if nothing happened, because I knew that one remark could be enough to trigger things.⁴⁵⁸

With the increasing discontinuation of motion picture products, it is of course likely that more new realists will switch to digital, for image recording that is to say, because for sound Dolby Digital has already been the standard for a while. For now though there also remain many who have not, including the Dardennes and Dumont, who, like Pialat before them, prove that also with analog means a certain intimate distance between the spectator-viewer and the character-actor is possible. In the case of the Dardennes, this is a distance that is small enough to feel and large enough to reflect on the protagonists' small, solitary wars. I am not just talking here about literal, technical shot lengths. In fact, starting with *L'Enfant*, and continuing in *Le Silence de Lorna* and *Le Gamin au vélo*, the brothers have lengthened their shots more and more, giving their images some space to breathe and, to invoke Luc Dardenne's earlier cited observation about the difference between their work and Dumont's (Chapter 1), even showing some sky.

⁴⁵⁸ Cantet continues: "I was quickly persuaded that the shooting plan required three cameras: a first one always directed at the teacher; a second one on the student standing central in the scene that we were turning; and a third in order to allow digressions: a chair balancing on one leg, a girl cutting her friend's hair, a student who is daydreaming and then all of a sudden starts paying attention—the everyday details of a classroom that we would have never been able to construct." Cited in Mariane Schouler, "Contraintes du tournage et choix techniques," <http://entre-les-murs-laurent-cantet.blogspot.com/2009/04/contraintes-du-tournage-et-choix.html> (accessed February 10, 2013).

One place in which do *not* get see the sky is the final scene of *Le Silence de Lorna*. Like the Dardennes' previous features, this film performs "a Levinasian-inspired challenge to the being of cinema," as Sarah Cooper writes, by at its most extreme moments raising the question "to kill or not to kill."⁴⁵⁹ It is a question that the Dardennes must have faced repeatedly. Do we want Rosetta to follow in Mouchette's footsteps? Will Olivier strangle Francis (*Le Fils*)? And what about Lorna, what price does she have to pay for her silence? Or is this is not the kind of cinema that demands an eye for an eye? In the case of Bruno (*L'Enfant*), the Dardennes did actually consider the possibility of death. Luc Dardenne writes in his journal: "Accattone dies but there is the music of Johann-Sebastian Bach. Mouchette dies but there is the music of Monteverdi. What if Bruno dies and there is no music?"⁴⁶⁰

Bruno lives though, like Rosetta, Francis and Lorna. Yet with Lorna it is different. If there is any hope for salvation in her case, that salvation needs to come from beyond the image. Whereas the Dardennes' four preceding films end in the middle of an encounter, a face-to-face, Lorna's flight forward leads her to a dead end, an isolated cabin in the middle of the woods. While collecting firewood she raises her gaze, hoping for it to be returned, but except for a bird nothing is there. "Je te laisserai pas mourir, jamais. Je laissais mourir ton père. Toi, tu vivras" ("I won't let you die, ever. I let your father die. You'll live"), she speaks to the imaginary child in her womb, the conception of which she attributes to Claudy, the addict-Christ in whose murder she has had a part. In the following shot Lorna is back in the cabin. She ignites the stove and closes the shutters,

⁴⁵⁹ Cooper, "Mortal Ethics," 66.

⁴⁶⁰ Dardenne, *Au dos de nos images*, 161.

almost fading out the image. “On va aller dormir, on repartira demain matin” (“We’ll sleep now, we’ll leave tomorrow morning”). And then there is music. No Bach or Monteverdi, but a handful of chords from a Beethoven piano sonata that leaves open a secular reading of all of this. Lorna lies down, the music stops. “Dors bien” (“Sleep tight”), she speaks, caressing her belly, in reminiscence of Rosetta’s cramps as well as her secular prayer. And with the frame going fully black now, the music resumes, a tiny bit louder this time, yet without fully silencing her breathing, as if seeking to compensate for what the image cannot give her, cannot give the viewer.

How comfortable are we with this old-fashioned humanism, however subtly it infiltrates the Dardennes’ images? To be a humanist nowadays without burning oneself too badly requires miracles. We already knew this from *Miracolo a Milano*, and we are reminded about it by Dumont. Dumont’s new realism, insofar as the term applies to his work, forms a special case. Whereas the Dardennes only give us strictly immanent, human miracles (Riquet’s forgiving of Rosetta—who is not an angel—Olivier’s forgiving of Francis—who is not Isaac—the friendship between Igor and Assita, Bruno’s tears, the sunny sky in *Le Gamin au vélo*), Dumont’s quests for redemption almost always cross from the real to the surreal, from the possible to the magical and possibly also the transcendent. (The exception is *Twentynine Palms* [2003], a modern retelling of “Adam and Eve” that is set in the unredemptive Californian desert and that ends on the observation, spoken by a police-officer seen in an extreme long shot, that the male protagonist “looks like he has been through a meat grinder.” Based on the preceding scene, and with the merciless desert wind torturing the speakers, we can only confirm the

officer's observation.) Dumont's only unequivocal "new realist" film is his first feature, *La Vie de Jésus*, that is to say up until this film's final shot, where we all of a sudden see Freddy (David Douche) stretched out in the field where he should be in jail. Where *La Vie de Jésus* ends, *L'humanité* begins: with explicitly negativizing the realism that the Nord calls for, an approach we also find in *Flandres* and *Hors Satan*, Dumont's two other films to date that were shot in Nord-Pas-de-Calais. All these films draw the viewer into new realist worlds populated by new realist characters, but only in order to emphasize a deviation from (new) realism. Formally, through their self-referential and, especially in the case of *L'humanité*, overtly aestheticized style, these films at repeated moments disrupt the realist illusion. Narratively, whereas new realism, like neorealism in the past, largely develops its characters along socioeconomic lines, the protagonists of *L'humanité* are, as we have seen, motivated by more primary, natural forces, forces that are simultaneously biological and spiritual, immanent and transcendent in nature. It is therefore no surprise actually that such a large part of the Cannes audience showed itself so upset by *L'humanité*. Dumont's films *are* hard to stomach, because they uproot layers of our humanist soil that we perhaps rather leave unthought.

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