

**Africanicity in Black Cinema: A Horizontal  
Labyrinth of Trans-Geographical Practices of Identity**

Boulou Ebanda, de B'béri

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**Abstract**

*Africanicity in Black Cinema: A Horizontal  
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Boulou Ebanda, de B'béri, Ph.D.  
Communication Studies  
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This dissertation examines the role of cinema as a conduit of black expressions of identity. It finds that since its inception, cinema has played an important part in generating, on the one hand, imaginary significations about black peoples, and, on the other hand, imaginative signifying(s) harmonized with black expressions of identity.

This dissertation reviews the categories of cultural and political identity in order to discern the reenacted practices of expression linking the socio-historical experience of black peoples to trans-geographical expressions of identity in film. It concludes that specific paradigms of communication, such as 'affectivity' and 'resilience,' determine the ways in which some black people articulate their practices of identity through the medium of cinema. Examination of these paradigms as discursive practices of 'détournement' or 'marronage' allows us to



understand the more complex effects of Africanicity as a necessary reenactment and articulation of their social, cultural, and historical experiences.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura  
che la diritta via era smarrita."*

In the middle of the journey of [my]  
life I found myself in a dark wood  
where the straight way was lost.  
(Dante)

Writing is one thing, knowledge is  
something else. Writing is the  
photography of knowledge but it is not  
knowledge itself. Knowledge is a light  
within humankind.  
(Amadou H. Bâ, 1971)

The importance of motion pictures worldwide in twentieth-century history and culture has led to new conjunctural reflections in the fields of social sciences and the humanities. These new reflections treat the fragmentary objects of cinema (posters, scripts, critiques, titles, images, and narratives) as an intrinsic element of the complex discourses reflecting the worldview, ideology, and identity of the social formations that have produced them.

Through discursive analysis of films and other objects of cinema, this dissertation examines how motion pictures may facilitate the exposition of the trans-geographical ideation or practices of identity articulated by black people to express their Africanicity. This endeavor requires an 'intermediate

trajectory' to bridge past symptoms and present socio-cultural experiences, locally and globally. Specifically, the expression of black identity in cinema is investigated as an immediate response to the prevailing dominant characterizations of black people. This immediacy exemplifies what Achille Mbembe (2001:2-19) describes as "imaginary significations," implying that something is being invented in correlation with its historical constituency — a signification of identity performed both inside and outside one's social-historical borders. This juxtaposition of mediacy (the invention of self) and immediacy (the distinction from an outside world) (Georg W. Friedrich Hegel, 1991:38) in historical and contemporary motion picture production is addressed in this dissertation. Indeed, I argue that the 'reality' of black people in black cinema illustrates an exemplary "structure of effects [or a "structure of feeling" (Raymond Williams, 1966, 1977) marked by a multiplicity of planes of effects and the ways they intersect, transverse and disrupt each other" (Lawrence Grossberg, 1992:48). Thus, it is the symptoms of these planes of effects that this dissertation traces through the objects

of cinema and the practices of black expression within cinema.

Tracing the historical symptoms of specific practices of expression does not limit the analysis to the level of causality, but rather tracks the regularity of such practices. Unlike an investigation of the history of practices, any examination of the regularity of practices necessitates the articulation of the fragments of such practices, helping to find the 'linkages' connecting them together. Therefore, the notion of fragments is of high importance in this dissertation. The corpus's material — films, narratives, discourses, filmmakers' and artists' speeches etc, that I call the objects of cinema — through which this dissertation draws out specific symptoms of expression and articulates its own discourse, is of composed fragments. This corpus is not representative of the 'diversity' of black cinema, but rather a representation of specific fragments of expression in the practice of this cinema.

Black cinema is not about racial pigmentation of filmmakers, esthetical and stylistic orientation, or the so-called Third World films, or the film's intended audience. I contend that black cinema is rather about



filmmaking practices displaying specific differentiated expressions or what Tommy Lott describes "a film's [particular] political orientation within the hegemonic structures of post-colonialism" (Lott, 1991:11). Therefore, black cinema is not a concept defining a particular film's theme. It is a figuration delineating the regularity of specific practices of expression in films, and comprises films made in Africa and in black diasporas, i.e., black Africa, black British, Afro-Caribbean/Latin, and black American cinemas in broad terms (Michael T. Martin, 1995:3). That is why this dissertation anticipates such practices to be trans-geographic expressions of identity that, however, articulate differentiated geopolitical and cultural experiences. Hence, the finding of this dissertation can help in analyzing differentiated practices of expression of people in India, Australia, or any other place in the world, in spite of the fact that its main corpus is circumscribed around the North/South Atlantic axis.

While this study is not a historical analysis of films, nor a historical discursive genealogy of blacks in film and black films, its focus is on non-temporal moments of history and moments of expression. I consider

that some specific moments of history produce specific symptoms and practices of expression. At the same time, I admit that these symptoms cannot be reduced to historical moments of production or determination. Therefore, the films studied, based on symptomatic fragments, allow us to discover the discursive practices used in specific in-temporal moments of history and in cinema, as the medium of specific forms of representations. I will show the linkage of specific forms of representation to specific practices of expression in in-temporal moments of history, with particular discourses allowing us to articulate the conjuncture, the continuum (*'ligne de fuite'*) between these specificities.

This dissertation analyzes two levels of articulation in films. The first examines the representation of blacks portrayed in certain dominant practices of cinema. For this first stage, I provide samples or fragments from three classic figures of cinema — Griffith, Greville, and Rouch to illustrate the mode of representation of 'blacks in cinema'. The second level of articulation focuses on selected fragments of 'black cinema' illustrating black people's discursive regularity and articulation of new forms of representation and

identity. This second level of analysis helps to understand the regularity of the expression of Africanicity in cinema, as trans-geographical, collective, and affective practices of black identity formation.

Analyzing a collective identity generates an interesting *problématique*, in that one's findings sometimes conflict with the complex definitions of the concept of identity. My approach is to look at the ways in which black people have constructed an ideational framework through multileveled symptomatic discursive articulations, as an alternative regulatory response against misrepresentations of their cultural, racial, and even geopolitical identity. By an alternative geopolitical identity, I mean a practice of identity that transcends national and continental borders under which, for example, the notions of citizenship and nationality are framed.

This dissertation studies black cinema as a singular unifying materiality that transcends the monolithic limits of the concepts of national and cultural identity. This notion of black cinema is based on affective practices of expression located far beyond

geopolitical borders. My approach is therefore to examine the issue of blackness in North-South Atlantic axis motion pictures regardless of the race of the actor, producer, or director. In different moments of history, blacks frequently collaborated on stories and plots set dealing with blackness in various locations with diverse geographical and cultural roots. This evidence explains the trans-geographical borders under which this dissertation has drawn its corpus of film and literature, and introduces the notion of 'intermediality' as a conceptual articulation with which to expose this possibility. Thus, through an '*intermedial*' analysis allowing me to expose specific significations of the practices of trans-geographical identity as expressed in black cinema, this approach will produce an alternative paradigm to arguments of Black Nationalism citing mythical historicity as the basis for black identity-politics. The notion of intermediality, in contrast to the advocates of the theory of hybridized cultural-identity, allows us to explore and articulate the impact of socio-historical experiences in shaping one's affective belonging through the necessary expression of everyday life practices. Even if we admit that the

concept of identity is a continuous process of formation within precise locations (Philip Schlesinger, 1991), Africanicity, for example, is not restricted to a given geopolitical area, nation, nation-state, or culture, and cannot be defined as an international "citizenry," in the sense of Eric Hobsbawm (1990). My challenge is therefore to examine expressions of identity through performative practices of expression, not merely as cultural or political articulations of identity.

Since the 1950s, the predominant approach to cultural research has been to examine society, population, and creativity in geographically defined areas or given nation-states. Such research has produced cultural paradigms at higher levels of social organization, in ethnic, tribal or racial groups, and gender specific. Studies of group identity and specific racial groups became and remain the target of severe cultural criticism, while cultures or cultural identities have been analyzed in respect of their unavoidable hybridity. Some other research suggests that studying specific group identity obscures the singularity of the individual, and diverts attention and resources from more fruitful lines of inquiry, such as the dynamics of

collective class struggle and the scientific study of particular social structures and functions (James E. Lassiter, 1999). However, much of the available literature in Black Studies continues to use cultural and political frameworks to define the identity of blacks. Advocates of the hybridized cultural-identity theory give scant attention to 'specific collective historical fragments'. They argue, for example, that cultural memory is incapable of differentiating among the proliferation of discourses on the same issue, because each discursive version appears contaminated by subsequent ones (Paul Gilroy, 1993:106).

It is not my intention here to disparage academic and epistemic-oriented research. However, one cannot easily dismiss black historical reenactment in their contemporary performative discourses. These contemporary discourses constitute an expressive articulation and reflect new forms of meaning mobilizing specific historical fragments. Put in a different way, my study concentrates not only on the level of silent discursive practices of black expressions in cinema, but also on the context of such practices. I want to examine the context or the field where these practices of expression

"coexist, remain and disappear" (Foucault, 1978:15) as an articulation of a historically informed constituent element, shaping the performative expression of blacks.

I suggest that to understand the contemporary practices of black expression within films, one must begin with the genesis of black in cinema. With similar concern, both Simon During and Homi Bhabha support this argument. For Bhabha (1990b:218) contemporary "histories of progress and *civitas* cannot be conceived without evoking the savage colonial antecedents of the ideals of civility and the mythology of 'civilization'". During (2000:393) argues that one cannot circumscribe the relationship of modernism and postcolonialism with poststructural arguments based on hybridity, because that restricts the articulations to merely outlining the ideologies prevalent on both levels of discourse. Further, I want to suggest that any radical dialectical thought risks giving insufficient attention to the dynamic of agency — here as creative expressions of the self and the collectivity — of powerless communities. For example, Afrocentrists in favor of an authentic black identity-politics (Maulana Karenga, 1993; Molefi Asante, 1990, 1988, 1987; Chancellor Williams, 1987) apply

dialectical arguments advocating radical idealism to support the existence of a mythic black race. This radical-political and intellectual milieu covered by "the banner of democratic rights" as argued by C. L. R. James, (1948:139) invalidates the impact of colonial and imperial discourses and many forms of exploitation shaping black cultural experiences. Still, Afrocentrism does articulate something essential in cultural criticism, because of its "indelible impact on the shape of radical praxis" (Brent H. Edwards, 2001:3) on the issue concerning black identity. In other words, Afrocentrism seems to articulate what bell hooks (1990a:152) calls "re-writing" the self, that is writing him/herself anew, as a pure "author" of history or the only "authority" of oneself experience.

This dissertation takes a conjunctural position among and in-between these Afrocentric and cultural hybridity theories. This position encourages a third position, an *intermedial* approach as a site of conjuncture or a new ground for investigation. In order to negotiate on multiple levels to further a deeper understanding of Africanicity. This conjunctural use of



the notion of intermediality allows us to observe not only the conceptual tensions of the concepts of identity. Intermediality also permits us to outline the articulation and effect of diverse levels of discourse. I suggest that the paradigms of intellectual radicalness and cultural hybridity are direct effects of historical ideological productions of black-Otherness, and they need to be understood as a reflective conjecture. On a similar issue, for example, hooks (1990b:7) argues that "any [cultural] critic exploring the radical potential of postmodernism as it relates to racial difference and racial domination would need to consider the implications of a critique of identity for oppressed groups".

I contend that black expressions of identity in cinema creatively and reflectively respond to historical representations of blacks, as portrayed by some Western cinema. However, this reflective response does not only need to be analyzed in its level of causality, but to be mapped up and re-opened, because the meaning it produces is not fixed. According to Homi Bhabha "what is at issue is a historical moment in which [...] multiple identities do actually articulate in challenging ways, [...] not some

flowering of individual talents and capacities," (Bhabha, 1990b:208) but rather a changing relationship of political positions.

Therefore, I suggest mapping up specific historical symptoms and reopening the discursive 'negotiation' taking place between black in cinema and the institutionalized 'dispositive' of cinema-art, to articulate the conjuncture emerging among and in-between black expression of identity in cinema. This position is influenced by the conjunctural analysis suggested by Martin Allor's and Michelle Gagnon's study of the dynamic relationship between institutionalized production and emerging forms of discourse. The authors argue that to conduct a detailed analysis of both the existing institutionalized characterizations of an object, i.e., the dominant dispositive of cinema-art, and of emerging discursive forms, i.e., the expression of Africanicity in black cinema, one needs a conjunctural articulation that delves beyond the surface of the power-dispositive (Allor, and Gagnon, 1997:29-30). I suggest that the creative response of blacks is less an unwitting reflection of material reality than a signification of an emerging form of discursive production challenging

prevalent representations of blacks in dominant dispositives<sup>1</sup> such as cinema-art.

This method of discursive analysis develops multiple perspectives of the articulation of trans-geographical expressions of identity in black cinema. This approach incorporating black social historical experiences and the aesthetic of film is hybridized by the nature of this analysis, whereas the object studied — black expression of identity in cinema — is analyzed as a distinctive or conjunctural practice in order to fully understand its 'difference'. Here, the notion of difference is a powerful articulation. It helps to connect differentiated practices and experiences to specific expressions of struggle or to the space of the construction of collective formations in avoiding the "simplistic polarity between the ruler and the ruled; [and] any monolithic description of authoritative power [...], based on that kind of binarism..." (Bhabha, 1990b:220-21).

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the term 'dispositive' to explain the ways in which the language of cinema-art, for example, build specific conceptual, symbolic, and institutional dispositions. In his chapter on *Les Régularités discursives*, Michel Foucault (1969:29-102) reviewed the formations, strategies, and modalities of institutional dispositions. My use of the concepts of dispositive is similar to Foucault understanding of institutional strategies, which are, as noticed Gilles Deleuze (1989:185) "chains of self-conflicting variables" not necessary concerned with the 'truth', but rather with discursive "variations" and "regularities" (my translation).

My analysis focuses on two central issues. The first is the role played by representations of black people as differentiated, neglected, or constructed 'Others' while mediating or reflecting at this same time about something else. Vumbi Yoka Mudimbé (1994:xii), Achille Mbembe (2001:3) and Edward Said (1978:1-5) observe similar articulations of the construction of differentiated Others. I argue that this first level of construction characterizes the production of 'imaginary significations' about black-Otherness. The second is the articulation through which some continental and diaspora Africans express the complex discursive figuration of their trans-geographical Africanicity. I suggest that there are significant common articulations of Africanicity in black cinema, however diversely expressed. Thus, I focus my analysis on two correlated articulations — resiliency and affectivity. As a modality of communication, both concepts allow us to mobilize imaginary and imaginative significations through the expression of common social history, and expose the figuration of '*marronage*' (Boulou E. de B'béri, 2000) or "*détournement*" (Michel de Certeau, 1990) beneath the

surface of performative practices of black cinema.<sup>2</sup> This approach allows me to extend my analysis of black cinema beyond the realms of cinema-art and entertainment, and the esthetical contingency of genre and style. Indeed, it permits me to examine the conjunctural epistemology that occurs among distinctive categories of discourse (culturality, identity, and cinema) as they intermedialize with performative practices of the expression of Africanity. Here, the objects of cinema intertwine with broader discourses and aesthetics to mediate the relations of representation with specific expressions of Africanity.

It is therefore apparent that I use the notion of articulation in Grossberg's and Hall's terms, because my goal is to illustrate a new conjunctural possibility of non-fixed meaning produced in black cinema as well as to understand the context of that meaning (Grossberg, 1998a:74-7), "thereby producing a different meaning: breaking the chain in which it is currently fixed" (Hall, 1990:9). In other words, I am interested in locating the symptomatic practices of identity in black cinema, to be

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<sup>2</sup> Section Two of this dissertation analyzes black practices of expression in cinema through the figure of *marronage* and *détournement*. Generally, these terms imply, a complex combination, based on elements of resistance/persistence and seduction within specific practices or relationships. Michel de Certeau (1990) characterizes similar practices in term of "tactics".

able to articulate its affective "connections to its exterior, to that which is other to it" (Grossberg, 1992:53). Such application of the notion of articulation shows how fragmentary practices of expression are connected together beyond nationality, culture, or geography. Such articulations also permit us to conceive the practices of expression in black cinema as the necessary effects of producing meaningful expressions of identity, of Africanicity.

This dissertation is composed of three main sections, each comprised of two to three main chapters. The first section examines the state of theories and methodologies in Black Studies. I present several debates on the concepts of identity and the ways in which these debates deploy opposing arguments about the notion of identity-politics. Specifically, I address the problematic of Afrocentrism and some contemporary cultural criticisms, attempting to explain black culture as two different forms of identity-politics. I then introduce some historical expressions related to the practices of Africanicity in black literature and other venues of representation. I also introduce the central

concerns of concepts of intermediality, showing the conditions of new conjunctures taking place inside and outside Afrocentrism and the broad field of Cultural Studies. I discuss Werner Wolf's (1999) articulations of intermediality, and Dick Higgins's (1984) poetic theory of intermedia. I conclude the section in showing the applicability of intermediality to black cinema and in relation to the notion of Africanicity.

Section Two reviews some symptomatic characterizations of blacks in some Western films. I argue that such characterizations voice specific imaginary significations to symbolize blacks in certain ways. Here, I use Stuart Hall's analysis of three historical modalities, ideologically constructing black-Otherness: (1) the polarized imaginary of stereotypes and themes of fixed subordination and domination; (2) the dialectical superior/inferior grouping of stereotypes explaining natural species; and (3) the specific linguistic signs points One and Two generate as the language of history and natural signs (Hall, 1990:14). According to Hall, the meaning effects on oppressed groups and the power of the discourses have historically functioned through these modalities, and such racist

ideologies still operate in today's postmodern mass media, such as MTV, by way of unpredictable meta-messages (in Grossberg, 1986). I therefore reviewed the historical foundation of this construction of black-Otherness in cinema, using in part second readings of Hegelian dialectic to suggest the movement from an imaginary foundation of ideology to its performative antithesis. I also use Edward Said (1978; 1993) and Vumbi Y. Mudimbé (1982; 1988; 1994) to show the ways in which ideological constructions of cultural minorities unwillingly permit contradictory 'exclamations' of dominant discourses. Here, I underscore the conjunction of resistance and seduction through black expressions of identity in films, and conclude the section with a conjunctural analysis. I approached the articulations of this differentiated expression of identity with Deleuze's and Guattari's notions of "rhizome" and "becoming minor," Henry L. Gates Jr. development of the notion of "Signifying" in black oral performances, de Certeau's articulation of "*détournement*," as well as Bakhtin's notion of "surplus." The conjunction of these notions helps to epistemologically delineate the specificity of the figuration of '*marronage*' as an emerging conjunctural



*Signifying* of practices of expression used by blacks, beyond their potential hybridized cultures and racial identity-politics. I illustrate the ways in which blacks 'tactically' mobilize the practices of their differentiated identity as a conjunctural articulation 'recycling' prior historical characterizations and expressing new forms of discourse.

Section Three, entitled *The Ideation of Black Cinema*, analyzes the narrative practices of identity through which blacks build new significations parallel to, or coexisting with dominant frameworks of representation. A study of film texts, as well as official and spontaneous declarations by black actors, actresses, and filmmakers indicates that their discursive performances generate a complex '*Signifying*' of their Africanicity, and demonstrates a trans-local or trans-global history of their expression of identity. I argue that the contemporary expression of identity of some black filmmakers and artists echoes the preexisting process of renaming and (re)presentation at the core of the literature of '*Négritude*' and '*The New Negro*' (*Harlem Renaissance*) movements, and the performative modality of Griots in oral performance. Citing Pierre Bourdieu

(1993:183-84), I suggest that the expression of identity in black cinema initiates not a breach with history, but a struggle over positions of power and their space of possibilities. bell hooks also suggests a similar argument. For hooks (1990b:147) the struggle of black people is the "struggle of memory against forgetting," and need to be located in the margin of hegemonic dispositives. Indeed, I argue that the expressions of identity in black cinema activate some inescapable horizontal modalities illustrating trans-geographical affects of belonging and reenactment of memory. For example, in the making of *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), Alex Haley says that an African old man recounts for hours a story that 'resembles' his own (present) life. It is such historical practices of expression mobilizing 'recognizable' affective articulations that this Section reviews. I discuss Boris Cyrulnik's (1999) and Philip Schlesinger's (1991) notion of 'affectivity' in the communication process, and Achille Mbembe's (2001) analysis of the "aesthetic of vulgarity." I conclude by reviewing the ways in which these theories can support the ideational articulation of a trans-geographical identity built upon affective

practices similar to the "structure of feeling" proposed by Raymond Williams (1966). Franz Fanon (1963), Partha Chatterjee (1993), and Benedict Anderson (1991) suggested similar formations of identity, based on an 'onto-theology of love' among trans-local groups.

This notion of onto-theology of love is of particular importance because it mobilizes a series of regularities that link differentiated discourses and cultural experiences to trans-geographically sanctioned practices and expressions of identity. The notion of onto-theology of love permits me to illustrate the way these expressions of identity make the meanings of Africanicity not merely a cultural or political framework, but the figuration of a shared trans-geographical practice of expression. It is an articulation visualized as a horizontal trajectory introducing 'specific practices of expression such as "*the commandment*" of an 'authoritarian' modality par excellence (not from a 'subject-of-authority'), together with its coercive images and ideological structures coinciding with the agency of everyday life practices (Mbembe 1992:2-3). In other words, this notion of onto-theology of love functions as an intermediate site of

investigation alleviating the conceptual tensions among diverse conjectures, i.e., geography, ideology, nationalism, and culture, or individualism, collectivism and experience. In relation to Africanicity, this notion suggests the articulation of "comradeship," introduced by Chatterjee and Anderson as a horizontal trajectory in the formation or the expression of identity.

## 1. THE STATE OF THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES IN BLACK STUDIES

The history of thought, to say nothing of political movements, is extravagantly illustrative of how the dictum 'solidarity before criticism' means the end of criticism.

[...] Even in the very midst of a battle in which one is unmistakably on one side against another, there should be criticism, because there must be critical consciousness if there are to be issues, problems, values, events, lives to be fought for.

(Edward Said, 1993)

Blackness and Africanicity designate a 'recognizable' experience and life experimentation of black or African peoples. For example, blacks or Africans generally recognize slavery and colonialism as experiences related to their blackness or Africanicity. Therefore, I use blackness and Africanicity, black and African interchangeably. References to historical experience of slavery or colonialism can be seen as a performative discourse reenacting 'recognizable' feelings and affects, not necessarily as an essential experimentation of the existence of either slavery or colonialism. I agree with Ella Shohat (1995) that to talk about or "to represent a given community," one need be not limited "to carrying, epidermically suitable representatives of that community" and that "the experience of oppression [does not] confer

special jurisdiction over the right to speak about oppression" (Shohat, 1995:167). One does not necessarily have to go through the experience, i.e. slavery, to relate to and be affected by it.

The purpose of this first section is to outline some diverse theoretical frameworks related to black people's identity-politics and cultural identity. The first chapter of this section examines two antagonistic paradigms, that of Afrocentrism and some trends of cultural criticisms. The second chapter introduces the historical foundations from which the concept of Africanicity emerged, using intermediality as a method of analysis to expose new conjunctures and alleviate some conceptual tensions.

I employ an extensive bibliography of diverse approaches to draw theoretical frameworks for the notion of identity. Although, there are various ways to analyze the concept of identity in relation to black people, my intention is not to circumscribe its complexity. Stuart Hall offers an interesting sketch of five contemporary social theories on the question of identity that challenge the Enlightenment theory of fixed and stable

identity. Hall reviews the problematic of each paradigm, from the Marxist man making history, Freud's psychoanalysis of the symbolic processes of the unconscious, de Saussure's notion of language as a social, "not an individual system," Foucault's genealogy of modern subjects vis-à-vis power and discipline, and Feminist criticism as both a social theory of identity and a political movement (Hall, 1994a:119-25).

My investigation of practices of identity in black cinema focuses on two such frameworks emerging from two distinct fields of contemporary cultural criticism. The first, Afrocentrism, posits the concept of black identity as essentially established, a politically closed entity of racial groups, where only "delegated representatives speak on their behalf" (Ella Shohat, 1995:167). The second field, that of some trends of cultural criticisms, suggests that cultural identity is a dynamic identification, an open process of association within "a specific culture to share a sense of what it has in common with other cultures and of what distinguishes it from other cultures" (Jan Servaes, 1997:81).

While Afrocentrism asserts 'classical' affirmation and selection of African mythical objects, historical

timeframe and space to construct an 'original' identity-politic of black people (a theoretical counterpoint to Eurocentric discourses of power-knowledge, and especially of power-race), some trends of cultural criticisms cite the influence of modernity to justify the consequent hybridity of cultural identity. Both approaches address the issues of black identity-politics and the experience of blackness in the world and are relevant to the emergence of Black Studies as an academic discipline.

### **1.1. Black Cultural-Identity: Two Theories of Identity-Politics**

African Studies or Black Studies were established in the 1970s<sup>3</sup> as an interdisciplinary field of research in Social Sciences, the Arts and Humanities. Despite various

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<sup>3</sup> Prior to the 1970s, one could hardly talk about the studies of Africans as an academic discipline. It is in fact around the 1960s that black protestations in the US would lead to the establishment of Ethnic Studies. An exception could be made to the 1916 University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. In fact, established disciplines such as Sociology, Anthropology and History introduced the studies of Africans as early as 1916 in England, 1940 in France, and 1950 in America. In 1979, Kyoto University (Japan) created a Center for African Studies, following the 1964 initiated experience of Tokyo University creating its Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa. In the United States, multiple African Studies Associations emerged prior to the 1970s, however, they remained associative organizations, and not established disciplines. (See particularly the work of Mario Azvedo, 1998, and Nikongo BaNikongo, 1997.) Although, here, I do recognize the work of Lorenzo Dow Turner, Melville Herskovits, Roger Bastide, Robert Farris Thompson and many other scholars who have posed Africa in the center of their research prior to the 1970s, these works were however not realized in a specific discipline of African Studies. It is in the late 1960s that black history, literature, and interdisciplinary humanities and arts courses were instituted at some universities in the United States, in order to promote understanding of cultural heritage, analysis of political problems and solutions, and encouragement of artistic endeavors. However, the foundation of a true academic discipline did not take place until around the 1980s. The 1980s would also be the golden years of the emergence of Black, African, and African-American Studies.



methodological postures or interdisciplinary approaches, two paradigms have dominated Black Studies' lines of investigation. The first, Afrocentrism, focuses on the 'promotion' of African 'authenticity', values, attitudes, lifestyles, and mythical and traditional knowledges; whereas the second, defined here as some trends of cultural criticism, focuses on understanding the articulations of meaning production, social attitude, and economy shaping the dynamic process of cultural-identities. The Afrocentrists base their assumptions on an affirmation of self-determined identity-politics; while some trends of cultural criticism assert an unavoidable cultural hybridity at the foundation of any identity-politics. I want to separately unpack the complex system of both paradigms, starting with Afrocentrism attempting to explain black cultural identity as an 'authentic' identity-politic.

**I**

Afrocentrism posits that a better understanding of African knowledge and past African contributions to world knowledge leads to an improved achievement in Africans'

performance in life.<sup>4</sup> In his book, *La Crise du Muntu: Authenticité africaine et philosophie* (1977), Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga argues that forgetting, or the lack of a historical subject, results in reducing the identity one claims to a vague and abstract universality. This remark could be seen as the cornerstone which leads Afrocentrists to argue the necessity of the black authentic identity-politics. Molefi K. Asante, a preeminent Afrocentrist, argues that:

Afrocentrism seeks to uncover and use codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data. Such a method appears to go beyond [Eurocentric articulation] in order to revalorize the African place in the interpretation of Africans, continental and diasporan (Asante, 1990:6)

Asante's definition of Afrocentrism supports the paradigmatic articulations inspired by multiple epistemological formations of essentialism, cultural and social psychology, pragmatism, and history. This definition also illustrates Afrocentrism's dialectical framework which posits the centrality of African ideals and values as a counterpoint to the ways these ideals and values were (dis)qualified by Eurocentrist master

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<sup>4</sup> Such argument is sustained by J. H. Schiele, 1996, 1994, 1993, and 1991a; A. S. Abarry, 1990; and M. Asante 1990, 1988.

narratives. For example, in his exhaustive enumeration of Afrocentric paradigms, Jerome H. Schiele (1997:28) points out six main elements: (1) Human beings are conceived collectively; (2) Human beings are spiritual; (3) Human beings are good; (4) The affective approach to knowledge is epistemologically valid; (5) Much human behavior is nonrational; (6) The axiology of highest value lies in interpersonal relations. The main articulations throughout which these paradigms are applied, consequently, serve to overturn the Eurocentrist-hegemonic-discourses that have failed to validate African-based organizational systems.

This is precisely the central *problématique* of Afrocentric paradigms. Erskine Peters (1997:60) argues that Afrocentrism "still spends more time in argument with the European, racist historical legacy than [it does] on presenting" African knowledge itself.

Some proponents of Afrocentrism suggest establishing new theoretical frameworks based on organizational articulations grounded in African philosophy, in an attempt to mediate the experiences of blacks throughout the world. However, according to Schiele, this new shift of focus to black organizational perspectives must

immediately' (as well dialectically) be able to function in a "Eurocentric or western-oriented society." For example, the questions that the Afrocentric scholar might pose here are:

(1) How can collectively oriented people in an Afrocentric organization maintain a collective orientation in a society that is, to a considerable extent, antithetical to a collective, communal focus; (2) How would an Afrocentric oriented organization, with its de-emphasis on efficiency, survive in a society that places substantial value on efficiency; (3) How would other external factors, such as legal and legislative mandates, affect the de-emphasis on efficiency in an Afrocentric organization; (4) How would this type of organization establish a communal bond with members of a community who are influenced by the dominant, western value of individualism; and (5) What role would social class and race play in shaping organization-community relations? (Schiele, 1997:35)

Following Karl Mannheim (1985:192), Clarence E. Walker qualifies this Afrocentrist organizational theory as "utopian mentality," because Afrocentrism calls for a specific conception of life that is "incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs" (Walker, 2002:xxix). Nonetheless, Schiele's concerns about Afrocentrism are central to understanding the theoretical paradigms and tools put in place. They show that the new praxis of Afrocentricity is the result of the re-discovery of African-based philosophy of community, which interacts dialogically with the dominant discursive

determinations of the everyday life experiences of blacks. In so doing, the discourse behind Afrocentricity establishes the groundwork for a radical rejection of any prior discourses attempting to qualify the experience and identity of Africans. For example, the paradigmatic cornerstone of one of the founding fathers of Afrocentrism, John Henrik Clarke, was to reinforce the "authentic existence of Blacks" (Roland Walters 1993:368). This political and methodological perspective implies that all black people are authentic African people and must reject the geographical divisions and "locations based on colonialist spheres of influence" (ibid.)

The Afrocentrist community established numerous institutions to promote their assumption of African authenticity. The most active centers of research are the Kemetic Institute in Chicago and the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization, respectively, founded and co-founded by Jacob H. Carruthers. The success of these political and intellectual institutions will determine the significance of further evolvement of Black Studies.

I contend that the premise of the Afrocentrist search for African cultural authenticity is most manifest in the classical affirmation, categorization, and selection of African mythical objects, historical timeframes, and 'sanctified' space. For example, the Kemetic (or Ancient Egypt) is presented as the cardinal point of reference throughout which 'all' black people express their relationship with their traditional knowledge and civilization. Herein lies one of the central problematics with Afrocentrism,<sup>5</sup> i.e., that the classical 'signs' of experience of all blacks are linked solely to Egypt.<sup>6</sup> I argue that, however, this Afrocentric search for origins to validate a potential 'authentic' African knowledge can be explained with the Kantian constructivist framework of 'purity'.

The concept of 'purity' in classical western philosophy is intrinsically linked to the classification

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<sup>5</sup> Asante, in *Afrocentric Idea* (1987), argues that the articulation of Afrocentricity is "a critique that propounds a cultural theory of society by the very act of criticism" (p.6). But this theoretical strategy not only proposes new avenues integrating cultural criticism, it also deploys fundamental concerns at the core of Black Nationalism, because it actualizes "a cultural reconstruction that incorporates the African perspective as a part of an entire human transformation," (pp. (8-9) an assumption recognized in Eurocentric master narratives, and classical objectivism.

<sup>6</sup> In "Afro-Kitsch" Manthia Diawara (1992) argues that on reducing blackness "to Egypt and *kente* cloths [...] Afrocentrism has become a religion, a camp movement, where one can [take] refuge from the material realities of being black in Washington D.C., London, or Nairobi." Gilroy (1992), "It's a Family Affair," suggests that the Afrocentric framework shifts its main focus to the "reconstruction of individual consciousness rather than a black nation in exile or elsewhere." In *Black Atlantic*, Gilroy (1993:91) adds that Afrocentrism is "an invariant, anti-historical notion of black particularity to which [Conservative Afrocentrists] maintain privileged access."

of categories. Although Aristotle is considered the mastermind of classification, his work actually served for the foundations of racial-logic (*raciology*) developed in Kant's lessons of physics, geography, and anthropology, as well as in other major philosophical thought throughout the centuries.

In this process of underlining one of the main problematic, related to the Afrocentric paradigm, I briefly revisited the constructivist philosophy of Kant dealing with the notion of 'purity' and 'intuition'.<sup>7</sup> The physical categories of the sense of feeling, beauty and the sublime are central to Kant's philosophy. He applied these categories as an anthropological classification of cultures and races based on their geographical origin. Specifically, Kant used two different epistemologies (geography and anthropology) to demonstrate the relationship between knowledge, culture, and race. This classification of races based on geographical origin resulted in the conceptualization of a sublime, white

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<sup>7</sup> As suggested by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (1997), it might be useful to mention that Kant was concerned with the question of race (or questions of knowledge of the world of different human species) in all of his lectures: "In my occupation with pure philosophy, which was originally undertaken of my own accord, but which later belonged to my teaching duties, I have for some thirty years delivered lectures twice a year on "knowledge of the world," namely on Anthropology and Physical Geography. [...] However, it will not be possible considering my age, to produce a manual from my manuscript, which is hardly legible to anyone but myself." (I. Kant (1978:6) .

race, producing a kind of Hippocratic slogan inducing the natural talent of European culture: - *Die raße der Weißen enthält alle Triebferderund Talentes in sich* (Kant, 1785:§4).<sup>8</sup> He subsequently argues that non-European races lack "moral elevation" and "subliminal feeling," and are therefore incapable of ethical principles because they are passive animals.

On account of his reason, [man] is destined to live in a society of other people, and in this society he has to cultivate himself, civilize himself, and apply himself to a moral purpose by the arts and the sciences. No matter how great his animalistic inclination may be to abandon himself passively to the enticements of ease and comfort, which he calls happiness, he is still destined to make himself worthy of humanity by actively struggling with the obstacles that cling to him because of the crudity of his nature (in Starke, 1831, pp. 241-242).

The above quote on human nature is Kant's answer to Rousseau's articulations of "Nature" and the "Social Contract." It is meaningful to recognize the tremendous "motivating force" of Kant's words in characterizing all non-Europeans as belonging to a passive category of the human race, constitutionally incapable of attaining the morality, civility or sociality of the white, or "pure" race. Kant even offered subcategories within the non-

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<sup>8</sup> "The race of white people possesses all forces of enlivening and talents in itself". In F. C. Starke (1831, ed.), *Kant's phisolophische Anthropologie: Nach hadschriftlichen*.



European races, differentiating blacks from Asians and Native-Americans.

The race of Negroes, one could argue, is exactly the opposite of Indian people who cannot be educated, and have no motivating force and affective passion of love. [...] The Negroes are full of enlivening passion and love and can be educated, but only to serve (Kant, 1831:352-3).<sup>9</sup>

In Kant's view, Negroes possess a motivating force and affective potentiality for passion that Indian people lack. Consequently, Negroes can be educated, but only to be passive servants. Rousseau argued that since there is no "natural" right to arbitrarily legislate for community, because individuals are born free, the only legitimate way to secure "collective existence" and freedom is through "self-legislation" (or institutionalization).<sup>10</sup> Kant, however, felt that the "state of human-nature," as described by Rousseau, is evil in nature, and demands to be purified through man's highest-moral ability to overcome it.

Parallel to this *raciology*, Kant's philosophy is a methodological disposition of the ratiocination of the

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<sup>9</sup> Die raße der Neger, könnte man sagen, ist ganz das Gegenteil von den Amerikanern. [...] Sie sind voll Affekt und Leidenschaft, sehr lebhaft, schwatzhaft und eitel. Sie nehmen Bildung an, aber nur eine Bildung der Knechte, die sie lassen sich arbeiten. Sie haben viele Triebfedern, sind auch empfindlich, fürchten sich vor Schlägen und Thun auch viel aus Ehre (Kant, 1831:352-3).

<sup>10</sup> Coppleston (1964) illustrates the dialogical reflection between Kant and Rousseau that suggested the idea for this analogy between articulations of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism (in *History of Philosophy: Wolf to Kant*, Westminster, MD: Newman vol. 6, p. 81).

notion of 'intuition.' As a fundamental concept of his transcendental dialectic, *a priori*, the notion of intuition is also exclusively tied to the question of purity. But this time, Kant uses space (geography) and time (evolution) to apply his theory.

I call pure (in its transcendental sense) all representation in which one finds nothing belonging to sensation. [...]

In the transcendental aesthetic, we first isolate sensibility, by separating concepts from their intelligibility in a manner that the only remaining element is an empiric intuition. Second (from the remains of that empiric intuition), we once again distinguish all that which belongs to sensation in a manner that only the pure intuition and simple phenomenological forms remain, which are the only recognizable sensitive elements *a priori*. Two forms of pure sensitive-intuitions would result from this research as the principles of knowledge of **time** and **space** (emphasis added).<sup>11</sup>

Kant here invokes a constructivist perspective to legitimate the subjective construction of signification. According to Kant, the concept of transcendental purity is not an *a priori* state of truth reflecting a pure origin, but rather the ability to recognize (construct) the knowledge of this origin, not simply as an

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<sup>11</sup> "J'appelle pures (dans le sens transcendantal) toutes les représentations où l'on trouve rien qui appartient à la sensation. [...] Dans l'esthétique transcendantale, nous isolerons d'abord la sensibilité, en séparant tout ce que l'entendement y pense par ses concepts, de telle sorte qu'il ne reste rien que l'intuition empirique. En second lieu, nous en écarterons encore tout ce qui appartient à la sensation, de sorte que l'intuition pure et la simple forme des phénomènes, seule chose que la sensibilité puisse fournir *a priori*. Il résultera de cette recherche qu'il y a deux formes pures de l'intuition sensible, comme principes de la connaissance, savoir l'espace et le temps" (Kant, 1980:88-90, my translation, and emphasis).

intervention of inherent knowledge. This Kantian argument is antagonistically at the core of both modalities of Afrocentrism discussed so far in this chapter and some trends of Cultural Studies that I discuss in the next sub-chapter. Here, however, I want to mention that some trends of cultural criticism imply that one (i.e., the subject or agent) must first eliminate all pre-constructive concepts related to the intelligibility of an object — in other words, the 'iconic sign' referring to sensible representations of the world. Second, one must eliminate the 'index' of the remaining sensitivity of recognized elements or phenomena. Thus, the remaining sign(ification) is freed of natural significance, because it has been subjectively (re)constructed. The same process of selection and exclusion also takes place in Afrocentrism; the difference is that the resulting signification remains an original pureness of blackness, an essence that authentically reveals a primary being free of contamination by Eurocentric characterizations.

Kant's assumption of a subliminal purity resembles the radical Afrocentric methodological (political) framework. Afrocentrists argue with the same ratiocination as Kant did in explaining race and the

subliminal aesthetic. Afrocentrism's unitarian self-legislative apparatus, i.e. the *Kemet*, is analogous to a holy space proclaiming the elevation and purity of the black race. In this respect, references to 'home' (space in Kant's thought) are deductive referents of 'pureness' in which a new, universalized knowledge, 'Africalogy', is implemented. This 'home' is represented through the rhetorical figure of 'repetition'. It recapitulates, in fact, the classic Eurocentrist parameters of Greece as the origin of classic knowledge. For example, Asante (1988:ix) argues that the centerpiece of Afrocentric theory is to connect the African "minds, of Egypt to Africa". In another text, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, he adds that "the uses of African origins of civilization and the Kemetic high culture as a classical starting point are practical manifestations of the ways the scholar secures centrism when studying Africa" (Asante, 1990:14).

The Kemet is therefore a new 'intuitive' legislation and institution 'temporally' and 'spatially' located in a 'classical' site of reference, i.e., Ancient Egypt. Interestingly, this classical site is framed in much the same way as the Eurocentrics claimed Greece as the pure

and primary birthplace of world knowledge. According to Kant's intuitive philosophy, Greece then is not simply a concept, but rather a pure representation of a highly given space:

Space is represented as a highly and an endless given site. One should undoubtedly conceive all concepts as a representation containing within itself an infinitive multitude of diverse possible representations [...] but none of the concepts could be as such conceptualized; as if it contains within itself an infinite multitude of representations. [...] Therefore, the representation of space is an intuition *a priori*, and not a concept (Kant, 1980:92)<sup>12</sup>

The reference to Kemetic connections in Afrocentric discourses is represented as a boundless intuitive milieu, echoing Kant's statement above. Afrocentrists believe that Ancient Egypt is a valid example similar to Euro-elitist notions of classicism vis-à-vis the ancient Greek and Roman Empires. In addition, because it has become a powerful academic discipline, Afrocentrism now functions as a reference for the 'primary truth' to which ALL black scholars are supposed to be aligned. Michel Foucault notes that:

In a discipline [...] what is supposed to be its basis is not an undiscovered signification, nor an identity which should be repeated; it is what is required for the construction of a new enunciation. Hence, to have a discipline is the

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<sup>12</sup> L'espace est représenté comme une grandeur infinie donnée. Il faut sans doute penser tout concept comme une représentation contenue elle-même dans une multitude infinie de représentations diverses possibles [...] mais aucun concept ne peut comme tel être pensé. Comme s'il contenait en lui une multitude infinie de représentation. [...] La représentation de l'espace est donc une intuition *a priori*, et non pas un concept (Kant, 1980:92, my translation).

possibility to formulate, endlessly, new propositions.

[...] a discipline is not a sum of everything that could be said as true about something; it is not, even, the whole ensemble that could be accepted as the virtual truth about one object, according to the coherent principle of a system (Foucault, 1971:32-3, my translation).

Foucault also sees an academic discipline as a network of power blocking external agencies from infiltrating its circles with new propositions. All external propositions that do not adhere to the prevailing discourse of discipline are "considered as fantasies" (Foucault, 1971:34, my translation).

From a contemporary continental-African perspective, Thandika Mkandawire (1997) notes that this new power-discipline (Afrocentrism) within Black Studies continues to dictate its agenda as Euro-ethnocentrist studies on Africa. In other words, Afrocentrist scholars still impose dominant parameters on the studies of blackness and African people worldwide, dismissing the views of continental Africanists seeking to participate in this discussion. These Afrocentrists play the role of gatekeepers in the academic palace, imposing their theoretical frameworks and political positionality on African scholarship and reality. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, they 'repeat' the Kantian sub-

categorizations, presupposing that Africans are uncivilized, substandard, and inadequately prepared to move into the echelons of higher thinking. Despite their opposition to modernization theory, which views Europe as the nucleus of human civilization, Afrocentrists further this Eurocentric myth, implying that Africans have a long way to go to reach Western ideals in thought and culture.

Despite Afrocentrists' repetitive rhetoric of Eurocentric frameworks, relevant manifestations of Afrocentrism can be found in their critique of hegemony and dominant academic disciplines. For example, in the United States, Afrocentrism has been at the center of new narrative inclusions in the mainstream academic curricula. Otis Madison highlights the "compartmentalized history" of dominant historiography, particularly American, continuing to be "replete with nonsense" because it elevates specific figures,

Jefferson and Washington and others, as though they were people who were truly concerned with freedom and democracy. Only as an aside is there any mention that some of them were holding hundreds of individuals as slaves, and if not, were at the very least engaged in the support of the institution of slavery itself (Madison, 2001:360)

Emerging ethnic disciplines (Asian, Black, and Chicano) as well as Women's Studies, which, unfortunately, have

helped to fill the gap between the dominant curricula and the necessary historicity and articulation of everyday experiences of cultural minorities.

It is, however, pointless here to argue that 'legislative' institutions and the 'intuitive' legislation of ancient totalitarian European institutions contributed to the practice of repressive politics against non-Europeans, and the foundation of slavery and colonialism.<sup>13</sup> According to Walker (2001:xxiv), discussion on issues related to black experience should avoid repeating the "totalitarian groupthink," that uses "therapeutic mythology" (ibid.:23) to either accept or reject its fundamental premises.

Now I want to introduce some central problematics related to 'some trends of cultural criticisms'.

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<sup>13</sup> On another level of analysis, I will argue that the politics of 'exclusion' can be extended by citing the practice of rejecting of the mad person in European society. According to Foucault this practice of exclusion typified the word of a mad person carrying the truth that an established power-knowledge does not want to hear. For example, "cases that the word of a mad person is taken as nothing, which does not hold the truth, any importance, and could not make any justice in order to make its case [...]; there are cases, as a result of its opposition, that the mad person is considered to have strange power, for example, being able to reveal the hidden-truth." (My translation, Foucault, 1971:12-13). Similar practices of rejection are also common to some traditional African societies, despite differences on the levels of exclusion, i.e., a mad person is sometime considered an emissary of God, however, he/she is isolated from social spheres of power mostly, to protect his word. That is for instance the case for the Duala people in Cameroon.



## II

Keyan Tomaselli observes that the first paradigmatic break in the genesis of contemporary cultural criticism, occurred with the publication of *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Hall et al 1979).

This study drew on the work of European social theorists and applied a media based analysis of mugging through the employment of criminological concepts such as the discourse of policing, ideologies of crime, methods of social control and theories of the state. The study moved concern away from the elaboration of culture from within texts and artifacts of a society to the *relationship between texts and their contexts*. This located cultural studies as a site of convergence for the analysis of culture from a number of very different perspectives, each deriving from earlier Marxist-derived theory. (Tomaselli, 1995:13)

I suggest that this neo-Marxist perspective emphasizing the model of social class, race, and culture has also supported deeply subjective functions such as over emphasis on individual agency. In relation to the transformative means of cultural modernity, 'centered' neo-Marxist dialectical ideas of class, culture, race (and gender, to some extent) have 'mediated' with certain central subjective frameworks, e.g., the maxim: "Men make history" (Hall, 1994a:120).<sup>14</sup> The resulting structure of subjectivity and social class as agents of history,

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<sup>14</sup> Hall also mentions that some re-readers of Marx interpreted this mean in arguing "that individuals could not in any true sense be the 'authors' or agents of history since they only act on the basis of the historical conditions made by others into which there were born" (Hall, 1992a:120).

further, permits some contemporary cultural critics to determinate collective and subjective 'practices of discourse of knowledge'. Here both powerless and powerful elements negotiate, because they use the same social patterns of thought, i.e., science, freedom, and justice. Some trends of cultural criticisms have conceptualized those practices-of-discourse-of-knowledge as a new form of contemporary mythology of 'de-differentiation', conveying a strong politicized referent to cultural identity, namely hybridity.<sup>15</sup>

One can observe two interrelated frameworks in this new terrain of cultural theories: (1) positioning or an over emphasis a sovereign agency, and (2) reformulating unavoidable hybrid identity. On sovereign subjectivity, Stuart Hall notes that:

the birth of the 'sovereign individual' between the Renaissance humanism of the sixteenth century and the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century represented a significant break with the past. Some argue that it was the engine which set the whole social system of 'modernity' in motion" (Hall, 1994a:119).

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<sup>15</sup> For example, some emerging cultural analysts, driven by postmodernist perspective, attempt to articulate classless, raceless and cultureless frameworks, and suggest that the effort of non-Western cultures in the twentieth century has come to terms with modernity. Others suggest that "learning how to cope with or respond to Western ways and Western patterns of thought, chiefly democracy and science," has provided equality. (See Peter Watson (2000), *A Terrible Beauty: A History of the People and Ideas That Shaped the Modern Mind*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson (p.761), quoted by Oscar Guardiola-Rivera (2002), "In State of Grace: Ideology, Capitalism, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge" in *Nepantla: Views from South*, Vol. 3, No. 1, North Carolina: Duke University Press (pp.15-38).

Similarly, Cornell West observes that the universality and stability of the subject of the Enlightenment was rejected "in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity [...] to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing" (West, 1990:19).

However, the notion of 'diversity', particularly 'cultural diversity' remains an epistemological object, "a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics, or ethnology..." and does not necessarily include cultural difference, which is a third space of discrimination authorizing "the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity" (Bhabha, 1995:206). Some feminists participating in the movement of gender diversity and the rejection of universal subjects suggest that "the struggle is no longer concerned with the quest for equality, but, rather, with difference and specificity [...] in order to discover, first, the specificity of the female, and then, in the end, that of each individual woman" (Kristeva, 1986:196,).<sup>16</sup> As noted by Gilbert D. Chatain, such

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted by Gilbert D. Chatain, 1999:780

argument must permit us to understand that the basic democratic function of the equality of the human condition represents females as pure abstractions, denuding individual histories, experiences, and feelings (Chaitin, 1999:786). Therefore, the notion of 'difference' cannot limit itself to the study of gendered specificity, but must also include individualized experiences.

For the Birmingham School, derived from a Marxist perspective, the individual has also achieved a strong degree of agency because he/she is recognized as capable of creating his/her own meaning. Stuart Hall (1990:119) argues that "this does not mean that people were not individuals in pre-modern times," but rather that they were "conceptualized differently". Hence, modernity sets the individual subject free from pre-modern stability. For instance, the subjectivity of consumers in their social practices, particularly in relation to the growing mass media and mass culture in modernity, can then be 'positioned' in contradiction to hegemonic or dominant norms of production and consumption. Here, individual (i.e., specific social subclasses, mostly young blacks and whites) and subcultural practices (punk rockers, and

mods, etc.) instead of being manipulated by dominant frames of reference as suggested by some deterministic Frankfurt School's frameworks, differently decode the ruling-class ideology or 'preferred meaning', and make their own sense.<sup>17</sup>

From such new forms of subjective positionality, Stuart Hall noted that there are three levels of decoding: Acceptation, Negotiation, and Opposition. Hall produces a circulatory<sup>18</sup> encoding-decoding modality, implying that the whole process must be seen "as a 'complex structure in dominance', sustained through the articulation of connected practices, each of which, however, retains its distinctiveness and has its own specific modality, its own forms and conditions of existence" (Hall, 1980a:128). Hall further articulates these distinctnesses and complex practices within three hypothetical possibilities. The first, the dominant-hegemonic (or acceptance) position, implies a "perfectly transparent communication" in which the sender and the decoder are aligned side by side and both produce and reproduce hegemonic signification of events without any

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<sup>17</sup> See particularly Morley, 1980, Hall, 1980a

<sup>18</sup> I use the term circulatory to underscore Hall's application of a Marxist framework, to counter the linear model of communication theories, i.e., sender/message/receiver.

contradiction. The second position is that of the *negotiated code* or "a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements." Here, the receiver has two decoding possibilities: (1) Acknowledgment of hegemonic production "to make the grand [or dominant] signification;" and (2) Production of "its own ground rules," which operates as the exception to the rule. Globally, the negotiated position "accords the privileged application to 'local conditions', to its own more corporate positions." The third possibility is an *oppositional code* (or position) that implies that the receiver "detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference" (Hall, 1980a:136-8).

Subsequently, the Encoding/Decoding framework has been cited as a 'cultural decoding formula' of practices and identities, or practices portraying cultural and social identities. These frameworks have been displaced from their specific moments and contexts of production.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the encoding/decoding model that was a critique of the unidimensional theory of communication,

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Teshome Gabriel (1995-1985). I review Gabriel's application of encoding/decoding in black cinema in Section Two.

i.e., uses-and-gratification frameworks of sender-message-receiver, has been displaced from that targeted criticism, and applied as a decoding formula of other empirical cultural relationships.<sup>20</sup> According to Hall, the encoding/decoding model

opens up new questions [and] maps the terrain. But it's a model which has to be worked with and developed and changed [because] it's simply to give some fleshing out to the notion that decoding is not homogeneous — that you can read in different ways and that is what reading is about (Hall, 1994b:255-6).

One of the central problems in the use of this model, however, is its misapplication — particularly the contextual misuse of the notion of 'moment', which denotes "an articulation of the moments of production, with the moments of consumption, with the moments of realization, with the moments of reproduction" (Hall, 1994b:255). Central to the encoding/decoding model, the notion of moment suggests an articulation of distinctive contexts of production-consumption-reproduction. As a model of cultural criticism, encoding/decoding also denotes its intrinsic context of production-consumption

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<sup>20</sup> Hall outlines three central contexts of the production of the Encoding/Decoding model: (1) was to interrupt "the transparent notion of communication," (2) the political positioning implying "that meaning is not fixed," and (3) a critique of Marxist structuralism, i.e., Althusser and Blaibar (1971) *Reading Capital*, London: New Left Books. (Hall, 1994b, pp.253-255)

that needs to be re-articulated as Hall suggests, not simply applied.

I want to propose a metaphoric example to illustrate the contextual problematic of this model, using the linguistic 'assimilation' that Africans, in general, have faced during their recent colonial history.

In his social theory analysis at the beginning of twentieth century (1902), Herbert George Wells 'anticipates' that by the year 2000, British and French hegemonic languages would dominate the world. Today, from north to south, and in diaspora, blacks communicate 'officially' using these hegemonic languages. But has their use of these colonially-imposed languages in 'official' everyday life abrogated the fragments of the native languages and cultural practices? I am referring here to the fragments of culturality — that Fernand Dumont in *Le lieu de l'homme* defines as "a given primary culture" (Dumont, 1994:73);<sup>21</sup> or that Hall recognizes to be the accumulated "tradition of struggle," sustained across time (Hall, 1997:293-4). In other words, has

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<sup>21</sup> "La culture première est un donné. Les hommes s'y meuvent dans la familiarité des significations, des modèles et des idéaux convenus : des schémas d'actions, des coutumes, tout un réseau par où se reconnaît spontanément dans le monde comme dans sa maison. Fermée habituellement sur elle-même, et m'enfermant avec elle pour me conférer le sentiment de ma consistance, la culture [première] s'offre par ailleurs à une reprise en charge : non pas seulement par l'intermédiaire de la conscience personnelle, mais dans sa structure même" (Dumont, 1994:73).



Africans' "acceptation" of the apprenticeship, and even of the production and re-production of imposed-colonial rules, languages and cultures, erased African culturality?

My critique of these decoding frameworks applied to an object such as Africanicity is that one cannot only rely on definite stable moments (temporality) or decoding moments in the process production, consumption, reproduction and disregard the possibility of diacritical attitudes. For example, these oppositional, negotiated, and dominant positions do not seem to take into account the conjunctural possibility of other levels of practices, such as subversion, seduction, or masquerade. However, these possibilities are resolutely related to the unpredictability of human beings, whose diacritical and changing response to production and reproduction depend on specific, momentary attitudes such as humor, contradiction, necessity, or any other historical constituent element that cannot be fixed in a single formula.

I contend that whether or not Africans oppose, negotiate or accept colonial rules cannot be determined by any decoding logic that does not mediate the context

of historical constituent elements or symptoms with the 'finality' of everyday life practices. The notion of 'finality' — I develop further in the last Section of this dissertation — is essential in any decoding process. Because this notion allows us to frame the "specific system of signs, [or] a particular way of fabricating simulacra" (Mbembe, 1992:2), which is the basis for specific cultural practices of production, consumption, and reproduction, particularly in relationship to blackness.

In the context of Africanicity, the use of the encoding/decoding model must take into account the multi-layered practices of expression that betray an endlessly ideological construction and reconstruction of meanings. These meanings cannot be limited to the articulation of specific differentiated moments, and must unavoidably include the diacritical possibility of producing simulacra. In other words, one must consider "what is related to what" (Hall, 1994b.257-9), while the historical symptoms, the present, and the indeterminate future constitute a myriad of possibilities of practices of interpretation, production and reproduction, and their applicability to one's specific historical constituent

experiences. Such analysis is merely a conjunctural ground for investigation, not limited to binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination (Mbembe, 1992:3), i.e., resistance, passivity; subjection, autonomy; state, civil society; hegemony, counterhegemony; as well as totalization, detotalization, but to a circulatory articulation of apparently "disconnected practices" over space and time (Hall, 1994b:258).

The second problematic in some trends of cultural criticisms has to do with the present conditions of contemporary politics, i.e., globalization, and ongoing local resistance. Here, we can observe a reverse epistemological movement — a U-turn from the particular to the global — through two concerns from which it becomes possible to reopen politicized differences to a new global hybridity — cultural hybridity in particular. According to Guardiola-Rivera, this movement first sets up the 'local' against the 'global', and then develops

a practical critique of global commodification and its cosmopolitical ideology, that is, the idea that all productions and subjectivities derive their meaning from their spiritual relationship with the 'universal' purposive experience (cognitive and historical) of mankind (Guardiola-Rivera, 2002:27).

Simon During notes a similar trajectory. For During, while "globalization came from the media and the social sciences, notably, economics, sociology and communication studies," it is essentially about three interrelated questions:

The first was foundational (is globalization an effect of the totalizing reach of increasingly flexible forms of capitalism?); the second structural (to what degree does globalization intensify the convergence of local cultures and societies?); and the third, political (does globalization have a centre? is it named America?) (During, 2000:38).

The second question noted by During is of particular importance for my study, because it helps me to understand the 'efficacy' or 'ineffectiveness' of cultural hybridity as a decoding framework of Africanicity. Here, globalization is related to modernity as a site of subjective and or cultural agency, but, however, intersects with other subjectivities and culturalities.

To what extent, however, does globalization legitimate cultural intersections, locally and globally? As During noted, "globalization has come to mean just the 'form of unification' of the world both as event and knowledge" (During, *ibid.*) the same as the notion of

cultural hybridity has come to mean the absence of any 'difference'.

Hall correctly observes that the "liberal ideology of freedom is connected with individualism and the free market, whereas in socialist [Marxist] ideology, 'freedom' is a collective condition, dependant on, not counterposed to, 'equality of condition', as it is in liberal ideology". In part at least, Hall sees the mass media as a site of social struggle, because the media are places where ideas of race, for example, "are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated" according to multiple ideologies (Hall, 1990:9-12). In other words, mass media are the terrain of ideological struggles and epistemological intersections.

Janet Woollacott's review of the Birmingham School's cultural research illustrates such epistemological and ideological intersections. She shows that Marxist-derived cultural studies were first inflected through Gramsci's theory of hegemony and the Althusserian conception of ideological state apparatus such as mass media. While the mass media tend to reproduce the ruling-class' interest, they are at this same time a field of ideological struggle allowing resisting articulations (Woollacott,

1982:109-10). In other words, the social site of political struggle suggested by Hall illustrates an articulation between and among two kinds of ideologies and relations of power: (1) institutional ideology and the hegemony of control; and (2) individual ideology of expression, freedom, and agency. This articulation of distinctive epistemologies explains the active process through which both institutional and popular individualized meanings are connected at specific historical moments, by specific discursive expressions.

As I will demonstrate later, some trends of cultural criticism analyzing the political expressions of black culture articulate (connect) specific historical experiences with the production of cultural commodities. One of the central frameworks of such cultural criticisms lies in the articulation of the intersection of cultural practices with institutional parameters (ideology and hegemony). Whence, under the present conditions of 'globalization' and the framework of cultural 'intersection', some trends of cultural criticism shift their central premise to the persistence of hybridized practices-of-discourse-of-knowledge, functioning by attempting to erase links to any differences.

In relation to the identity-politics based on the notion of 'difference' and specific subjective experiences, the framework of the intersection of culture illustrates that globalization is partly the deconstruction of the late-modernity concepts of 'pure' nationality and ethnicity, and paradoxically, of the subject's specificity as well, as such frameworks are applied by Afrocentrist scholars. Therefore, both collective and subjective 'specificities' become hybridized through their unavoidable mediation with external historicity. This framework needs to be carefully unpacked, particularly because its proponents tend to link cultural identity to textual productions, as if changing historical conditions can dissolve "the traditional confidence with which critics and consumers divide the terrain of culture into texts, genre and media, and the terrain of cultural subjects into audiences and communities" (Grossberg, 1997:40-1).

In this new terrain of inquiry, textual productions (whether political or cultural) seem disconnected from specific histories and moments or articulate "discontinuous histories" (Gilroy, 1993:16-17). Here, unlike the *inferential* articulation of histories

connected to traditional struggles and ideologies, i.e., enslavement, colonialism and imperialism, emerging cultural analysts reinforce the autonomy of sign and discourse, and construct, or conjecturally mediate the relationship (or the mediation) of produced text and the subject-identity under which the text is produced.<sup>22</sup>

#### **1.1.1. CULTURAL HYBRIDITY VERSUS CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY: WHICH WAY IS THE RIGHT WAY?**

A central contribution at the core of contemporary cultural analysis is the deconstruction of the nationalistic concept of purity. As Hall (1993:361) argues, the appeal to racial or ethnic purity in the formation of national identity has become dangerously prevalent in the discourse of emerging and established nation-states. According to Hall, it is through these discourses of authenticity and purity that cultural minorities of all races have experienced nationalist oppressions.

As mentioned earlier, Keyan Tomasseli suggests similar articulation. He notes that the emergence of

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<sup>22</sup> (See Hall, 1990:11-4). Elsewhere he admits that one of the central concerns of cultural studies is "historical specificity" and "the specificity of each cultural configuration and pattern" [although] they may undoubtedly be [...] general mechanisms in common across the globe that are [for example] associated with practices of racism" (Hall, 1992b:17).



multiple European Nationalistic movements constitutes a prevalent ideology proclaiming the necessity for a fundamental change, even for academic disciplines.

The [coincidental] rise of Nazism in Germany, Fascism in Italy, Spain and Portugal, and Stalinism in the Soviet Union provided a context for the germination in the mid-1950s of 'cultural studies'. The general field thus owes its genesis to the reactions of different scholars working in distinct historical conjunctures to particular political, social and economic conditions. These conditions were themselves the result of massive forces which reconstructed entire societies and their relation to other societies during the early 20th Century (Tomasseli, 1995:4).

For Hall, the notion of authenticity is an ideological construct, because "ideologies 'work' by constructing for their subjects (individual and collective) positions of identification and knowledge which allow them to 'utter' ideological truths as if they were their authentic authors" (Hall, 1990:9).

As I noted earlier, Clarence E. Walker (2001) heeds the Afrocentric call for an authentic black identity as a dangerous nationalist articulation. In *Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms* (1980b), as well as in *Encoding/Decoding* (1980a), Stuart Hall suggests that cultural meaning or signification of culture arises reflectively from subjective experiences and social or systemic dispositives. For Walker and Hall, experience is an

effect, a historical construction, and not the core of signification.

A powerful concept in Hall's analysis is his typological illustration of the notion of 'construction'. He demonstrates how the social process of racial construction functions "to reproduce", for example, "the ideology of racism" (Hall, 1990:8). He argues that ideologies, for example, "do not consist of isolated and separate concepts, but [...articulate the] different elements into a distinctive set or chain of meanings" (ibid.:9). Similar to the structural applicability of the notion of articulation (*articulus* in de Saussure's term) an ideology is thus the '*langue* not language', because it gives specific meanings to the montage of specific images and symbols.

The same position is taken in *Encoding/Decoding*. The structure of meaning production is recognized in its differentiated moments, an articulation of production or structure of "the totality formed by [...] social relations [...] as a whole" system (Hall, 1980a:130). According to Hall, it is exactly at this level that the confusion between a potential authenticity (natural sign) and a performative construction of signification takes place.

Certain codes may, of course, be so widely distributed in a specific language community of culture, and be learned at so early an age, that they appear not to be constructed — the effect of an articulation between sign and referent — but to be 'naturally' given. Simple visual signs appear to have achieved a 'near-universality' in this sense: though evidence remains that even apparently 'natural visual' codes are culture-specific. However, this does not mean that no codes have intervened; rather that the codes have been profoundly naturalized. [...] Actually, what naturalized codes demonstrate is the degree of habituation produced when there is a fundamental alignment and reciprocity — an achieved equivalence — between the encoding and decoding sides of exchange of meanings (Hall, 1980a:132).

Hall's emphasis on the structural nature of signification as a subjective performance opens the door (epistemologically at least) to the concept of a centralized 'wholeness' under which some trends of Cultural Studies attempt to analyze the production of cultural identity. The point here is that, unlike the first attempt to link popular and individual subjects to intrinsic experiences and decisive forms of agency existing outside power-discourses — while needing discourses to become intelligible — some forms of cultural criticisms consider modernity as a site of unavoidable cultural intersections.

However, one central question remains: how can one grant the conjectural force of a cultural intersection or 'hybridized cultural identity structure' while still

recognizing differentiated or oppositional singularities and narratives "as the 'subjects' of [specific] history?" (Ella Shohat, 1992:174). In other words, how can the individual subject remain an agent of history (as we saw with feminist studies and the Birmingham School) and at the same time be a 'political hybridity'?

Paul Gilroy uses the concept of "political hybridity" to explain the structure whereby linguistic micro-systems "crossing borders in modern machines" become referent to "cultural hybridity," a "formal unity of diverse cultural elements" encapsulated in "discontinuous histories of black settlers in the new world" (Gilroy, 1993:12-17).

Stuart Hall rightly notes that although "rigid binary, racial logic is being used against [blacks, they] certainly know what's wrong with it, [...] when it seems to be working for [them, they] find that it's extremely difficult to give it up" (Hall, 1997:292). Does this mean, however, that the unavoidable hybridity of blackness is a non-differentiated or discriminatory practice of expression? For Bhabha the notion of hybridity is a conjunctural space of expression (a third

site) that translates the original into new forms of expression. According to Bhabha

cultures are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentered structures — through that displacement of liminality opens up the possibility of articulating different, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities" (Bhabha, 1990b:210-11).

Thus, the question about whether black cultures are hybridized cultures cannot explain the practice of difference expressing the struggle of blackness. Bhabha recognizes that such practices of political struggle open new sites to old principles and force us to "rethink the profound limitations of a consensual and collusive 'liberal' sense of community." They push us to understand "that cultural and political identity is constructed through a process of othering" or differentiation (Bhabha, 1990b:219).

With this complex position, I argue that some trends of contemporary cultural criticisms focus less on 'differences' or 'specificities'. This is because methodologically, any cultural specificity can lead to consider the potential authenticity claimed, for example, by Afrocentrism. This methodological problematic is therefore solely a political position, not an

epistemological positionality that can permit us to "rethink our perspective on the identity of culture" (Bhabha, 1995:207), as an 'enunciative' practice juxtaposing 'culture as a political site of struggles' of specific expressions of identification.

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this [differentiated and] ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity (ibid:208).

Again, as a very powerful framework, the concept of 'difference' is of particular importance in my study. For example, in analyzing the work of Fanon and Césaire, Edward Said notes that what both cultural agents

required of their own partisans, even during the heat of struggle, was to abandon fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition. **Become different they said**, in order that your fate as colonized peoples can be different" (Said, 1989:225, emphasis added).<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the idea in this 'nutshell' principle of cultural hybridity must first articulate a 'difference' or 'third space' of struggle because it is through that space that the cultural emerges as a political terrain of expression. This epistemological positionality is not limited to an articulation 'connecting' cultural

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<sup>23</sup> (Cited by Aschroft and Ahluwalia, 1999:111).

practices (because they are already connected). Rather, it finds the conjunctural articulation to explain the acts of enunciation 'among' and 'within' differentiated cultural and political expressions. For example, Bhabha notes that:

Fanon's vision of revolutionary cultural and political change as a 'fluctuating movement' of occult instability could not be articulated as cultural practice without an acknowledgement of this indeterminate space of the subject(s) of enunciation. It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew (Bhabha, 1995:208).

Therefore, the use of concepts of hybridity to decode the contaminated nature of cultural practices and subjectivities with the hope of explaining identity, atomizes the ambivalent process of 'difference' and 'identification'. Such uses of hybridity reinforces the 'homogenizing', 'reconciliatory', and 'unifying' framework of historical cultural knowledge, which, however, can only lead to Liberal rational<sup>24</sup> of cultural

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Bhabha (1990b:207) notes that "the attempts to conceive of cultural difference as opposed to cultural diversity comes from an awareness that right through the Liberal tradition, particularly in philosophical relativism and forms of anthropology". Sylvia Wynter (1992) also conceives this Liberal rational of diversity in similar manner. For Wynter, such rationale calling for apparent equality or multicultural diversity constitutes the site of racist discourses found, for example, in the systematicity of representations and images of textbooks, a systematicity of color-line that prones to turn every attempt of social change into the reproduction of the same dividing racial-line.

diversity, or the Afrocentrist centralized rational of cultural purity. The concept of cultural hybridity in relation to black expressions of identity or cultural productions has been widely applied.

In his book, *Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy argues that north-Atlantic black cultural identity is a hybridized transculture that has been initiated by modernity. According to Gilroy, black identity is a hybridized formation of modern influences occurring as a reflective mirror between Europeans and Africans. Gilroy cites in part the Foucaultian notion of "commentary" and Du Bois's views on "double consciousness" to illustrate this intersection of black culture, or what he calls "changing same" (Gilroy, 1993:106). Black cultural commodities and expressions are here interpreted as an expression "of commentaries upon ambivalences generated by modernity and their locations within it" (ibid.:117). Gilroy uses 'commentary' and 'double consciousness' as dialogically interpretative constructs of the 'changing same', i.e. all black-produced significations express an identity that is already hybridized by its reflective nature.

A dance mix, a radio mix, an *a capella* mix, a dub mix, a jazz mix, a bass mix and so on. On the most elementary level, these plural forms make the abstract concepts of changing same a living reality. [...] The relationship of the



listener to the text is changed by the proliferation of different versions. Which one is the original? How does the memory of one version transform the way in which subsequent versions are heard and understood? The components of one mix separated and broken down can be more easily borrowed and blended to create further permutations of meaning (Gilroy, 1993:106)

I contend that such analysis of practices-of-discourse-of-knowledge as hybridized forms of expression remains problematic, methodologically and epistemologically. This is because this use of hybridity to explain cultural productions has hardly been theorized as a decoding framework of cultural identity.<sup>25</sup> I suggest that it is more important, epistemologically, to consider the role of the historical fragments utilized in the production of social knowledge as being 'unit-specific', even if these units result in a hybridized performance. Methodologically, I argue that prior to hybridization, distinctive fragments of historical conjunctures articulate a 'specific economy' or context based on reenacted experiences. In analyzing the work of Jonathan Friedman, (1999, and 1994), Mike Featherstone rightly notes that:

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<sup>25</sup> Here, I agree with Stuart Hall suggesting that if theoretical paradigms "are closed, of course, new phenomena will be quite difficult to interpret, because they depend on new historical conditions and incorporate novel discursive elements" (in Grossberg (1997) "On postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall" (p.138). Therefore, unlike conjunctural propositions, any decoding structure has the risk of limiting an object of study to closed paradigms.

the question whether there is actually more mixing today than in the past when we had blues, jazz, pasta etc [...] may have more to do with the formation of a particular type of gaze on the part of upper class and middle class Westerners who are consumers of cultural objects and images. **Hybridization and creolization can be seen as the ideology of the intellectuals drawn from these groups.** But [this intellectual] celebration of rootlessness and their anti-ethnic orientation, should be seen as part of the logic of modern experience. (Featherstone, 2001:511, emphasis added).

One of the main problematics with the theory of modernity as a site of hybridization is that such methodology underestimates the practice of resistance-seduction taking place as counter-expressions of some dominant-middle class Western intellectual gazes on so-called low-culture. But let us separately outline two central problematics in Gilroy's analysis.

First, the notion of 'double consciousness' as a decoding framework of 'cultural hybridity' is ineffective when discussing blackness in the 'present moment of history', even if such investigations trace its symptoms solely to the North/North axis Atlantic African Diaspora. I contend that African-Europeans, Caribbeans, and Americans, as well as Africans in Africa, claim a multiple consciousness. Cultural, political, and religious hybridization through transnational migrations of people legitimates this claim. Intra-continental and

intercontinental migration of blacks also provide the parameters of cultural intersection, and therefore, of unavoidable double consciousness.

Double consciousness is not confined to north/north Atlantic black identity, nor is it an exceptional application for the African Diaspora. The conjectural force of double consciousness proposed by Du Bois can be seen as a conjunctural space of investigation, through which new conditions of complex articulations of expressions of identity emerge. Such conditions of expression allow us to understand specific moments of production in particular moments of history, as I will show in literary (re)production of the *New Negro* and *Négritude* movements introduced in the next chapter of this section.

Double Consciousness illustrates the 'reflective articulation' of the dynamic expression of identity, since the constructive process of one's identity invariably operates as a projection of 'Otherness', which Du Bois qualifies as a feeling of 'doubleness'. Indeed, double consciousness is a reflection of the cause/effect relation, or human interactive-relation, in modernity. It confirms the evidence of cultural intersection, because

one can hardly name a place, nation-state, continent, or population untouched by some aspect of modernity or cultural contamination, even in the so-called 'primitive' and uncivilized jungles of Africa from which I come.<sup>26</sup>

Raymond Williams has suggested that this unavoidable interaction of culture is a modernist phenomenon based on the internationalism of the historical avant-garde.

The true social bases of the early avant-garde were at once cosmopolitan and metropolitan. There was rapid transfer and interaction between different countries and different capitals, and the deep mode of the whole movement, as in Modernism, was precisely this mobility across frontiers: frontiers which were among the most obvious elements of the old order which had to be rejected, even when native folk sources were being included as elements or as inspiration of the new art (Williams 1989:59).

Modernity provides the rationale for cultural intersection and the development of new references of inspiration, which themselves are 'objects' to the interchangeability of 'multiple modernities'. These characterizations of specific identities and daily life experiences imply that any case of modernization (i.e., imperialism, colonialism or religious conquest) "creates facts that can hardly be deleted by new circumstances"

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<sup>26</sup> Perhaps postmodernist frameworks of modernization proposed, for instance, by Appadurai (1996) and many others, in the sense that it actualizes the 'connectedness' of human culture, can be relevant in this case.

(Ben Rafael and Sternberg, 2001:5). Ben Rafael and Sternberg add that: even wars in former colonies, or the "outbreak of revolutions against local elites, leave quite intact the signs of modernity in major spheres of social activity." Thus, modernity "has had a far deeper impact than the transformations brought about by the ideologies that it itself nurtures, like communism or nationalism." For example, "the communist regimes that collapsed in Eastern Europe after decades, left few prints in the structures of the new regimes and in the reconstruction of national culture (Ben Rafael and Sternberg, 2001:7, 23).

The above quote underscores the differences among modernity, cultural identity, cultural difference, and the process of culture of struggle in the expression of specific practices of identity. I contend that the failure of Afrocentricism and Eurocentrist nationalism must not result in an aversion to 'specific cultural practices, intrinsic belongings or identification of group formations recognizable within the framework of one's particularity or 'difference'. The contrary of that view can only re-apply relativistic anthropological rationales underscored by Bhabha (1990b), as well as

common scholarly confusions between the notions of identification and identity.

Indeed, Du Bois's notion of 'doubleness' amends the difference, and "Double Consciousness" becomes the site of struggle for this differentiated possibility of identification. Such differentiation becomes necessary in the analysis of production and reproduction of cultures, because the specific *enunciation* of the cultural cannot be limited to the comparative categories of cultural diversity, which, of course, produce hybridized commodities. Unlike Gilroy, Bhabha uses the notion of hybridity to illustrate this third space that he calls the space of negotiation explaining for example, how:

the effect of colonial power [illustrates] the *production* of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions [which then produces] an important change of perspective [because the] ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (Bhabha, 1996:112)

In part at least, the process of hybridization can explain cultural commodities, which are part of the contaminated expression of cultural performances and not, necessarily, historical constituent elements or experiences, i.e. slavery, colonialism, exploitation etc.

Thus, if hybridization is a process like identification, it must articulate historical symptoms with specific moments of expression that are at the core of the differentiated practices of identity. "From the minority perspective, [any cultural production] is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities [emerging] in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha, 1996:2), rendering invalid any fixed decoding formula, i.e., hybridity.<sup>27</sup> While there is always negotiation and transformation between differentiated practices taking place in that process, hybridity can only be a moment that exposes itself to transformation and negotiation. Perhaps, here, a 'changing same' might take place, but this is a moment of history, not a fixed formula of identification, which necessitates tracking down the symptoms at the edge of historical experiences — examining the relations of power, colonialism, slavery, and imperialism, and the

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<sup>27</sup> Although Gilroy argues against "Africentrism" and its cult of Africa—the nostalgia for Pharaoh's treasures rather than liberation as in the Exodus story—in Gilroy's analysis, the slave ship, the Middle Passage, and finally, slavery itself become static. Those experiences that can be referred to and looked back upon as imaginary significations shaping everyday life production of black people are wrenched out of a historically specific continuum, and the '*doubleness*' of their nature. As Dayan (1996) has suggested what is missing is the continuity of the Middle Passage in today's world of less obvious, but no less pernicious enslavement, because for Gilroy, slaves, ships, and the middle passage are historical metaphor of the double consciousness.

necessarily counter-expressions that they help to produce.

Similarly, Simon During argues that any postcolonial or postmodernist "rejection of resistance along with any form of binarism, hierarchy or telos [...] made reconciliatory [frameworks] an easy target for radical [theories] by deploying categories such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence... (During, 2000:386-7).<sup>28</sup> Grossberg supports a similar argument when he notes that:

The logic of mediation [as a decoding space of cultural intersection] has produced a crisis of relativism which, to some extent, cultural studies must face head on. [...] The solution can only come [...] by escaping the text and meaning, in order to explore the relations between discursive, social and economic practices, experience and power.<sup>29</sup>

Edward Said, as well, suggests similar position. In Said's view, culture is the site of struggles, because it is through culture that people change their view of the

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<sup>28</sup> It is worthy to mention that some relevant Afrocentric critics of Cultural Studies paradigms target issues of high/low cultures, and analysis of culture studies' relation to the literary or the specialization of 'literature'. For example, Asante argues that along the evaluative axis deployed to defend of high culture and exclude popular forms of expression in literature, a new category of popular literature "has then been instituted, to describe works which may be *fiction* but which are not *imaginative* or *creative*," and are therefore "devoid of AESTHETIC interest, and which are not ART". In regard to literature, Asante concludes that many cultural studies are devoted to analyzing of works in this popular "sub-literary" category, redefined as the promulgator of a new counter-hegemonic ideology, and opposed or conflated with high-cultural, exclusionary standards of literary merit. Still, most poems, plays and novels of black people are not seen as literature; they fall below this level, in a sense related to the old distinction of Cultural Studies *polite learning*; because they are not 'substantial' or 'important' enough to be works of literature, however, they deploy complex, difficult, resistant, often avowedly elitist works of popular literary modernism (Asante, 1988:153)

<sup>29</sup> See L. Grossberg, "A Prisoner of the Modern?," in the *Second Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference*", Tampere, Finland (<http://culturemachine.tees.ac.uk>), 1998b



world. This is because culture allows people to resist imperial power and structure of knowledge and to express their difference (Said, 1993). In another text, Said argues that "resistance cannot equally be an adversarial alternative to power and a dependent function of it, except in some metaphysical, ultimately trivial sense" (Said, 1983:246).<sup>30</sup>

I contend that the notion of hybridity as a decoding logic of cultural intersection prevents us from asking some of the questions that need to be asked if we are to articulate what is occurring in cultural productions and imagine alternative or counter-articulations (Grossberg, 1998a). Indeed, I concur with Ben Rafael and Sternberg (2001) that three important factors must be taken into account with regard to modernity and analyses of ways in which specific cultural practices can determine multiple levels of responses.

1) Modernity expands in diverse settings while this expansion does not necessarily eradicate existing traditional and religious standpoints and practice. (2) Hence, 'multiple modernities' means that modernity becomes associated with different cultures. (3) By the same token, modernity may represent different lasting tensions in societies" (Ben Rafael and Sternberg, 2001:16).

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<sup>30</sup> (Cited by Aschroft and Ahluwalia, 1999:107)

This enactment of "tactic's"<sup>31</sup> potentialities reveals the conjunctural ways of 'doing' in the same spaces within which hegemonic discourses appear to determine social reality and creative expressions. For example, Prasenjit Duara argues that "nationalism is rarely the nationalism of the nation" as an instrumental, circumscribed border "but rather represents the site where very different views of the nation contest and negotiate with each other" (Prasenjit Duara, 1996:152). Therefore, concepts such as nationalism and hybridity must be an 'in-between' location explaining the performative process of negotiations and tactics among particular antagonistic forces. The understanding of such performative practices of tactics, which I will analyze as a figuration of 'marronage' in the second chapter of Section II, allows us to dislocate not only the visible site of power and knowledge, but to comment upon the reflective articulation of black expressions of identity in cinema. Specifically, it will permit us to illustrate a new conjunctural articulation creating meaning in the practice of black cinema, through the negotiation of the

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<sup>31</sup> Tactic, according to de Certeau (1990), is a way in which one creates parallel modalities to escape dominant regulations, or institutional instruments of control. Tactic is not based on power, nor does it seek power, rather it uses its illegality to gain self-autonomy. It is a state of self-affirmation, usually in contradiction to formal regulation.

expression of oneself with the historical symptoms determining one as an 'Otherness'.

My analysis then will outline historical symptoms involved in the process of tactics, as seductive practices of historical constituent expressions not limited to activities of resistance. The correlation of seduction and resistance suggested by this analysis results in differentiated practices of identity or expressions of marronage. The notion of tactic allows us to explain, despite dominant surrounding cultural and imperial "strategies,"<sup>32</sup> why black forms of expression continue to articulate specific social concerns (events), positing a trans-geographical affective identity exposing specific rhizomic units of Africanicity, particularly in cinema.

The second problematic in the use of the concepts of hybridity is concerned with Foucault's description of "commentary." Therefore, reexamination of Foucault's (1971) notion of commentary within its French context is instructive. In his book, *L'ordre du discours*, Foucault's

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<sup>32</sup> Contrary to tactic, "strategy" illustrates the way in which regulations, and other kinds of instruments of control, command, and/or subjective powers are organized. For example, it illustrates ways in which linguistic, and other scientific disciplines have instituted the "right-way" of doing and being. And anyone who does not respect the established rules is an outlaw.

notion of "commentary" is based on the power of interpretation of literary texts. Foucault believes that "interpretation" itself is linked to disciplinary dispositives. Foucault explains this articulation prior to analyzing Janet's text (Foucault, 1971:25-26). According to Foucault, commentary postulates the existence of a complex articulation of 'reenactment'. For Foucault, the primary text is always a treasure demanding to be 're-actualized' and 're-commented' upon by subsequent texts or secondary commentaries. Foucault cites religious and judiciary writings as an example of texts that are continually re-commented upon (ibid.:24). Indeed, he argues that it is through the first conditioned process of the appearance of a primary text (or its 'primarily' discursive production) that the analyst locates meanings for subsequent produced commentaries.

Several major texts are mixed and vanish, and commentaries sometimes substitute the primary text. However, their function remains; and the shifting principle (of these commentaries) is constantly reintroduced. The radical erasure of the level's differentiation is simply a game, utopia or anguish. A game 'à la Borges' of a commentary which is in fact a word for word reappearance (although solemn and expected) of what is the basis of its comment; again, game of a critic who would endlessly debate about a work which does not exist. The lyrical dream of a re-born discourse, absolutely innocent, and which

endlessly reappears in its refreshed sentiments,  
objects, and thoughts (Foucault, 1971:25.)<sup>33</sup>

Putting aside the question of ideology, Foucault's articulation of commentary is based on the power of interpretation of literary texts. He believes that "interpretation" itself is linked to institutional comprehension, not ideology. In other words, one must always examine the discursive practices taking place within the institution (discipline) and the production of text to make meaning. Here, the locus of meaning is dislocated or separated from its secondary (commentary), discipline's interpretative function because one must always re-actualize the primary text to render secondary commentary intelligible. Furthermore, one cannot radically obliterate the primary text; any attempt to do so is simply a game. Such as a game "à la Borges" or a commentary that is, in fact, nothing more than a word-for-word reappearance of the primary text.

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<sup>33</sup> "Bien des textes majeurs se brouillent et disparaissent, et des commentaires parfois viennent prendre la place première. Mais ses points d'application ont beau changer, la fonction demeure ; et le principe d'un décalage se trouve sans cesse remis en jeu. L'effacement radical de cette dénivellation ne peut jamais être que jeu, utopie ou angoisse. Jeu à la Borges d'un commentaire qui ne sera pas autre chose que la réapparition mot à mot (mais cette fois solennelle et attendue) de ce qu'il commente ; jeu encore d'une critique qui parlerait à l'infini d'une oeuvre qui n'existe pas. Rêve lyrique d'un discours qui renaît en chacun des points absolument nouveau innocent, et qui reparaît sans cesse, en toute fraîcheur, à partir des choses, des sentiments ou des pensées" (Foucault, 1971:25).

Hence, through the notion of commentary, it seems epistemologically unfeasible to question the absence of any 'primary units,' self-expression, or local-specific practices in the production of a potential black performance, e.g., music in Gilroy's analysis.

It is from such symptomatic development that we can show, at least partially, a historical genesis and highlight some central problematics evident in the attempts of the two main paradigms of cultural criticism and Afrocentrism trying to articulate black identity-politics. These examples illustrate recent cultural analysis that attempts to 'reinvent the political' as a cultural form of identity, opening up the possibilities of neo-political imagination both in theory and practice.

The central problematic of both paradigms seems to be the lack of connection linking the history of distinctive experiences, human practices of knowledge, and phenomenological formations at the core of ideological discourse in the process of production of Otherness, particularly black-Otherness, as a subcultural production or (com)modification. Here, Stuart Hall's analysis of social functions of discourse becomes

helpful, particularly in relation to mass media as a conjunctural terrain of identification, not identity. "Identity," argued Hall, is what is at stake in political organization. It is not that the subjects are there and just cannot get to it. It is that they don't know yet that they are subjects of a possible discourse" (Hall, 1997:291). Yet, identification as a conjuncturally open articulation of Africanicity, works in the present, through the "contingent antagonistic, and conflicting sentiments of which human beings are made up" (Hall, 1997:292). I suggest that although the notion of identification is a conjunctural articulation located in the present, one must mobilize historical symptoms related to identity i.e., ideological characterizations of imagined black-Otherness, to make sense of this conjuncture. Here, we can find the conjunctural power of the concept of articulation. Hall suggests that an articulation is:

the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. [...] The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected (in Grossberg (1986) "Interview with Stuart Hall," p.55).

For example, he argues:

the discourse of racism, as a means of disavowing the realities of racism and repression does not mean that we can permit the term to be permanently colonized. That appropriation will have to be contested, the term disarticulated from its position in the discourse of 'multiculturalism' and transcoded, just as we previously had to recuperate the term 'black' from its [historical] place in a system of negative equivalences (Hall, 1992a:257)

Articulations are thus the practices of discourse and meaning produced by the conjunction of historical categories of discourse that Hall defines as ideologies transforming a people's "consciousness and awareness of themselves and their historical situation..." (in Grossberg (1986), *"Interview with Stuart Hall,"* p.55).

In *"reel to reel: race, sex, and the class at the movies"* bell hooks suggests that it is quite impossible to escape the historicity of the cultural articulation of "patriarchal parenting, class exploitation, race and gender domination, exclusion and subordination" (hooks, 1996:65-7). Therefore, the decoding structures of both cultural hybridity and authenticity to explain black identity risk becoming yet another formulation limited to the surface of meaning. I agree with Walter Benjamin (1978), that we must get back to the reiterated aura (specific historical constituent elements) of an object



of knowledge to fully make sense of its expression. That is, we must investigate the core of historical experiences that shape the contextual practices of everyday life, even if these practices are subjectively performed. For example, analysts of South African cultural expressions created greater scope for ideological maneuver by replacing the idea of "race" with that of "culture."<sup>34</sup> However, does this 'changing same' of a 'signifier' resolve the problems of racial experience under apartheid, or is it a 'truth commentary', especially for the people who have actually experienced it? Stuart Hall suggests that although the well-known phrase of "changing same" constantly reshapes and reworks traditions, it still "transmits the capacity to be both the same [historical struggle or experience] and different [contextual historicity and practice,] both located in tradition and yet not constrained by it" (Hall, 1997:294). For Hall, the changing same is a conjunctural articulation grounded in a specific tradition, a specific cultural expression reworking itself through specific historical experiences, particularly those related to a history of struggle. Such

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<sup>34</sup> Arnold Shepperson (1996), quoting Boonzaier (1988).

conjunctural articulation vis-à-vis the construction of black formations of identity, functions both inside and outside the practices of expression of blacks — to reveal the symptoms of their struggle, the transhistorical or in-temporal representation of their identity — and of course, one has to expect changes and continuities in such process. Therefore, I envision the notion of changing same in much the same way as Stuart Hall does in his critiques of some postmodernist frameworks on the end of narratives and the 'collapse of the real'.<sup>35</sup>

**1.1.2. ON AFRICANICITY: WHICH WAY CAN'T BE THE WRONG WAY?**

I want to borrow Lawrence Grossberg's usage of "context" to specify my argument. In developing his view on how cultural studies should conduct its investigation, Grossberg (1998a) observes that most cultural productions analyzed through the gaze of hegemonic disciplines have very little to do with the culturality (everyday life practices) of the people in question. In his view, cultural analysts must circumscribe the context shaping

the relations between discourses, everyday life and the machinery of power. This is the peculiar logic of cultural studies: it begins with a

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<sup>35</sup> See particularly, Hall's interview in *On Postmodernism and Articulation*, in Grossberg, 1986:45-60

context that has already posed a question; yet the question itself defines the context. Thus cultural studies always has to begin again by turning to discourses as both its productive entrance into and a productive dimension of that context. In the end, it is not interested in the discourse per se but in the articulation between everyday life and the formations of power. Thus it ends with a different understanding of the context than that with which it began, having gone through the mediations of culture (discourse) and theory. Cultural Studies is, then, a context-specific theory/analysis of how contexts are made, unmade and remade as structures of power and domination (Grossberg, 1998a:68)

Grossberg's articulation of "contextualism" in cultural analysis suggests that one cannot discuss potential expressions of the identity of blacks, regardless of their modern geopolitical locations, without taking into account the specific historical circumstances under which they enact their culturality. Whether this expression be a-logical or irrational commentary of some socially constructed origins, it continues to be part of a conjunctural articulation.

Without denying that cultural practices enable us to 'make sense' of the world (or at least to navigate within sensible world), such a contextualism contests the reduction of sense-making to cognitive meaning and interpretation, and the model of culture as somehow standing apart from — and between — other planes that it interprets. Instead, cultural practices always operate on multiple planes, producing multiple effects that cannot be entirely analyzed in the terms of any theory of communication, ideology, consciousness or semiotic (Grossberg, 1998a: 75).

With this in mind, I will introduce the following chapter with poems by African descendants. As context specific expressions, those poems help us to understand 'the articulation in-between everyday life expressions and historical experiences', that one might call the "mix" of cultural commodities or "pure" expressions. Instead of limiting our analysis to the potential mix or purity of these transformed expressions ("cultural practices" in Grossberg's term) into commodities, we must be able to understand what is being conveyed in such practices that are called 'mixes' or 'hybridity' by some trends of cultural criticism and 'pure' or 'authentic' by Afrocentrist scholars? Does this mix or authenticity transiting through the instruments of modernity (music, literature, and cinema) reflect the context of specific units or fragments of black historical constituent elements, the experience of blackness? What is this experience? Does it express a sort of lamentation about black contemporary experience through their performative reenactment of the past? At which point can the mediation between history and everyday life articulate the practice of expression of Africanicity as a common trans-geographical expression?

The task here is not to enforce mediation as a socially reconciliatory framework, but rather to articulate the 'figuration of mediation' that emerges in-between the expression of these practices and their contextual discursive articulation. In the final chapter of the second section, I will demonstrate the difference between the figuration of mediation and the mediation itself, using Deleuze's notion of "crystallization."

As I noted before, Grossberg suggests that the logic of mediation prevents us from asking what is going on. Yet, I want to argue that we must re-articulate the conjuncture of the universal-global and local-specific to analyze the 'linkages' of both essentialist identities and cultural practices. Such epistemological positionality:

would have to think about the mechanisms and modalities of belonging, affiliation and identification in order to define the places people can belong to, and the places people can find their way to. Identity becomes more of a political category to be mobilized and laid claim to and matter of belonging to the claim to be somewhere and hence with someone. (Grossberg, 1998a:70).

In other words, the rejection of universalism or biological regimes of identity, seems not to be enough, if cultural identity, at least in part, is in essence a practice of recognition or identification. For example,

the terms such as *Black cinema* or *Black Atlantic* cannot be legitimated without an epistemological and methodological positionality, not determined positions. For bell hooks, such terms imply something different from the simple word black cinema or black Atlantic. This is because the term 'black' "can function to both close down and open up creative positionalities" (hooks, 1996:71), of specific practices of expression. Cited by hooks, John Akomfrah argues:

I'm a black filmmaker" — means that there are certain [essential] prescriptions that you're expected to take on board. I'm not particularly troubled by that because that is par for the course. What I'm troubled by is the Kantian nature in which that prescription is placed on us as a separate categorical imperative — [i.e.,] a black filmmaker has to do this. I think this is not just wrong because it's absurd, but it's also wrong because it forecloses questions we need to ask (in bell hooks, 1996:71).

Such critical propositions need to be seen not just as the formal defining terms of Culture Studies, but as the resulting symptoms of particular conjunctures that ascribe historical and cultural meanings and political valences to ideas and practices. Here the conjunctural notion of black cinema is fully located in actual historical time, designating a specific moment, practice, and ideation, and cannot be articulated taxonomically

from the decoding space of a general logic. John Trimbur (1993) suggests that such conjunctural articulations constitute the temporal and temporary moments at which ideas take on particular social weight, cultural meaning, and rhetorical effect, not because of their intrinsic or essential identities (as specified categorically) but because of the way these ideas are articulated by 'specific' group formations and take on 'specific' identities located in 'specific' historical settings and social contexts.

Traces of such critical conjunctural analysis can be found in Bergson's philosophy. One of Bergson's assumptions of 'human freedom' is opposed to the various doctrines of determinism and to Kantian constructivism. In fact, Bergson introduces an epistemological framework that I see as an antecedent to intermediality. For Bergson, "to affirm the existence of universal laws, both natural and moral, is to impose a strait jacket of conformity onto everyone, thus robbing them of any opportunity for freedom or what we would today call difference,"<sup>36</sup> hybridity, heterogeneous, and specificity

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<sup>36</sup> (Cited by Chaitin, 1999:785)

Bergson's *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (Bergson 1932) develops what he conceived to be the political implications of his notions of temporality, contingency and freedom. "According to [Bergson], there are two kinds of human society, or two aspects present in every individual and every social group: the one designed to ensure the survival of the group, the one therefore closest to nature, the "closed society," which is dominated by universal rules and characterized by rigid adherence to traditional ways and by militaristic hierarchical relations of command by the few and obedience by the many; and the very unnatural--and therefore all the more human--"open society," that is, modern democracies which bear witness to human struggles to supersede the constraints of universal law. (Bergson dismisses ancient democracies, for their freedom was built upon the enslavement of subject peoples.) What makes it so human is precisely its institutionalization of the principles of creative evolution (Cited by Chaitin, pp.785-86).<sup>37</sup>

Such an intermedial analysis indicates my preferred line of investigation in examining the emerging practices of expression in black cinema, because such articulations 'intermedially' will mobilize distinctive black historical experiences and everyday life practices of expression into one space of production. It is through this conjunctural articulations that one can appreciate the notion of intermediality, because, on a conceptual

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<sup>37</sup> Chaitin correctly analyzes Bergson's argument against extremist nationalism as one of his central ideas was that freedom and universalism must remain open to further evolution and agency expressing liberty and equality that are not yet articulated or even conceived, a Bergsonism known as "Personalism", i.e., "l'avenir doit rester ouvert à tous les progrès, notamment à la création de conditions nouvelles où deviendront possibles des formes de liberté et d'égalité aujourd'hui irréalisables, peut-être inconcevables" (Bergson 1932, 1215). This Bergsonism became the primary ideological basis for "personalism" in the early 1930s, and dominated an important segment of the non-Marxist Resistance during the German occupation and immediately after the liberation.



level, it alleviates the dialectical dichotomy existing between located experience and context, and allows us to see the emergence of new forms of analytical possibilities and challenges in the study of Africanicity.

## 1.2. Africanicity: A Methodological Framework of Intermediality in Black Studies

*Tu te souviens de chaque mot le poids des pierres d'Egypte  
Et l'élan de ta misère a dressé les colonies des temples  
Comme un sanglot de sève la tige des roseaux  
Cortège titubant ivre de mirages  
Sur la piste des caravanes*

...  
*Mandingues Arada Bambara Ibo  
Gémissant un chant qu'étranglaient les carcans  
Et quand nous arrivâmes à la côte  
Mandingues Bambara Ibo  
Quand nous arrivâmes à la côte  
Bambara Ibo  
Il ne restait de nous  
Bambara Ibo  
Qu'une poignée de grains épars*

...  
*Mais je sais aussi un silence  
Un silence de vingt-cinq mille cadavres nègres  
De vingt-cinq mille traverses de Bois d'Ebène sur les rail du Congo-Océan  
Mais je sais  
Des Suaires de silence aux branches de cyprès  
Des pétales de noirs caillots aux ronces  
De ce bois où fut lynché mon frère de Georgie  
Et berger d'Abyssinie.  
(Jacques Roumain)*

*I am Negro:  
Black as the night is Black,  
Black a like the depths of my Africa.  
I've been a slave:  
Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.  
I brushed the boots of Washington.  
I've been a worker:  
Under my hand the pyramids arose.  
I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.  
I've been a singer:  
All the way from Africa to Georgia  
I carried my sorrow songs.  
I made ragtime.  
I've been a victim:  
The Belgians cut off my hands in Congo.  
They lynch me still in Mississippi.  
I am a Negro:  
Black as the night is black,  
Black like the depths of my Africa  
(Langston Hughes)*

Hughes and Roumain are African descendants in the New World.<sup>38</sup> Hughes writes in English while Roumain uses French. Both languages represent power-subduing

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<sup>38</sup> In this dissertation, the New World signifies the idea of African diasporas, and thus includes the Caribbean, the Americas, Australia, Asia, and Europe.

instruments of modernity. However, the codes of these strange languages are used as vehicles of expression to articulate a specificity of blackness. Their poems expose the historical articulation between Africans and the experience of blacks in multiple geographical locations in the world. The links and expressions of these experiences are intrinsically related to what I call the 'Literature of Exclamation'. As a performative practice, this literature of suffering is a practice of expression that articulates strong figures of mediation between history and everyday life experience. This practice of expression also transcends national, cultural and tribal identities and reinforces the blackness of Africans (as an experience taking place across geographical and physical borders) from the Mississippi to the Congo and from Georgia to Egypt. These exclamations are not concerned with authenticity or hybridity; rather they introduce the 'practice of writing' as a vehicle communicating the sameness of their structure of feeling, blackness, identification, and Africanicity.

Diverse articulations related to the notion of Africanicity emerge in literature around the mid-

nineteenth century. Originally, these works arose as a response to the calls for African nationalism. In his book, *In My Father's House*, Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992:3-6) notes that Alexander Crummell, a Liberian born African-American considered one of the founding fathers of African nationalism, as early as 1862 published a collection of writings entitled *The Future of Africa* (1869-1862). In this book, Crummell postulated the formation of a 'common nation' for Black people in Africa. From the end of the nineteenth century to post World War II, circa 1887 to 1950, the idea of a pan-Africanist entity was expanded with practical applications chiefly conveyed by William E. B. Du Bois. Despite huge ideological division, Pan-Africanism essentially advocated that blacks represent themselves through autonomous institutions liberated from colonialism.<sup>39</sup> This ideology based on self-representation comprises the notion of blackness that is a trans-local experience based on historical formations, a

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<sup>39</sup> This historical emergence at the foundation of Black Nationalism can be traced through multiple political panels such as: the first Pan-African Congress, in London, 1900, followed by Paris (1919), London and Brussels (1921), London and Lisbon (1923), and New York (1927) organized by W. E. B. Du Bois. Subsequent meetings with African leaders took place between 1927 and 1944, for the first time claiming African autonomy and independence. For example, African political figures such as Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Kwame Nkrumah (Gold Coast, today Ghana), Akintola (Nigeria), Johnson (Sierra Leone), and Armattoe (Togo) launched the idea of the United States of Africa at Sixth Pan-African Congress at in Manchester in 1945.

transnational culture intersecting: "First and Third worlds across Africa, the Americas, and Asia to the metropolises of Western Europe and North America" (Michael T. Martin, 1995:4). It was not, however, until after the Second World War that the notion of Africanicity became viable, as a singularizing narrative concept, emphasizing the trans-geographical similarity of the historical and everyday life experiences of blacks around the world.

Following World War II, studies were produced attacking the premises on which Western discourses asserted the superiority of Western culture and knowledge. In the diasporas, as well as in Africa, emerging black intellectuals started to focus their research on African cultures, civilization, and historical heroes.<sup>40</sup> Forceful leaders such as Lumumba (Congo), Keita (Mali), Malcolm (the) Little and Martin Luther King Jr. (USA), Toussaint Louverture and Henri Christophe (Haiti), and many others became important figurations calling attention to historical oppression

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<sup>40</sup> It may be useful to notice that most titles of literary productions of this era talk about this issue, i.e., *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, (1939), *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950), *Toussaint Louverture*, 1960, *La tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963), *Une saison au Congo* (1967), all by Aimé Césaire; *Batouala, véritable roman nègre* (1926), *Un homme pareil aux autres* (1947), by René Maran; and *The White Man's Burden* (1898), *The Negro* (1915), *The Crisis* (1934) by W. E. Du Bois to name few.

and struggle of blacks, and evoking the security of a 'symbolic' identity for black communities worldwide.

Some critical scholars refer to this kind of literature as *Négritude*, and *The New Negro* (*Harlem Renaissance*) (Lylian Kesteloot, 1968), and "*Black Radical Tradition*" or "*Black Nationalism*" (Cedric Robinson, 1981, and Alain Locke 1968). For example, Locke describes the *New Negro* movements as having inherent objectives emphasizing philosophical and esthetical dimensions of black life and experience. For Kesteloot (1968:5-7), *Négritude* and the *New Negro* movements are painful articulations of silenced cultures that expressed the liberation of black people worldwide.

Regardless of the definition one may choose here, the point is, these movements articulate fragments of the same feeling, which are like a '*rhizomic*' sequence, expressing a black communality (Africanicity). This common feeling is manifested in their writings from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. It is the duration of this '*repetitive exclamation*' by blacks shared feelings that I call '*an expression of blackness*', Africanicity, and which I want to study the articulations of in black cinema.

The *Négritude* and *New Negro* movements 'poetically' articulate different discourses from Afrocentrism and some trends of contemporary culture studies. Both movements address what Grossberg calls an epistemological linkage between essentialist identities and cultural practices. For example, the *Négritude* exalted the body and soul of blacks: - *Naked Woman, black woman - Clad in our color that is life, in your form that is beauty! ...* (*Black Women*, Senghor(1994)).

I suggest analyzing the practices of such expressions of feeling through the oxymoron figure of structure of feeling. In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1985), Raymond Williams relates the ways in which societies make "common" sense of their feelings, and experiences. For Williams, experience and experimentation are literally connected, historically at least. Both notions are related to the accumulation of past events such as history, or the awareness of specific social knowledge, including feelings, which are in fact, also, a result of external contingencies and discursive representations (pp.126-8). Here, this accumulation or skillfully learned history, whether the discourse of this history is true or not, constitutes the starting point of

'precise' creative skill, leading people to analyze, interpret, communicate, and actively participate in the construction of their immediate society (Williams, 1985:71). In other words, the greatest challenges facing any self-expression of identity, and particularly any expression claiming an 'identity-specific', demand sufficient means of symbolic interaction, interpretation and communication.

In this communicational process, four interrelated keywords or questions occur. First, "who 'speaks?'" Second, "from what 'situation?'" Third, "with what 'authority?'" And fourth, "with what 'intention?'" These keywords, in fact, relate to the question of authority, subjectivity or individualism (cultural authority in Diawara's words), and less on the ways this potential authority articulates its knowledge based on 'learned' or 'gained' social experience. In other words, this articulation of authority was neither about the question of authenticity nor hybridity. But the concept of the authority, in the philosophy of performance and literature at least, has been vastly debated. Some understood this "concept as substance" having a specific social position in the domain of the "being". But as



Levinas (1996) argued, this position contains two problems:

First, how do we understand this leave-taking from the self which the thinking substance brings about and which displays an entirely original aspect? Indeed, we could say that thought, in reaching out toward objects, does not actually take leave of itself, since its objects — considered as ideas and contents of thought — are, in a certain sense, already within it. [...] Such reflection is a basic requirement for a subjectivity enclosed within itself which must search within its own interior for signs of its conformity with being. From there, it is but a step to idealism. [...] The subject itself will constitute its own object. Idealism comes to be one of the consequences both of the Cartesian *cogito* and of the theories of knowledge whose flourishing has been fostered by this new conception of the subject (Levinas, p.12).

My concern is that William's articulation of who speaks, from what situation, and with what authority and intention falls into a possible subjective idealism. The second problem Levinas highlights is located at the very heart of constructivist conjectures of the subject, i.e., that any "substance is that which is. Now, existence is for us essentially linked to time — whatever theory we might have about it" (Levinas, 1996:12). Levinas uses Heidegger's critique of Kantian constructivism to argue that in the very terms philosophy employs to speak of the subject, one meets with the "temporal indices."

What is more, once we admit that the subject is temporal—that it subsists as an eternally present substratum, that it unfolds in time in a chain of causes and effects—can that subject be

called a substance and can it have being except in a purely nominal [or constructed] sense? But if we acknowledge the substantiality of the subject, how do we understand that next to this *temporal dimension*, life, precisely as conscious life, is related at each moment of its passing to an object? This relation to the object as such is not a *temporal* event of which, so to speak, we could become aware. The relation points in a direction to which conscious life is bound in each moment of its passing, but in which it does not perdure. But on the other hand — and this is crucial — we cannot reduce the relation of *subject to object* as it persists within idealism, where the object is encompassed in consciousness, to one of these supertemporal relations we know in an ideal world. For it is a matter of a relation lived out and established effectively by the individual beings such as we are (Levinas, 1996:12).

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes describes the myth as "a type of speech" which is 'acquired' from "silence existence of oral state, open to appropriation by society, for where it is no law, whether natural or not with talking about things" (Barthes, 1972:109). Not unlike Williams, Barthes considers that any speech act (particularly mythic speech) has *already* been worked to produce suitable structure "for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance" (Barthes, 1972:110). Barthes expressively used italic characters to mention that a myth is *already* something acquired from social historical expressions. In other

words, myth, for Barthes, is part of social bibliography, such as Williams's *Keywords* of "common" gained convention.

For the issue at hand, my concern is how can we understand the meanings within the *Négritude* and the *New Negro* movements as an articulation based upon collective-self experiences? And to what extent can such an articulation help understanding the practices of identity in black cinema?

The Barbadian artist, George Lamming, argues that: "the fundamental engagement with creating that material base has been completed, and in a way, all the edifices that one constructs will in some way be influenced by the nature and the character of that material base" (Lamming, 2002:178). Lamming continues in attesting that:

Why do I make this effort to reproduce myself? And this question is then going to be answered in a variety of what you call disciplines—this question will be answered by reflections called religion, it will be answered by reflections called philosophy, and so on. But all of these areas of enquiry really derive from that early question, the recognition that I am here, I exist, [and] I have reproduced myself [in relationship to my earliest culture] (in David Scott, 2002:178-9).

This terrain of complex expression illustrates how black artists consider the question of their identity seriously. Particularly, it shows that this terrain is

structured with complex feeling, calling, at the same time, some common potentiality and structural regularity to articulate black peoples 'becoming'.

Yet, I argue that the *Négritude* and *New Negro* movements become an articulation of communication that calls upon all Africans to recognize and celebrate their beauty and humanity. Has noted by Francena Thomas, Césaire articulated this celebration as a ground for "common communication between all Africa's stolen legions: - *My name is Bordeaux, Nantes, Liverpool, New York and San Francisco, Virginia Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama. A monstrous putrefaction of results coming to nothing... Red earth, brother earth, Blood-Brother earth...*" (Thomas, 1995:494). Whereas for David Diop, Senghor, Jacques Roumain, and Leon-Gontran Damas, the mediation of discursive ground in favor of their blackness was at the center of their concern.<sup>41</sup>

While the *Négritude* and the *New Negro* movements employed poetical-articulations to advocate a trans-geographical sentiment of blackness, those engaged in Black Nationalism adopted political patterns of

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<sup>41</sup> See particularly Senghor (1948), *À l'appel de la race de de Saba*, Paris: Seuil; Roumain (1945), *Bois d'Ebènes*, Port-au-Prince; Diop (19\*\*-1947), *Coups de pilon*, Edition Présence Française"; and Damas (1962-1936) pigments, Paris: Présence Africaine

historical revisionism, structural functionalism and Marxism<sup>42</sup> to refute prevailing scientific (Darwinist) assumptions of black inferiority. Black Nationalists employ a comparative international approach to politics observing the ways in which the international system functions to construct hierarchies, legislatures, parties, and social class. Specifically, they would combine Hegelian concepts on the production of culture and meaning with Marxist modes of commodity production and social class. For example, Trinidadian born C. L. R. James is cited as one of the leading figure of this political production. Cedric Robinson rightly observes that James' interests were the "evaluation of civilization and wilful agency" and that he "forsook the mechanics of determinism and objectivity" (Robinson, 2001:37). James's thirty years of expatriation in Britain and America provided him with an understanding of the ways in which narrative structures alien to the West are

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<sup>42</sup> For example Mahmood Mamdani states that "[P]recolonial Africa comprised neither just pristine stateless communities nor only tyranny-ridden conquest states. Even in the nineteenth century, the conquest states did not exhaust the experience in state formation. External conquest was one route to state formation, and the other was through internal differentiation. The latter and not the former experience is the more fruitful ground for recapitulating custom and tradition. We will see that although it abolished formal slavery, colonialism crystallized, formalized, and built on the range of unfreedoms unleashed in nineteenth-century conquest states, only to generalize them. From African tradition, colonial powers salvaged a widespread and time-honored practice, one of a decentralized exercise of power, but freed that power of restraint, of peers or people. Thus they laid the basis for a decentralized despotism" (Mamdani, 1996:48).

'historiographically' constructed with selective and 'compartmentalized' sketches. Applying comparative modes of analysis, the work of James not only mediates his knowledge of the West and the everyday life experience of blacks, but also engages political ideology about the becoming of blacks.

It is through such articulation that Black Nationalists began the work of historical revisionism. However, this nationalism of diverse approaches is marked by a theoretical impasse, because the centrality of their object (i.e., blacks are a-national, contextually, historically, and discursively). Consequently, the form of 'Nation' or 'Nationalism' that Black Nationalists defend is also, in part at least, concerned with a performative state of mind, which is similar to the poetical articulation advanced by the *Négritude* and *New Negro* movements. For example, one of the fathers of the *Négritude* movement, Aimé Césaire, notes that:

[...] I affirm that the word *negritude* fits a visible reality and fulfills an undoubtedly profound need.

What is reality?

An ethnic reality, some would say.

But the word ethnic should not confound us.

In fact, *negritude* is not essentially of a biological nature. Beyond immediate biology, it obviously refers to something deeper; more precisely, to a sum of lived experiences which have defined and characterized one of the forms of human condition made by history. It common

denominator is not a skin color as such but the fact that we all belong in one way or another to a people who has suffered and continues to suffer, a people who is marginalized and oppressed (Césaire, 1995:13).

According to Césaire, Négritude is thus a movement, a practice of expression, located far beyond the biological referent of race. It is a movement based on the expressive conditions of life of certain categories of people recognizing themselves through certain categories of discourse. To illustrate this articulation that goes beyond a biological referent of race, and to concentrate on the practice of expression and feeling, Césaire continues:

I shall never forget the day I saw in a bookstore window in Quebec a book, whose title bewildered me: *We the White Negroes [Niggers] of America (Nous autres nègres blancs d'Amérique)*. Of course I smiled at the exaggeration, yet I said to myself: "Well, this author may be exaggerating, but at least he has understood negritude" (Césaire, 1995:13-4).

Thus, the notion of Africanicity appears to be a performative practice in that its object of concern, black people, represents a grouping that is nationally, culturally, and geographically dissimilar. That explains the diverse articulations related to Africanicity. For example, in relation to nationalism, Africanicity is variously described as: "a spiritual principle [...] a large-scale solidarity [...] a daily plebiscite" (Ernest

Renan, 1990:19), or an essence that remains "intangible," Walker Connor (1994). Jude Akudinobi echoes Hans Kohn's analysis in *The Ideas of Nationalism*, that Africanicity remains an act of consciousness legitimated "first and foremost [by] a state of mind," (Akudinobi, 2001:122, quoting Kohn, 1944:11).

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson analyzes the link between cultural production and nationalism. For Anderson, the nation is an imagined political entity conceived as horizontal comradeship inherently (that is geographically) limited (Anderson, 1993:6-7). The central frameworks of nationalism, in Anderson's view, are therefore part of a "large-cultural system" preceding political discourse from which the nationalism became an intellectual movement (Anderson, 1993:12). Anderson credits the universal systems of mass communication as an example of generating the discourse and networks through which a sense of communal experience is performed or produced for the benefit of people who may never meet (Anderson, 1993:163-64), in other words an "imagined community." This argument is very powerful, because it recognizes the role of mass communication as a medium of



performance transmitting imagined feeling of group formations, however still limited to the same geographical borders.

My focus is with the 'horizontal' of affect or "comradeship" taking place in the performative process of a black a-national space that I call affective trans-geographical expressions or practices of identity.

The question this dissertation addresses is the articulation from which Africanicity is performed to reveal horizontal expressions of identity, or trans-geographical senses of belonging. Taking into consideration international and geopolitical *problématiques* at the core of any potential identity of black people, one needs to determine what kind of performative 'fragments' can elaborate expressive signification of this identity. To realize an investigation unconstricted by theories of nationalism, Partha Chatterjee proposes a concept of "fragment" opening new lines of research inside the articulations of nation-state, ethnicity, and national culture. Chatterjee observes that the "fragments" of a performed identity are like Deleuzian *rhizomic* "units" of a whole social system, as well as "the most creative results of the nationalist

imagination in Asia and Africa..." (Chatterjee, 1993:5)<sup>43</sup>  
 which overlaps the political construction of the  
 sentiment of belonging within national communities

The colonial state, in other words, is kept out of the "inner" domain of national culture; but it is not as though this so-called spiritual domain is left unchanged. In fact, here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a "modern" national culture that is nevertheless not Western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being. In this, its true and essential domain, the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power. The dynamics of this historical project is completely missed in conventional histories in which the story of nationalism begins with the contest for political power (Chatterjee, 1993:6).

This dynamic view of colonial power and colonized creativity allows Chatterjee to observe not only colonial ideology as the only producing force, but, to some extent, underscore the creativity of subdued communities. Further, Chatterjee discusses the theory of labor/capital and capital/community<sup>44</sup> to illustrate the nature of 'communal love' taking place within these oppositions.

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<sup>43</sup> This is my commentary of Chatterjee's notion of fragment, however, in Chapter II, I will mostly refer to Deleuze's and Guattari's articulation of rhizome to explain the fragmented roots of Africanity. Whereas in Chapter III, Chatterjee's articulation of communal love will help us to better understand the ways in which multiple national and cultural differentiated fragments communicate their feeling of belonging in their dynamic response to power.

<sup>44</sup> "What Marx did not see too well was the ability of capitalist society to ideologically reunite capital and labor at the level of the political community of the nation, borrowing from another narrative the rhetoric of love, duty, welfare, and the like. [...] It is not so much the state/civil society opposition but rather the capital/community opposition that seems to me to be the great unsurpassed contradiction in Western social philosophy" (Chatterjee, 1993, pp.235-36).

This love, however, echoing articulations of communal feeling and belonging, implies an onto-theological phenomenon, a unificatory figuration holding fragmented groups formations together. Going back to *Négritude* and the *New Negro* movements, their initial stages of expression and practice "can be defined as sudden awareness of difference, as a collective memory, as loyalty, and last, as form of solidarity" (Césaire, 1995:15) between members of multiple nationalities, cultures, and races.

Frantz Fanon (1963) also suggests a theological rhetoric of love as a decisive figure in the formulation of a sovereign identification obstructed by colonial power.

In undertaking this onward march, the people legislates, finds itself, and wills itself to sovereignty. In every corner that is thus awakened from colonial slumber, life is lived at an impossibly high temperature. There is a permanent outpouring in all the villages of spectacular generosity, of disarming kindness, and willingness [...] to die for the 'cause.' All this is evocative of a confraternity, a church, and a mystical body of belief at one and the same time (Fanon, 1963:132).

I will argue that the articulation of trans-geographical fragments in black cinema reenacts similar affective chords of 'recognizable' historical experiences expressing empathetic narratives, or as Shirley Samuels

(1992:4) describes "a set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer". For Fanon (1963:244), if the "nation is consciousness, the culture is the expression of that consciousness in the form of spirit". Here, the consciousness is a form of spirit not belonging to the nation-state or "its institutional embodiment," but to the people performing their difference inside and outside the nation-state borders.

This understanding of the empathetic historical experience, mediated through diverse black performances, allows us to suggest the conditions of the formulation of Africanicity, which is in part at least expressed as a 'feeling of belonging (love)'. Put in a different way, in *Négritude* and the *New Negro* movements, the poems illustrate the conjunction between historical context and mostly empathic content. Further, they also indicate a conjunctural form of investigation, a new trans-geographical space of black identity, emerging through discursive articulations expressed through the intermediation of literature and everyday life experience. This process explains the conjunctural application of

intermediality positing this trans-geographical black identity as an emerging form of discursive event.

In this dissertation, this intermediality will obligate two interrelated articulations to outline the trans-geographical appearance of Africanicity. The first is the conjunction of fragmented social practices expressing the same feeling of belonging through the medium of cinema. The second is the mediation of discursive tensions resulting from the juxtaposition of historical context and contemporary practices of expression enacting the commentary of the experience of blackness worldwide. Or as Césaire (1995:15) has put it, a collective memory. The first articulation shows the potentiality of discourse of black cinema to reveal specific fragments or figurations of historical experience; the second permits us to understand and outline the conjectural tensions under which this performative practice of Africanicity is expressed. It is this process of articulation that I call intermediality.

### **1.2.1. *Intermediality as Methodology***

I want to conclude this section by explaining the notion of "intermediality" which is the cornerstone of my

argument that the cinema can be the conduit of differentiated discourses of identity and the surface of investigation of the history of discursive symptoms of and on black people. This double position necessitates one to build analytical bridges between practices of cinema and wider discursive practices, between specific moments of the past and specific expressions of the present. The concept of intermediality allows me to conjuncturally articulate an approach of the relationship between the art of cinema, ideas, practices, and social discourses.

Jürgen E. Müller was one of the firsts to use the term "intermediality." In fact, in the late 1980s, Müller (1994) suggested that:

If "intermediality" is the relationship between distinctive media(s), and that one of their functions is the historical evolution of these relationships, this implies that the "monadic" conceptualization of singular kinds of media is unacceptable (Müller, 1994:219).<sup>45</sup>

For André Gaudreault and François Jost (2000), however, intermediality is imposed by media's interconnectivity. Due to modern communication technology (computers,

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<sup>45</sup> "Si nous entendons par "intermédialité" qu'il y a des relations médiatiques variables entre les médias et que leur fonction naît entre autres de l'évolution historique de ces relations, cela implique que la conception de "monades" ou de sortes de médias "isolés" est irrecevable... (Jurgen E. Müller (1994 :219, cited by André Gaudreault and François Jost (2000) in "Presentation," Societies and Representations: La Croisées des médias ([www.cri.umonreal.ca](http://www.cri.umonreal.ca))).

television, telephones), and institutional mergers in the fields of communication shifting disjunctive philosophies and interests, researchers have been forced to revise their monolithic theories. Gaudreault and Jost further observe that the evolution of technologies, especially with regard to visual representations, necessitated the establishment of new inter-disciplines such as Film, Television, and Media Studies. They propose to analyze this intersection of disciplines (intermediality) not as a revolutionary process or point of disjunction, but rather as a 'continuum space of interconnection', and 'variable duration'.<sup>46</sup>

This is also the way by which artist and art critic Dick Higgins defines "intermedia" as the irreversible continuum of multiple categorized practices.

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<sup>46</sup> "L'actualité des médias est à la convergence. Convergence des dispositifs (le bon vieil écran de télé est aussi aujourd'hui un ordinateur, un accès à la "toile", un téléphone, une console de jeu, etc.) et convergence des intérêts (les fusions des certaines sociétés de médias antérieurement "divergents" ont pris, au tournant du siècle, une ampleur insoupçonnables il y a quelques années à peine). En un sens. Tous les médias sont à une croisée des chemins. Pourtant, à jeter un coup d'oeil en arrière, cette croisée des médias ne semble pas née d'hier. Le vingtième siècle a été particulièrement, et proprement, "intermédiatique, ce qui a eu maintes conséquences sur l'élaboration des modes de pensée et des pratiques culturelles actuels. La rencontre de l'écrit, des reproductions visuelles, numériques et audio, ainsi que les économies de circulation qui leur sont propres ont donné naissance à de nouveaux champs du savoir (par exemple, les études cinématographiques ou les études télévisuelles) et à des sujets de recherche insoupçonnés il y a peu encore (tel l'hypermédia). Ainsi est-il devenu urgent de prendre en considération l'aspect proprement médiatique des productions intellectuelles, afin d'en comprendre les propositions esthétiques et les enjeux socioculturels. Sans doute ce contexte explique-t-il la résurgence récente, dans le champ des recherches médiatiques, du concept d'intermédiarité, un concept qui existait pourtant depuis quelque temps déjà mais qui était resté fort peu usité. ... Plutôt que de penser en termes de rupture, de coupure ou de révolution, nous avons choisi d'explorer, dans le cadre de cette livraison de la revue Sociétés & Représentations, ce moment critique, de durée variable, où les médias se croisent." (Gaudreault and Jost, op. cit.)

[...] I would like to suggest that the use of intermedia is more or less universal throughout the fine arts, since **continuity** rather than **categorization** is the hallmark of our new mentality. There are parallels to the happening in music, for example in the work of such composers as Philip Corner and John Cage, who explore the intermedia between music and philosophy, or Joe Jones, whose self-playing musical instruments fall into the intermedium between music and sculpture. The constructed poems of Emmett Williams and Robert Filliou certainly constitute an intermedium between poetry and sculpture. Is it possible to speak of the use of intermedia as a huge and inclusive movement of which dada, futurism and surrealism are early phases preceding the huge ground swell that is taking place now? Or is it more reasonable to regard the use of intermedia as an irreversible historical innovation, more comparable, for example, to the development of instrumental music than, for example, to the development of romanticism? (Higgins, 2001:52).

Higgins provides an illustration of intermediality (see Chart I), and concedes that it is more than a fusion of distinctive ways of doing and categories of media, but rather their interconnectivity that usually result in the misuse or frequent confusion with the term "mixed media."

This [figure] is a venerable term from art criticism, which covers works executed in more than one medium, such as oil color and [gouache]. But by extension it is also appropriate to such forms as the opera, where the music, the libretto, and the mise-en-scene are quite separate: at no time is the operagoer in doubt as to whether he is seeing the mise-en-scene, the stage spectacle, hearing the music, etc. Many fine works are being done in mixed media: paintings which incorporate poems within their visual fields, for instance. But one knows which is which.

In intermedia, on the other hand, the visual element (painting) is fused conceptually with the words. We may have abstract calligraphy, concrete poetry, [and] "visual poetry." [...]



Again, the term is not prescriptive; it does not praise itself or present a model for doing either new or great works. It says only that intermedial works exist. Failure to understand this would lead to the kind of error of thinking that intermedia are necessarily dated in time by their nature, something rooted in the 1960s, like an art movement of the period. There was and could be no intermedial movement. Intermediality has always been a possibility since the most ancient times, and though some well-meaning commissar might try to legislate it away as formalistic and therefore antipopular, it remains a possibility wherever the desire to fuse two or more existing media exists. (Higgins, 2001:52-53).

The notion of intermediality is an unavoidable methodological posture in the fields of the Social Sciences and the Arts and Humanities today. Indeed, there have been multiple attempts to prescriptively define its concerns. One such attempt shifting the concern of intermediality out of the space of technological media to fundamental practices, such as human memory, is the closing lecture of Eric Méchoulan, at the 2000 Conference of Intermediality. Méchoulan concludes this conference entitled *Les Nouvelles sphères de l'intermédialité* at the Musée des Beaux Arts (Montréal) in suggesting that:

Intermediality [...should] also focus on all the "in-between" of arts and techniques; all this milieu where, somehow, this retreat operates, precisely. Not only the recent technologies such as video or internet, but also fundamental 'Techniques' which constitute what has sometimes been referred to as view or memory or rumor. There lie some challenges which belong, I

believe, to the order or what should concern us if we were to deal with intermediality.<sup>47</sup>

Méchoulan's attempt to circumscribe the methodological space of intermediality is compelling; because he not only evaluates the intersections of the technological apparatuses observed earlier by Gaudreault and Jost, and the interconnectivity of artistic practices and media's categories emphasized by Higgins. Méchoulan pushes the questions of intermediality within the surrounding modalities of human agency — 'fundamental Technique as he named it' — using the arts of cinema, video, radio or even telephone to endorse new forms of social expression and performance. According to Méchoulan, the collective memory certainly constitutes one of the greatest achievements of contemporary technology, which have succeeded in constituting a memory parallel to human memory.

This important observation shows how the notion of intermediality allows us to analyze the process of 'transfer' of esthetical structures not merely within artistic practices, but also to social spaces of

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<sup>47</sup> « L'intermédialité [...doit] aussi concerner tout ce qui est l'« entre » des arts et des techniques; tout ce milieu où se joue en quelque sorte justement ce repli-là. Non seulement des techniques récentes comme vidéo et internet, mais aussi des techniques fondamentales, des technologies fondamentales que sont, on les a évoquées parfois, le regard ou la mémoire ou la rumeur. Il y a là des enjeux qui sont aussi, me semble-t-il, de l'ordre de ce qui devrait nous intéresser si on voulait faire de l'intermédialité. » (Méchoulan, 2000)

expression or fundamental social discourses, such as the historical anamnesis enacted by the Négritude and New Negro movements.

Another good example of this usage of intermediality is Werner Wolf's study of nineteenth and twentieth-century Anglo-Irish social fiction set to music. In his book, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (1999), Wolf describes the "transition" of fiction into music, using Bergson's ideas of the mediation between the dancing sentences, rhythm, punctuation, and curve of thought and feeling.<sup>48</sup> This conjunction of practices, phenomenon, and epistemologies allows Wolf to observe new articulations in Anglo-Irish music. For example, he notes that the oral performance in Anglo-Irish music whereby musical units effectively transferred into the experience of everyday life (Wolf, 1999:63). This observation posits an interesting point, suggesting that these artistic creations based on

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<sup>48</sup> It is useful to mention that Henri Bergson's idea of mediation implies the conjuncture of appearance, i.e., virtuality to actuality, memory to multiple temporalities, etc. For example, Bergson notes that the primary function of memory "is to evoke all those past perceptions which are analogous to the present perception, to recall to us what preceded and followed them, and so to suggest to us that decision which is the most useful. But this is not all. By allowing us to grasp in a single intuition multiple moments of duration, it frees us from the movement of the flow of things, that is to say, from the rhythm of necessity." It is apparent that memory plays the role of facilitator of multiple temporalities, permitting to navigate, perceptually, from the past, present, and to future, but most importantly, punctuating the rhythm (duration) of this perception, and the participation of agency freed by the flow of mnemonic information (Bergson, 1991:228-40).

everyday life expression, function semiotically to express Anglo-Irish culture (Wolf, 1999:229). These semiotic functions permit Wolf to understand the transfer of the social imaginary into intrinsic Anglo-Irish reality expressed through music, in spite of their mimesis of 1920s British high society (ibid.:174).

Wolf's observation offers an example of intermediality that necessarily engages conjunctural analysis and epistemological tensions. Wolf's task was to make people hear and feel "by the power of the written word," quoting Joseph Conrad's (1898) *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. This methodology of fictional musicalization expressing new forms of discursive articulation allows us to see the complex tensions between the concepts of music, oral performance, fiction, and reality, representation, and social experience. Indeed, in order to playfully "experiment [...] how far literature can actually go in approaching music and sensory [as] non-verbal experience," (Wolf, 1999:158-9), this setting of fiction to music engages true tensions, because it articulates distinctive epistemologies, i.e., biology, musicology, sociology, and philosophy exposed by the notion of intermediality. The success of this complex

methodology in conjoining multiple epistemologies into one space of mediation illustrates the conjunctural analytic power of the concept.

Silvestra Mariniello notes that the concern about intermediality is the analysis of passages, the '*in-betweenness*' of discourses and practices, because

the intermediality is more on the side of movement and becoming, which could not be the one of *Being*. Or that would be the knowledge of *Being* where the latter is no longer intended as continuity and wholeness, but as difference and interval" (Mariniello, 2000:7)<sup>49</sup>

In this dissertation, the notion of intermediality is therefore used to analyze the interconnection of internal and external 'movement' and 'becoming' of Africanicity. This movement and this process must permit us to examine the complex '*rhizomic*' fragments of African expressions of identity, which mediate multiple epistemologies and indeed, the different discursive conceptions of identity discussed in this chapter. The central function of intermediality, thus, is to produce the space — the passage — of connection among differences.

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<sup>49</sup> Translated by Silvestra Mariniello.

### 1.2.2. *Intermediality in Black Cinema: Some Labyrinthic Applications*

As a concept of interconnectivity, intermediality has been applied in the field of Black Studies, although less conceptualized as a methodological posture.<sup>50</sup> Further studies of black cinema have been concerned with the applicability of conceptions of intermediality. For example, Manthia Diawara examined African cinema through a conjunction of popularism, historicism, colonialism, traditionalism, and modernism. This multiple disciplinary and epistemological juxtaposition allowed Diawara to value factors of independent subjectivity in African artists, and in film as an inter-text. Consequently, his over emphasis of agency, which outcome indicated black filmmakers as subjects of power, allows Diawara to describe them as new forms of 'cultural authority' (Diawara, 1992:12-3). In other words, Diawara legitimizes the argument of some trends of cultural criticism according to which there is always a 'dominant subject' behind any cultural representation.

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<sup>50</sup> In this regard, Gilroy (1993) understands the notion of diasporas as an intermediate concept allowing the examination of cultural productions as a body of work "lodged between the local and the global, which have a wider applicability in the cultural history and politic precisely because they offer an alternative to the nationalist focus which dominates cultural criticism. **The intermediate concepts**, especially the undertheorised idea of diaspora [...] are exemplary precisely because they break the dogmatic focus on discrete national dynamics which has characterized so much modern Euro-American cultural thought" (p. 6, emphasis added).

The basic methodological function of intermediality is to connect and produce new knowledge about an object of study, not to justify the causality of that object. By using such frameworks, Diawara justifies the position of black filmmakers through an unsolved epistemological problematic, i.e. the question about the 'subject' in cultural productions. Therefore, the question one can pose is: does that mean that only those black cultural authorities (filmmaker, artist, epidermically colored representative) are qualified to talk about blackness or black experience in film? As Ella Shohat asked, can only an "African-American direct *Malcolm X*? [...] Should Paul Simon not have made *Graceland*? Would it have been better had Stevie Wonder made it?" (Shohat, 1995:167)

Further, Diawara depicted three narrative functions in African cinemas. The first is 'social realism' as site of the exposition of tension between cultural imperialism and colonialism within African traditional practices and worldviews. The second is a 'conflicting characterization of Europeans versus Africans which pits "African heroes and heroines against European villains." The third narrative function observed by Diawara are the defenses for 'self-representation', which is a "return to the

source" (Diawara, 1992:140-59), or the origin of the African 'Being'. This interesting analysis, however, becomes less an intermedial ground producing further spaces of investigation. Rather, it suggests some static methodological structures in its conclusion limited to the oppositional 'actions of resistance', and less on the articulation of this resistance with diacritical discursive practices in black cinema.

I want to suggest that the articulation of resistance becomes an obsolete decoding framework in the analysis of black cinema, specifically, if black cinema is a kind of sub-cultural practice opposed to high cinema. The question to pose is if black cinema can be understood through its production of specific, complex discourses. For example, is black cinema producing specific expressions of struggle? Some culture theories framing the notion of resistance usually "failed to recognize that sometimes struggles are lost," and that "sometimes struggles are carried on in ways that merely end up reconstituting their own submission" (Grossberg, 1997:148).

The problematic of the framework of resistance is its confusing (apparent) dependence on the concepts of



ideology and hegemony. Resistance usually comprises hierarchical levels, which differentiate high/low culture to refer ideological structures, and power/powerless to indicate hegemonic relationships.

In reviewing the concepts of ideology and hegemony through the work of Antonio Gramsci, Michèle Barrett describes some unsolved questions in the theoretical terrain of these concepts in cultural analysis. Barrett notes that for Gramsci, ideology is differentiated to material forces and organic forms whereas hegemony is the organization securing the social consent (Barrett, 1991:52-6). Therefore, on the one hand "material forces are the content and ideologies the form" (ibid.52). On the other hand, hegemony "is best understood as the organization of consent — the processes through which subordinated forms of consciousness are constructed without recourse to violence or coercion" (Barrett, 1991:54).

By using intermediality as a methodological posture, the question to pose here is not to be to what extent potential resisting expressions in black cinema can be reduced to processes of class ideology or consensus hegemony; nor to which extent these expressions must be

locked into socially resisting roles of low cultures and classes? Rather, an intermedial framework of analysis articulates resisting attitudes or expressions of subdued communities as one of the 'moments' connected with other 'moments' of production-reproduction. Indeed, the moment of resistance is by itself inter-mediated with necessary agency (creativity, masquerade, marronage, seduction, and affectivity, etc.) at the core of any potential articulation of the moment of production with the moment of reproduction. This intermedial articulation posits another understanding, while the notion of resistance is one of the multiple units (the multiplicity) not an 'aggregate' of black practices of expression in cinema.<sup>51</sup>

Elsewhere, Diawara concedes the existence of intrinsic units (practices) of African societies. He observes that the "site of resistance" against forces of globalization and models of fluid postnational organization based on regional identity, linguistic

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<sup>51</sup> Although the notion of resistance remains an ineffectual discursive operator for the notion of Africanity, perhaps, the general view of Foucault's power/knowledge relationship can be helpful to illustrate our articulation here. Considering that discursive regimes suggest an imbricate relationship between power and knowledge—cinema-institutions and practices of expression—Foucault places ideology away from that relationship. For Foucault, the notion of power does not imply an activity of resistance, but rather a production of genealogical multi-layered discursive practices (knowledge), or what he calls "a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts" (in *Power/Knowledge*, 1976, p.83). Here, we can see that this posture shifts attention on the rules of power and the productions of discursive practices, or the understanding of the type of power susceptible of producing social discourses, and less on the multiple hierarchical limitations of power-ideology or classes. (ibid.93)

affinities, economic reality, and geographic proximity defines the similarities in political and cultural dispositions grounded in history and patterns of consumption (Diawara, 1998a:122-4). This analysis illustrates the tensions revealed by the application of the intermediality. For example, the movement of African social practices, such as oral traditions, became visible not only in differences that conflicted with diverse contemporary practices of communication, but also in assertion of those differences in a derogatory sense that devaluate the performative activities of black self-determination. Specifically, the context of black cinema opens itself up to specific tensions, not only against discursive categorizations such as charges of neocolonialism, imperialism or misrepresentation, but also within black cinema itself, as a practice informing emerging expressions of modernism within African traditional practices. In other word, black cinema facilitates the mediation of multiple conjunctural analysis, as in Bergson's (1991) idea of the mnemonic mediation in-between multiple temporalities revealing the interconnectivity of different epistemologies, and the discourse beneath the practices of projection. Thus, the

particularity of the notion of intermediality is to allow us to understand complex discursive formations, and the juncture within juxtaposed epistemologies in black cinema, opening the analysis of black identity beyond centralized spaces of chaos such as authenticity or hybridity, but rather through analysis of the practice of expression in film.

In his extensive *Black African Cinema* (1994), N. Frank Ukadike also uses, indirectly, the notion of intermediality to circumscribe his object of research:

The social, cultural, and historical analysis here will draw from a broad spectrum of ideas: the notion of Africa's triple heritage (Ali Mazrui, Ngugi wa Thiong'o); the critique of cultural colonialism and underdevelopment (Walter Rodney, Basil Davidson, D. K. Fieldhouse); and work on traditional culture (Amadou Hampate Ba, Cheikh Anta Diop, Joseph Ki-Zerbo) and decolonization (Aimé Césaire). This discussion will also draw on Marxism as elaborated and disseminated by Louis Althusser's view of "ideology" (especially the concept of ideology as a total phenomenon identified with culture or the symbolic as a whole), Raymond Williams's notion of "realism" as a "conscious movement towards social extensions," and Antonio Gramsci's work on "hegemony (Ukadike, 1994:9).

Ukadike acknowledges black cinema as a pole of attraction for philosophy and historical experiences. Following this argument, the cinema of black people is therefore at the crossroads of various intellectual historical-epistemologies and institutional settings operating as a

site of actualization and re-enactment of unique experience. The conjunction of contents and contexts of black cinema articulates implicit and explicit discourses crossing above the theoretical border of cultural and national identity, locally and globally.

By investigating this black cinema with the methodology of intermediality, one can detect and depict the intrinsic discursive and group formations, epistemological deconstruction and poles of seduction, in the contents of black cinema and at the root of black contexts of production.

As a methodological position, this posture will show the particularity of black cinemas described by Fredric Jameson in his analysis of *The Geopolitical Aesthetic of cinema in the world system as an emerging discourse* suggesting:

two powerful interpretative temptations — the modern and the postmodern, subjectivity and textuality — to neutralize each other, to hold each other in one long suspension in such a way that the film can exploit and draw on the benefits of both, without having to commit itself to either as some definitive reading, or as some definitive formal and stylistic category (Jameson, 1995:151).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This quote is related to Jameson's reference to Edward Yang's film *Terrorizer*, but he convincingly closes his argument in mentioning that: "Besides Edward Yang's evident personal mastery, the possibility of this kind of mutually reinforcing suspension may owe something to the situation of Third-World cinema itself, in traditions in which neither modernist nor postmodern impulses are internally generated, so that both arrive in the field of production with a certain chronological simultaneity in full post-war modernization" (Jameson, 1995:151). Such observation illustrates the power of the concept of intermediality.

This practice of 'in-betweenness' as a conjectural site of the exposition of new forms of discursive formulation and positionality manifests an articulation of historical continuity (or connectivity) grounded in the everyday life of black people, which identity is artistically expressed as an actualized dynamic and mnemonic event in the production of films. Therefore, through intermediality, the conjectural analysis of black cinema illustrates new space for further investigation, and less functional or stable definitions of black expressions of identity.

### **1.2.2. Conclusion**

In this section, I suggested that the notion of Africanicity is not opposed to modernist articulations of identity-politics or cultural identity. Rather, I argued, the notion of Africanicity permits us to articulate specific practices of expression or trans-geographical fragments of identity, intermedially at the level of affectivity, using the medium of cinema as a conduit of articulation. Before underlining the frameworks of Africanicity or blackness, I reviewed the central

problematic of the literature, i.e., two contradicting paradigms. I argued that some trends of cultural criticism see modernity as a site of contamination, hybridity or cultural intersection, whereas Afrocentrism sees modernity as a site of mythical affirmation, or center of authentic identity and racial purity. I suggested an intermedial position between these two lines of investigation, arguing that questions about the notion of Africanicity or blackness must be linked to practices of expression, not to skin color nor reconciliatory concepts, hybridity, nationalism, or particular cultural contingencies. I further argued that some deployments of the concepts of hybridity create methodological and epistemological tensions and are ineffective as a decoding framework of black practices of expression, particularly when those practices express historical struggles. I provided examples from black literature of such practices of expression, beginning with the *New Negro* and *Négritude* movements. I argued that the poetics of self-representation found in the *New Negro* and *Négritude* movements expose these political expressions of freedom as an intermedial articulation of a boundless practice of identity (Africanicity) that cannot be

analyzed based on nationality or culture. Review of discursive articulations in both movements provided a ground for an intermedial analysis indicating the emergence of conjunctural practices of expression with new forms of meaning about blackness. At this conjuncture, I argued that instead of being subdued by a colonial-imperial dispositive, these movements 'seduced' the medium, language, mode of representation, and literature of these same colonists to express their own experience and belonging. This analysis can be extended to black cinema. In other words, like the *Négritude* and *New Negro* movements, black cinema is also a third space — a site of 'passage' of specific expression of struggles through which one can conjuncturally analyze different fragments of Africanicity. I concluded this section by showing how this methodology (intermediality) and its preferred framework (conjunctural articulation) illustrate the connection of such fragmentary symptoms to present practices of expression in black films, locally, globally, and trans-geographically.



## 2. AFRICANS AND CINEMA: THE CONSTRUCTION OF "OTHERNESS" VIS-À-VIS THE REAPPEARANCE OF SELF

Media construct for us a definition of what race is, what meaning the imaginary of race carries, and what the 'problem of race' is understood to be. They help to classify out the world in terms of the categories of race.

The media are not only powerful sources of ideas about race. They are also one place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated. [...] For it would be wrong and misleading to see the media as uniformly and conspiratorially harnessed to a single, racist conception of the world.

(Stuart Hall, 1990)

Most filmmakers do not have to deal with the issue of race. When white males make film with all white subjects or with people of color, their "right" to do so is not questioned. No one asks a white filmmaker [...] who makes a film with only white characters if he or she is a white supremacist. The assumption is that the art they create reflects the world as they know it, or certainly as it interests them.

(bell hooks, 1996)

In this section I will explore various conjectures about the ways in which blacks were characterized in cinema before they began to represent themselves. In the following chapters, I will first review the discursive foundations of the construction of "black-Otherness" differentiated in their values, culture, and everyday life. This outline provides tangible examples of how some important motion pictures have characterized blacks since the beginning of the film industry, and how this

discourse persists, albeit marginally, to the present day.

This analysis is not intended to chart the genealogy of the representation of black peoples in cinema. Hence, it is not a review of different periods of cinema in which various discourses emerged according to specific genres or styles of cinema-art — many of them somehow moderated in the ways in which they represented blacks. My goal is in fact to go beyond the discourse of 'assimilation' that emerged, particularly in Hollywood, in the early 1920s. *Midnight Ramble* (1994) and *A Century of Black Cinema* (1997), both documentaries on early black cinema and on blacks in cinema, provide some wonderful anecdotes of this era. For example, in *Midnight Ramble*, black actor-singer, Herbert Jeffries, recalls a singing-cowboy role that made him famous in the late 1930s. However, he also recalls that in the same period, he saw a young black boy crying in frustration, because he wanted to play Tom Mix, but his white playmates insisted that he could not. 'Mix was white and there were no black cowboy stars'.<sup>1</sup> It is through such an experience as this

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<sup>1</sup> Emerging black cinema in the sixties in Africa used the same western genre films, and even the names of actors copied Hollywood's western character. See for example *Le retour de l'aventurier* (1966), a western genre parody directed by Moustafa Alassane, who made of such parodies his main artistic signature.

that Jeffries promoted the idea of black cowboy movies, and subsequently became the first African-American singing cowboy in Hollywood's film.

This anecdotal story illustrates that in early mainstream cinema, the question of racism had more to do with representation of blacks in cinema than the development of a new aesthetic or genre in filmmaking or new characterization of blacks per se. Therefore, the need to represent blacks by black people or to let blacks play key roles in dominant cinema reflects this social symbolization of American society that led eventually to the development of charismatic black characters such as Sydney Poitier, or of the film genre known as Blaxploitation in the 1970s. Those symbolic representations, however, help us to understand the more complex figurations and discursive regularities intrinsically related to social constructions of Otherness that articulates the ongoing discussion of representation of blackness, race, and identity reviewed in this chapter.

Thus, my focus in this section is solely on the extremity (the symptoms) of those discourses of cinema-art considered to be avant-garde in their epoch, because

they underscore specific fragments of the historical regularity of the construction of an "Otherness" that is differentiated in value, culture, and everyday life experience. This articulation of the regularity of social discourses beneath artistic practices and historical moments of cinema illustrates, methodologically, how some social characterizations of 'black-Otherness' have been transmitted through the medium of cinema.

In the second chapter of this section, I will review the ways in which black cinema reflectively responded to former characterizations. I make the case that besides its distinctive artistic creativity and adoption of the institutionalized politics (codes) and language of cinema-art, including categories of genre and style, black cinema is inherently engaged in intermedial trajectories based on two ideating frameworks: self-representation, and social realism. This 'ideational' engagement implies a highly discursive '*Signifying*' in which it is not what someone says or does that determines an activity of production-interpretation-reception, as I argued in the Section I, but the 'finality' of one's action. A propos that ongoing discussion in culture studies, I will argue that the figure of the *Signifying*

*Monkey* in African oral performances is a powerful articulation of '*marronage*' or '*détournement*' providing the means of black active expression of practices of identity, Africanicity.<sup>2</sup>

I will conclude this section by arguing that although prior historical representations of black people are based on external discursive conditions of possibility, it is paradoxically these very external constructs or reflective mirrors through which blacks see and articulate their 'difference'. Therein lies the paradox of some emerging decoding formulas introduced in Section I, and the complexity (the horizontal labyrinth) of this study. I contend that the signification projected in some important historical productions of cinema dehumanizing blacks have shaped, unwillingly, the self-consciousness of black people to move such fixed identity into new conjunctures and as Bhabha argues, to make "political articulation and political negotiation across a whole range of contradictory social sites. [Because

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<sup>2</sup> It is not my intention to shift the focus of this study to the multiple frameworks of reception theories that use different paradigms. Martin Allor (1988) surveys the theoretical and methodological problematics generated by these paradigms with respect to political economy, post-structuralism, feminist criticism, cultural studies and post-modernism. My purpose here is mainly to illustrate how the process of production/interpretation/reception analyzed with an object such as black cinema can, in fact, be part of, yet not limited to the polysemic model of reception theories advocated by Fiske (1986), Hall (1980a), Morley (1980), and Radway (1986); and that it opens a new conjunctural positionality illustrating the impact of emerging discursive shaping black articulations of Africanicity.

black] people always exist as a multiple form of identification, waiting to be created and constructed" (Bhabha, 1990:220). This kind of analysis of blacks in cinema, and of black cinema itself, allows us to observe the ways in which the figuration of Africanicity 'escapes' (*marronage*) prevailing theories of benign-resistance, while expressing differentiated ideational *Signifying* parallels to 'recognizable' black narrative, voice, and face. To accomplish such a level of investigation, I examine two distinctive but related articulations. The first is discursive symptoms regulating the representation of blacks in cinema; and the second is the use of cinema as the medium of reappearance of specific imaginative significations, engaging with different social reality and everyday life in black communities worldwide.

### **2.1. Some Discursive Constructions of Blacks in Cinema: From 1895 to the Present**

On Saturday, December 28, 1895, in the basement of the Grand Café at the 14 Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, the motion-picture industry was born. Not only was the technique of moving images a scientific prowess, but the

films themselves had immense consequences for the future of the popular entertainment industry, in particular on the visual representation of exotic (abstracted and distant) cultures. Because they decided to present their discovery before a paying audience, the Lumière brothers created a new popular industry despite the fact that they were unsure of its success. Historian David Robinson states that:

The Cinématographe was still a long way from the cinema. The inventors of 1895-6 had provided a machine, not a medium. The ability to record and subsequently project a moving photographic image was a technological achievement for which there was as yet not evident use, and certainly no aesthetic principles.

[...]

Georges Méliès (1862-1938), a magician and proprietor of the Théâtre Robert-Houdin, who was to become the cinema's first true artist, recalled that when he tried to buy a cinématographe from Antoine Lumière, the old man refused him: 'Young man, you should thank me. This invention is not for sale, but if it were it would ruin you. It can be exploited for a while as a scientific curiosity; beyond that it has no commercial future' (Robinson, 1973:22-3).

Indeed, the Lumière brothers would be surprised that their creation made possible a new kind of universal activity of representation that economically would become a major industry of entertainment in the world, and providing audio and visual substantiality to preexisting imaginary significations of worldviews. Put in a different way, the power of this industry of

entertainment art lies in its methods of manifesting the conjunction between social imaginary and visibility, a demonstration implying that seeing is believing.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the cinematic technology and objects of cinema have indeed become a conduit for discourses revealing remarkable clues (signs, footprints, symptoms) as to how the identity of blacks is represented. The objects of cinema delineate a holistic semiosis, representing the codified language of motion pictures, social worldviews, institutional dispositives, and cultural practices. Thus, as an historical eye, cinema is neither a simple object of entertainment-art nor a mere vehicle of representation. It is, also, a conduit of conjunctural knowledge underscoring the myriad discursive articulations that have emerged as a result of historical representations that were largely regarded as regimes of truth.

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<sup>3</sup> Although Mbembe (2001:2-19) describes the notion of "imaginary significations" as something being invented in correlation with its historical constituency, for example, a signification of identity performed both inside and outside of one's social-historical borders, I am using this notion with another meaning. In fact, the imaginary signification also refers to an object, whether this object is present – *Dasein* – or in the mind. Therefore, Euro-Western' imaginary significations about blacks is the 'image of black' similar to Edward Said's (1978) articulation of image-black (image-Orient). As Paul S. Landau (2002:2) argues, it should be acknowledged that this image really consists of a set of idea and imaginary associated with blacks (albeit one that, perhaps, also embody visual component).



In 1897, less than two years after the historical commencement of the film industry, a "*Universal Exposition*" was launched in the cities of Brussels and Teverueren (Belgium); this was the first attempt of the Belgian Empire to use cinema as an object of colonial propaganda (Guido Convents, 1986:67). In fact, an exclusive pavilion was reserved for colonial screenings (see *Figure I*). At the entrance of this pavilion, posters displaying a large capital letter, "Z," were placed as a referent of zoology or "*Zoographe*," the French language designation of Lumière's *Cinématographe*. This "Z" on these posters is indeed reminiscent of Adolph Hitler's appropriation of the swastika as a symbol of power and purity, and thus an 'unavoidable iconic sign' revealing the ways in which the technology of cinema was utilized by colonial/imperial forces to characterize the 'Other'. An analysis of the context and content of screen footage shown at the *Universal Exposition* will bear out this conclusion. We must also consider the articulation behind the discourse of this exposition. Thus, from the zoological perspective, the "Z" displayed at the entrance to this pavilion reveals specific worldviews expressed through early cinema, particularly with regard to the

representation of blacks as objects of a zoological gaze. Here, the objects of cinema represent not only the evidence of this colonial discursive regularity and modality of representation, but they denote that such a discursive gaze legitimized the colonial extension of power. Consequently, the *Universal Exposition* was renamed the "*Colonial Exposition*," and became a site of colonial propaganda for the expression of the western conception of the *Others*, of the 'coloreds', a discursive category of people with differentiated cultures, or devoid of civilization. These expositions, however, attracted millions of curious westerner spectators. For example, the *Colonial Exposition* of 1931 in Paris, lasted for six years and in 1937 erupted into a popular gathering at Champ de Mars, between the Russian and German nazi pavilions. There, millions of European visitors shared the same exotic taste for mysterious fascination of colonies, as well as respect for traces left by the white man on so many faraway oceans and continents (Hodier and Pierre, 1991:138). A map of the Paris exposition locates the "*Salle de cinéma*" between *Porte de Reuilly*, *Côte des Somalis*, and *Route des fortifications*, directly opposite the pavilion of "*Madagascar et dépendances*." In the

1931 Paris exposition, as well as in prior expositions, the cinema played a key role in how native-Europeans viewed Africans, or what I have defined as 'imaginary significations' representing the ways in which a reflective Otherness is constructed.

In *Darkest Hollywood*, Peter Davis mentions a script from the Biograph Studio that bears the signature of David Wark Griffith, which can be examined in the Paper Print Collection of the Motion Picture Division at the Library of Congress in Washington (Davis, 1996:8).<sup>4</sup> This script, *The Zulu's Heart*, written in 1908,<sup>5</sup> remains an exemplary historical trace of the work of this pioneer of cinema, and indicates Euro-Americans' cinematic

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<sup>4</sup> "This film [...] was made when Griffith was learning his trade as a film-director. About seven minutes long, it is a melodrama of the kind that Griffith was cranking out at the rate of one a week. Today, the acting looks histrionic, even for the silent era; but it comes out of a different tradition, and one should not infer that it was not taken seriously by the people who saw it then. However, at first glance it does not seem to hold much merit, other than what we can glean from it about the evolution of Griffith's art. In the history of film-making, it is a curiosity, because of its director, and because it has the great comic director, Mack Sennett, in the leading role, and was shot by Griffith's great cameraman, Billy Bitzer" (Davis, 1996:8).

<sup>5</sup> - Scene I: In a Zulu village, a Zulu chief and his wife are performing a funeral ritual for their dead child. A warrior dashes in to report something he has seen. The Zulu chief and his band rush off  
 - Scene II: In a rocky landscape, we see a covered wagon with a Boer pioneer family: man, woman, and child. They are attacked by the Zulus. The woman and child run off, while the man tries to hold off the attackers. He is killed by a spear, and the Zulu chief exults, in savage triumph, with his men. They rush off in pursuit of the woman and child.  
 - Scene III: The white woman hides the little girl before she herself is captured by the Zulu band. The Zulu chief finds the little girl. He is about to kill her when he is reminded of his own dead child. He hides her amid the rocks, and returns to the village.  
 - Scene IV: Back at the village, he rescues the woman from the other Zulus, reminding them that he is their chief. He and the woman go off to collect the child.  
 - Scene V: Other warriors find the little girl, and drag her off. They are about to cut her throat when the Zulu chief intervenes, and fights them for the child, defeating them all.  
 - Scene VI: The Zulu chief releases the woman and child. Before the little girl leaves, she gives him her doll as a present. This affects him deeply.

application of their conception of black people's lack of civilization, their barbarism and animalistic nature. The script gives us an insight into the Euro-Americans' worldview through the ways in which they discursively manufactured and portrayed Africans. Davis observed that Griffith would not use blacks in this film simply because he believed that they could not act; that is why *The Zulu's Heart* was "shot in New Jersey, across the Hudson River from Biograph's New York headquarters, with white actors playing the Zulu roles" (Davis, 1996:8).

It is a melodramatic story, and Griffith made scores of such films. But it establishes something remarkable. Drawing on colonial experience with its ingrained biases and distortions, absorbed second-hand. Griffith unwittingly projected, in a few clumsy and ludicrous frames, an image of black Africa that would dominate the screen for most of the twentieth century. It is a Janus-faced image. Griffith's Zulus either threaten whites, or serves them. The Zulu chief, who does both in turn, is a Noble Savage - but his nobility lies in his good deed towards the white woman and child. After this, in film after film, Africans would be defined as either good or bad by their actions towards whites, which determined whether they were the Faithful Servant or the Savage Other (Davis, 1996:9)

Many other of Griffith's titles stereotypically represented black people in such a way. For example, Griffith's famous film, *The Birth of A Nation* (1915), presents

the Ku Klux Klan as an heroic vigilante group successfully defeating in violent battle the corrupt black and mulatto politicians of the

Reconstructionist South and thereby reuniting two families — the Stonemans of Pennsylvania and the Camerons of South Carolina — by means of marriages which serve as emblems of "the birth of a nation" after the disasters of the Civil War (Jonathan S. Lee, 1995:159).

In the film *The Birth of A Nation*, Griffith does not use a single black actor, however, the sin (corruption) comes by way of a 'true' colored Mulato. Peter Noble's historical analysis of the Negro in silent films points out that if "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" was the first full-length picture to give prominence to Negro subservience, the first important full-length film to devote much of its content to Negro villainy was the famous "*The Birth Of A Nation*" (unknown year p.33). After outlining its artistic achievements, Noble chose to approach this film through its hidden discourse, an articulation implying the juncture of creativity with a social worldview. For example, he argued that this film exhibits an "extraordinarily vicious anti-Negro bias" because:

[The] director Griffith was himself a Southerner, steeped in an atmosphere of racial intolerance, and brought up with the conventional Southern States' attitude to the coloured man. In the majestic sweep of Thomas Dixon's strongly partisan novel *The Clansman*, he probably saw perfect material for a large-scale epic. The resultant production was technically and artistically far ahead of any other movie of that period, for it must be acknowledged that Griffith was a cinematic genius and certainly the pioneer in employing a number of vital techniques in film-making which are in general

use in the studio today. Nevertheless, however great workmanship, however inspired the direction and however remarkable the acting and production of "*The Birth Of A Nation*," the fact remains that for sheer bias and distortion this film heads the considerable list of American motion pictures which consciously maligned the Negro race (Noble, p.33.)

In this analysis, Noble examines Griffith's background as part of a social discursive production. Therefore, his examination recalling Griffith's past artistic achievements also makes obvious the discursive context in America society. In underscoring Griffith's social position as a reflection of the Euro-American worldview vis-à-vis blacks, Noble reveals the socio-historical atmosphere (the context) of racial intolerance of American society at the time under which *The Birth...* conceived its narrative. Griffith, however, denied such a bias in an open letter to the editor of *Sight and Sound* on February 12, 1917.

Dear Sir,

My attention has been directed to Mr. Peter Noble's attack against myself and certain of my films ("*The Birth Of A Nation*," etc.) in the Autumn, 1916 issue of *Sight and Sound*. This attack charges me with having projected in these films bias against, and hatred of, the Negro race. I have also read an advance copy of a reply which Mr. Seymour Stern, author of the Griffith Index and my biographer, has written to Mr. Noble refuting his charges. Mr. Stern informs me that this reply is scheduled for publication this Spring in *Sight and Sound*.

Mr. Stern has, I believe, presented the facts adequately and effectively. I have nothing to add to them, but for myself, I will take this occasion of Lincoln's birthday to request that

you permit me to say just this: I am not now and never have been "anti-Negro" or "anti" any other race. My attitude towards the Negroes has always been one of affection and brotherly feeling. I was partly raised by a lovable old Negress down in old Kentucky and I have always gotten along extremely well with the Negro people.

In filming "*The Birth Of A Nation*," I gave to my best knowledge the proven facts, and presented the known truth, about the Reconstruction Period in the American South. These facts are based on an overwhelming compilation of authentic evidence and testimony. My picturization of the history as it happened requires, therefore, no apology, no defense, no "explanations." I regret that Mr. Noble, whose remarks do not appear to be based either on historic fact or personal experience, has made even this statement of the self-evident truth of my film necessary.

Very truly yours, David Wark Griffith.

February 12th, 1917

Beverly Hills, California, U.S.A.<sup>6</sup>

I contend that the discourse underpinning Griffith's letter and Stern's defensive response show that they could not have posted their argument in any other way. The knowledge of their object as subjects of history (their views of the historiography of the American Reconstruction Period) had already been molded by a preexisting social worldview, endorsing the acting incapacity of blacks, especially in this sort of dramatic

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to this letter, the editor of *Sight and Sound*, Seymour Stern, had also published in the Autumn 1916 issue a "*No Guilty*" article in which he argued that: "The truth is, that [...] Griffith depicts the history of the tragic and turbulent Reconstruction period in the South with a degree of authenticity, documentation, objectivity and scholarship seldom if ever equaled on the screen. What is more important, he carefully explains and in the action itself makes it unmistakably clear, that the real villains of Southern history from 1865-72 (the Reconstruction Period) were not uneducated and newly-freed Negroes but the doctrines of certain financial and vengeful Northern whites who duped the Negroes with glittering promises of wealth and power."

plot expressing national interests. Therefore, the 'language of representation' that Griffith uses in his film is an accurate depiction of the hegemonic imaginary signification of Euro-Americans with respect to blacks. The presence of 'true' colored black faces in the Reconstruction Period of American history, then, illustrates the constructed 'adequacy' of blacks, which has been repeated in multiple Western cinematic productions representing the life black people. Ironically, despite this representation of American social discourse, an evidence, another discursive level exists in the highly expressive activity of faceless black people playing their own characters in the Reconstruction.

Before we get to this second level of analysis, however, I want to introduce a European avant-garde film to circumscribe my westernized global geography of the discursive construction of black-Otherness. In so doing, let us cross the Atlantic, from America to Europe, and examine the narrative of *Les Maîtres fous*.

Jean Rouch's (1954) *Les Maîtres fous* (*The Mad Masters*) is a documentary about the Hauka, from Niger,



who have immigrated to Ghana and their secret ritual during the colonial era. The Haukas were immigrant workers of the ethnic Haussa people. Once a year, they conduct a traditional secret ceremony of possession in which they mimic current social events. French documentary filmmaker, Jean Rouch (1982), was invited by the Haukas to film this traditional possession ceremony.

This film is another good example of the characterization of black people's incapacity for self-voice, even when they are at the center of the narrative frame. The metaphor of the in-frame is exemplary in this case, because it is in the off-frame that discursive ideologies take place.

*Les Maîtres fous* was presented as an experimental film, an ethnographic documentary, whose intention was to represent Africans acting out their aggressions, lust of power, and sexuality, validating preexisting westerner discourse of the exotic and animalistic nature of blacks. The majority of critics both celebrating and criticizing this film tend to react at this level of evidence of Rouch's discourse. For example, some critics admit that Rouch's choice not to interview any of the people in this documentary, and to employ manipulative editing practices

make the Haukas seem like voiceless-animals.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the animalistic representation of these Africans, in which they perform bizarre rites that are not self-explained or interpreted, are explained by Jean Rouch's voiceover and camera's lens (God's voice and eyes) through which the knowledge of the possession becomes intelligible.

However, I argue that this representation illustrates the ironic 'adequacy' I have outlined in Griffith's case, in that both filmmakers were incapable of relinquishing their social perceptions of black character shaped by colonial and imperial discursive principle of civilization that has reified and perverted blackness. Rouch's representation of voiceless-animalistic blacks in *Les Maîtres fous* has generated ethno-academic interest in investigating the meaning behind ceremonies performed by the Haukas, in which their identity seems to be a central concern, as an

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<sup>7</sup> The recent wonderful essay of Kien Ket Lim (2002:40-2) underscores the still ongoing discussion on Rouch's *Mad Masters*. But in the first screening of this film, Marcel Griaule along with other anthropologists, defined *Les Maîtres fous* as "a travesty" and urged Rouch to destroy it. Ousmane Sembene, the patriarch of black African cinema also accused Rouch of looking at Africans like insects. Black film specialist Teshome H. Gabriel also called *Les maîtres fous* a racist film that had taken the Africans as "scientific specimens, laboratory subjects and insects." In 1995, Manthia Diawara produces a documentary, *Rouch in Reverse*, suggesting that *Les Maîtres fous* "remained some of the most disturbing images in modern cinema." However, Michael M. J. Fischer charts Diawara's *Rouch in Reverse* as a set of "superficial clichés." Kien Tek Lim correctly underscores all these ongoing discussions.

articulation of self-expression. The performance of this identity mirrors an outside world, that of colonial Africa. Their mimicry of colonial brutality on colonized objects such as themselves signifies their reappearance or ability to represent what was going on in their life. Further, their language, which Rouch tried to translate, expresses the 'death' of the subject of power trying to speak in the name of its subdued objects. This is a good example of the figuration of '*marronage*', an active articulation of production-reception-interpretation by blacks, which I will discuss, in the next chapter of this section.

Are these films inherently related to specific aesthetic codes of the cinema-art? In the case of Griffith,<sup>8</sup> one might mention dramatic fiction in the literary and reductionist sense, implying that it is not representative of a socio-political ideology or worldview, but to a 'Western sovereign author'

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<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that there are many angles at which it is possible to outline the work of Griffith. Indeed, his moral-aesthetic, as suggested in his notice to *Sight and Times*, suggests the idea of an author assuming the duty of educating his public. However, from the sovereign authorship perspective advocated by Jean-Paul Sartre in his famous 1948 essay *What Is Literature?*, the central idea of *Littérature engagée*, in this case *cinéma engagée*, is the embodiment of the freedom to choose and therefore an ethical act of commitment. The sovereignty of the imagination neither sequesters the creativity nor absorbs it within moral dialectical faith of good/bad. For Sartre, the sovereignty of the imagination has to do with the active will of the author's self-agency against submission to dominant creative economies and discourses, and to command the understanding of his/her liberty. (See Jean-Paul Sartre (1949) *What Is Literature?* (Bernard Frechtman, trans.) New York: Philosophical Library.

representing a particular social class in the American Reconstruction Period. On the one hand, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1977) explain this reductionism between politic and racial class from a Marxist perspective, which can legitimate the sovereignty of Griffith. On the other hand, Rouch's ethnographical approach suggests that the filmmaker has virtually no power over the event—he simply captures it on film. In this respect, the subjective imagination is not sovereign, because the filmmaker is entirely subjugated by the event. However, the excited voiceover of Jean Rouch affirms his participation in the ritual, and reflects his exuberance at this ethnographical discovery. Here Rouch easily fits into four axes of orientation of documentary film (Bill Nichols 1991)<sup>9</sup>, and series of

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<sup>9</sup> In *Representing Reality* (see particularly pp. 32-106) Nichols sets forth a system of four grids within which to classify films according to representational, ethical, and axiographic aspects. These grids are *expository*, where the viewer is addressed directly; *observational*, which stresses the apparent non-intervention of the filmmaker; *interventional*, which is the apparent intervention of filmmaker on the events; and *ethical* illustrating the filmmaker's attitude and motivation. In contrast, many recent politicized films are examples of an "*interventional*" stance related to constructivism perspective, since I believe that if filmmakers have not a stake in the course of the events, they do have power to locate narrative meaning. As I am arguing here, an "ethnographical gaze" is prevalent in films where the filmmaker shares his or her social discursive constructs. In the course of my analysis, this articulation will become more apparent and corresponds to the development from exploitation/objectification to self-reflection. This argument is sustained by Barsam (1991) who establishes a series of categories or subgenres related to documentary that mark the shifting of filmmakers into political spokesmen one finds in the *Cinéma Vérité*, *Liberation Filmmaking* and, *Films to Change the Word*. These three categories are also intrinsically related to Jean Rouch because most of defensive arguments about the film advocate Rouch's political positionality as a means to argue that his goal was to change the way in which we (Westerners) observe Africans. (See "Jean Rouch, un griot Gaulois" in *CinémAction*, No.17, op. cit. pp.166-75).

categories of non-fictional film (Richard M. Barsam, 1991). In attempting to represent the reality of the Haukas people, Rouch "observes", assuming that the ceremony was not a theatric setting; he "exposes" in addressing the viewers with his voice-over, and that includes a direct "intervention" on the ongoing event, and his "ethical gaze" results on the strangeness of what he was filming.

My concern is nonetheless with the historical symptoms of the discursive construction of 'Otherness' in Griffith's and Rouch's representation of blackness in films. In other words, which historical forces have produced this discursive articulation of strangeness, faceless, and voiceless in the films of Griffith and Rouch? The answer to this question is not so simple as Mbembe (2001:238-40) somehow suggests in his examination using Hegel's dialectical frameworks. In his chapter, "The Final Manner", Mbembe notes:

To some one who is slave we can also give the forename "thing." By "thing," we must understand the contrary of the substantive — that is, something that somewhere is *nothing*. But the thing [...] is also that on which a person arrogates his right to exercise her or his will. As such, the thing does not determinate itself at all. It is something that belongs to the person who happens, by chronology or by force, to be first to take possession and enjoy it (Mbembe, 2001:235)

I contend that in addition to this dialectic, the process of becoming animal or savage (a "thing" in Mbembe's sense), or faceless and voiceless (in the case of the Rouch's and Griffith's films), is a discursive production signifying an institutionalized (social) hegemonic representation. A thing is only that thing for the discourse representing of qualifying what the thing must be. That does not mean that the reality of the things is not out there. Therefore, one must go beyond simple postcolonial critiques here to articulate a conjunctural epistemology as was suggested by Martin Allor's and Michelle Gagnon's study on the discursive linkages between and among culturality and power (1997). As I argued in *The State of Theories and Methodologies*, a conjectural analysis implies that one considers both the existing institutionalized discourse of an object (which is here the Western characterization of blacks), and the emerging discursive forms that re-appropriate (recycle, if you will) the same power-discursive character to assert a differentiated self. In that case, the qualified thing can become something else, something 'different' from the characterization of power-discourses. Again, the concept of difference is of powerful interest.

Specifically, in this case, the concept of difference is a conjunctural articulation allowing us to map three modalities: (1) is to understand the context of meaning, (2) is to re-open that meaning, and (3) is to recycle — that is to change — apparently fixed meanings.

It is in part at this conjunctural level of analysis that we are able to outline specific contexts and discourses and to discredit the strongly held biological determination or regime of truth of 'the animalistic nature of Africans'. At the same level, we also understand the *dispositive* of this discourse as a performative production generated by its dialectical relationship between the gaze of a 'power-subject' and its 'system of meaning production'. Stuart Hall offers an interesting outline of some institutional characterization of black-Otherness, using the 'white eye' as a framing metaphor. Hall notes that we can find such characterizations

in the diaries, observations and accounts, the notebooks, ethnographic records and commentaries, of visitors, explorers, missionaries and administrators in Africa, India, the Far East and the Americas. And also something else: the 'absent' but imperialising 'white eye'; the unmarked position from which all these 'observations' are made and from which, alone, they make sense. This is the history of slavery and conquest, written, seen, drawn and photographed by The Winners. They cannot be read and make sense of from any other

position. The 'white eye' is always outside the frame — but seeing and positioning everything within it. (Hall, 1990:14)

Interestingly, the 'white eye' becomes a communicational or cinematographic metaphor, because it allows us to understand the process of "filter" as part of an imperialist mode of representation and ideological meaning production of strange-Otherness. Eliseo Veron (1978:7-20) has examined a similar relationship as a discursive process that lays open the social system of meaning production.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, he argues that in the case of representation or systems of representation, meaning is bestowed upon significant materials that are the social productions of discourse (Veron, 1978:8). According to Veron, "all social productions are susceptible to be analyzed through the ideology and power producing them" (Veron, 1978:9), despite the multiple mechanisms that this process can put in place.

For Achille Mbembe, such process is a mirror attesting a "real presence that is, at the same time an untenable figure," which is "an inanimate image and a living sign. As such what might be called [the thing]

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<sup>10</sup> Mbembe (2001), noted similar characterizations. He argues that "colonization as enterprise of domestication includes at least three factors: the *appropriation* of the native, the *familiarization* of man and the animal, and the *utilization* of the animal by the human. Here the native signifies the animal, and the human signifies the colonist. (p.237).



immediate being-in-the-world does not necessary coincide with what the mirror shows" (Mbembe, 2001:240). In other words, for Mbembe, the qualified thing always remains powerless, even at the level of negotiation. There is no other ways to disqualify pre-qualifications of 'something' but rather to cohabit with the power-discourse.

Such dialectical relationships that Mbembe induced risks promoting the negotiation of subjective power and the production of culture to the level of cohabitation. I argue that while cohabitation takes place at the level of a dialectical negotiation, underground active resilience occurs within the same process, at the moment the power actualizes its extension over social production, and vice-versa.<sup>11</sup> To understand this activity of resilience, we need to consider discursive symptoms taking place between the power and the object of production — in the case of these films about black people, between Western systems of representing blacks and black articulations of self identity. For example, Stuart Hall suggests that "the ideological construction of black people as 'problem

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<sup>11</sup> This articulation is part of one of my central arguments in the subsequent sections, in which, following Schlesinger's and Bhabha's and Grossberg analysis on the dynamic of identity formations, I discuss the ways in which negotiation takes place within both institutionalized discourse and black expressions of identity.

population mutually reinforce and support one another" (Hall, 1990:10). Perhaps Mbembe's idea of dialectical negotiation rests in this mutual reflectivity. However, Hall also suggests that practices of ideology work by the transformation of discourses and the transformation of subject-for-action and thus mobilizing "distinct type of social struggle" (Hall, 1990:10.)

Ella Shohat mandates similar approaches. She suggests pushing the postcolonial reconciliatory "critique in a politically resisting direction", because:

It is imperative, to be more precise, to negotiate the social mobilization of minority communities as 'imagined' but also as capable of narrating their histories and their ongoing resistance. At the same time, it is important to interweave the local, the specific, with global oppositional narratives. Identities can be formulated in provisional, non-finalizing terms, as situated in geographical space and 'riding' historical momentum. **The fact that identity and experience are narrated, constructed, caught up in the spiral of representation and intertextuality [hybridity] does not mean, as Stuart Hall has maintained, that nothing is at stake, or that struggle is over** (Shohat, 1995:174, emphasis added).

For Eliseo Veron, however, two contextual problematics can be designated at such a level of analysis: (1) the "effect of the meaning" produced by the subject [a figure of authority]; and (2) the "recognition" of the meaning, which allows double articulation that of the codification (language) and interpretation (Veron, 1978:10-1).

I will now focus on "The effect of the meaning" to illustrate the historical forces influencing the meaning production of 'Otherness'. In the second subsection I will concentrate on the notion of "recognition."<sup>12</sup>

There is a wise, old African saying about the relationship between a hunter and the wild animal: *After shooting the animal, the hunter always talks about the animal's pain and suffering; however, the hunter can never feel the pain of the shuted-animal, he can merely speculate!*

The films of Jean Rouch, Griffith, and Stern's reductionist analysis totally illustrate this saying. Both filmmakers effectively consider the object of their pursuits to be inferior in nature. As a result of this perception, they have unintentionally, through the medium of cinema and the operative *dispositive* of their

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<sup>12</sup> It is clear that Veron understood the relationship between the effect of meaning, recognition, and interpretation as a pragmatic articulation in the sense that he does not oppose these elements, but rather operates on conjuncturally as in Charles Sanders Peirce's (1978) "semiosis" implying a continuum link of the interpretant between the icon, index, and symbol. For example, Veron's understandings of recognition, effect of meaning, and subsequent interpretation is the equivalent of Pierce's semiosis, suggesting the link between an "object" (a defined concept about something), the "signification" (the notion – language or code - defining that object), and the "interpretant" (the finality of logic under which the interpretation is articulated). In Peirce's terms, it is through this correlation (semiosis) that we become aware of the system of representation through which the sign establishes communication. (See Charles Sanders Peirce, *Ecrits sur le signe* (G. Dedalle, trad.), Paris: Seuil (p.214).

respective hegemonic discourses, propagated the Western zoological mode of the representation, the construction of animalistic 'Otherness'.<sup>13</sup> This indicates an inscribed uncritical engagement on their part; they are passive observers, fixed into their social ideology. The political engagement also predicates the reductionism of their narratives.

I have argued that Africa and Africans throughout the world became 'objects' of great interest for the newly born Western cinema industry at the end of the nineteenth century, although this fact was never covered in my film study classes.<sup>14</sup>

During my undergraduate and graduate years, I was enrolled in four major courses dealing with the history of film, not one mentioned the role cinema played in the discursive construction or objectivization of black

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<sup>13</sup> It is my strategy to talk about social discourses as ideologies, because both notions are very close, conceptually at least, and command complex reflections that I do not want to explore in this studies. In "*The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media*" (1990), "Stuart Hall analyzed the ways in which the media, "sometimes deliberately, sometimes unconsciously define and construct the question of race in such a way to reproduce the ideologies of racism" (p.8). Further, Hall illustrates that these ideologies "do not consist of isolated and separate concepts, but in the articulation of different elements into a distinctive set or chain of [social] meanings." (p.9). In fact, what this understanding of social ideology means is that the ideology is part of discourse, social discourse in Foucault's sense, and not merely part of "individual consciousness or intention (p.9). Because people "'speak through' the ideologies which are active in [their] society and which provide [them] with the means of 'making sense' of social relations and [their] place in them" (p.9). Therefore, it is this social articulation of making sense social relations that I call social discourse.

<sup>14</sup> Boulou E. de B'éri, 2000, pp.7-15

people. In 1997, I went to Paris to research historical archives of early cinema that dealt with Africa. This research has provided the impetus for the present study, because I discovered that blacks were not only discursively characterized in the images of early cinema, but as well in the criticism of those films, as shown in the following scientific excerpt of the December 1912 edition of the *Pathé Journal*:

On the fifth page devoted to our film, we will be dealing with sleeping sickness (*maladie du sommeil*.) One can witness a miserable nigger, all skin and bones, infected by this disease. He turns his dumb face to the lens of the brave cameraman who dared cross these cursed regions overruled by the *tsetse fly*, the terrible tsetse or *glossina palpalis*, as our scientists name it. As the film proceeds, we are able to envision the infernal perspective, thanks to a thirty thousand diameters' increase, of the tiny portion of a drop of blood belonging to a victim of the fly [...].<sup>15</sup>

After a clear metaphor that associated bacteria with 'dark' Lilliputians on the one hand, and the 'white' corpuscles protecting the red (dark) ones on the other hand, the author concluded:

Many among us have, in our early years, been enthusiastically transported thanks to descriptions of journeys across Africa, such as Livingstone's long travel, the adventures of

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<sup>15</sup> This article was signed by Dr. J. C. "Notre bande cinématographique qui paraît en cinquième page est consacrée à la maladie du sommeil. On y voit un pauvre nègre, d'une maigreur squelettique, atteint de cette infection. Il présente sa face hébétée à l'objectif photographique du courageux opérateur qui osa traverser les régions maudites où règne la *mouche tsé-tsé*, la redoutable *tsé-tsé*: *glossina palpalis*, comme nos savants la nomment. Le film se déroulant, la projection nous donne ensuite la vision infernale que présente, à un grossissement de trente mille diamètres, l'infime partie d'une goutte de sang d'un malade victime de la mouche [...]" (my translation).

giraffe hunters or of young Boers described by Mayne Reid. They have thus heard about the *tsetse fly*. They are aware of the fear it aroused among settlers, Africa's explorers, not for themselves, indeed, but for their horses, their cattle which were ineluctably decimated while crossing these lands infected by the insect [...]. My chat has been long enough and these issues, thank goodness, only concern a handful of readers in France where sleeping sickness is but a very sweet thing.<sup>16</sup>

One of my current conceptualizations, quoted by specialists in black literature and cinema,<sup>17</sup> qualifies this era of early cinema as "Zoological Cinema."<sup>18</sup> This definition corroborates the observations of Youssef El Ftouh (1994) and Yrzoala J. C. Meda (1994) on colonial cinemas. For El Ftouh, the image of Africa could be summarized in a series of *clichés* based on virgin characterizations that figuratively legalize its violation.

The continent itself is one of the main characters. Represented by a plethora of maps which open the majority of films, it is an empty territory like the American Far West. At the beginning of *L'homme du Niger* [*The Man of Niger*](J. de Baroncelli, 1939) for example, the

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<sup>16</sup> Beaucoup d'entre nous, dans leurs jeunes années, se sont, sans doute, enthousiasmés aux récits des voyages à travers l'Afrique, à la grande randonnée de Livingstone, aux aventures des chasseurs de girafes ou des jeunes Boers contées par Mayne Reid. Ils ont donc entendu parler de la *mouche tsé-tsé*. Ils savent combien les colons, les explorateurs de l'Afrique la craignaient, non pas pour eux, il est vrai, mais pour leurs chevaux, leurs troupeaux qui étaient infailliblement décimés quand on passait dans les pays habités par cet insecte. [...] Ma causerie s'est assez prolongée et ces questions, heureusement, n'intéressent que peu de nos lecteurs, habitants de la France, où le sommeil est non pas une maladie, mais une très douce chose.

<sup>17</sup> See for example the 2001's *Littérature et cinéma en Afrique francophone*, in *Revue internationale de langue et de littérature* (S. Niang and A. Tcheuyap, eds.); also the 2002's *Cinéma d'Afrique* (D. Mondoloni, ed.), No. 149, Paris: Notre Librairie/Revue des littératures du Sud.

<sup>18</sup> Boulou E. de B'éri, op. cit. p. 12

camera is at ground-level and we almost mistake the Red Cross vehicle for a stage-coach. But the most caricatural example is *Grand Gala* (F. Campaux, 1952) which shows us heroes dressed as cowboys: guns, hats, jeans, checked shirts, nothing is missing not even the fights with horse-thieves, all set in Marrakesh! Africa is thus a virgin territory to be conquered literally and figuratively and [Western] filmmakers often used sexual metaphors. The "penetration," a recurrent word in the commentaries of documentaries is graphic in the first place, with its roads and arrows transpiercing the continent, recalling the different "raids." This representation takes on an openly nuptial character when in *Itto* (J. Benoît-Lévy and M. Epstein, 1934), the representative of the French government slips a ring on to the fourth finger of the Berber chief to seal the latter's capitulation (El Ftouh, 1994:81).

Meda also observes the same phenomenon. For him, the operative conditions of colonial cinema, from exotic-scientific to exotic-fictional films, use Africa as a backdrop for European glorification.

Colonial Cinema had a specific character: that of defending the colonial system in Africa and elsewhere (Asia, America etc.), legitimizing the genocides of the colonized peoples, such as the Conquest of the American Far West which gave rise to the Western - a real glorification of the massacre of the Indian peoples by the cinema. The populations of the colonized countries, in the best of cases, were ridiculed, but more often than not they were presented as savage hordes killing and devouring each other. [...] And yet this cinema, of which the racist content of certain films is evident, nevertheless had scientific aim (Meda, 1994:86-87).

According to Meda, some titles of French European films are sufficiently convincing in themselves because they openly evoke an animalistic and barbaric content. For

example, Marquis de Wavrin's "*Au pays des sorciers et de la mort*" (*In the Land of Wizards and Death*) (1933); Martin and Osa Johnson's "*Chez les cannibales*" (*At the Cannibal's House*) (1921), "*Chez les chasseurs de têtes des mers du sud*" (*At the House of the Headhunter of South Seas*) (1923); André-Paul Antoine's and Robert Lugean's "*Chez les mangeurs d'hommes*" (*At the Cannibal's House*) (1927-28); and Baron Gourgaud's "*Chez les buveurs de sang: le vrai visage de l'Afrique*" (*Together With the Blood's Drinkers: The True Face of Africa*) (1930-31) (Meda, *ibid.*).

In his book, *Black African Cinema*, Frank U. Ukadike (1994) enumerates English titles that imply subaltern, enslaved and colonized blacks. In this Western linguistic terrain, one can find Martin Johnson's "*Congorilla*" (1932), an ethno-anthropological projection of Western gaze upon African daily life practices, similar to Rouch's *Mad Masters*; Zoltan Korda's "*Sanders of the River*" (1935; 1937) illustrating the paternalistic construction of an indigenous and mysterious African primitive group that however serves and protects European explorers (*ibid.*:3). As Kenneth Cameron suggests, all these titles show that "Africa is a very old site for



European projection, a location of myths and fantasies for which the North seemed not to have the uncharged space" (Cameron, 1994:11). In fact early representations of blacks in film depicted the same territory of some Western exotic poetry, novel, and travel literature, and were flourishing. Cameron produces one of the most complete filmography of blacks in film, covering the period between 1900 to late 1980s. He shows that they are more than a thousand titles using specific animalistic and negative stereotypes to depict blackness.

Both Hall's (1990) and Mbembe's (2001) observation of the relationship between the animalistic characterizations of blacks appropriated, familiarized, and utilized as a thing-animal by the colonist white-eye or white-lens found legitimate grounds on all above titles. The *dispositive* of such colonial/imperial representation applies the modality or a 'practice' of surveillance — because the precision of their hegemonic representation depends on the barbaric characterization of their objects. Therefore, any movement and dependence of this animal-object must remain grided into these restricted 'spaces of practices' or systemic borders of surveillance (de Certeau (1990:77). In cinema-art, it is

such structural economies of surveillance that I call 'Zoological Cinema'.

'Zoological Cinema' generally refers to film of all genres and styles (fiction, documentary and newsreel) initially made for the benefit of Western Fairs ('*Fêtes Foraines*') and *Universal Expositions* in which colonial extension of power was expressed and glorified, and the animalistic 'nature' of blacks denigrated, dehumanized, but attractive. This way of representing 'Otherness' through cinema manifests an epistemological problematic intrinsically related to the normative frameworks of the power conceded to the 'authorial subject'. Sylvia Wynter analyzes this absolute subjective stance by questioning man's perception of other mankind, and as an ideological construction of others. She argues that this construction of an 'Otherness' "is a specific local-cultural conception of the human, that of the Judeo-Christian West" (Wynter, 2000:25).

[...] Man conceives of itself, through its Origin narrative or 'official creation story' of Evolution, as having been bio-evolutionarily selected, its 'Other' and 'Others' are necessarily those categories of humans who are projected, in the terms of the same Origin narrative, as having been bio-evolutionarily selected - i.e. all native peoples, and most extremely, to the ultimately zero degree, all peoples of African descent, wholly or partly (i.e. *negroes*), who are negatively marked as defective humans within the terms of Man's self-

conception, and its related understanding of what it is to be human (Wynter, *ibid.*)

In addition, Wynter believes that it is *a priori* from this perspective that we become aware of this 'other human', whatever our culture of origin. But most importantly,

it is because of the shared nature of this perspective, one that, as Michel Foucault pointed out, is [found in] all our contemporary disciplines, that we can all understand each other - that is, as long as we remain within the terms of this conception, and the field of meanings to which it gives rise. But what if we were to move outside this field? Outside its perspective or reference frame? (Wynter, 2000:25)

The symbolic positions of the camera and the editing process in Rouch's *Mad Masters* are symptomatic of the ways in which Wynter's definition of the shared social nature of Western master narrative producing the meaning of "Others." Here, the camera represents blacks with a hyperbolic voice hedonistically penetrating within the body of its object, the ritual of this wild human-animal. This phase describes Veron's understanding of the level of the "effect of meaning." Rouch's voiceover dictates what to see and to 'comprehend' from the images, while also portraying the authorial (subjective) manufacture of its objects. This is a good example of the Judeo-Christian hegemonic conceptualization of a powerful God

explaining the genesis (or the absolute truth) of human described by Wynter. According to Veron, it is also the phase of codification and interpretation. Here, the subject of power (the filmmaker) constructs and interprets the signs from his own grammatical code to define "what is to be human" (Wynter, 2000:25).

The absence of African voices in Rouch's *Mad Masters*, as well as their uncolored faces in Griffith's *Birth of A Nation* and *Zulu's Heart* participate in the discursive construction of characterizations of blacks as non-contributors to human civilization because they have been discursively reified as commodities. The biblical reference to this Judeo-Christian discourse is the mythical malediction of Ham, the darkest son of Noah and the father of Canaan, who was expelled from constructing the Ark, and denied mention in the narrative of this myth (Genesis, 9,22-27).

In *The Birth of a Nation* the conceptualization of the 'faceless' and 'voiceless' African became an important semiotic of the Euro-American system of meaning production, enabling us to conjecturally investigate the assumption that blacks were absent in the construction of pre-and-post-war American society, similar to Ham who was

condemned to be the slave of his brother, and denied mention in the construction of the Ark.

These examples help us to understand the social discourses at the core of the construction of Africans, and their eventful expressions of Africanicity. They also illustrate the institutionalized aesthetic and language of cinema that built its semiotic of the representation of 'Others' through preexisting systemic stereotypes of social discourses. Current film productions harmfully persist in representing blacks with the same stereotypes (Davis, 1996:9).<sup>19</sup> These kind of "clichés of hedonistic Africa" dominate film productions "set in colonial Africa" and continue to be present in titles such as *Out of Africa* (Pollack, 1985) and *Tarzan* (Lima and Buck, 1999), "as though the African imagery were reduced to a mere desire for physical pleasure" (Barlet, 2000:54). For example, in one of Disney's latest *Tarzan*, "there are no blacks. However, with Tarzan's dreadlocks and deep tan despite his white parents, Leslie Felperin (1999) notes that this version of the film *Tarzan* is 'blacker' than any previous representation.

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<sup>19</sup> Davis also observes that: "Establishment cinema appeared to have no interest in changing this formula, and exploited it shamelessly for half a century [...]. The formula had other uses than that intended for a white audience, where it both confirmed the white man in the role of master, and flattered him as being the worthy recipient of black fidelity." (Davis, p. 9)

While the zoological representation of blacks is inscribed in the Western symbolic charter of cinema-art and its esthetical codes, it would, however, convey the integration of multiple other stereotypes such as the one related to the sexuality of blacks in relation to socio-political concern of the preservation of racial purity. For example, in the case of *The Birth of a Nation*, Wynter notices that: "the integration of North/South Immigrant/Anglo-America was therefore to be effected by means of the creation of a powerful new stereotype, that of the black American male. This stereotype was that of the violent, sensual, 'big black buck' bent on assaulting white men and raping white women; and thereby of 'miscegenating' the "racial purity" of the hegemonic population group of European hereditary descent" (Wynter, 2000:32).

These stereotypical constructions of blacks in cinema, whose voices and faces are absent, have been extensively illustrated here. The formulation of these discursive constructions, however, owed their genesis from the political legitimation of early-modernity, which emerged in fifteenth and sixteenth century Western

worldview, and which continued into 18<sup>th</sup>-century colonization.<sup>20</sup> In asking if we are dealing "with a kind of rationale" that can be seen to exist "as an object of knowledge within the terms of our present mainstream order of knowledge", Wynter suggests that it is by understanding the Western ontological rationale or the rationale of its symbolic code that we can locate the Western's discourse about the 'Others'. In fact, the question that Wynter poses is

what if this rationale, which I shall tentatively entitle the ontological rationale or the rationale of the symbolic code, is a rationale that opens us onto the issue of Consciousness as an issue in its own terms? One therefore that opens up to a new 'ground' beyond the ground of 'Man', beyond its purely biologised conception of being human, of human being? (Wynter, 2000:43).

Grounding his analysis on historical events, Guido Convents (1986) observes that the modern discursive

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<sup>20</sup> A footnote could however be added in arguing that the postcolonial era that is the present day still marvelously illustrates the same discursive strategies of categorization between the uncivilized wild-animal, the evil axe, the *Others*, versus the civilized West. Consequently, the end of East/West ideological division of the globe still prevails in the discourse, and navigates within new conjectural parameters of power-knowledge that is in fact no-knowledge because biased by an onto-hegemonic discursive construes, and resistance activities that are and still remained the *Others* expression of self-determination. For example, in analyzing the events of September 11 2001 in the United States and discursive articulation of American politicians, P. A. Passavant and J. Dean remark the mechanism of those old hegemonic forms in President Bush's "line in the sand," positing of an "us" and a "them," and his demand that *everyone* must choose a side. According to these authors, this line suggests a clarity, but it is a clarity produced in part through the discourse of civilization versus barbarism – a discourse with a long and ignominious genealogy. Bush's speech of 20 September 2001 makes this clear: the "us" is constituted in the racial tradition and image of the "civilized" West: "This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight." The "them" appearing in the position of "civilization's" barbarous Other are those who believe the world might be otherwise than what it is within the global capitalist imaginary. They are denounced as "terrorists" and for their "radical" beliefs." In (2002) "Reflections on September 11," in *Theory and Events* (W. Brown, et. al, eds.) Vol. 5, No. 4, John Hopkins University Press

construction of the wild-black man can be traced to three central themes that formed the arguments at the core of colonialism, imperialism and religious crusades: (1) The defense of the nation or, in other words, patriotism: the greatness of the nation that justifies the extension of power over other civilizations. (2) Legitimation: the West, as representing the civilized and superior white people, according to social Darwinism, must provide civilization to black people to rid them of barbarism. It explains why colonial propaganda insisted on emphasizing black inferiority, tribalism, and strange and exotic customs. The slave trade conducted by the Arabs on African continent, prior to 1900, was also described as inhuman and intolerable. (3) Proselytism: religious propaganda was at this point applied based on Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in name of the Father..." This utmost Christian commandment was more than a dictum of legalized enslavement of the African people, because Western Catholics and Baptists thought it their duty to show superstitious blacks the 'right' way to God and happiness, thereby decreasing the progress of Islam in Africa. Western believers were inundated with unrelenting



information on the animalism, fetishism, and strange rituals of African people. Like Convents and Wynter, Vumbi Yoka Mudimbé also focused his recent analysis on 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>-century Europe to study the emergence of the ontological discursive formulation of the 'wild-African man'.

The intellectual space covered outlines Africa as a paradigm of difference. For the Greeks, such a peculiarity did not seem to mean more than what the words Africa, Ethiopia, Libya signified, as Alain Bourgeois has demonstrated (1971). Asians and Northern Europeans were "barbarians" too, and functioned in the Greek imagination as a uniform order of alterity. It was, I think, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe that invented the savage as a representation of its own negated double. Exploiting travelers' and explorers' writings, at the end of the nineteenth century, a "colonial library" begins to take shape. It represents a body of knowledge constructed with the explicit purpose of faithfully translating and deciphering the African object. Indeed, it fulfilled a political project in which, supposedly, the object unveils its being, its secrets, and its potential to a master who could, finally, domesticate it. Certainly, the depth as well as the ambition of the colonial library disseminates the concept of deviation as the best symbol of the idea of Africa (Mudimbe, 1994:xii)

Through all these views, constructivism is the mode of representation universally applied in the intersection of modernities and cultural representations, and the interaction between I (We) and THEY (the Other) (Mudimbé, 1988). Throughout his works, Mudimbé understands this constructivist modality not as a negative modality, but

as a necessary historical mechanism of early-modernity portraying the savaged-other to legitimate a negated and differentiated self. Particularly, he argues that is it through this construction that one can understand the contextual regularity of external and internal conditions of possibility of an object of inquiry such as Africanicity (Mudimbé, 1985:9).

Here I agree with Achille Mbembe, who sees this process as a dialectical mechanism that, however, induces determination of the self. According to Mbembe, the slave, for example, is a naming system that does not necessarily abrogate the capacity of the slave to "arrogate the right to exercise her or his will" (Mbembe, 2001:235). On the same track, Stuart Hall, Edward Said, and Tzvetan Todorov recognize that the understanding of the construction of 'Otherness' lays at the heart of Enlightenment social philosophy, far behind the romantic rationalism common to 18<sup>th</sup> century-Europe. As has suggested Stuart Hall (1994a:119), "this does not mean that people were not individual subject in pre-modern times," but rather that they were "conceptualized differently."

In his book, *La Réflexion française sur la diversité humaine*, Todorov suggests that our notions of exoticism, assimilation and disenchantment:

were articulated or anticipated in the vast travel literature of the Enlightenment, both by circumnavigators of the world and by voyagers of the imagination, by fellow-travelers seduced by the mysteries of Persia or invigorated by the freshness of North America. In this literature, eighteenth-century writers such as Lahontan, Diderot, and Degérando traced a fascination with 'Otherness' which lies at the heart of modern ethnology, while portraying as universalists not so much the *philosophes* of the mid-eighteenth century as the holistic philosophers of history who succeeded them - in France, most notably Condorcet, Saint-Simon, and Comte. For Montesquieu and Rousseau in particular, Todorov shows the utmost respect, preferring their richly textured conceptions of the varieties of otherness and our diverse ways of gazing upon it, over the contorted objections of their critics, from Chateaubriand to Péguy."<sup>21</sup>

The problem brought about by this dialectical mechanism is the absence of truth as a premise of democratic principle, because it is based on an authorial *dispositive* of translation (encoding) and representation (interpretation). Therefore, the mechanism producing the meaning of 'Otherness' in films, the literature and narrative of explorers and missionaries, importantly projects Western imaginary significations of blacks. The major shift of this legitimation and location of meaning

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted by Robert Wokler, (1996:44).

has been strongly implemented with the help of modern<sup>22</sup> technology such as photography and 'excellently' by cinema through its capacity to combine moving images with sound. The development of motion picture technology at the end of the nineteenth century armed explorers and the academic world with new kinds of instruments of representation. As mentioned earlier, the cinema became an 'indubitable' discursive conduit of pre-imaginary symbols. Films became a new kind of library (a conjectural archive) that provided exotic visuality not only to travelers and other colonial forces, but also to the academic erudite (the anthropologists, theologians, historians, and biologists) manufacturing master

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<sup>22</sup> It may be useful to indicate that the purpose of this differentiation between early-modernity and later-modernity is simply based on the support (medium) of representation used in both moments. The differentiation of this medium commands to consider the notion of multiple-modernity. That does not mean that the imaginary signification in the era of early modernity was mostly imaginative in the manner that before the medium of photography or film provided concrete images, they were no other conduits out of which Western discourses constructed the Others. In fact, the above analysis of Todorov and Said exactly indicates the contrary. The importance of this differentiation is based on the imputed confusion of signifiers that the concepts of modernity imply. However, in this dissertation, the multiple-modernity is seen as a process of time within which ideas of novelty endlessly emerged in world's society. It also, fundamentally, a specific historical moment or timeframe out of which diverse populations have experienced important changes (novelty) in their culture and everyday life. This understanding of modernity is based on the contradictory definition that of Jurgen Habermas (1987, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press) for whom the modernity is generally a configuration that is at the core of emergence modern nation-state, civil society an industrial capitalism; and of Jacques Derrida (1976), who considers modernity as a dynamic movement of 'metaphysics of presence' that of something here (present) and there (meta-) conjointly expressing however the 'being of the Other', and at the same time being the self. The conjunction of these signifiers of the concept of modernity allows us to confirm our opposition to any static unifying paradigm defended for example by Habermas, and any hybridity that could be emerged from it. Therefore, my position and interpretative hypothesis sustains the paradigm of multiple modernity suggesting that there is contrasts and conflicts in all projects of modernity, some of which represent effective, (or efficacy) some other are not.

narratives on Others.<sup>23</sup> It is the 'product' of cinematic harvest that was presented as objects of research on the one hand, and engendered multiple funfairs and other gatherings such as the *Colonial Exposition*.

In his profound critique of Western academic disciplines, Johannes Fabian (1983) suggested that visual representations show various forms of domination that have contributed to the maintenance of western imperialism and subduing politics.<sup>24</sup> For example, the fields of geography, anthropology, and aesthetics introduced visual and spatial images, maps, diagrams, traces, and tables depicting the 'Others' as pure objects of study that, after structural dissection and systemic disciplinary interpretation, were accorded the status of

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<sup>23</sup> In his introduction of "An Amazing Distance: Pictures and People of Africa," Paul S. Landau (2002:5) notes that "[w]hen Christian travelers encountered slave traders and plantations in Central and West Africa, they reacted in horror and attributed what they saw to an extreme "otherness" of essence, to the irreducibly "barbaric" character of "Arabs" (actually Swahili) or Africans. They did not know or did not credit that the slave trade and the importation of European firearms had destabilized new African polities; nor that the subsequent abolition of the Atlantic slave trade had cheapened slaves in Africa without shutting off their supply. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when the providential benefit of slavery in the Americas was no longer argued, Central Africa's garrisoned states and the incorporation of slave carriage into legitimate commerce in West Africa continued to reinforce European prejudices. All the while, Westerners accumulated a library of knowledge about Africa, developed ethnological comparisons, and applied their misprisions of Darwinism to them. As African identities were essentialized in terms drawn from the growing image-Africa of these paper representations, a science of bodies and races emerged and became a sourcebook of biological arguments for African inferiority. The "amazing distance" became a chronological gulf: Africans lived in a past era, which had accidentally been mislaid in the present.

<sup>24</sup> According to Fabian (1983:121) "it is commonly believed that the visual-spatial is more germane to the infantile and adolescent mind than to the mature intelligence. Whether such is indeed the case may be for the psychologist to decide. However it is easy to see how arguing from ontogenetic to phylogenetic visualism may turn pedagogical principles into political programs."

'valuable commodities' worthy of museum exhibits, and other venues in the Western commercial marketplace. However, none of these imported 'commodities' were allowed to express their intrinsic feeling, because, as Fabian argues, far from being simply decoded, they have never 'performed' or expressed their own experience.<sup>25</sup> This is an exemplary description of *The hunter and wild-animal* and the *problématique* of the normative empowering an authorial subjectivity as a premise of this Kantian vulgate according to which the subject is above all human experience. Elsewhere, Fabian argues that in order to understand an experience, especially contingent cultural performances, one must be cognizant of its morphology.

[...] It is not "natural" to assume that a given text - leaving aside the case of multilingual texts, which the *Vocabulaire* is not — comes in a "given language." The text, especially one that is based on a precarious literacy (precarious for both the writer and the reader),<sup>26</sup> must be creatively appropriated. Far from being just a decoding of graphic signs, reading such a text requires an oral performance without which the writing would be a quaint example of literary incompetence (lacking orthography, misrepresenting morphological and syntactic structure), a caricature of speech

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<sup>25</sup> I expressively use the term "expression of feeling" for those so-called commodities or artifacts, although one can argue that object cannot express feeling. I contend that the objects of cinema, especially, produce an expression of feeling related to specific social worldview—codification and interpretation of meaning—, which, here, can be similar to systemic disciplinary modalities of analysis.

<sup>26</sup> By precarious Fabian means "writing that is not ruled by fixed orthographic standards, not even by routine. Documents such as the *Vocabulaire* were not produced routinely. The latter was the case with private letters that speakers of Sh/KS, though not literate in that language (most had learned reading and writing in French or one of the local Bantu-languages), had been exchanging for a generation or two. This practice had resulted in a remarkable degree of uncontrolled standardization, something I have referred to as common sense orthography (and used as a model for my own transcriptions)."

(and, by implication, of thought) (Fabian, 2001:12).

We have seen this with the historical mechanism at the core of the discursive construction of Others outlined by Mudimbé, Wynter and Covents. The central question for Fabian remains: Is it possible for an object to represent itself outside its natural location, for example, in academia or a museum. The morphology of object suggested by Fabian is thus crucial in any discursive analysis because it is part of the content that contextually mediates with its experience to perform its specificity. As many of the manufactured objects, black people as well, are emptied of their self-performing voice, any analysis not accessing to this morphology also limits its comprehension because of the dislocation, distance, and strangeness of the visualized objects from the systemic or social *dispositive* viewpoint of the decoders.

In his essay, *A Pedagogical Cinema: Development Theory, Colonialism and Post-Liberation African Film*, Brian Golfarb underscores the fact that "[t]he practices of collection and display of photographs and artifacts taken by colonizers and missionaries became the basis for a body of work produced by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthropologists, many of whom never left Europe"

(Golfarb, 1995:9). As it was suggested by Edward Said (1978) and Tzvetan Todorov (1989) the question raised by Golfarb's observation is the adequacy or truth as a democratic principle in the process of representation, especially as this process relates to human beings, which is basic of someone's identity.

I conclude this chapter by arguing that the operative *dispositive* of the Western gaze on blacks generally denotes the dialectical problematic recurrent in the question of identity and the authorial subject defining one's identity. Put in a different way, this dialectic suggests the performance of one's identity as a self-being (as a methodology suggested by Mbembe) and the discourse representing this identity can be observed in Hegel's<sup>27</sup> social and political theories.

Hegel's socio-political theory continues to influence contemporary reflection, especially the ongoing discussions about identity and recognition. His social theory remains crucial in any investigation about the

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<sup>27</sup> As in the case of Kant, the dimension of Hegel's racism has been widely reviewed by diverse scholars. (See, for example, Sander Gilman (1982), *On Blackness without Blacks*, Boston: G. K. Hall. This is certainly not the place to deeply analyze Hegel's discourse on race. My concern is much more his knowledge apprehending the self and consciousness through the counterfactual formation of discourses.



reflective construction of difference, as well as any particular socio-cultural or political identities. For example, Hegel's socio-political philosophy suggests that the reality of one's identity is actively created rather than passively discovered. This position illustrates part of his dialectical theory of contradictory postulates such as active versus passive; immortal, identical, and static; and creative, active, and dynamic. But Hegel's most interesting articulation of social theory is the way in which he uses discourse as a systemic location of meaning construction, to displace and locate the subjective authority and the medium through which one becomes aware of himself. Hegel concedes that One's self-determination — "to be is to say" who one is — is always taken into the performative space of discursive formulation and formation. As such, the animalistic discursive representation of blacks should not pretend to objectively define the truth of their identity, inasmuch as there are not a regime of truth. Consequently, I argue that these discourses are dramatic performances participating in the performative 'reappearance' of black expressions of identity. This dialectical engagement implies an articulation involving the active

participation of an agent in the construction of his/her self. While the world that one creates is fundamentally predicated on historical indeterminacy, a discursive agent must articulate differentiated constructs, adequately and ethically coherent vis-à-vis self-recognition. In this process, the significance of oneself — the ways in which one perceives the world — is also part of this self-recognition (Hegel, 1988:48). The next subsection of this chapter focuses on this reflective construction of oneself, which has been widely debated in Black Studies, and which I will investigate practical examples in film.

## **2.2. Reflective Self-performance: A Discursive Examination of the Practice of 'Marronage' in Black Cinema**

To understand the articulation of self-representation in black cinema, we must first outline the primary symbols of the social reality experienced by blacks in Africa and the diaspora. For example, I contend that the academic glorification of the artistic and aesthetic achievements of Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* can be linked directly to

the potentiality 'resilience' of African audiences, qualified by Manthia Diawara (1993:211-20) as resisting spectators.<sup>28</sup> While the question posed here asks if someone would 'resist' a representation depicting his recognized reality, the notion of resistance does not elucidate the practices beneath that articulation; rather, the practice of discourse creates the possibility of resistance. Simply put, the notion of resistance assumes a relation to power. Here, a subject of power defines an object that, ultimately, resists this definition; however, does this relation explain the conjunctural articulation of emerging practices of self-determination? In his postcolonial study, Achille Mbembe (2001) uses the same position to question whether an expression of resistance is *a priori* an opposition against authority (Mbembe, 2001:108-13). Accordingly, Mbembe suggests that this should be a secondary concern impossible to draw in single and stable frameworks, because the relation between ruler and ruled is

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<sup>28</sup> In his adaptation of Laura Mulvey's feminist thesis on visual pleasure in black cinema, Diawara (1993) suggests that the dominant cinema situates Black characters primarily for the pleasure of White spectators (male or female)." This pleasure in dominant cinema now has created new figures that often represent black characters as non-threatening, usually "deterritorialized from a Black milieu and transferred to a predominantly White world." However, it is through this deterritorialization of blacks on location that misrepresents or distorts their social reality that black audiences construct an active attitude of resistance.

constantly shaped and reshaped through their "attempts to rewrite the mythologies of power"(Mbembe, 2001:108).

I have argued throughout this dissertation, and particularly in the first footnote of this chapter, that it is important to consider preexisting historical discourses not merely as manifestations of power that have objectively circumscribed all parts of its 'object', but conjunctural practices shaping further possibilities through the emerging forms of self-representation. For example, the ways in which blacks were historically represented in cinema, evidently, conveyed resisting practices contradictory to former representations. Further, focussing on this apparently simple articulation must lead to emerging conjunctions taking into account the context of historical characterization, and new forms of articulations of representation re-appropriating — in the sense of dynamic correction or '*recyclage*' — former historical assumptions. Therefore, the dichotomy of the powerful/powerless is less essential here, because both spheres of representation articulate and produce differentiated meanings, which also illustrate their resisting attitudes. Or as Vumbi Y. Mudimbe (1985)

correctly notes, they articulate a neglected self through the construction of Other.

In her analysis of Lester Walton's early criticisms of popular culture, Anna Everett (2000) underscores the fact that the attitudes of resistance of African-American audiences to the first screening of *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915 illustrates a process whereby blacks transcoded the dominant anti-black rhetoric for their Euro-American counterparts.

One reason the early cinema's anti-black rhetoric did not foreclose the enthusiasm of early black spectators was this audience's ability, through a process of transcoding, to locate unanticipated points of critical textual entry to facilitate their attenuated specular pleasures. In other words, African American spectators were able to bring a critical distance to the cinematic texts that featured white actors burlesquing [...] black people's everyday lives. Since these portrayals had so little to do with their real or ideal lives and everything to do with the white racial imaginary, it is unlikely that early black spectators were subject to the mirror phase of cinematic identification with these caricatures (Everett, 2000:31).

Everett concluded her essay with the argument that:

As [Walton's] early articles [...] demonstrate, African American cultural workers were neither complacent about nor acquiescent to their historically proscribed places at the margins of early American film culture. And although Walton's analyses of the excesses of the early cinema reveal a type of deconstructive transcoding, more research and critical work needs to be done to uncover and explore the evidence of early black spectatorship that points to a reconstructive transcoding approach to mainstream film texts wherein the fulfillment

of visual pleasure and not critical exegesis is the goal (ibid.47-48).

The paradox underlined by Everett here is that although Griffith's innovations of cinematic art were far-reaching and set the pattern for many techniques of cinema that were to follow, it is the stereotypical reification of blacks that mandates the necessity of reconstructive transcoding.<sup>29</sup> Hegel's argument that 'to be is to say' is truly exemplary here, because the meaning conferred to our lives is no longer by virtue of an absolute power-subject constructing what ones 'Is', rather it exists independently of discursive practices, and by virtue of those practices themselves. It is in this particular appearance of self-expression (the morphology of experience underscored by Fabian) that the performative act of experience takes place. To simplify the complexity of this process, I want to outline three intermedial conditions of analysis of what I have called "Zoological Cinema" and the reflective articulation of self-expression. First, zoological cinema specifies 'extreme' visual stereotypes depicting, particularly, the

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<sup>29</sup> Wynter observed that "indeed, the aesthetic force and power of Griffith's technical innovations would lead filmmakers of the stature of an Eisenstein not only to hail him as one of the genuine masters of the American cinema - i.e. 'a magician of tempo and montage' - but to be also deeply influenced by the new techniques in the series of masterpieces that Eisenstein was himself to conceive and direct" (op.cit. p.32).

animalistic nature of blacks in cinema. Second, the ways in which these stereotypes serve as a contradictory process, articulated with practices of re-appropriation of Africanicity, indicate a reflective attitude allowing us to further this investigation. In other words, besides this reflective attitude suggesting an active process of resistance, I suggest that '*marronage*' is employed as a figuration of trans-geographical practices of blackness, at the edge of specific expressions of their everyday life experience, wherever their geopolitical identity is located.

Let us begin with the instruments of zoological cinema. Black people have been represented through multiple characterizations. Added to Hall and Mbembe remarks on the ways in which hegemonic representations construct their animal-object, I want to outline four main characteristics that are proper to Zoological Cinema. The first is 'a wild animal': blacks were characterized as animalistic and uncivilized. The second is a figure of 'untrustworthiness': they could not be a 'right-hand' because of their obscurantism, barbarism and especially their unpredictability. The third character is

a 'servant': they could serve under the control of civilized white masters. The fourth is 'a reinstated nobleness': they could become noble after faithful service to the master or bloody fight for their own liberty.

The wild and untrustworthy black has authorized the reification of his humanity, (see *Annex II: Colonial and Imperial Hunting*). As shown in these pictures, blacks were hunted down as animals, because they were considered biologically inferior human beings. This discourse explains 'Why' Europeans 'penetrated', raped, violated, subjugated, killed and eradicated any potential African civilization to insure their hegemonic position. In film, the animalistic character of blacks has been fully exploited, as shown in John Hudson's *African Queen* (1951), a four-time Academy Award Nominee and Oscar winner for best actor for Humphrey Bogart's performance.<sup>30</sup>

The official celebratory description of this film illustrates the still blinded discourse with regard to the symbolic construction of an 'Otherness', but also with the question of representation and history. The

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<sup>30</sup> The fact that this film was considered for multiple Oscar's nominations also shows how well the Academic of Motion Picture has appreciated its plots, arguments, and discourse. Here, I want to add that this example shows without any doubt the ways in which western institution of entertainment perceived blacks.



grammatic codes of this Western cinematic *dispositive* of film analysis limit Tim Dirks to the aesthetic of genre — "the semi-comic scene" (and style) "the uncomprehending natives in noisy," singing atonal hymn.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, above this normative economy of film analysis, the opening sequence of *African Queen* remains significant for my purpose, because it illustrates the Western discourse regularity (the imaginary significations) beneath this imaginative representation.

Taken as an object of cinema, the official description of the *African Queen* resists portraying blacks as wild animals. In its opening sequence, however, the natives were not only able to produce cacophonous vocalizations, but fought among themselves for Bogart's cigar butt, thanks to Hudson's imagination, mastering not only the technique of filmmaking, but deploying the

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<sup>31</sup> "Credits for the film are displayed atop a view of the blue, cloud-filled sky through the canopy of the rain forest. The camera tracks along the crown of the trees and then slowly moves downward to a shot of thatched rooftops in a native village. One of the buildings has a cross at the pinnacle of a steeple - a title card reads: "GERMAN EAST AFRICA, September, 1914." From a closer angle, the camera again descends from the cross into the doorway where an engraved stone panel identifies the site: 1<sup>st</sup> METHODIST CHURCH KUNG DU. Inside the mission church, stuffy English missionary Rev. Samuel Sayer (Robert Morley) and his prim, repressed, spinster sister Rose Thayer (Katharine Hepburn) lead the church service. Utterly devoted to her brother, high-collared, fervent, perspiring Rose pedal-pumps and plays the organ to assist **the uncomprehending natives in noisy, atonal hymn singing —in the semi-comic scene**. Above the sound of the voices inside, the sharp sound of a steamboat's whistle is heard to announce its arrival. A gin-drinking, cigar-smoking, uncouth drifter named Charlie Allnut (Humphrey Bogart), the owner of the squat, 30-foot ramshackle supply launch steamer, *The African Queen*, arrives on his up-river rounds to deliver supplies, mail and news to the isolated village" (Tim Dirks, 1996-2002, emphasis added).

grammatical codes of cinema to represent the reification of these natives. That is nonetheless why, in this sequence, these constructed-animalistic men authorized the domestication of their inhumanity, to render themselves true human beings according to Western structure of evangelization — and since this sequence takes place at the church, we should also remember Saint Matthew's chapter 23, verse 24. However, this Western self-imposed duty is not simple, because a wild animal cannot be totally domesticated. Its 'identity' howsoever categorized, remains an unpredictable wildness, and dangerous. And that is also the irony of a manufacturing discourse. For example, in order to keep the dissimilarity (Vumbi Y. Mudimbé (1985) defines as the neglected self) with this animalistic identity, the authorial power of representation must seemingly articulate a discourse of differentiation suggesting to maintain the Others into their wildness.

To continue my trans-geographical strategy illustrating both views of the Western Ocean, and English/French linguistic territories, let us move once again in France. An unprecedented European-manufactured

discourse of the animalistic-black — who however remains uncivilized after many efforts — is found in Edmund Greville's film, *Princess Tam-Tam* (1935), starring Josephine Baker. Officially, the story of this exotic musical comedy is about a French author who goes to North Africa to write a novel, but becomes attracted by a charming, yet paradoxically wild black woman. Nevertheless, this noble French novelist 'partially' achieves his mission to domesticate the wild African woman and transform her into an acceptable princess.<sup>32</sup> Here also, the film opens and ends with the assumption that it is possible to subdue the savage black, but

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<sup>32</sup> "Novelist Max de Mirecourt (Albert Préjean) fights with his wife Lucie (Germaine Aussey) and goes with his collaborator Coton (Robert Arnoux) to Africa. Alwina (Josephine Baker) is seen stealing oranges, but Max pays. Max and Coton try to write and visit Roman ruins. Alwina dances for children. She guides tourists who imply she smells like a musky animal; so she puts sand in their salt shaker. She begs, runs from the police, and gets on Max's car, which takes her to his villa. She is caught snooping; but Max and Coton decide to teach her while she lives with them. Meanwhile Lucie is flirting with a Maharajah (Jean Galland) and says she is using him to make Max jealous. Max tells Alwina that Coton, who is writing everything down, is his slave. Alwina goes out on a sailing boat with Dar (Georges Péclet) and sings of the ocean. Max gets mail with clippings of Lucie and the Maharajah. He works to finish his novel so that he can go home. Alwina is dressed up and studies piano, dance, and arithmetic. Max and Coton take Alwina back to France. Coton calls on Lucie and asks about the Maharajah. Coton tells Lucie that Max is seeing a black princess. Coton shows Alwina to reporters, and Lucie sees a news photo. Max asks Alwina to be a princess and takes her to the opera. People look at Max and Alwina and then at Lucie and the Maharajah. Max talks with Lucie during intermission. At the horse races Max tells Alwina to calm down. Alwina is depicted in various forms of art. She tells Max she is staying home to rest but goes out for wild fun. At a bar she sings "Under the African Sky" and dances. Lucie's friend (Viviane Romance) tells Lucie how Alwina danced. Lucie has the Maharajah invite Max to a sophisticated party. Chorus girls dance in lavish production numbers. African drums and Lucie's friend urge Alwina to strip off some clothes and dance in African style. Max is ashamed, but people applaud. Max chases Lucie in a car. The Maharajah tells Alwina to return to her country. Lucie stops her car. She and Max exchange jealous words, but then he kisses her. Alwina sees them kissing and calls Dar. Max and Coton complete the novel. Max lets Alwina stay at his villa in Africa. Alwina watches animals in the house, and an ass eats the cover off Max's novel, *Civilization*." (Sanderson Beck, 2000, in [san.beck.org/MM/1935/PrincessTamTam.html](http://san.beck.org/MM/1935/PrincessTamTam.html)).

impossible to transform his/her wildness, because he/she belongs forever to the wild bushes and resists any evolutionary civilization. That is why the final juxtaposed images connote Baker as an ass eating the cover of the book, "*Civilization*," a symbolic codification signifying her rejection of modernity.

Indeed, this discourse utilizes the circulatory structure of western science. For example, the opening sequence depicts Baker amidst sheep, whereas the last one shows her returning to her primary living, after a beautiful dreamy life in Paris in which she has caused paradoxical envy on males and females needing to penetrate or possess her, and to exclude or reject her. Such Eurocentric representation "enact the dominant set of codes," and allows us understand why Baker was unable "to alter the ending of *Princess Tam-Tam* [...] nor could she conceivably marry the working-class Frenchman played by Jean Gabin in *Zou* (1934). Instead, *Zou* [Baker] ends up alone, performing as a caged bird pinning the Caribbean." (Ella Shohat, 1995:172).

The denial of aesthetic representation to the subaltern has historically formed a corollary to the literal denial of economic, legal, and political representation. The struggle to 'speak for oneself' cannot be separated from a history of being spoken for, from the struggle to speak and be heard. Speaking for oneself is not simple

act, however, but rather a complex process. From Fanonian nationalism to Afrocentrism, Third Worldist anticolonial identity has been linked to the reassertion of the precolonial past, and the forging for of a revitalized community (Shohat, 1995:173-4).

We have in fact here many regulatory symptoms of discourse characterizing black-Otherness. However, that does not mean that the so discursively reified black-thing is without any sense of mobility, transformation<sup>33</sup>, and ambiguous instability. In fact, Stuart Hall adds that in many times of history, there have always been the process of decolonization of the gaze, i.e., "the naming — the possibility at last to name the unspeakable fact," that meant to serve for oneself representation (Hall, 1997:294).

In Spike Lee's (1992) film, *Malcolm X*, Malcolm X's speeches have provided the groundwork for the third and fourth categorizations of the blacks as servant, and noble slave. Malcolm X (The Little) defines two kinds of slaves in order to illustrate their differences. Both categories are analyzed through their assimilation or

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<sup>33</sup> In his chapter, "The Aesthetic of Vulgarly" Mbembe analyzes the ways in which the "postcolonial subject", in spite his/her incontestable participation and contribution to the benefit of hegemonic representation, the (post)colonial commandment, he/she is also engaged "in baroque practices fundamentally ambiguous, fluid, and modifiable even when the are clear, written, and precise rules. (Mbembe, 2001:129)

rejection of the space within and outside which their everyday life takes place. The first one is a "live-in" slave who dwells with the masters and sleeps in the basement or in a maid's room near the master's children. This category of slave is related to an 'assimilated' black capable of giving his life to protect the master's goods, life, and family. The second category is the "out-housed" slave who sleeps in the farmyard or workers' cabana. This slave is not really part of the main house despite his contribution to the well being of his master; in addition, he is always waiting for an opportunity to escape, to look for and claim his freedom. This active attitude is also a sign of his nobleness.

According to Bogle, two early Porter films, the shorts *Conference Spy* (c.1910) and *For Massa's Sake* (1911), were the first in the long line of socially accepted Good Negro characters

In the former, dear Uncle Daniel is a Negro spy for the South. He dies before a Northern firing squad, but he is content, happy that he 'did it for massa's sake and little massa.' In *For Massa's Sake* a former slave is so attached to his erstwhile master that he sells himself back into slavery to help the master through a period of financial difficulty (Bogle, op.cit. p.14.)

Bogle's observation aptly illustrates X's category of the servant slave dying for the nation in order to gain his

citizenship. He even sacrifices himself to be sold, in order to help the master facing a difficult financial time.

[This slave] "loved his master better than the master loved himself. If the master said we get a good house, 'he'd answer yeah, we got a good house'. If the master's house caught on fire the house-negro would be the one who runs to put the blaze out. If the master got sick, he'd say what's the matter boss, 'we sick'?" (Malcolm X, the scene of live TV's debate).

I will analyze Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* in Section 3, here I just want to underscore another of Lee's films, *Do the Right Thing* (1989) as an always-current referencing the enslaved black man, particularly, the "out-housed" or noble slave. *Do the Right Thing* takes place during one long, hot day in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. This is a typical poor, urban cityscape depicted by countless American motion pictures in which violence is directly referred to. The film introduces this neighborhood like any other city neighborhood in an urban movie, with the difference that here, the people know and accept one another, although there are problems like depression. Robert Ebert (1989:24) observes a sense of community despite the tension visible on the face of its members. This neighborhood is primarily black, with two major local

businesses: an Italian family pizzeria (Famous Pizzeria) owned by Sal (Danny Aiello), and a Korean family fruit and vegetable stand. In the Famous Pizzeria, however, there are no black heroes or leaders displayed on the *'Wall of Fame'*. That is why the giant Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), whose large boom box provides a musical commentary insulating him from the world and everyone attempting to disgrace his blackness, invites Sal to put up pictures of black people alongside those of Robert DeNiro, Joe Dimaggio, and Frank Sinatra that cover the *Wall of Fame*. This scene indicates that the Famous Pizzeria is a central site of this neighborhood complex life, and paradoxical community. Ebert argued that "nobody seems to quite know the Koreans, but Sal and his sons are neighborhood fixtures: They know everybody, and everybody knows them" (Ebert, 1989:24). The owner of the pizzeria basically wants to do business. One of his sons working with him, Vito (Richard Edson), is a secret racist. Pino (John Turturro), the other son, hangs out with blacks, and even falls in love with a black girl. Mookie (Spike Lee), who delivers pizzas and dispatches news and gossip, is black. Mookie is apparently happy at his job, and at this first level of analysis, could be viewed as an



assimilated servant, but the 'finality' of his action shows that his heart was not in that job, because he consistently sought an opportunity to escape.

We meet other people of the neighborhood, but I want to underscore one key character, a local disk jockey, whose program provides a non-stop verbal commentary. "*Wake up!*" shouts Señor Love Daddy (Samuel L. Jackson), twenty-four hours, every day, week, month, and year for the local radio station *We-Love*, as he holds a ringing alarm clock near his microphone. From an intimate close-up of Señor Love Daddy's mouth, microphone and clock, the camera pulls back, through the glass front of the studio booth and out onto the street, the sole site for the whole film. The apparent calm of this establishing shot would nevertheless installs the tension, an inherent characteristic of the street's walls and pedestrian faces. This establishing shoot, followed with Rosie Perez energetically dancing on *Fight the Power*, in front of the images of Brooklyn music band, *Public Enemy*, and on quotations from Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>34</sup> complete the narrative of the enslaved black ready to say

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<sup>34</sup> - Malcolm X: [...] I don't even call it violence when it's self defense, I call it intelligence.... - Dr. King Jr.: Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral [...] a descending spiral ending in destruction for all...(in Spike Lee's *Malcom X*)

no, and take the opportunity to destabilize the subduing power of his master. The plot's key figure of the enslaved black seeking freedom is Mookie, who expresses his rage and feelings of disappointment in a single decisive violent act that destroys the apparent cohesion of this neighborhood, including Sal's Famous Pizzeria.

In *La culture au pluriel* (1987), Michel de Certeau argues that cultural, social, or ethnic formations become a public demonstration when they reveals their oppositional discourse with the generally conceded evidence of their potential assimilation. "No, says a Black, I am not American. No, says an Indian, I am not Chilean or Argentinean. No, says the Briton, I am not French" (De Certeau, 1987:125). This is a fundamental beginning, but not a 'finality'.

I argue that Sal's Famous Pizzeria is a 'colonial settlement' at the center of this contemporary black neighborhood. Sal enjoys the colonial life, making money out of this urban-jungle, but never tries to speak the 'language' (in Veron's sense of "decoding") of the savage blacks. Sal refuses to put black pictures of reference's on the Wall of Fame, and the rap music that colors the experience of this film narrative (the morphology of the

performing voice of the object according to Fabian) is also banished inside this colonial space (the pizzeria) even though this music is a sign of 'recognition' for Sal's all-black clientele. Sal's Famous Pizzeria is indeed the analogy of a colonialist settlement in the middle of African jungle, similar to the bush-installed hospital of Nobel Prize's Albert Schweitzer, who, as a character, is also self-absorbed and arrogant in Bassek ba Komio's (1995) *The Great White Man of Lambarene*.

On this other opposite side of the ocean, we hear the same voice of enslaved blacks looking to fly away from the paternalism of their self-imposed master — looking to say: - *No, I am not what the discourse decided that I am.*

*The Great White Man of Lambarene* is shot on the site of Doctor Albert Schweitzer's hospital in Lambarene (Gabon). Behind Schweitzer's (Andre Wilms) psychological reserve, the film depicts a man totally blinded to the people around him by his own theological-paternalistic love-hate character. In this film, Schweitzer totally appears as a figure of oxymora. For example, he is characterized as a loving father who looks on Africans as primitive children needing his protection against the

temptations of evil instruments of modernity: electrical generators, modern sanitation, and potential political independence. At the same time, Schweitzer uses modern apparatuses to keep his clientele subservient. The same as Sal's character in *Do the Right Thing*, Schweitzer refuses to mediate the practices of the native, the native's voice of experience, with his own culture. Just as Sal hates rap music, Schweitzer disdained the nightly sound of tam-tams, because it prevented him from working, or echoed over his piano performance of western classical music. For this purpose, he offered a saxophone to the drum-player in order to assimilate him, a common European strategy of colonialism. Just as Sal denied black heroes a place on the Wall of Fame of his pizzeria, Schweitzer refused to acknowledge black traditional medicine in his hospital ward. Whereas Sal truly depicts the multicultural idea summarized by '*you are free to play your rap music, but not inside my land, the Famous Pizzeria*', Schweitzer's hospital is an intercultural site in which only a single logic-culture prevails, ready to assimilate the rest to its master narrative. Schweitzer's over-paternalistic character is evolved completely when he discourages Kumba, (Alex Descas) an African boy, from

becoming a doctor, because he thought that Kumba would be better off serving the master-doctor. Kumba, however, later returned with his degree and rebukes Schweitzer: - *the independence of the people has never been your concern. You only wanted to share their hell, in the hope of reaching your heaven.*

This reflective articulation is valid for Mookie's character as well, because the finality of his actions (which imply the remembrance of sad, historical experiences) is at the core of the final implosion destroying the Famous Pizzeria, and which allows Sal to understand how colonialist his attitude was in this black neighborhood.

I have outlined some specific stereotypes that depict the animalistic character of blacks in cinema, and the ways in which these stereotypes serve as a discursive regularity in the representation of black identity as an established, natural malign phenomena. To this end, I have analyzed two western films employing extreme characterizations of black-Otherness: *African Queen*, and *Princess Tam-tam*; and two other films reflectively recycling black expressions of identity: *Do the Right*

*Thing*, and *The Great White Man of Lambarene*. Now I would like to articulate the practice through which, on the question of self-representation, black filmmakers generate the figuration of '*marronage*' establishing not merely an activity of 'resistance' but also a 'resilient seduction' of dominant discursive structure. In English, "resilient" means recovering, strength, spirit, and good humor, tending to recover or adjust easily to misfortune or change. In fact, resilience signifies transformation. Its connoted meaning refers to a kind of resistance to shocks.<sup>35</sup>

The outlining of the four extreme characteristics of blacks in cinema highlights the conjectural articulation of specific discursive practices. These discursive characterizations help to produce an activity of a highly and somehow dynamic reflective process at the juncture of black historical experiences and everyday life

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<sup>35</sup> It might also be useful to note that this term, resilience, is used in physic sciences and psychology. In physic, resilience is a notion explaining the capacity of resistance of materials, a kind of energetic component characterizing the strength of an element. In Psychology, Michael Ruttera, a British psychiatric professor known as the founding father of this notion in that field, had defined resilience as the capacity to one's evolution despite adversities and unfavorable experiences. The first step of resilience is the resistance-strength that can be seen as a "process of negotiation" which is within every human being willing to recover after negative experiences. It implicates one interaction with other elements: environment, discourse, and what happened before (the post-synaptic), between (the active memory), and after (the pre-synaptic). When applied as a conjunctural epistemology, the resilience permits us to observe the formation of emerging affective potentialities related to one's own specific experience with the world (see Boris Cyrulnik (1999), *Un Merveilleux malheur*, Paris: Odile Jacob, pp.205-208).

production. I suggest that deeper analysis is needed of this dynamic process of historical reflectivity. We can begin by tracing the intermedial trajectories related to black cinema in Africa and the diaspora, to see the emergence of '*marronage*' beyond the assimilated, negotiated, or oppositional frameworks, as an articulation connecting practices of expression to the notion of Africanicity.

From April 8 through 13, 1974, almost 80 years after the Lumière brothers' unintentional launch of the institution of cinema in Paris, a conference entitled "*The Role of the African Film-Maker in Rousing an Awareness of Black Civilization*" took place at Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). This title indicates the goals of the organizers: an open invitation to African filmmakers to take part in a global project to help African people become aware of their own world, values and fundamental attitudes *vis-à-vis* their existence — in a word, their civilization.

Obviously, the organizers of this conference envisioned cinema as an object of mass education, which would more than ever reveal 'true images' of Africans and

their intrinsic reality. Indeed, the seminar pointed out that an African filmmaker could draw his strength, originality and the beauty of his art from his daily life experience, which provides the living sources of African values. The papers presented at this conference were based on five central themes:

- 1) how the cinema can inspire a feeling of cultural and historical solidarity between black communities and rouse an awareness of a common civilization;
- 2) how the cinema can present the human, social and cultural realities of Africa and make Africans think about their destiny;
- 3) how the cinema can work for African independence and cultural authority;
- 4) how and why the African cinema should use African languages;
- 5) the problem of an original cinematographic language freed from certain Western models, criteria and myths (e.g. the individualistic hero myth, the all-pervading power of money, unbridled sex, violence, false luxury, etc. (In *Cultural Review of the Negro World*, No. 90, 1974:8)

All these themes support the fact that it is by reinforcing these operative conditions that cinema conjuncturally engages new forms of social reflection, which then evolve into creative, entertaining activities. Therefore, these observations should curtail the temptation to produce only vulgarities and indirect social concerns.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that there has never been a film in black cinema that does the contrary of this ideational proposition. But this number is truly very low, as indicated in the introduction of the conference. Further, this assumption indicates that the social engagement of black filmmakers complements their artistic creativity.



The pursued aspirations of most African filmmakers continue to indicate this ideational engagement. African films are usually analyzed through their close articulation of social realism, and they address the active participation of Africans in the construction of global humanity. Here, the local and global become central concerns of African villages, paralleling the local and global relation of power and creativity. This co-relation is represented as an 'intermedial' site of tension and the conduit of a conjunctural epistemology allowing us to observe reflective articulation where the creative imagination endlessly posits new forms of ideational posture expressing a different formation of identity, Africanicity.

Abderrahmane Sissako's *La Vie sur la Terre (Life on Earth, 1998)*<sup>37</sup> is a good example of this ideational expression of Africanicity. The film begins with a wide-angle shot traveling backward on a European style supermarket whose shelves are full of various kinds of

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<sup>37</sup> *Life on Earth*: This film depicts a young African man living in the West who decides to return to his village, Sokolo, in the Malian rural area, on the Eve of the Year 2000. He finds his father, and plunges into village life. The film shows the life of this village unconcerned with the events of the turn of the millennium, while everyone is concerned with immediate needs. Here, Sissako uses of Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un pays natal*.

yogurt, butter, and margarine, followed by a slow zoom-in on a tree in a Sahelian parched environment. By this establishing shot, Sissako installs a tension through visual contrast between Western abundance and an empty African field, to legitimize the consistency of his ideational posture.

I think that all films are a quest. You look for yourself as if you master something, but in fact you find yourself faced with all the doubts and uncertainties of an inferior search. Which means that in effect you return to square one where you actually dare come face to face with your father, you talk about your mother somewhere, if you are married you will talk about your wife, etc...

[...]

But as far as *La vie sur terre* is concerned, you must remember that it's a film in the context of a commission for the year 2000, on the transition to the year 2000 and that ten different people all over the world were asked to make a film. When they asked me to represent Africa, I felt an enormous responsibility and I thought that the opportunity was so important and the freedom so great that somewhere I would have to have the courage of my opinions. But, to make myself clear, I did not want to yell at the top of my voice. Things had to be murmured. So, by making the story personal and private, which may be like everybody's life when they go back to their family, when you ask yourself certain questions, I thought that from then I would have managed, slowly but surely. (Interview with Sissako by Alessandra Speciale, in *African Screen* (2000), No. 23 (pp. 24-25))

At one point in the film, Sissako, who is also the voiceover-narrator and one of the figures of the plot assumes a second personality, by abandoning the authorial position as a 'subject of power', to adopt a pan-Africanist posture:

[...] Having left the "I", I thought that I could go on to more important things that dealt with the village [of Sokolo] and above all Africa. This continent has great potential but the previous generations, our respective fathers, have never really been capable of creating a real dialogue between Europe and Africa.

[...]

African cinema is, for the most part, financed by Europe [...]. And perhaps it is also a matter of courage. We are often afraid of speaking about our reality; of looking at ourselves in the eyes and understanding that we have to be really rooted as deeply as possible to make ourselves heard (in *Interview with Sissako*, op. cit. 25-7)

The central issue of *La vie sur terre*, and the political engagement of its director as he reinforces his resisting views on Africa and black cinema, illustrate the mediation taking place at the local/global level. There is, however, another, less visible articulation, an 'escapement' of discourse, that I have referred to above as the figuration of 'marronage'.

Historically, the maroon (*marron*) is a term used for fugitive slaves in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century West Indies, Guyana, South America, and Jamaica, or for their descendants. The French and Spanish respectively named these fugitives *marrons* and *cimarróns*. Later, the term came to be used to refer to the ability of black slaves to escape to freedom. Consequently, the 'marronage' becomes the signifier of the slave's resistance, and the

seduction of colonial power, particularly in Caribbean studies.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel De Certeau articulates this combined attitude of resistance and seduction as a practice of "*détournement*," indicating the potentiality of self expression within an institutional site, and interestingly, by using the codes (structures or objects of surveillance) of the institutional dispositive. De Certeau refines the potentiality of '*détournement*' by illustrating a distinction between the strategy and the tactic (De Certeau, 1990:45-60). The tactic consists of momentary intrusion into the coercive sites of strategic structures. For de Certeau, the tactic is always a critical exposure for the benefit of strategic structures. However, in order to escape from the strategic dispositive and suspend its influences, the practice of tactic must assess the flow of institutionalized codes, and must constantly invent new moves that disqualify the dispositive of power, because tactic "depends on time - it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing." Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It perpetually

manipulates events in order to turn them into "opportunities" (de Certeau, 1990:xix). For example, de Certeau conceptualizes perambulating pedestrians as a "tactic" of expression generating an individuated (sign)ification that escapes the "strategic" *dispositive* of power-institutions. He argues that these signs differ from the social symptoms of authorial power structures, rather than conform to institutional prescription or regulation. In other words, they illustrate the move in the different direction of people rejecting systemic structuration. This rejection signals the exercise of creative thoughtfulness, agency, that "bring[s] to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'" (De Certeau, 1990:xiv).

Instead of being a few short cuts of ready-made recipe<sup>38</sup> applied to an object of investigation, this review of de Certeau's articulation of the tactic of '*détournement*' is analogous to the conjunctural activity of '*marronage*'. The Maroons, as we will see later on at the analysis of *Quilombo* in Section 3, were a tactical

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<sup>38</sup> Hall, 1990:8

resisting force, and masters of dispersion. However, the Maroons were also masters of simulacra (*cache-cache*), because they were constantly on the move, and allowed the exposure of their positions when dealing with authority; and risking, therefore, revealing their footprints. Therefore, their primary tactic was to disappear as soon as they achieved their goals. This *cache-cache* signifying, or paradoxical conjuncture of resistance and seduction is observed in Sissako's *La vie sur terre*, which illustrates the 'imaginary and imaginative signification' as a mode of creativity that conjuncturally responds to social emergencies in the everyday life experience of blacks.

Sissako suggests that most African films, including *La vie sur terre*, are financed by Western institutions. However, as a 'noble-slave' always looking for opportunity to express his specificity, Sissako seizes this Western commission — in fact, he uses Western finance to install a discourse criticizing the Western structural economy and hegemony. In so doing, he exposes himself to a power-subjugation as a resisting force. However, he also seduces, during this process of resistance, the subject of power for the advantage of his

space of expression. The game of '*marronage*' occurs within this conjunction of correlated articulation of resistance/seduction, that Boris Cyrulnik (1999:206-7) defines as a figure of oxymora: "resilient-affectivity".

In analyzing female modes of seduction, Jean Baudrillard (1990) suggests different considerations for this concept. Baudrillard asks if it is not characteristic of the seducer to turn himself "into an appearance in order to disturb appearances" (Baudrillard, 1990:98). According to Baudrillard, the seducer produces an illusion to create the condition for his own advantage.

He too turns himself into an illusion in order, to show confusion, but curiously, this illusion is part of a calculation, with finery giving way to strategy. Now if a woman's finery is also strategic, a calculated display, is not the seducer's strategy a display of calculation with which to defend himself from some opposing force? A strategy of finery vs. the finery of strategy (Baudrillard, 1990:98) .

The difference between Baudrillard's argument and the ways in which I articulate the concept of '*marronage*' lies in the conjunction of resistance and seduction.

The practice of resistance/seduction, or final stage of '*marronage*', is not an advantage or teleological reproduction of traditional oral practice "marching through the future" (Hall, 1997:294). *Marronage* is rather

a conjunctural articulation endlessly producing new forms of expression or '*Signifying*' regularities.

In black oral performance, the figure of '*marronage*' uses a specific framework known as *Signifying*. *Signifying* generally refers to a diacritical frame of reference that allows endless dynamic possibilities of articulating new propositions, dispositions, or codes.

*Signifying* is similar to the Deleuzian and Guattarian "rhizome;"<sup>39</sup> or the Bakhtinian notion of

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<sup>39</sup> The rhizome is an underground or anti-disciplinary system that links some roots to other root systems in a disseminating structure. Unlike an "*arbre de connaissance*," the rhizome is not like the millions of roots leading to origin. It is rather a multiplicity of fragments — of the same root — indicating the absence of authoritative space between one fragment and another growing simultaneously, and hijacking cultural, national, and geographical boundaries. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is like a "book-machine" assembling differences without necessarily losing or gaining anything and without giving more importance to one element over another, because it is a code that is inseparable from the process of decoding inherent to it. Both authors illustrate this image in arguing that "[t]here are no genetics without "genetic drift." The modern theory of mutations has clearly demonstrated that a code, which necessarily relates to a population of other codes, has an essential margin of decoding: not only does every code have supplements capable of free variation, but a single segment may be copied twice, the second copy left free for variation. In addition, fragments of code may be transferred from the cells of one species to those of another, Man and Mouse, Monkey and Cat, by viruses or through other procedures of hybridization or contamination. This involves not only translation between codes (viruses are not translators), but a singular phenomenon we call "surplus" value of code, or "side-communication" (*Thousand Plateaus*, p.53). In addition, this code always implies a surplus that of the "free margin of the code" itself, that, however, frees the molecular particles from their restricted role within the process of genetic transmission. This articulation of '*rhizomic*' surplus illustrates Mikhail M. Bakhtin's (1981 and 1986) usage of the notion of surplus. In Deleuze's and Guattari's terms, the surplus value of code empowers local environmental factors with the capacity to forge endless modifications and new codes that "have an aleatory cause in the milieu of exteriority, and it is their effects on the interior milieus, their compatibility with them, that decide whether they will be popularized, deterritorializations and reterritorializations, which "do not bring about the modifications; they do, however, strictly determine their [discursive] selection." (*Thousand Plateaus*, p.54).



"surplus,"<sup>40</sup> exceeding any conceivable static transcription.

For example, Sissako's acceptance of an institutional commission to participate on a reflection about the passage into the new millennium and his shunning of Western hegemony prove to be the *Signifying* articulation of 'marronage'. In black oral performances, *Signifying* means endless variation of signification. In his book, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1989) analyses this multileveled variation of significations in black oral performances. Gates's study explores the relationship between African and African-American vernacular English and standard English. This comparative

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<sup>40</sup> In Bakhtin's terms, the notion of surplus also opens the production of text (code) to endless diacritical assemblages that only the remained code is emptied from authoritative constructs, even from the producing site. Bakhtin underscores this framework in "*Problem of the Text*," in which he uses himself as an example. The "quests for my own words are in fact quests for a word that is not my own, a word that is more than myself; this is a striving to depart from one's own words with which nothing essential can be said. I myself can only be a character and not the primary author. The author's quests for his own words are basically quests for genre and style, quests for an authorial position" (ibid.: 149). This quotation defines Bakhtin's attitude toward the quest for transparency and autonomy, and illustrates the ways in which the embodied experience, history particularly, transcends the subject's intention. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin (1981) refers to this surplus as a primordial articulation that has usually escaped brilliant theorists, including paradigmatic frameworks of rationalism, and most broadly of conjectural theoretism. Bakhtin's idea of conjectural theoretism is generally an account for everything with no remainder. To articulate this structural conjecture of historical rupture, Bakhtin observes that theorists first transcribe the world into their form of systems which can handle and then overlook or deny whatever does not fit the Procrustean structure. But for Bakhtin, the experience that is often under the surface of these structural productions lies in coming to terms with what exceeds any conceivable structure. There is always a remainder, a "surplus" as Bakhtin called it. That surplus is most evident when we are dealing with everyday life practices of human beings. And it is at this articulation that I envision the expressive figuration of 'marronage'.

analysis of the notions of 'black Signifying' and 'standard English signifying' addresses a fundamental differentiation.

The English-language use of *signification* refers to the chain of signifiers that configure horizontally, on the syntagmatic axis. Whereas signification operates and can be represented on a syntagmatic or horizontal axis, Signifyin(g) [in the Black Vernacular] operates and can be represented on a paradigmatic or vertical axis. Signifyin(g) concerns itself with that which is suspended, vertically: the chaos of what Saussure calls "associative relations," which we can represent as the playful puns on a word that occupy the paradigmatic axis of language and which a speaker draws on for figurative substitutions. These substitutions in Signifyin(g) tend to be humorous, or function to name a person or a situation in a telling manner. Whereas signification depends for order and coherence of the exclusion of unconscious associations which any given word yields at any given time, Signification luxuriates in the inclusion of the free play of these vertically suspended associative rhetorical and semantic relations. Jacques Lacan calls these vertically suspended associations "a whole articulation of relevant contexts", by which he means all of the associations that a signifier carries from other contexts, which must be deleted, ignored, or censored, "for this signifier to be lined up with a signified to produce a specific meaning" (Gates, Jr. 1989:49-50, emphasis added).

Put in a different way, in standard English, (s)ignification equals the conjunction of signified and signifier, both referring to the concept (image-sound); whereas in African vernacular, the (S)ignification equals the diacritical rhetorical figuration related to the signifier, that endlessly 'regulates' its 'fragments' or codes, depending on the circumstances.

It is in this African diacritical register of discursive practice that the morphology of experience remains un-seized in the analysis of its performance, because "thinking about the black concept of Signifyin(g) is a bit like stumbling unaware into a hall of mirrors: the sign itself appears to be doubled, at the very least, and (re)doubled upon ever closer examination" (Gates, Jr., 1989:44). This remark resonates to Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of "rhizome", and Bakhtin's "surplus." This is because, *Signifying* articulations in black oral performances can hardly be limited to structural conjectures. For example, Western reviews of *La vie sur terre* were limited to the esthetic frameworks of genre and style from the standpoint of Hollywood cinematic structure, ignoring the depiction of context under which Sissako constructed his remarkable ideational discourse.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Jude G. Akudinodi (2000) observes that most North American press reviews have analyzed *La Vie sur terre* as a 'Calabash film', meaning that the creation is centered on village thematic, or a film showing "civilization that never entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (Kliwer, 1999:N62). For Graham 1999:6 "[Sokolo, Sissako's village in which he shot the film] is a place stuck in time, a village virtually untouched by modernity;" because for both above-mentioned critics, modernity depends upon possessing modern apparatuses (television, automobile) that are not the central concern in the everyday life of Sokolo. For Imruh Bakary (2001:4) "however, international audiences and writers within the North American and European tradition of film theory and criticism inevitably approached African film through what Teshome Gabriel has termed a 'cultural curtain'. The challenge was therefore to understand African cinema on its own terms, and to identify the influences and discourses at work within it. Significantly this was not a naive cinema in the sense of a naive art. The filmmakers were not returning to the origins of cinema to re-create their versions of the first Lumière exhibitions. What was to be confronted was a sophisticated and studied use of film technology and conventions to produce films articulating the very modern experiences of contemporary African societies."

Sissako was thus condemned by *The Boston Herald's*, James Verniere and *The New York Times'* famous film critic, Stephen Holden for producing "a slow and sociological film" (Verniere, 1999:S14); and a naïve and allegedly apolitical film, which

compiles a picture of a way of life that is so primitive and detached from the material abundance and technological sophistication of Europe that you are left with the feeling of having visited a country that has been forever left behind, literally in the dust (Holden, 1999:B18).

Taking into account the historical context and the ideational discourse articulated in *La vie sur terre*, this analytical position prevents us from being trapped inside both the institutional structures of film economics, and generic aesthetic codes of media dispositives. This conjuncture allows us to circumscribe emergent meanings beneath the visible surface of black cinematic articulation. Valid criticisms of *La vie sur terre* also permit us to understand that this film does speak for those who 'recognize' themselves as dispossessed. One might therefore rally the lines of the Maroons, to "fight the power" as (Mookie) Spike Lee loudly suggests in *Do the Right Thing*. It does, however, speak for the character of this discourse, implying that when a black man takes the

opportunity to speak in such a context, he eventually always induces diacritical *Signifying*. It is at this point that the meanings in black cinema are horizontally dispersed within the dispositive of institutional structures in such a way that any attempts to render these cinematic practices transparent risks the erasure of their specificity.

In a recent volume of essays about African cinema, Imruh Bakari (2001) recognizes that black cinema undoubtedly challenges and often contradicts established approaches to cinema, because of its strong connection to the dynamic cultural and political realities of black peoples which, in fact, are the constituent conjuncture of African reality.<sup>42</sup> In echoing Tapsoba's epigraph about the capacity of film to capture "authentic reality," Jude Akunodinobi (2000:356) asks if this can be understood without "being manacled to [Western] depreciatory representational grids?"

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<sup>42</sup> "African cinema, by its intrinsic nature remains problematic. While filmmakers continue to pursue their aspirations, they do so within the highly charged arena of Africa's political economy. What becomes apparent is the paradoxical relationships which must [...] be negotiated between various means and ends; the filmmakers' international reputation and their domestic existence; and the radical aspirations and the diverse contemporary realities within African societies. Here is to be found 'the contested and dynamic terrain, one that is in constant flux, and continually subject to myriad internal pressures and demands as well as to the effects of a constantly changing global political and media economy'" (Bakary, p.4).

In the context of black cinema, we therefore admit that Sissako's political engagement typifies a practice of 'marronage'. This practice is beheld in linking the content of his film and interview with the historical context of black cinema. Here, Sissako uses every available means necessary to promote his specificity or difference through those objects of cinema.<sup>43</sup>

I contend that many black filmmakers consider the medium of cinema as an artistic *raison d'être* pushing their local struggle to the attention of the global. Similarly, Djibril Tamsir Niane argues that the cinema is more than a political instrument; it is a recording of reality that engages the historical promotion of African knowledge and a 'way of being'. In addition, it inspires a feeling of cultural belonging and historical solidarity for the global African community, despite past European

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<sup>43</sup> "It is no surprise that the key questions in *La Vie sur terre* seem to be: how can the present century achieve a 'break' with its predecessor? Should the specific difference between the two millennia be of kind rather than degree? Does the preceding era bring anything or nothing to the foretold 'encounter with time'? How do you infuse the rhetoric or aesthetic of 'break' in a film about the twilight of the century not yet experienced? How can one develop the relationship between temporality and narrative? The dilemmas posed by these questions indicate that this is not an issue where the director simply takes 'time', especially its passage, as the film's subject of representation. [...] The main challenge for Sissako, therefore, lies in working within the conceptual limits set by the project itself: how to make the future tangible either as inimical to the past or an extension of the present. [...] Interestingly, what Sissako takes as his principal object, rather than 'time', is the desire to fuse the relationship between Africa and the West into a critical system of representation, especially the types of subject positions which derive from that relationship. It is, therefore, no surprise that the film eschews drama and a perspective of the century's end glibly premised on the imperative of change or threat of fragmentation. In this respect, *La Vie sur terre*, as well, embodies a rhetoric of reflexivity" (Akudinobi, 2000:356).

conquest and domination, or linguistic, national, and regional differences (Niane, 1974:21-32).

Ferid Boughedir follows a similar line of thinking. He argues that cinema is also an invention that deeply impacts people's lives, as well as being an art form. Cinema is more than an instrument — it is a powerful conduit of expression. In this respect, cinema reproduces people's realities, and allows them to recognize themselves in these realities, as one does with representation, in telling lies or the truth (Boughedir, 1974:123-39).

In Africa, these postures of black filmmakers truly began to be visible seven to eight decades after the invention of the film industry, and prefigure active practices of '*marronage*' in their articulation of identity. This conjuncture of active practices of resistance/seduction into black cinema allows us to understand the ways in which black filmmakers re-appropriate or recycle their cinematic expressions of identity. It also highlights their ethical use of their position of sovereign author(itie)s to express critical issues concerning their specificity, in which they recycle historical characterizations of Africanity.

This reflective intersection indicates a fundamental similarity within the practices of continental African and the diaspora's black filmmakers, because I argue, both have adopted the medium of cinema with the same ideational posture.

In the diaspora, particularly in the United States, black people did not wait until the Seventies to become consciously engaged. Anna Everett's book chapter, *The Soul of Black Folk in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* extensively underscores the historical receptive potentialities of early African-American literary criticism.<sup>44</sup> She observes that as early as in 1909, newly established blacks in the northern states began to use multiple media such as news editorials to target mainstream films. This critical attitude played a key role in the beginning of African-American filmmaking.

Once established as an important labor force in cities such as Chicago, New York, Baltimore, and Pittsburgh, this migrant community's eventual possession of leisure time and money easily transformed them into a substantial audience for the new cinema. [...] It was not only as avid spectators that black migrants interacted with the early cinema. Since many were also possessed

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<sup>44</sup> This wonderful historical book chapter is explicitly concerned with the earliest criticism of cinema by African American journalists. Everett argues that the "significant aspect [these black's critics is] the relationship between the contents of the black press and a number of the major sociocultural vicissitudes that typified race relations at the turn of the century. Thus the reader is invited to recognize within northern newspapers such as the *New York Age*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, and the *Chicago Defender* a cultural discourse so influential that it helped engender the first wave of the great migration of African Americans from the economically depressed and racially polarized South to the imagined promised land of the industrial North" (Everett, 2001:7).



of a sense of Du Boisian racial consciousness, these avid filmgoers interacted with the cinema as critics as well. As black film fandom increased during these early years, so too did the black press's critical and celebratory commentary on film. On behalf of a burgeoning black readership caught up in the modernizing process of social, political, cultural, and economical transformation, African American journalists and other race leaders understood from the outset that blacks needed to be passionately engaged with the cinema as the cinema was with them (Everett, 2001:7-8).

Accordingly, the critical track record of these early African-American activists survives today, and permits us to document their 'active' reception of mainstream films. Black Americans were therefore engaged in the production of films as early as in the Nineteen-twenties, during the silent period. For example, in 1916, a Group of Blacks started the *Lincoln Motion Picture Company* founded by the Johnson brothers, Noble and George. Noble (an actor of bit parts in mainstream films), and his brother George (the company's business manager), produced the "first feature film, a two-reel drama entitled *The Realization of a Negro's Ambition* (*"Talk of the Town,"* 1916) dealing with the everyday life of African people in America through an introspective point of view (Everett, 2001:117). One week later, an article detailing the event entitled the *"Opening of the New Angelus a Notable Success"* mentions that:

On Tuesday evening, July 4<sup>th</sup> [1916], the Angelus Theatre was crowded to its utmost capacity by Colored citizens, eagerly bent upon seeing the real physiognomies of real Negroes thrown upon the canvas. "The Realization of a Negro's Ambition," is the title of the play produced by the All-Star local cast.... The erection of this enterprise marks another epoch in the social and economic independence of the Negroes of California.... The Lincoln Motion Picture Company guarantees the Colored citizens of Los Angeles that all pictures featured and delineated by this company will be of the highest order: depicting the Negro only in his natural habitat. All application and references will be true to the life and character of the Negro.... We are certainly proud of the work being done by this company. ("Opening" 1916, quoted by A. Everett 2001:117).

This production of black American 'reel' life marked black engagements into cinematic productions that consciously targeted the everyday life from a 'black perspective'. More importantly, the central ideation behind this engagement, as seen in above quote, is closely connected to self-representation and self-reality, as the continental-African filmmakers continued to position themselves, '*ideationally*', into the late Nineteen-sixties.

These filmmaking practices and engagements built on the ideational regularity of their discourse. Some scholars, however, restrict the motivations of this discourse to ideological blind alleys. For example, Teshome H. Gabriel produces a chart in which he describes the three phases of black film culture in terms of

cultural theory, maintaining that they are confluences of cultural constructs (see *Figure II*).

Gabriel's first phase (marked in the figure as "A") is the unqualified assimilation of Western/Hollywood mainstream entertaining themes and styles. The characteristic of this phase is to imitate the Western film industry, even their acronyms. For example, African companies, from Egypt to Nigeria, would adopt acronyms such as Third World's Hollywood, Hollywood Orient, Hollywood-on-the-Nil.

The second phase (in figure as "B"), related to 'remembrance,' is the 'indigenization and control of talents, production, exhibition and distribution' as central components in the realization of oppositional films. This indigenous control is augmented by the films' preoccupation with themes and narratives celebrating the strengths, traditions, and heritage of the black civilization. Although Gabriel acknowledges the positive aspects of phase two, with its necessary departures from dominant filmmaking imperatives, he is rightly concerned about a danger of falling into the trap of exalting traditional virtues and racial categories of cultures. This observation could also explain the inherent

uncritical acceptances of history by certain early black filmmakers. The problem, as Gabriel explains it, is that black filmmakers committed to represent the experience of black peoples in contradistinction to mainstream conceptions are prone to go down a blind alley. Here, the position of black filmmakers as agents of historical liberation, faces the true nature of a cultural representation. Albeit well intentioned, they have the possibility to falsify and create new history. In doing so, however, they are also confronted to possible misrepresentations and problematics.

Phase three (in figure as "C") is characterized as combative. Here, filmmakers signal their maturity, and this phase is also the one of cinema of mass-participation and indigenous language. The particularity of this phase is also dynamic dialectical articulations. For example, some black filmmakers express contradictory modes of representation opposed to or combating mainstream misrepresentations of black peoples.

Gabriel's chart is similar to Stuart Hall's (1980a) three levels of reception introduced in the preceding chapter. Notwithstanding such as intermedial perspective, I suggest a different position. Paradoxically, I am more

concerned by the conjunctural potentiality of new meanings emerging behind these phases of expression. Specifically, I argue that Gabriel's "A" phase and Hall's phase of "Assimilation" in dominant discourse cannot be legitimated as individuated moments in this expression of meaning production. For example, it is arguable that the imitation of western names is similar to the assimilation of western film genres by Africans, as I argued above. But this argument needs an epistemological elaboration to outline some regulatory symptoms legitimating such practices.

Born around the era of African independence, I also adopted the name of Jacky Jackson (my American heroes), whereas for some of my all-black childhood friends, Elvis Presley, Mike Brant, Johnny Halliday, Django... were other kinds of adopted names. In the domain of cinema as argued Gabriel, most African institutions have also adopted western acronyms. These names, however, were true 'figures of example' — that is more than a role model — because they show the ways in which Achille Mbembe's figure of *commandement* works in relationship with "postcolonialized subject." The *commandement*, according

to Mbembe (2001:129), is not simply "an act of "opposition" or "resistance," because it can be expressed through convivial simulacra affirming the participation of the masse in the false construction of their own identity.

From such complex understandings of the practices of expression in black cinema, any static decoding formula can only remain limited. In *Relocating the site of the audience*, Martin Allor (1988) suggests a similar position conveying to approach any process of production-reproduction through its multiplicity of conjunctural possibilities.<sup>45</sup> After outlining the main paradigms of the study of audience and their problematics, Allor suggested that one must consider the context and expression of identity to articulate specific practices of meaning production. For Allor,

the articulations of [...] class, gender, subcultures, reading formations, fantasy, identity, and ideology become the ground for questioning rather than the reproductive logic of decodings that [obviously] make meanings for the dominant formation" (Allor, 1988:550).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For example, beside the Encoding/Decoding model, Allor (1988:219-28) suggested some predominant works within Cultural Studies, which have shifted their questioning from the latter model, to consider the level of determination in the process of discursive production. "Ien Ang's analysis of Dallas fans' letters in the Netherlands (1985) pushes toward a textual analysis of television melodrama and its construction of a 'tragic structure of feeling' as an ideological form. John Fiske's discussion of television's popularity (1986) centers on a semiotic analysis of the polysemy of particular texts. And Tony Bennett (1986), in developing a model of 'reading formations', has extended the work on the audience as discursive competence."

<sup>46</sup> This page number is from the reader version of Allor's essay, published in *Approaches to Media: A Reader* (Olivier Boyd-Barret and Chris Newbold, eds.), Arnold Publisher.

Hall agrees with such opening when arguing that:

What [he] tried to do was to follow through the notion that there is no one fixed meaning, and, consequently, there never can be one fixed reading, based on a notion of a set of ideal typical positions. So there's a position of ideal transparency and perfect equivalence between the two moments [encoding/decoding] where the reading more or less perfectly corresponds to the way in which the text was preferred. (Hall, 1994b:264-65).

For Gabriel, however, the textual component is the intersection of codes and sub-codes; the chief thematic and formal characteristic of existing films and the rules of that filmic grammar, and, the transformational procedures whereby new 'texts' emerge from old,' whereas the reception component prefigures the audience's active interrogation of images versus the passive consumption of films. Therefore, the issue of assimilated identity and the ideal/inscribed reader is only understandable through the social determination or social control theory "where the wider context of determinants informs social history, market considerations, economy of production state governance and regulation" (Gabriel (1995:90). In any case, in his model the meaning is not open to interpretation or production of possible emerging attitudes, because institutional encoding and decoding

dispositives condition all activities of production and reproduction.

I maintain that because one seems to accept and even to reproduce dominant discursive parameters does not mean that he or she is assimilated. This paradox relates the limits of the model of assimilated productive commodities of hegemonic discourse, in which social classes appear to act as if they concur with the producing discourse. Moreover, this paradox escapes the general parameters of the 'social control theory',<sup>47</sup> which, if applied renders black filmmakers and other social agents as simply passive receivers reproducing hegemonic meanings. I posit that a figuration of '*marronage*' takes place during this assimilation in the hegemonic process of meaning. This paradoxical articulation is based on an African figuration of *Signifying*, expressing 'attitudes' of

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<sup>47</sup> Generally, the social theory of media is defined in terms of a Marxist framework that builds a dialectical relationship between power-production and powerless-reception. Here, "the dominant paradigm underlying the study of communication in western [...] societies], is  $A > B = X$  understood as A 'communicates' something to B with the result X. Stripped of their filigree and of the elaborations intended to differentiate them, this is the paradigm which underlies most model – and 'theory' building in communication in the Western world. It is the paradigm which, made explicit or not, informs most of the research and writing done in the field of communication regardless of the specialty. Furthermore, this is the paradigm which underlies and informs our everyday orientation to an understanding of communication in the west." L. Thayer (1977), *The Study of Communication: Critique and Prospects*, in *Vistinän Virtanksia: The Flows of Communication* (L. Abderg and E. Erholm, Eds.), Helsinki: Otava Oy. See also Adorno and Horkheimer (1977) and the Frankfurt School scholars who apply this mathematical model of communication to a "culture industry." Perhaps, and this is a hypothesis, it would be one the leading paradigms permitting to determinate that the culture could explain the fabrication—or processes of fabrication—of hybridized identity, as the production site imposes the meaning that the reception site passively accepts, and therefore, both sites 'become' the same thing, however, differentiated in their relation of power, as the Marxist circulatory principle illustrates.



experience, and is not simply an articulation of negotiation, but rather a practice nurtured by generally unfavorable historical experiences provoking a 'resilient affection'. From this perspective, rather than being assimilated, black filmmakers seduce, or 'coerseduces' the dispositive of power. Rene-Jean Ravault (1985 and 1986) uses the term "coerseduction" to enunciate this discursive possibility occurring in the process of transnational or intercultural communication. In his Ph.D. thesis, Ravault (1980) underlines the necessity of differentiating the socio-cultural context from the communication environment. Following Ruth Benedict's suggestions, he suggested that:

[...] the communicational environment is not limited to traditional socio-cultural factors such as ideologies, norms, attitudes, options and beliefs, but also include the media which carry them: i.e., the mother tongue as well as any form of language, dialect, and jargon shared by the members of an epistemic community (Ravault, 1980:439).

I suggest that in the case of black filmmakers taken here as a trans-geographical epistemic community, it is important to emphasize that both the socio-cultural and communicational environments are secured with specific trans-historical *Signifying(s)* transmitted through the media of communication. This view grounds the specific

trans-geographical context of black cinema. Blacks act as a conduit of communication to express their proper voices in multiple fragmentized linguistic tonalities. Cinema, therefore, plays a key role in this expressive capacity. This 'voice' is constructed with communally 'recognizable' figures, signs, and practices. It is not the voice of collective language, dialect, or mother tongue; rather it represents an 'affective' symbolization acknowledged through multiple 'recognizable' units or fragments of their belonging. The figuration of 'marronage' is one such practice of the articulation of these recognizable fragments. This argument goes beyond the analysis of black cinema as a merely political "threat to cultural authority" as suggested by Diawara.<sup>48</sup> Although the discourse of these cinematic productions can diffuse a black culture politic, it also exposes the tension in its intermedial passage, mirroring the everyday life, historical experience, and expressions of identity of black communities. This argument implies that even if a black filmmaker uses dominant aesthetics and themes of mainstream cinematic frameworks, the 'finality'

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<sup>48</sup> For example, Manthia Diawara (1992) sustains the idea that all sorts of black filmmakers saw the new medium of cinema as a threat to their cultural authority (pp. 12-13, pp.80-81, and pp.155-156).

of his discursive articulation remains essential to understand the specific ideation of his expressions. As I argued in *The State of Theory and Methodology*, this notion of 'finality' is essential in this cultural conjuncture articulated alongside intermedial perspectives. It outlines the regularity of multiple discursive articulations, and grants the condition for emerging forms of expression. For example, early black films used dominant stereotypical Hollywood-type frameworks to represent themselves:

The tendency of early black filmmakers to redeploy the oppressive skin color caste system of meritocracy inherited from the dominant culture exemplifies an obvious aspect of this well-meaning but wrongheaded preoccupation with "aping Hollywood" aesthetics and their attendant ideology of whiteness. The films produced by Johnson's Lincoln Motion Picture Company and by Oscar Micheaux come in for special scrutiny along these lines, for both are guilty of constructing fictional black worlds characterized by fair-skinned protagonists and dark-skinned miscreants (Everett, 2001:120)

Jane Gaines (1997) observes the same phenomenon:

Some of these early productions have racial themes that categorize the world in such a way that black heritage is rewarded over white paternity; they are schematic renunciations of the prevailing order of things in white American society where, historically, the discovery of black blood meant sudden reversal of fortune, social exclusion, or banishment (Gaines, 1997:61).

Gaines concludes that:

After the advent of sound and the Depression, this product was a mix of genres — Western, musical, as well as melodrama. In the black turn-about melodramas, black heritage is generously rewarded, as *By Right of Birth* (1921), in which a California coed is forced to leave school when she finds she is part Negro. She later inherits a fortune in land, and is reunited with a lost parent. *Call of His People* (1922) holds up a light-skinned hero whose success in the business world is certain as long as his race is undetected, but the darker-skinned woman he loves and her brother dramatize the choice between his black birthright and his career. His decision to acknowledge his race is rewarded by a seeming miracle — his employer turns out to be unexpectedly liberal (Gaines, 1997:77)

I contend that such racial copying represents, evidently, racial discursive plagiarism of the mainstream model of production, consumption, and reproduction. Black filmmakers' assimilation of Hollywood methods of representation, however, does not eradicate their primary ideation of self-representation, which they strive to make recognizable to blacks as mirrors of their everyday life. Here, the apparent assimilation becomes a figuration of 'marronage', allowing black filmmakers to infiltrate the film industry to represent their specific expressions. The notion of 'finality' allows us to underscore their expressions of self-representation as a necessity that contradicts the prevailing formula of assimilation, negotiation, or resistance, because it also challenges the ideology of the preferred meaning.

An analysis taking into account the notion of finality of practices of expression will open new conjectures, and will observe what Achille Mbembe calls simulacra.

What distinguishes the postcolony from other regimes of violence and domination, then, is not only the luxuriousness of style and the down-to-earth realism that characterize its power, or that it refers to exercise particularly raw power; peculiar also to the postcolony is the ways the relationship between the rulers and the ruled is forged through a specific practice: simulacrum (*le simulacre*). This explains why [hegemonic-power] can sleep at night lulled by roars of adulation and support only to wake up to find their golden calves smashed and their tablets of law overturned (Mbembe, 2001:110-11).

That is why it remains essential to track the finality of practice to be able to observe the way in which the 'fetishization' of "officialese vocabulary, signs, and symbols," building the relationship between hegemonic-power and the mass, maintains "the possibility of altering the place and time of this [official] ratification" (Mbembe, 2001:129). Because such relationships are purely 'fetishization', they permit us to understand that the moments of assimilation, negotiation, or resistance as the ground for conjunctural investigations, particularly, in such process of meaning production/reproduction related to black cinema.

I suggest that black cinema displays multiple everyday life experiences of African people. I argue that Black cinema asserts, *by any means necessary*, collective practices of expression, Africanicity or blackness, transcending, on the one hand, the so-called black culture, and on the other hand, racial identity-politics formerly characterized by skin color in dominant films. In his book, *Black Film as Genre*, Thomas Cripps (1979) provided a concise theoretical analysis of the cinema vis-à-vis the question of blackness. He observes that:

[The] definition of black film must necessarily be broader so as to include the work of those self-conscious black artists who were at least as interested in the beauty of the medium as in the effectiveness of the message; the black filmmaker whose work emerged from the conventional channels of production that were lined with white money, advice, and control, even down to "final cut" approval; and finally though rarely, film produced by white filmmakers whose work attracted the attention, if not always the unconditional praise, of black moviegoers and critics (p.358 of Reprinted version).

According to this view, the 'finality' of black cinema counts as the conjunctural condition, and not the production process assimilating, negotiating or rejecting the institutional structures of dominant production. It is indeed arguable that early black-American films using

Hollywood's dominant parameters of representing blacks<sup>49</sup> felt it necessary to represent American society through African-American eyes. Today, one of the most visible African-American filmmakers, Spike Lee, repeats this formulaic characterization.

One scene of Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* shows one light-black-skin, characterized as an in-house slave, accusing the dark-black-skin to be a demagogue and rebel. In continental Africa cinema, light and dark skin are also common narrative issues. They even, usually, constitute the leitmotiv of the plot. This issue constitutes a more deep sociological matter known as the 'colonial mentality'; but which Franz Fanon (1954:61-5) qualifies as a complex of inferiority characterizing a psychotic convulsions of a colonized black.

Tommy L. Lott, however, suggests that the concept of black cinema has to be understood through its ideational context that engages a reflective relationship between the concept of black and the concept of cinema.

"Because, we need only consider the manner in which we must still grapple with the age-old problem of the "non-black" person, for example, the person who, though biologically black, does not identify himself with black culture (p.82).

Although there can be little doubt that, in the context of the American system of

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<sup>49</sup> For example, a light-black-skin symbolizing intelligence, and a dark-black-skin connoting, rebellion, savagery, criminality, or drug addiction, etc.

apartheid, the question of whether a particular person counts as black is most often decided by skin color and physical appearance, there are numerous instances in which this honor is withheld strictly on cultural grounds" (Lott, 1997:91-2).

Therefore, cinematic racial characterizations must be understood as practices of representation reflecting deep colonial mentalities. These mentalities include practices of acculturation (i.e., chemical lightning of skin or hair curling that still prevalent among some blacks today), which illustrate the nature of a more deep social complex, a kind of negation of blackness already suggested by the Fanon's *Peau noire masque blanc* (1952).

Therefore, the racial symbolization of blacks in black cinema depicts the specific context of Africanicity as a trans-geographical experience, similarly emerging with the same questions in the diasporas and in Africa. Such analysis of black cinema is more than a scholarly application, it is also the production of a 'minor experimentation' that continues to defy established paradigms of analysis. The figuration of '*marronage*' that I have traced through the everyday life practices mediated in black cinema is one such minor experimentation.



In *Anti-Oedipus*, as well as in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari use the terms "becoming minor" to suggest that one should not read a performance-producing discourse as a scholarly procedure searching for what is signified. It is less a highly textual exercise in search of a signifier than a morphological experiment containing multileveled fragments beneath its surface, or within the filigrees of its constitutive web.

The concept of "minor" differs fundamentally from the notion of "minority," just "multiplicity" differs from "multiple." In Deleuze's and Guattari's terms, the "minor" performs as a conceptual web actualizing both the imaginary and imaginative practices of difference, which are not necessary for discursive representation. John Rajchman believes that minor expressions differ from minoritarian performances, often referred to as the "politics of recognition" (Rajchman, 1999:50).

I contend that the figure of '*marronage*' used to escape the web of major power-regulation also induces 'minor' expressive productions, continuing to perform discourse implying a new "sense of time, of the future, of the vitality of the future" (ibid.50).

Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of "minor" characterizes one of the ways in which black cinema articulates ideational discourse "affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (1986:16); and in which every creative performance transcends subjective politics and "takes on a collective value" (1986:17). This usage of the concept of "minor" also shows the *oxymoronic* nature of black cinema as "a willed poverty, pushing deterritorialization to such an extreme that nothing remains but intensities", (ibid.:19) or 'resilient-affectivity' as I will argue in Section 3. It is, however, this emotional power — this intensity expressing an event, i.e., Africanicity — that matters in black cinema rather than the author's identity. Indeed, in black cinema, the concept of 'minor' manifests the revolutionary conditions — the originality of an event or the subset of possible appearance of an expression —, that Deleuze and Guattari define as great literature escaping the structures of major disciplines (ibid.:18).

### **2.3. Conclusion**

In reviewing the discursive constructions of 'Otherness' and their epistemic foundations, particularly their relation to some symptomatic characterizations of blacks, I applied specific theoretical frameworks for an in-depth analysis of black cinema. I exposed that historical characterizations of blacks in cinema revealed specific ideologies and cultures of representation, and that the understanding of their foundation remains essential to articulate the *modus operandi* of black cinema. I undertook the analysis of this procedure by outlining the ways in which black cinema builds the modalities of its appearance beyond the simple activities of resistance of prior representations, but rather as a practice of re-appropriation or 'recyclage'. I used diverse frameworks to illustrate the complexity of this conjuncture. For example, I posited that it is through an intermedial conjuncture that one can circumscribe the space for questioning, and the relationship between historical constituent elements and the complexity of emerging expressions of black filmmakers. I illustrated the historical context, and outlined the conditions of discursive articulations in black cinema. I argued that

in addition to the modalities of resistance, negotiation or assimilation, black filmmakers also articulate tactics of '*marronage*' throughout which the '*finality*' of their production appears as an expression of their trans-local identity. This conjunctural analysis allowed me to underscore the emergence of a trans-geographical expression of Africanicity. Showing that from the African continent to the diaspora, filmmakers routinely adopt similar figures of '*marronage*' to express their difference, belonging, and collective struggles through the media of cinema. I argued that this way of infiltrating institutional structures for self-representation is very powerful because it installs a '*minor*' articulation of camouflage/exposition. At the same time, such productions of specific voice articulate a diacritical (horizontal) trans-geographical context of Africanicity, linking the local-global, and subjective-collective to the same event of communication. This attitude makes black filmmakers non-subject(s) of history in that they cannot be structurally isolated, even momentarily, from the collective context of their performance. Quoting Bakhtin (1981), we learned that the search for self-expression (as Abderramane Sissako

explains as the quest for one's self) is more than the search of one's national, cultural, or tribal origins. This search of self-expression transcends a *subject's* word in his/her context of appearance to evoke endless ideation beyond borders. It is at this point that the autonomy of a subject articulates its collective necessity, and the struggle of collective memory against forgetfulness (hooks, 1990:148). At the same time, it is not the subjective political discourse of filmmakers that remains essential *per se*; rather it is the conjunctural aspect of their discourse, the "surplus" in the Bakhtinian sense. These emergent expressions are mostly territorialized from shared historical context, and can be insignificant to anyone not located within the subject perspective. Therefore, the disclosure of black filmmaker expressions' suggests a mediatory position that Bakhtin presented as a humanness, a precious emergence of collective words that always remain beneath the surface of individuated politics.

### 3. THE IDEATION OF BLACKNESS IN CINEMA: A HORIZONTAL 'LABYRINTHIC' ARTICULATION OF IDENTITY

If no other medium was to be more effective than the cinema in ensuring the continued submission to its single memory of the peoples whom the West has subordinated in the course of its rise to world hegemony, no other medium is so equipped to effect our common human emancipation from this memory, from the prison walls of its world perception.

(Sylvia Wynter, 2000)

The first group of films that we have reviewed up to now shows the ways in which some Western discourses have historically represented blacks; the second group demonstrates black cinema responses to these categorizations. Both groups of films build a reflexive relationship in which we can trace the passage, the intermediality of the history of discursive representations of blacks in motion picture productions. At the same time, both groups of film illustrate the effect of black practices of expression in cinema. As I argued in the conclusion of the previous chapter, black cinema is concerned equally with questions about the representation of Africanity. The characters of Sal in *Do the Right Thing* and Schweitzer in *The Great White Man of Lambarene* reveal that the ultimate tragedy of any

extension of power is the refusal to see and value the colonized person as an 'agent' and creative human being. Sal's and Schweitzer's refusal to integrate black 'intrinsic local experiences' into their own worldview brings about a potential cultural mediation only after the explosion of social tensions. Thus, the tensions displayed in black cinema are reflective articulations of interior-exterior states, local-global connections, impressions of self-other, and truth-falsehood. These articulations are the passage through which those dichotomies reveal new discursive formations. Sissako's film, *La vie sur terre*, as well as Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, cautiously articulate this conjuncture, not only revealing the tensions between their own ideologies as black filmmakers and the dominant institutional structures of film's industry. These films also create discursive linkages for a complex trans-geographical identity constructed symbolically through the figure of 'marronage'.

My analysis of black cinema takes into account the passage within this reflexive operation to clarify the morphology of discourse articulated beneath the surface of representations of black experience. I suggest the

analysis of black cinema from a purely external viewpoint consciously or subconsciously applies zoological patterns of coding inherited from dominant socio-historical representations of black peoples. Such an argument is central to this dissertation because the question of representation is intrinsically related to 'recognizable' figures.

In the early days when all the black characters were still portrayed by white actors in blackface, there was nothing but the old character types. They sat like square boxes on a shelf. A white actor walked by, selected a box, and used it as a base for a very square, rigidly defined performance. Later, when real black actors played the roles and found themselves wedged into these categories, the history became one of actors battling against the types to create rich, stimulating, diverse characters. At various points the tom, the coon, the tragic mulatto, the mammy, and the brutal black buck were brought to life respectively by Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Stepin Fetchit, Nina Mae McKinney, Hattie McDaniel, and Walter Long (actually a white actor who portrayed a black villain in *The Birth of a Nation*), and later "modernized" by such performers as Sidney Poitier, Sammy Davis Jr., Dorothy Dandridge, Ethel Waters, and Jim Brown. Later such performers as Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, Lonette McKee, Whoopi Goldberg, and Danny Glover also found themselves struggling to turn old stereotypes inside out. [...] The early silent period of motion pictures remains important, not because there were any great black performances—there weren't—but because the five basic types—the boxes sitting on the shelf—that were to dominate black characters for the next half century were first introduced then. (Bogle, 1997:14)

Black performative recognition displaces the preexisting stereotypes of codified aesthetics in cinema in a way that reveals new powerful indexes of affect. An in-depth



observation of the ways in which blacks have been represented in cinema confirms the need for this radical analytical approach. Donald Bogle, in naming actors and actresses that carried their own faces and voiced their own characters, suggests that such performances activate an 'affective' feeling under which the entire notion of recognizing self becomes imaginable. On a similar issue, Stuart Hall suggests to reframe the question about black identity in taking into account the following concern:

How can we organize these huge randomly varied, and diverse things we call human subjects into position where they can recognize one another for long enough to act together, and thus to take up a position that one of these days they might live out and through as an identity (Hall, 1997:291).

This chapter examines the ways in which such practices of recognition are articulated, particularly through the activation of feeling, love, and emotion, actualizing an 'affective expression of identity' that I call Africanicity. I analyze this affective disposition by examining its imminent potentialities that, like Heidegger's "*Dasein*," are "right-there." These potentialities, however, are seen here less as an ontological principle based on an essentialist phenomenology of existence, than as visible mediated

practices of everyday life (affective expressions of black identity) enacted through the 'third space' of the medium and the objects of cinema. I suggest that such practices of affectivity complete, rather than abandon, their imminent potentialities with effectiveness ('effectivity').<sup>1</sup>

This articulation posits the modalities under which contextual discourses in black cinema reveal themselves to be more than localized content, but rather trans-geographical expressions, mediating the structure of feeling and virtual, horizontal, and emotional belongings. As Mbembe suggests, unlike some Afrocentrist frameworks making

possible the recognition of those who, by virtue of possessing those features [of blackness] can be said to belong to the racial collectivity and the geographical entity thus defined, [...] the guise of speaking in one's own voice, is less to demarcate the boundaries between "the native and the nonnative Other" (Mbembe, 2002:244-45).

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<sup>1</sup> According to Levinas, affectivity is a phenomenon comprehensible only there where existence presents this structure of being delivered up to its own destiny. Dereliction, the abandonment to imposed possibilities, gives to human existence a character of *fact* in the most specific and most dramatic sense of the term, in relation to which the empirical "facts" of science are only derivative; it is a fact that is understood as such by its effectivity. Having been thrown into the world, abandoned and delivered up to oneself—such is the ontological description of "fact." Affective existence and the positive characteristics of human finitude and nothingness, which we have pursued from the start through their multiple structures, are defined by Heidegger as "effectivity" [*effectivité*] (*Faktizität*). Further, the understanding and interpretation of this effectivity are the basis of the analytic ontology of *Dasein*. That is why Heidegger and his followers define ontology as the "hermeneutics of effectivity" (*Hermeneutik der Faktizität*) (Emmanuel Lévinas, 1996:24).

However, amending Shohat's observation, I agree that cinema, "interestingly, offers a privileged space for the examination of [the] processes of identification and symbolic affiliation (or disaffiliation)" not merely related to race or class, but rather "on the basis of shared closeness or common antagonist" (Shohat, 1995:168-9). This articulation exposes the trans-geographical possibility of Africanicity in cinema. To analyze this possibility, I review several narrative modalities in black cinema. In the first section, I argue that black filmmakers have, out of necessity, become modern Griots, using their voices in the medium of cinema as a conduit to express their Africanicity. In the second section, I discuss the ways in which narrative in black cinema actualizes the '*Signifying*' attitudes of love that activate this trans-geographical feeling of belonging.

### **3.1. Modern Griots of the Medium of Cinema**

Film analysts David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (1993) suggest that the narrative is perhaps the way in which we perceive the world. Human beings make sense of life's surrounding circumstances and events through narrative. For Bordwell and Thompson, beside the formal conventions

that structures the flow of story and plot information in films (i.e., associational, rhetorical, categorical, and abstract forms), it is through narrative that we "used to look for various sorts of meaning in formal processes," and that we are able to ask if, for example, a specific system of narrative produce "ideological significance" (1993:101). I argue that one of the central concerns about film narrative must be the process of meaning production — that is the cinematic structure and narrative articulated in certain ways, and producing specific discourses.<sup>2</sup>

Black filmmakers from Africa and the Americas have positioned themselves as the 'warrant' of representing images of black social reality. Such positionality necessitates an ideological articulation that makes the linkage between narratives and social discourses. An ideological articulation, in this case, is exactly what Stuart Hall qualifies as a theory of articulation:

[which] is a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how do or do not become articulated at specific conjunctures to certain political subjects. [...] the theory of

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<sup>2</sup> "Much of our conversation is taken up with stories of one sort or another – recalling an event from the past or telling a joke. Even newspaper articles are called "stories," and when we ask for an explanation of something, we may say, "What's the story?" We cannot escape even by going to sleep, since we often experience our dreams as little narratives... **Perhaps narrative is a fundamental way that humans make sense of the world.**" (Bordwell and Thompson (1993:64, emphasis added.)

articulation asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it; it enable us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling then to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their socio-economic or class location or social position. (Hall, in Grossberg: "Interview with Stuart Hall," 1986:141-42).

Thus, black filmmakers ideologically connect their social discourse to their social 'recognizable' conditions. Here, the question is not merely to break this ideology into specific social contingencies or groupings, or to see its relevancy, and its potential effect of power. For Hall, what counts is the moment of discovery, a moment through which some groups of people construct some narratives transforming people's consciousness and awareness of themselves and their shared historical circumstances (ibid.:142-44). In black oral performances, the representation of all aspects of shared social reality, passing on information, or simply ensuring that this information remains alive for the benefit of the community, has been for millennia the active-role of the Griot in both pre-colonial and present-day African society. As a key figure of social memory, the Griot makes sense of everyday life practices of the

collectivity, through public storytelling and historical allusion.<sup>3</sup>

"The Griots are professionals who specialize in storytelling, reciting legends, or recounting the valiant deeds of family's or country's forebears" (Elolongue E. Yondo, 1976:101).<sup>4</sup> In fact, Griots articulate social and political conditions of people, and make elementary sense, sometime amusing, sometime provocative, of very complex collective situations. For example, one of the patriarchs of African cinema, Ousmane Sembène, constantly "draws a parallel between the traditional storyteller and modern African filmmakers" (Pfaff, 1995:118). While filmmaker Adama Drabo observes that the Griots "often stepped out of their tales to make connections to reality" (cited in Barlet, 2000:154). In fact, Griots examined the past, organized history in narrative plots, in order to explain the present and look to the future. Today, black filmmakers continue this practice of oral

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<sup>3</sup> In his 410-page book about the origin, social role, and meaning of the Griot, Thomas A. Hale (1998) showed that African Griots fulfill a variety of roles: genealogist, historian, spokesperson, diplomat, musician, teacher, praise singer, master of ceremonies, and advisor and critic of authority. Griots are prominent in many African societies, particularly West African societies in the Sahelian region characterized, by stratified social organization and complex, often inherited, occupational specialties. In going back to the origins of this social position, Hale's general argument is that the Griot, first documented in a fourteenth-century account by a Berber visitor to the Mali empire provides evidence that the oral tradition maintained by these bards is over six centuries old. But Griots are not merely historical curiosities; in our day, they perform before global, as well as local, audiences. See also Georges Balendier and Jacques Minet (1974) analyzing multiple origins of the word Griot.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Pfaff, 1995:118

narrative through the medium of cinema. But unlike the traditional Griot whose "commitment is to maintaining, explaining, and legitimating existing sociological structures," these modern Griots have another agenda: "not to enhance [social] cohesion, but to move it forward" (Barlet, 2000:164-5). In the making-of of *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), Alex Haley uses similar argument to explain the impact of Griot's modality recounting a past connected to present:

The old griot had talked for nearly two hours up to then [...] 'the oldest of these four sons, Kunta, went away from his village and he was never seen again'. I sat as if I were carved of stone. My blood seemed to have congealed. This man whose lifetime had been in this back-country African village had no way in the world to know that he had just echoed what I had heard all though my boyhood years on my grandma's front porch in Henning, Tennessee" (Haley, in *Root: the Making-of*, PBS).

Such new forms of trans-geographical feeling allows us to articulate the linkages between narrative process in black cinema and black expressions of identity. Black cinema becomes the terrain of an ideological tour de force. Here, black filmmakers articulate their history and everyday life, not merely as dramatic entertainment trapped within the territory of the artistic 'frame' and formal narrative structure, but rather as a site of self-expression, self-recognition. In other word, black

filmmakers use the cinematic off-frame of the film to articulate historical events into a palpable everyday life panorama (in-frame), or a horizontal landscape that conjuncturally reenacts the history of the past in the present of the film-frame. I call this an articulation of specific discursive moments. It is this conjuncture that, as noted Titi Adepitan, "Alex Haley's *Roots* articulates against the background of the rolling landscape of America's South and pull off the Bouakarakarabiri sequences in the Ozidi story" (Adepitan, 2002:128).

Before the appearance of cinema, black literature has adopted the same discursive articulation. African creators from the movements of the New Negro to *Négritude* used the Griot's modalities of expression to raise their own voices, and from new expressions of black history. This conjunctural model of creation is clearly found in Raoul Peck's *Lumumba: Death of a Prophet* (1992). Like Sissako's *La vie sur Terre*, or Lee's *Malcolm X*, Peck's film is a true example of the transition between trans-geographical expressions of identity and trans-historical experiences. Peck mobilizes the orality of the medium of cinema (a vocal narration) to portray the death of



Patrice Lumumba, a key figure in the Liberation Movement of the Belgian Congo, and to articulate a trans-local social memory.

Once again, for these critically-engaged black artists, their primary goal is to pass on a knowledge organized in narrative plots, and to further express the social reality of their communities.<sup>5</sup> Like a true Griot, Peck passes on information about *Lumumba* to his audience, information he previously learned from his own mother. The audience is continually reminded of this by his voiceover stating — or, rather murmuring, as Sissako said earlier — "*My mother told me...*" Peck repeats this sentence again and again, not only to preserve the voice

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<sup>5</sup> In analyzing the extensive literary work of Maryse Condé, Chinosole observes that Condé's exploration of African knowledge constitutes a major part of her literary project. At least, Chinosole argues, this constitutes one viable reading for people of the African Diaspora in the Francophone world and now, with recent translations, for the Anglophone world as well. Edouard Glissant also aptly expresses the same challenge of this kind of discourse and narration. For Glissant the main difficulty facing Caribbean literatures is that they must combine mythification and demystification, this primal innocence with learned craftiness. Condé, who crisscrosses "myth", also uses this articulation and demystification by combining the critical stance of a griot's epic with the subjective realism of contemporary Western novels. In this way, both Glissant and Condé create a work that is grounded at the same time in the traditional European novel, and thereby succeeds in peopling African history, i.e., Condé's *Segu* speaks of *Segu* outside of *Segu*, tying, therefore, Condé to a movement of writing that is concerned with trans-geographical expression of blackness, like Senghor, Damas, or other *Négritude* writers. Further, Condé dares to position herself as storyteller, a Griot, as if she were speaking "in" *Segu* away from the earshot of foreigners. "She speaks not only in a public voice of what is historically praiseworthy, but also in a private voice of what is shameful. As is so frequently done when women depict the domestic sphere, by breaking silence this female descendant of colonized writers breaks an in-house taboo" (Chinosole, 1995:593-594). Diverse other generations of black writers and critics who do not necessarily constitute or follow the modalities of "movements" such *Négritude* or *The New Negro*, have been regular features of the African imagination in literature, i.e. Wole Soyinka (Nobel Prize), Chinua Achebe, J. P. Clark (Bekederemo), Ahmadou Kourouma, Alioune Diop, Bakary Diallo, Ousmane Socé Diop, just to name a few.

of his mother as a socially 'recognized' sign of the truth, but also to validate his source. Consequently, through Peck's murmuring narration, his mother's voice acts as the legitimate 'effectivity' of the narrative, supporting an affective attachment.

Like those stories of the Griot criticizing and recounting African heroism and triumphs, the film *Lumumba* also relates the story of an African hero. In this ideational articulation of black film, the audience is asked not to look at the hero only for his heroic qualities, but to examine him for the practices he collectively represents as a social figure. Therefore, the figure of Lumumba in Peck's film, wherever it appears, signifies an ideational articulation Africanicity because all blacks may recognize themselves through Lumumba's fights for freedom.

Recognition is an ideological affiliation — an a-logical affective effect — that do not necessarily denote 'acceptance' for all black people. Consequently, I contend that black's filmmakers intend less "to facilitate identification with the hero," than "to offer moral reflection on the state of crisis and on human behavior" (Barlet, 2000:174). The legitimation of this

moral reflection suggests an ideological affiliation; for example, that of a dereliction caused by modernity, particularly with regard to blackness.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, this moral affiliation suggests a conjunctural analysis allowing us to understand under which articulation the expressions of black identity emerge. Indeed, this figuration of the African hero, however extremist it may be, become articulated as an expression of identity, and illustrates the Du Boisian notion of Africanicity as a horizontal concept advanced to secure the affective belonging of black identity. In *The Soul of Black Folk*, Du Bois observed that:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness — An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (1903:5).

Du Bois's notion of socio-cultural identity operates in a space of expression transcending the biological discourse of race and a bounded geography of time/space, to advance the horizontal enactment of the idea of blackness. In

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<sup>6</sup> As I discussed in *The State of Theory and methodology*, Afrocentrism specifically articulates its racial rationale with this argument. Blacks are the wretched of the world from the resulting alienating practices of modernity that are the effects of slavery and colonialism. Key figures of the African Liberation Movement, from the continent and diasporas, also use this rhetoric to legitimate their action.

that sense, the figure of Lumumba transcends the local concern of Congo's Liberation Movement, and installs the personage as a figure of the black transhistorical and geographical struggle. However, this recognition of the figure of Lumumba is not so much an acceptance of his politics, as it is a formulation (an expression) of a collective identity.

In *Malcolm X* (1992), the scenes of groups of young black girls and boys in Harlem and Soweto classrooms, followed by Ossie Davis's inspiring eulogy, repeat this trans-geographical articulation of identity. In this sequence, we witness young girls and boys standing and heartily asserting: "*I am Malcolm X*;" surely an ultimate moment exemplifying black expressions of identity through the figure of Malcolm X, resulting in ideational articulations of a collective self. Here, black children are expressing their mediated (and trans-geographical) identity beyond fixed gender discourse and political identity. In fact, they are all Malcolm X. This sequence further illustrates a moment of geographical transposition, that of Harlem (USA) to Soweto (South Africa). These spaces become sites of the same expression

of struggle, and the same representation of blackness as a specific experience. Brilliantly, Lee closes the sequence with Nelson Mandela appearing in a Soweto classroom to invoke Malcolm X's words:

- As brother Malcolm X said, we declare our right on this earth, to be a man, to be a human being, to be given the right of a human being, to be respected as a human being, in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intended to bring into existence.

Here we do not merely witness the technological capacity of cinema to bridge, narratively at least, differentiated temporal and geopolitical spaces, but this narrative articulates trans-geographical "thermodynamic"<sup>7</sup> connections with an ideation, illustrated through Mandela's speech. Following his speech, historical footage juxtaposed with Ossie Davis's voiceover symbolically articulates the ideational affiliation between Mandela and Malcolm X, by concluding the speech

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<sup>7</sup> Here I am mobilizing this concept of 'thermodynamic' like Michel Foucault, to illustrate the ways in which the medium of cinema can juxtapose multiple spaces and times within one singular narrative, plot, or sequence. For example, in *La vie sur terre*, we visually traveled from Paris to Sokolo, and discursive articulation builds the conjunction of these geographical locations. Foucault uses the same concept to illustrate how the present epoch is above all the epoch of spatial simultaneity or juxtaposition. He argues that the epoch of thermodynamic is the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at the moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skin." (The original title of this text is "*Des espaces autres*." It was published by the *Journal of Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* in October, 1984, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication by the author and thus not part of the official corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Michel Foucault's death. (Translated by Jay Miskowicz as "Of Other Spaces" in <http://foucault.info>).

(and the film) with Malcolm X's famous phrase: "*by any means necessary...*"

The narrative setting of this speech impels us to consider the singularized identity of these black heroes, Malcolm X and Mandela, one people, one struggle: One identity, but multiple subjectivities. This articulation of horizontal identity is present in almost every action of Malcolm X represented in the film. For example, in a scene in which Malcolm X (Denzel Washington) speaks in the streets of Harlem, a banner behind a stage portrays black faces and their country of origin. This rapid display, a discrete exposition of the multiple African nationalities, also performs the idea of one people. There, we hear Malcolm arguing against his Americanness:

*- [...] So I have to stand here today as what I was when I was born: a black man. Before there is any such thing as Republican or Democrat, we were black; before there was any such thing as mason or an elk, we were black; before there was any such thing as Jew or Christian, we were black people. In fact before there is any such place as America, we were black. And after America has long passed from the scene, there will still be black people.<sup>8</sup>*

It is a challenge to separate the content of all these speeches from the claimed articulations of an identity-politic on one the hand, and from a cultural

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<sup>8</sup> This scene comes right after the marriage of Malcolm X, in which he talks about national politics and the social condition of blacks in the USA.

identity on the other. But in fact, by examining the setting of these scenes, multiple figurations (escapements) should alert us to the 'minor' discourse beneath the surface of this narrative. These figurations are specific symptoms of black expressions of identity that are much more a performance or practice of expression than a political or cultural claim.

The banners behind Malcolm X are visual the signs suggesting this practice of identity. In that scene, the presence of African countries on the banner transcends the abstraction of nationalistic or patriotic articulations. These signs are not part of a cultural form of expression that can be analyzed as a '*propre*', an essence of black cultural identity. Rather, I argue that these minor signs alert us to something happening under the discursive surface, as part of the figuration of expressions of Africanicity. All these symptoms are made possible through the action of filmmakers in reconstructing a recognized reality. Of course, this active construction can be examined through the perspective of political paradigms. However, how can one outline an identity-politics emerging through non-institutional settings? In other words, how can one talk

about black identity-politics if the expressions of this identity are taking place in the margin of diverse nationalistic settings?

In the films *Malcolm X* and *Lumumba*... this identity emerges by creating an intermedial space of discourse in multiple geopolitical and cultural locations representing a trans-geographical third-site of expression. This site of conjunctural expressions allows us to understand the ways in which the system of entertainment and art, and the production of minor discourses articulate the linkages between black expressions of identity, political tensions, and everyday life experience.

I contend that such practices in black cinema posit the question of identity as an event. This is because this use of the medium of film actualizes an emotional enactment of black identity challenging prior characterizations of blacks. Nelson Mandela's appearance at the end of Lee's *Malcolm X*, totally corroborates this observation. The proud statement "*I am Malcolm X*" by the boys and girls is less an acceptance of Malcolm Little who became Malcolm X. This statement is rather a '*Signifying*' combining a 'recognized' figure (Mandela)



with an expression of the concept of black identity (*I am Malcolm X*).

In showing the tensions related to Lumumba's and Malcolm X's life and death, Peck and Lee played the role of facilitators diffusing events, as the Griot, and not the role of "cultural authority" noted by Manthia Diawara (1992). For example, the finality of X's actions indicates that he was not a figure of authority installing a legacy as an authoritative subject would commonly do. In the film, Lee illustrates the inner-tension within the Nation of Islam between Malcolm X and Elijah Mohammad, who saw himself as an authoritative figure legislating over "his people."<sup>9</sup> But this political authority, imprisoning the agency) the freedom (within the structural settings of the nation, is rejected by Malcolm X. The scene in the film *Malcolm X* called the press conference to dissociate himself from the authority of the 'Nation' of Islam.

*[...] In the past I spoke the thought and thought the words of Elijah Mohammad. If you recall everything I said, I'd started off with "The Honorable Elijah Mohammad teaches us on so and so..." that day is over. From now on I speak My own words and think My own thoughts (emphasis added).*

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<sup>9</sup> I am referring here to the scene in which Malcolm X confronts his teacher, Elijah Mohammad. Here, the teacher argues: "*[...] I have built this Nation over the divine guidance of Allah. He has brought me back from death to lead my people, after me there will be no more, no more.*"

This articulation of identity in *Malcolm X* is another powerful figuration that needs to be unpacked. Here Malcolm X pushes his non-nationalistic critique to an extremist edge claiming the liberty of expression, or what some radical Afrocentrists might qualify as an 'authentic' voice. This extreme posture is visible in his insensitive analysis of the death of John F. Kennedy. He reminds us that this president of the United States is part of a nationalistic setting (an inherited political power structure) who (author)ized the killing of Patrice Lumumba in Africa. X's discourse rejects in fact any sort of authoritative subject claimed by Black Nationalism or Cultural Nationalism.

In articulating such discourses — that undermine the power of any kind of 'cultural authority', including Spike Lee, the director of the film — the film *Malcolm X* suggests that the finality of X's actions are closely connected to the expression of collective freedom. Malcolm X is thus a figuration of agency that does not fight for its exclusive own benefit, but for the 'recognizable' collective experiences of struggle affecting black peoples.

The above examples indicate practical expressions of the notion of Africanicity. In Africa, such expressions have helped to forge the 1975 Algeria Charter of FEPACI,<sup>10</sup> which implemented the April 1974 Conference admitting that cinema must play an important role in the social self-consciousness of black people. Black filmmakers, as the modern leading 'artisans of the whole community', should therefore reject any individualist creation that does not reflect their social reality.

To conclude, I want to re-emphasize the notion of the 'artisan' filmmaker. Indeed, it should be understood here as a synonym for 'independent' filmmaker, because both are implicitly engaged in creating non-mainstream contents through the instruments of the film industry. Their artistic language generally discards the standardized structural and political economies of mainstream filmmaking, and when applied, they must be viewed, ultimately, as a Signifying practice of 'marronage'. For example, Isaac Julien explains that the

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<sup>10</sup> Excerpt of Algeria Charter: Le cinéma a un rôle à jouer, parce qu'il est un moyen d'éducation, d'information et de prise de conscience, et également un stimulant de créativité. La réalisation de tels objectifs suppose une interrogation du cinéaste africain sur l'image qu'il se fait de lui-même, sur la nature de sa fonction et de son statut social, et d'une façon générale sur sa situation au sein de sa société. L'image stéréotypée du créateur solitaire et marginal, répandue dans la société capitaliste occidentale, doit être rejetée par le cinéaste africain qui doit, au contraire, se considérer comme un artisan au service du peuple (FEPACI)

goal of his latest successful production, the *Darker Side of Black*, was not to prove his aesthetic skills but rather to assert his artistic practice along with his social vision:

I really wouldn't call *Darker Side of Black* a cinematic experience. It's more televisual, really, which was correct for the subject matter to me. Sometimes one makes a film for more important reasons than the "good review" in the New York Times — though, of course, it's nice if you get one! — or for the mere winning of a prize at a film festival. I don't have to prove I am an artist; in fact, I see my artistic practice as cultural work, even in such films as *Looking for Langston* or *The Attendant*. (Interviewed by Bruce Morrow, 1995:413).

The question of artisan filmmaking is therefore, in this dissertation, less related to financial contingency but rather linked to the conceptualization of films in relation to mainstream structural economies of filmmaking that engage specific genres and styles for specific narratives and issues. For example, the \$40-million production such as Lee's *Malcolm X* still belongs to the artisan categories, because the director explicitly uses cinematic strategies that are critical alterations of mainstream cinema, to talk about one of the most controversial figures in American History.

I argue that such filmmaking practices permit us to legitimates the concept of '*marronage*'. Julien's quote,

for example, illustrates the active appropriation of the medium to 'penetrate', with a specific intention of 'marronage', the systemic spaces of dominant discourse. I call such practices an ideation that articulates endless re-actualization of historical events. It is no wonder, then, that Ousmane Sembène, considered to be the father of African cinema, still declared in 1997: "*We have to think for ourselves and by ourselves. The battle continues.*"<sup>11</sup> This continues to be true today because the spaces of production and distribution are powerfully controlled by dominant institutions and agendas that flood the market with entertaining productions, not necessarily related to social analyses. Indeed, for these black filmmakers, the so called-old struggle against nationalistic or institutional extensions of power,

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<sup>11</sup> Our last congress (February-March 1997) was the congress of maturity. We accepted the revision of the rules and regulations of the FEPACI which supports us all as one: "canning" a film is an epic and heroic act. After this solitary and underground fight, it still has to be shown to our fellow-citizens. Alas! Once produced, our films are not seen by their prime audience. A tragedy for us. The distribution and exhibition of our works in our countries is an objective that we can (and must) reach. It is important that we reflect on this together in order to advocate methods and measures to recover our cinema and television space. This is why we are appealing to you to contribute with your reflections and suggestions to a revision of the FEPACI. It is not a question of creating a new FEPACI but of reshaping its vital organs and joints for an alert market in line with the positive evolution of our continent; bearing in mind the sub-regional and regional groupings, technical bodies, national associations, African festivals, festivals of the Diaspora and the others. With the rapid and profound changes that have taken place over the past three decades, we have to adapt in order to continue and orient the changes. It is in this framework that there will be an opportunity to reflect on the shape that the Federation's Secretariat should take. We have to think for ourselves and by ourselves. *The struggle continues* (Ousmane Sembène, 1997:74).

slavery and colonialism has not abated; it 'continues' today under different forms.

It is through this kind of re-actualization of memory and recycling of the mainstream structural dispositive, in the African diaspora, as well as in the continent, that the black practices of representing social reality resist its own political demise. This practice of 'recyclage' reminds us of the Griot's words spread in the forecourt of the king palaces', glorifying the king as a subject of power, while at the same time criticizing him. The following remark of Julien is another good example of such an attitude of 'marronage':

I hope that my work can resist the category of a BBC documentary. But the first documentary that I made for the BBC was called *Black and White in Colour*, which documents the history of Blacks in British broadcasting. It is a meditation on the role of memory, television histories and race. Television has played a central role in the construction of the Master Discourse of race, through the developing of televisual genres, such as situation comedy (Interview with B. Morrow, 1995:413-414).

Black filmmakers borrow from traditional African practices and transform them into something altogether new through the medium of cinema. Such an analysis exposes their conjunctural position, which 'intermedially' juxtaposes the past to the present, world geography to a singular site of discourse, and the

Griot's modality of expression to the medium of cinema. In fact, black filmmakers question everyday life by looking at the ways in which the past historical experiences of black peoples can determine what lies ahead in the future. Their mobilization of the medium of cinema clearly articulates the intermediality exposing conceptual tensions contextualized by specific expressions, discourses, times, space, and places. Indeed, they constantly remind the viewer that modern consciousness has something to gain from listening to historical experiences of the past (Barlet, 2000:180). At the same time, by employing cinema as means within modernity, black filmmakers distinguish themselves from others and emerge as the "Griots of a new kind" (Barlet, *ibid.*), or, as Anna Everett calls them, "Modern Griots."

Haile Gerima (1984) an Ethiopian-born filmmaker even declared that: "A filmmaker is a story teller, nothing more, nothing less; one who provides information, one who creates the vital elements and innovatively synthesizes social relationships; one who plays a role in linking not only the historical but the global human experience." (Quoted by Mike Murashige, 1997:183).

The Griot's expression, critical discourses, and artistic performances articulated in black cinema become a terrain that produces new formations of black identity. This new conceptual space from which to analyze black identity, although embryonic, asks dominant academic frameworks of culture studies to think about new forms of identity.

For example, in *In Search of Africa* (1998b), Manthia Diawara introduces an insightful articulation of a borderless black identity. In his search for the expression of black identity, Diawara, well versed in the discursive contingencies of contemporary culture studies, nevertheless acknowledges the practical everyday life experience of black peoples, their specific struggles and needs. This position suggests it is necessary to take into account the context through which black people's profound wisdom merges with their expressions. Differing from the postcolonial hybridization theorists who attribute black ideation to coercive mix of incompatible colonial experiences and cultural intersection, Diawara unwillingly introduces the notion of trans-geographical identity of blackness, while declaring his book was written based on personal observation in Senegal, Mali,



Guinea, the Ivory-Coast, France, Jamaica, Bermuda, Guadelope, Martinique, and the United States.<sup>12</sup> Here, Diawara not only admits the '*rhizomic*' articulation at the core of black identity; he suggests that the materiality of this identity enjoins new conjunctures emerging through the very concept of black identity. For example, responding to the essentialist claims of the *Négritude* movement that the historical experience of blacks serves as a meditation of global salvation, Diawara suggests the tremendous challenge black activists in the forties have posed to humanity. "To be labeled saviors of humanity," he argues, "when only recently we had been colonized and despised by the world, gave us a feeling of righteousness, which bred contempt for capitalism, racialism of all origins, and tribalism" (Diawara, 1998b:7).

This *Négritude* approach pushes Diawara to do the work of the Griot, exalting but also critically reexamining heroic black figures, in the same manner as Spike Lee and Raoul Peck. For example, Diawara examines

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<sup>12</sup> More than a fieldwork for an ethnographic gaze, this positionality for writing a history of self, and using not only self voice but also self imaginary, focuses on the relation between black memory, historical experiences, multiple geographies, cultural forms and legacies. The outcome of such a work is the articulation of affectivity, as I will argue in the second subsection of this chapter, because it enacts a desire to tell the truth that can only be, to some extent, an essentialist phenomenon, however, resulting in practical expression.

some controversial black figures in master narratives such as Malcolm X, Sékou Touré, Richard Wright, Cheikh Anta Diop, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and many others through all their discrepancies and equanimities, suggesting their multiple facets. More importantly, despite the fact that some of them have been negatively characterized, Diawara saw them with substantial sympathy, because their figurations express a trans-geographical comradeship, multi-culturality, and nationality.

This work does not attempt to rehabilitate black figures from academic excoriation, but rather to recognize the 'efficacy' (*effectiveness*) of their 'figuration' affecting and expressing horizontal social memory. In transcending nation-state borders and conducting his search on black identity in various non-academic locations, i.e., the café, the bistro, the hotel, etc., Diawara generates black trans-geographical '*rhizomic*' roots, positing differences, but, however, at the core of such specific investigation. That is why, as noted Adeyayo Williams (2000:185), the hateful characterization of Wright: "an intellectual turncoat and renegade who forswore the radical militancy for a shabby

accommodation with white hegemony" is transfigured by Diawara to become an active reflection of black expressions of identity today. Diawara recognizes that Wright's "assessment of ethnicity, tradition, and religion" is badly needed as a necessary form of secularism in postcolonial Africa today (Diawara, 1998b:76).<sup>13</sup> Thus, in his *Search of Africa*, Diawara uses the same modalities of expression as the black modern Griots, i.e., writers, filmmakers, storytellers, articulating non-static thermodynamic times and spaces, and intersecting the past and the present to address questions concerning concepts of black identity.

The final declaration of the filmmakers at the Fifth Congress of the FEPACI, in February 1997 in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) posits such articulations. The theme of this conference, "Fight Against Poverty" highlights the important role that cinema and the audiovisual industry play in the fight against any kind of poverty, and the exercise of blackness. In this congress, the filmmakers

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<sup>13</sup> In looking at the present African continent, Diawara agrees with Wright "in his assessment of ethnicity, tradition, and religion. The African elites have not only entered into complicity with the agents of the Cold War to block the road to nation building in Africa, but have also maintained women" and social castes "in their subjugated positions. Today, Africa is badly in need of some of the secularism that Wright talked about in *Black Power*" (Diawara, 1998b:76).

once again declared the "continuity" of their challenge "to increase the awareness of different partners and social actors on the need to consider poverty as a real scourge which threatens the integrity of individuals, people and nations."<sup>14</sup> This shows a continuity in the practice of black cinema. A concern to link the everyday life experiences of black peoples with their historical reflections: a practice engaged since the late 1960s in Africa and since 1916 in the United States.

Imruh Bakari (2000:4) records similar findings. He observes that the economic circumstances "which inform the issues of [black] cinema debated over the years still remain largely unaltered". The 'event' behind the motives of these creative efforts in filmmaking and criticism

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<sup>14</sup> "Recognizing that poverty is a source of violence, various types of social conflict and instability, that every day it destroys thousands of lives, deprives hundreds of millions of individuals of drinking water, medical care and education, that it fosters the spread of disease, drugs and other behavior that is unworthy and degrading, that it destroys the environment, prevents women from fulfilling themselves and having access to equal opportunities and that it compromises the future of our children and that of Africa itself; recognizing the place of utmost importance that the United Nations, in particular the *Programme of the United Nations for Development* (PNUD), occupies in the struggle against poverty and the improvement in living conditions of African populations; taking into consideration the campaign led by the PNUD to promote Durable Human Development and fight poverty with the establishment of 17<sup>th</sup> October as the *International Elimination of Poverty Day* by the General Assembly of the *United Nations* in order to appeal to all consciences; aware of the important role that the cinema and audiovisual industry can play in the struggle against poverty; we undertake to continue our work as creators in contributing with our films to increase the awareness of different partners and social actors on the need to consider poverty as a real scourge which threatens the integrity of individuals, people and nations. We launch a pressing appeal to African leaders, inter-African organizations and the international community to make Double Human Development a major objective and the struggle against poverty an absolute priority. We ask the United Nations, in the framework of the PNUD, to double its efforts in setting up structural and endogenous programmes and we invite the PNUD to directly involve African filmmakers in the realization of its communication programme." (FEPACI Final Declaration: Ouagadougou, 26th February 1997, The Congress)

invokes traditional expressions of identity and necessary articulations of self-representation. My next concern is therefore to understand how we can explain the conjunctural context of these trans-geographical expressions of black identity which intimate multiple temporalities, social, and geopolitical experiences? Put differently, how are articulated these virtual experiences and expressions of Africanicity articulated in black cinema? What is the necessary process of exposition in such practices of expression?

### **3.1.1. *The Narrative of Necessity: Resilience and Affectivity in Black Cinema***

In *The State of Theories and Methodologies*, I argued that despite the various conjectures deployed in and about the concepts of 'onto-theology of love' (i.e., ideology, nationalism, culturalism, capitalism, or collectivism) Fanon, Chatterjee, and Anderson all articulate an intermediate trajectory — a horizontal structure of feeling. In fact, Fanon's, Chatterjee's, and Anderson's understandings of the concepts of national identity has something in common. They articulate an 'onto-theology' of love as a figure of mediation in the process of

identity formation. As Achille Mbembe argued, such intermediate trajectory introduces "specific systems of signs," permitting us to take into account "the *commandement*" (Mbembe 1992:2-3) of an authority or the authoritarian modality par excellence, together with its coercive images and structures coinciding the agency of everyday life practices. In other words, Mbembe understands this intermediate trajectory as a site of investigation alleviating the tensions between diverse levels of analysis such as ideology, nationalism, culturalism, capitalism, or collectivism. Therefore, the notion of love introduced by Chatterjee and Anderson is similar to this intermediate trajectory, another figure of *commandement*. For example, despite his criticism of theoretical frameworks contrasting the concepts of bad and good (love and hate) populist and statist, Benedict Anderson (1991:143) insists that love is something that can be perceived through the ways in which "languages describe its object" as a "vocabulary of kinship (motherland, *Vaterland*, *patria*) or that of home (*heimat* or *tanah air*)". The originality of Anderson's argument is the articulation producing the meaning of something behind this argument. In fact, Anderson's discursive tags

"denote something to which one is naturally tied" from an unselected practice and it is in these "natural ties" that "one senses [that] the beauty of *gemeinschaft*" become visible (Anderson, 1991:143).<sup>15</sup> For Anderson, then patriotic *Heimat*, or homeland love builds the conjunction between diverse entities in any given national state. This patriotism is less a homogeneous cultural expression of national identity or political identity, than a process imagined (inter)relations — trans-relations, trans-horizons or geography — of a fragmented group of people making sense of its (trans)social belonging.

In using another oppositional modality that confirms the statist ideology of cultural nationalism, Partha Chatterjee (1986, 1996) was concerned with the same mediation forming an intermedial trajectory between national formation and cultural ideology. For example, using Antonio Gramsci's framework of passive revolution, Chatterjee (1986) understands the relationship of populist creativity and bourgeois nationalism as a

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<sup>15</sup> Different other scholars observe the same phenomenon. For example, Kwame A. Appiah (1992:172) indicates that "the story is repeated, even in places where it was not drawn in lines of blood. Johannes Fabian (1986) concurs that the powerful Lingala and Swahili-speaking communities of modern Zaire exist "because spheres of political and economic interest were established before the Belgians took full control and continued to inform relations between regions under colonial rule." Modern Ghana witnesses the development of an Akan identity; speakers of the three major regional dialects of Twi-Asante, Fante, Akuapem—organize themselves into a corporation against an (equally novel) Ewe unity" (in *Language and Colonial Power*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.42-3).

dynamic articulation coupling their distinctive interests. He later argues that the opposition between nationalism and national culture, or capitalism and populism, remains on a discursive level, whereas the whole political community is 'united' through the rhetoric of love emanating from within both civil society and capitalist ideology (Chatterjee, 1996:235-36).<sup>16</sup> This intermedial trajectory (in)between discursive levels of analysis (even while each level deploys its own ideology), allows us to make the case for an onto-theological articulation throughout which a sense of community is united and formed above the ideology of nation, culture, and even geography.

Analyzed with the mobilized practices of '*marronage*', black cinema points to 'labyrinthic' trajectories, particularly because the practices of

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<sup>16</sup> Many other writers have analyzed the potentiality of this phenomenology of identity through the predicament of sentiment, affection, or culture. For Ernest Gellner (1983:55) this sentiment is, however, sustained by an opposition between high/low cultures because high cultures, for Gellner, pervade "the entire population and not just elite minorities" to constitute "the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify." Whereas for Philip Schlesinger (1991) although nationalism is a doctrine, is also carried "the sense of community mobilized (in part at least) in the pursuit of a collective interest" (p.168), which means that after the achievement of the political nation-states, it is no more the "high" interests that count as a homogeneous expression of the formation of national identity as in Gellner's analysis, but much more a heterogeneous collectivity secured by endless affective struggles. "The elaboration of national identity is chronic process [...]" taking place within the negotiation of the past and present, which "should be understood, at least in part, as an imaginary one, mediated by the continual, selective reconstruction of 'tradition' and of 'social memory'" (p.178).



expression in films reviewed up to now perform specific identity that does not 'exist' racially, nationally, culturally, or even linguistically. In other words, there is no way to conceptualize this identity through linguistic affinity. One must rather do so through the articulation of the 'natural relationship' mediating multiple '*Heimats*' through the dynamic process of such expressive representations of black identity. Black cinema organizes the present discourse on identity as an 'affective recognition' of historical experience, which Fanon (1963) (after his own oppositional structure between life, people, and death, colonial-state), qualifies as providing the dynamic power that has escaped from the colonial palaces and flags.

Removed far away from a nationalistic or culturalistic framework of identity, this analysis of black cinema opens the door to 'labyrinthic' or enigmatic affectivity, transcending the discursive borders of culture, ethnicity, nationality, and geography, to identify an expressive 'practice of identity'. Reversing the discursive dilemmas (or multiple levels of analysis), Kwame A. Appiah invites us to think in a different way about this enigmatic practice of black identity:

There are, I think three crucial lessons to be learned [...]. First, that identities are complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political, and cultural forces, almost always in opposition to other identities. Second, that they nourish despite [...] "misrecognition" of their origins: despite, that is, their roots in myths and in lies. And third, that there is in consequence, no large place for reason in the construction - as opposed to the study and the management - of identities. One temptation, then, for those who see the centrality of these fictions in our lives, is to leave reason behind: to celebrate and endorse those identities that seem at the moment to offer the best hope of advancing our other goals, and to keep silence about the lies and the myths. [...] So it is important for us to continue trying to tell our truths. But the facts I have been rehearsing should imbue us all with a strong sense of the marginality of such work to the central issue of the resistance to racism and ethnic violence - and to the sexism, and to other structures of difference that shape the world of power... (1992:178-9.)

This conjunctural articulation suggested by Appiah locates identity formation outside the discursive struggles of conceptualization, and inside the representation of everyday life practices, that he has defined as 'our own truth'.

The question is therefore what is the animating articulation among and (in)between those discursive concepts of nation-states and static borders, that induce new figurations for the horizontal concept of Africanicity? Perhaps the problematic discussed earlier in *The State of Theories* must again be raised, i.e., if identity is constantly negotiated among diverse elements

and levels of analysis, how can one even talk about an identity-politics or cultural-identity as a concept of definition, specifically if both culture and politics are hybridity? This question is highly important, especially if we admit the Kantian model of meaning production evoked in the opening chapter of this study. According to Kant (1980:92), no concept could be as such conceptualized as if it contains within itself a multitude of representations. Therefore, a concept must be cleared from its multiple signifiers, and designate a clear idea. Thus, what can be the meaning of hybridity, identity-politic, or cultural identity?

Of course, the literature considering the potentiality of an onto-theology of love in the process of identity formation posits diverse variables, or discursive enigmas that are not always epistemologically harmonious. For Chatterjee, the articulation of love oppositionally inherits the Marxist theory of nationality, as a phenomenon steeped in its own ideological process, and the active action of civil

society.<sup>17</sup> Put differently, 'love' is an ideological phenomenon (in Gramsci's sense) that mediates between political apparatuses and civil society (Hall, et al. 1978). For Anderson the centralized idea of comradeship in any given community is "by the style in which [the community is] imagined" within its conjunction of inconstancy, political ideology, and cultural practices (Anderson, 1991:6). Thus, it is also not merely an opposition to Marxist frameworks of nationalism that Anderson indicates, but rather a dynamic performative process of nationhood. Both articulations of affectivity in the performative process of identity are limited by geographical sovereignty to their particular nationals or inherent borders. In other words, the articulation of this affectivity, whose representation may vary in the process of national identity, cannot be confined within the fixed borders of the geopolitical nation-state

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<sup>17</sup> Although this analysis marks the difference between Gramsci's and other Marxist views of the concept of ideology, as Chatterjee understands it, I want to emphasize the function of mediation as a site of negotiation between institutional structure and civil society. As argued by Hall et. al. (1978:47), this site of negotiation produces the "terrain of contention" in Gramsci's view; because it is endlessly dynamic in the sense that both power and civilian produce the social meaning. (Antonio Gramsci, 1971). It is also the view expressed by Lawrence Grossberg (1988:24) when he argued that "a hegemonic politic always involves the ongoing rearticulation of the relations between, and the identity and positions of, both the ruling bloc and the subordinate fractions within the larger social formation." Again, here, Grossberg reinforces the practice of production to be at the core of the notion of articulation, and adds an intermedial framework (hegemony), to explain the relation between the ruling power and the ruled agency.

In the postcolonial Africa particularly, there is a sign indicating trans-border affectivity, mediated, at least in part, by common languages, and by imaginative affinity through commerce and simple social exchange, a mediation conceived solely on the basis of 'illegal' or informal international, tribal or racial relationships. In this a case, trans-nationality, the performative practices of people's self-organization take place outside statist structures of the '*commandement*'. These practices of exchange open up new questions of communication, especially if the trans-border relationship is not connected by a linguistic relationship. The process of communication itself functions as an unofficial modality of interaction. However, the deciphering of information, on both sides of the border, illustrates an in-out oscillation, a '*va-et-vient*' of negotiation from one side to another. This does not mean, however, that a Cameroonian can become Gabonese, or vice versa. Both groups remain discursively attached to their specific '*Heimat*'; and both enact their affectivity through their collective and imaginative interaction, and form a new form of identity through their trans-local practices.

This example is present in Cameroon/Gabon border in which we have the Fan tribe in northern Gabon and the Bulu tribe in southern Cameroon. The linguistic source of Fan and Bulu is Bantu. Therefore, one could talk about linguistic affinity, as indicated by Anderson. However, the central affective relationship between those two groups is the social exchange that establishes communicational idealization between them. The same example is found in other African borders, like the Ivory Coast and Ghana, Mali and Senegal.

In diaspora studies, this process of demographic, cultural and political redistribution is also largely studied. For example, in his essay, *Subalternity and the Neoliberal Habitus: Thinking Insurrection on the El Salvador/South Central Interface* (2000) Gareth Williams understands this whole process as an inaugurate articulation of the displacement of national configurations into new cross-border circuits of impoverished, unprotected bodies, and fleeting identifications. Williams argues that we witness, for example in El Salvador, the corporeal and affective movements that, in a bizarre twist of transnational logic, and competing affective lines of force,

characterized the struggle for hegemony over the nation-state in the 1970s and 1980s. This movement animates affective desires for collective embodiment and directs oligarchic wills of peoples toward a popular dismemberment, consumed and partially redistributed within the civil flow of migration (Williams 2000:144-6).

This analysis indicates social emergency as a practical articulation of affectivity occurring amongst working classes. Thus, the suffering (a postcolonial social reality) increase border hybridization. However, this hybridization conduces to a sharply trans-geographical affective identity in the postcolony, This is part because, for example, the working class transformed into the 'unworking' class as a result of mismanagement and also statist bourgeoisie that replaced colonial institution, built the conditions affective formations.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In Africa today, we have interesting case studies that can be outlined for this trans-affective articulation of the members of multiple nation-states, the Ivory-Coast/Liberia in the west, and Rwanda/Democratic Congo at the center of Africa. On these borders, the question of national identity and particularly "*Ivoirité*" is at the center of current trans-tribal struggles. For example, the internal conflicts opposing the *citizens* of Ivory-Coast and Congo have been transposed in their respective borders with Liberia and Rwanda, in which rebellion's movements retreat to reorganize their offensive tactics, or through which they receive additional forces. Most of the time, however, this trans-borders relationship between the rebellions of the nations in war with its own citizen entities operates out of "official engagement" of the armies of neighbor nations, i.e., Liberia and Rwanda, but rather with the help of civilians. On theoretical level, that can be seen as an example of a trans-border "comradeship" between people sharing distinctive identity-politics and cultures.

These figures of affectivity or shared love then propels a self-collective identity toward a generalized feeling of blackness in a universe (a space) of figurations, and specific systems of signs. These inner spaces of the national and cultural ego, open up to what Kwame A. Appiah calls one's "own truth" of identity representing a shared blackness of recognized-other at the same time.<sup>19</sup> This is the principal site within which the interplay of self-discourses (interdiscourse) is articulated as a sign of the coalescence of 'them' as 'me', 'they' as 'we'. The repositioning of such trans-border affectivity articulated in this unofficial terrain of national and cultural identity establishes a conceptual ground from which to engage in investigating black expression of identity. This new ground of investigation is visible as an intersecting location of practical expression within which some embryonic academic

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<sup>19</sup> Using ethical and psychoanalytical paradigms, Julia Kristeva (1991) observes this interactive passage from the 'other and oneself' differentiated in respect for the irreconcilable concept of 'alterity'. For Kristeva, the kind of 'Otherness' that manifests itself in the experience of the strangeness does not consist in the encounter with the irreducible alterity of the other person but rather brings an unsettling recognition of the subject's own strangeness integrated "within the assumed unity of human beings an otherness that is both biological and symbolic and becomes an integral part of the **same**" (p.181). However, there is an ethical encounter within this process of becoming the other, because as has suggested Ewa Ziarek (1995), it is "inconceivable without the acknowledgement of alterity inscribed already within the most intimate interiority of the self. Thus although the uncanny is not equivalent to ethics, in so far as it "reconciles" us with the irreconcilable within ourselves, it opens its possibility." See Julia Kristeva (1991), *Strangers to Ourselves*, (Leon S. Roudiez, trans.) New York: Columbia University Press. An extensive analysis of this ethico-psychoanalysis paradigm and their relation to aesthetic has been reviewed by Ewa Ziarek (1995).



discourse has begun to emerge, such as the work of Manthia Diawara (1998b) reviewed above.

Indeed, the conceptual metaphor of highly complex trans-border affective practices allows us to understand the intermedial trajectories, or the '*commendement*' amongst multiple temporalities and spatialities, local and global experiences expressed in black cinema as a conjunctural form of black identity. This analytical position distinguishing the identity of blacks through a 'practice of expression' such as cinema, echoes Homi K. Bhabha's (1990a), Benedict Anderson (1991) and Philip Schlesinger's (1991) analysis of the narratives of the nation. These writers analyze to a serial construction-deconstruction process at the very core of the concept of identity negotiated between individual subjectivities, socio-historical experiences, and the concept of nation articulated as sense of belonging. While the concept of identity remains localized within a given national rhetoric of cultural borders, Schlesinger suggests examining the complexity of this identity through the affectionate practices: a state of recognition that I call an onto-theology of love. For Anderson, this affectionate practice connects together people who may

never meet face-to-face. While both suggestions, after all, illustrate the horizontal articulation of affective belonging achieved through common cultural and national heritage in a given nation-state, for black people, it is further the commonality of historical experiences that permits them to reenact this feeling of belonging.

I contend that this feeling of the same belonging through which blacks can express their identity allows us understand the more complex discursive articulations of their Africanicity.

Bhabha suggests a sort of 'pedagogy of becoming' as a performative practice of self-representation to illustrate the absence of oppositional structures between the concept of nation and citizenship. Bhabha describes a movement of belonging "encapsulated in a succession of historical moments that represents an eternity produced by self-generation" (Bhabha, 1990a:298). This movement assures one's performative practice within multiple national experiences. In other words, the nation itself is no longer a representation of homogeneous practices in terms of its historical experience, but rather an ambivalent space of non-temporal narratives that are non-static performative practices resulting in the

possibility to formulate other narratives in the formation of communities (Bhabha, 1990a:300).

This articulation of the nation as both a space of representation, and a conjunctural movement of becoming within which specific performative historicity and differentiated experience are expressed, allows us to discern the position of black filmmakers in their performative practices of Africanicity. The study of black cinema around the world provides great examples of their shared assertions of struggle through their differentiated cultural and political experiences. And it is through such articulations that the practice of expression of struggle produces a self and image guided by specific principles claiming the difference of blackness (Bhabha, 1990b:208). Here, black cinema fully develops a shared third space or an intermedial space of expression, one that is a non-assimilating place of distinctive experiences and cultural values, and at the same time a holistic site of shared practices of struggle. Bhabha describes these shared practice of self-expression as "an eternity produced by self-generation" (Bhabha, 1990a:300) of people telling their own narratives.

The historical struggle of black entertainers, actors, actresses, and scholars (particularly in the West), was forcefully expressed in film and other venues of expression to signify the articulation of their eternal difference, their Africanicity. Sometime, such articulations become radical because they speak from voices raising "compelled difficult explorations of "'silences' [and] unaddressed places" (hooks, 1990:145-45). And to get access to the articulation of such expressions of struggle in black cinema, we need to understand the ways in which differentiated fragments of memory come to build shared practices of identity this dissertation calls Africanicity.<sup>20</sup>

### **3.2. Practical Fragmentized Expressions of Africanicity: An Intermedial Articulation of Memory through the Medium of Cinema**

Black filmmakers, specifically, comprise what Homi Bhabha defines as a generation of people who articulate a self-expression of identity. Black cinema also comprises what

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<sup>20</sup> Fragments of memory [which] are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed to give a "new take" on the old, [and] to move us into a different mode of articulation." [... Because] thinking again about space and location [is to hear] the statement "our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting"; a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present (hooks, 1990:147)

bell hooks calls a space and location in which the memory is expressed against 'anamnesia' or forgetfulness. Black cinema permits us to understand the complexity of expressions of Africanicity, a trans-geographical articulation of 'home', of belonging.

Indeed the very meaning of "home" changes with the experience of decolonization, of radicalization. At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied [fragmented] and seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order to reveal more fully where we are, who we can become, an order that does not demand forgetting (hooks, 1990:148).

Thus, for hooks, unlike a safe place of expression the referential reenactment of home in black practices of expression is a site of radical possibilities. It is in this 'marginal' site of dominant criticisms that one locates specific eternal practice of resistance because those speaking of a marginality want to stay in that place, and do not want to move into the center "because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new world" (hooks, 1990:149-50).

The historical role of black artists has always been to speak from similar marginal locations. For example, Anna Everett<sup>21</sup> did not hesitate to qualify Lester Walton as a "Modernist Mass-Culture Griot," comparing him to African traditional "storytellers" and knowledge-keepers.

Beginning with [Lester Walton's] 1909 essay "Degeneracy of the Moving Pictures," which supplemented his customary review of the latest stage offerings, and extending through his later more developed writings on the cinema, Walton's talking back instantiates the early cinema's "écriture noir," or black writing. For example, Walton wrote of the ongoing battle for the souls of black folk being waged by the cinema and the church; covered the "Change Wrought by Motion Picture Craze"; contemplated the issue of "The Motion Picture Industry and the Negro"; exposed how a "Motion Picture Concern Makes Film Ridiculing Race"; and examined African Americans' push for representation on film censor boards in the Northeast" (Everett, (2000:23).

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<sup>21</sup> "For more than a decade, Lester Walton edited a popular entertainment page for one of America's most influential early-twentieth-century black newspapers, the *New York Age*. Walton's weekly column, "Music and the Stage", included music, theater, and film reviews. During this period, Walton was the *New York Age*'s and (arguably) Harlem's preeminent cultural arbiter. In this capacity, he can also be regarded as among African America's first major mass-culture griots. In effect, Walton's trenchant probings of the primitive American cinema suggest an incipient, albeit intuitive, understanding of such yet-to-be-formulated aspects of the medium as genre, ideology, narratology, spectatorship and reception, apparatus, modes of production, and exhibition practices. The point here is not to advance any *a priori* claims about Walton's ability to envision (and thereby critique) these later theoretical categories; instead, it is to call attention to Walton's prescient recognition of the intertextuality of these various epistemological boundaries and his skilled evocation of them, often in a single essay. His recalcitrant gaze on New York's stage and screen establishments and his prolific literary output on the subject construct a historical and cultural blueprint for tracing African America's early tradition of black spectators' "talking back" to those early filmic narratives that Kay Sloan has dubbed "*The Loud Silents*." (See also Kay Sloan, 1988). Walton's talking back to the white cinema constitutes a necessary act of opposition to the emerging hegemony of the country's nascent mass-culture industries at that historic moment. The significance of Walton's talking back is best summed up in bell hooks's formulation of this act of black self-enunciation: "**Talking back**" meant speaking as an equal to an authority figure. It meant daring to disagree and some times it just meant having an opinion." Indeed, Walton had a plethora of audacious opinions that he dared and was permitted to express in his weekly column. As a matter of course and because of the irrepressible rise in black spectatorship, Walton increasingly devoted his columns to news of the cinema as he became fixated on cinematic objectifications of the black body and other concerns" (Everett, 2000:31-33, emphasis added). On the same issue, see also Lorenzo Thomas, 1992, and 1998.

Walton, like other black artists cited in this dissertation, delineates an expression that shapes the modalities of affective belonging and social struggle acknowledged by black peoples.

In one of the scenes in the film, *Broken Strings* (Bernard B. Ray, 1940), Clarence Muse expresses this affectivity, in addressing a black audience:

- I've struggled year after year to make myself worthy of your appreciation, and I'm never overjoyed to play for my folks. The matter of the fact is that if I play for the people of the world, there's a kinship... that's stretched here [pointing to his heart]... full of my memory, something that only you and I can understand (in *Broken Strings*, 1940)

In addition to Muse's emotional expression, delivered through the structural settings of the media — the aesthetic of this monologue, scene, and even the script — this speech-performance articulates a *Signifying*, an historical constituent figuration inviting the listener to activate his/her affective cords—his/her Africanicity. In other words, in this 1940 screenplay, Muse expressed exactly the 'same thing' as Walton did in 1909.

In 1993, in the film *Malcolm X*, Spike Lee mobilized the same *Signifying*, as a figuration expressing the intrinsic belonging of all black peoples.

- We want freedom by any means necessary. We want justice by any means necessary. We want equality by any means necessary [...] The thing that I would like to impress upon every Afro-American leader is that: no kind of action in this country is ever going to bear fruit unless that action is tied in **with the overall international struggle** [of blacks]. (Excerpt of a Malcolm X speeches in Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*, emphasis added.)

According to Malcolm X, all black "leaders" — here understood as Griots, storytellers, or 'my Grandma' (in fact the "leader" in black English is a *Signifying* of anyone 'talking back' as a non essentialist figure of cultural authority)<sup>22</sup> — must talk about 'the overall international struggle' that black people experience.

Here, a trans-geographical sense of belonging is implemented as if all black people live the same social experience, i.e., 'the international struggle'. Consequently, black leaders, i.e., black filmmakers, reenact the collective struggle of black communities worldwide, according to subjective experiences that Bhabha qualifies as self-expressions. Most of the time, this performative reenactment of historical and everyday life experiences uses practical modalities, such as the *Signifying* articulations of oral tradition as a

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<sup>22</sup> As W. E. B. Du Bois (1903-1970) noted, the preacher can be seen as one the most figure of black diaspora, because he is "a leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist — all these he is, and ever, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number," and he is speaking always for the benefit of the entire community (p.155).



'detonating' factor exposing the social struggle of black peoples. Here, and everywhere an African *Signifying* is implanted to legitimate the means of freedom and eternal social struggle. As hooks (1990:150) argues, "understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people". Marginality is a "space of collective despair that one's creativity, one imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for as lost" (ibid.:151). Similarly, marginality is a site of expression of eternal search for home and freedom.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, adapted to film in 1999, and Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993) articulates this shared, affective feeling of belonging through their *Signifying* leitmotiv, building a linkage between the mother and child and the search for home and freedom. In her analysis of both films, Nancy Otter (1999)<sup>23</sup> rightly argues that this re-actualization of memory, or collective historical heritage, illustrates a dynamic

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<sup>23</sup> Nancy Otter (1999), "Sankofa vs. Beloved" in *The African Diaspora* (Gloria Emeagwali, ed.) AFRICA UPDATE, Vol. VI, No. 4, Central Connecticut State University (online issue).

force that activates the knowledge of the ground on which we walk today.

In *Sankofa*, Mona (Oyafunmike Ogunlano) works on the plantation. She loves and admires Nunu (Alexandra Duah), an African woman and Shango (Mutabaruka), a West Indian man. The plot is simple but articulates a powerful African *Signifying*. In the Akan language, Sankofa means one who must return to the past in order to move forward.<sup>24</sup> In the film, Mona, a contemporary black-American model, travels to Cape Coast Castle in Ghana to have a series of photos taken at this exotic site, one of the largest slave-trading forts in the early 1500s. However, Mona's travel becomes a 'U-turn' to her past. She is captured by Europeans and sold as a commodity. She protests and cries, arguing that she is not an African, but an American; however, her dark skin betrays her: "*Wait a minute, you're making a mistake. Stop! I'm not an African. Don't you recognize me? I'm Mona; I'm an American!*" (Mona, in *Sankofa*).

In this narrative, Mona becomes an in-house slave serving on a Louisiana plantation. There, she is given

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<sup>24</sup> Pamela Woolford, "Filming Slavery: A conversation with Haile Gerima," in *Transition* (1994:pp.90-104).

the name of Shola, repeatedly abused by her master, and whipped by the priest for her "heathen" customs. She meets Nunu, the African female working in the plantation field, and Shango, the West Indian who becomes her lover. For Nunu, this causes a direct conflict with her son, a mulatto benefiting from the hierarchic color's system of slavery, because light-skinned blacks were likely to be in command over dark-skinned blacks.

This practical example portrayed in *Sankofa*, outlines the discourse of skin pigmentation as a racialized structure of power, based on the hierarchical social status of identity-race. In addition, this hierarchical structure of caste or human's pigmentation (see *Figure III: Race and Racial Sub-categories*), as seen in *Sankofa*, allows us to understand that the social concept of skin pigmentation is more than a categorization of racial identity. It specifically illustrates the conceptualized relation of power among members of the same or mixed racial group. Therefore, this hierarchy is not a given sign, but rather a social construct, or a social convention of representation. This explains why Mona was taken as a slave, despite her claim

to 'BE' the cultural and national subject of a given national and cultural identity — an American.

In the film *Sankofa*, the contextual experience of slavery manifests the fragmented roots of the characters of Shola, Nunu, and Shango. Their search for reconnection to their motherland, Africa, provides the concrete ground for the articulation of black identity in this performative slave narrative, is here the Signifying of black rhizomic identity, or Africanicity.

It may be useful to recall here Gerima's (1984) definition of his role as filmmaker. The "filmmaker," he argues, "is a story teller, nothing more, nothing less [...] one who creates the vital elements [...] and plays a role in linking not only the historical but the global human experience."<sup>25</sup>

In *Sankofa*, Nunu, the African, carries fragmented stories, mystic powers, and rituals from her memories. Shango, the West Indian, is a traditional doctor, and Shola searches for freedom. This triangular articulation between fragmented practices (the connection to African roots, experience of enslavement, and the search for freedom) shows the intermedial formation of a specific

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<sup>25</sup> Gerima (1985), quoted by Murashige, 1997:183

identity formation, of Africanity. In addition, the relationship between Shola, the slave, and Mona, allows us to identify an intermediate conjuncture 'actualizing' this new conjunctural expression of black identity and its connection to a 'virtual' historicity. For example, Shango and Nunu guide Mona/Shola to the free slaves living in the hills, the Maroons, whose lives are focused on the performance of African traditions in the Americas. Here, rather than remaining ensconced in the culture of the plantation, as a commodity belonging to her master, Mona/Shola takes the opportunity to learn about her roots and history. And she actively constructs this memory within her present everyday life practices.

This conjunction of memory, everyday life practices, and performative expressions of self-representation constitutes the space within which the trans-geographical expressions of Africanicity emerge as a 'becoming' ground for investigation.<sup>26</sup> Or as hooks has put it earlier: a

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<sup>26</sup> In the concept of becoming, the past and the future do not exist, as well as history. In the process of becoming one must, anyway, 'involuer' [de-involution and de-evolution]; it is not to regress, nor to progress. Becoming is to become more and more sober [moderate, well-balanced], and more and more simple; becoming more and more an emptied field [desert] and by that heavily populated at this same time [peuplé](Deleuze, 1996:37) "Dans le devenir, il n'y a pas de passé ni d'avenir, ni même le présent, il n'y a pas d'histoire. Dans le devenir, il s'agit plutôt d'involuer; ce n'est ni regresser, ni progresser. Devenir, c'est devenir plus sobre, de plus en plus simple, devenir de plus en plus désert, et par là même peuplé."

home that 'is nowhere' but 'which enables and promotes varied everchanging perspectives and through which 'one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference'.

In the film *Sankofa*, Africa remains not only the motherland of black *rhizomic* roots; it is also the conjunctural basis exposing "the power of the mother/child connection, and the horror and grief that ensue when that connection is severed or corrupted" (Otter, 1999). In *Sankofa*, Gerimas emphasizes the articulation of this universal dyad. This articulation calls black people to connect similarly not only literally to their mothers, but also to the *Signifying* of their Mother Africa.

Earlier in this chapter, the analysis of Raoul Peck's *Lumumba: Death of the Prophet*, allowed us to articulate the same figuration. There, the mother was the voice carrying the 'truth' or the regularity of history and events occurring around the death of Patrice Lumumba. In *Sankofa*, she is the '*eye of the cyclone*', the in-betweenness inter-mediating past and the current experiences, through which the entire *Signifying* system of black identity is transmitted. The figuration of

mother, motherland, and Africa in black cinema, thus is the ground of "becoming" through which the articulation of Africanicity becomes intelligible.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1999)<sup>27</sup>, directed by Jonathan Demme, also addresses the issue of slavery, the mother/child connection, and the search for freedom. As in *Sankofa*, *Beloved* illustrates how historical experience constantly impacts our present lives, as an embodied memory influencing one's everyday life practice. The film is set in the post-Civil War, Ohio countryside circa 1873. A freed Kentucky slave, Sethe, is disturbed by memories of her former life in slavery. Sethe lives with an old mother-in-law (Baby Suggs), and three children (Denver, Buglar, and Howard), in the house numbered "124," a number that metaphorically reveals the logical absence of the number three. But to illustrate this absence, the narrative must link the past to the present.

In her past, Sethe endured constant physical abuse. She gave birth to a daughter, Beloved, probably as the result of being raped by a schoolteacher on the Kentucky "Sweet Home" farm where Sethe was married to a black man,

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<sup>27</sup> *Beloved*, starring Oprah Winfrey (Sethe), Danny Glover (Paul D. Garner), Thandie Newton (Beloved), and Kimberly Elise (Denver) adapted from Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winning novel directed by Jonathan Demme (the director of *Silence of the Lambs*, and *Philadelphia*).

Halle Suggs.<sup>28</sup> Eighteen years later, the memory of this abuse continues to haunt her, because she was forced to abandon Beloved, rather than allow her to "become" enslaved. The house number "124" in Ohio illustrates Sethe's missing third child, Beloved, whom she decided to sacrifice. However, this absence is at the same time a presence, because the ghost of Beloved never left the family members, moving with them from Kentucky to the house in Ohio. Here, this absence/presence manifests a temporal overlapping between the past and the present, between yesterday and today, between history and everyday life, resulting in a dialectic absence, dichotomy, or dialogic structure.

Both the film and the novel display this articulation by showing the enslaved Sethe's 'determination' (another figuration of the mother) to kill her own children rather than see them returned to

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<sup>28</sup> It might also be useful to note that this novel is based on an actual occurrence that Morrison discovered in a newspaper clipping about an escaped slave women who killed her children so they would not have to experience the horrors of slavery. The freed slave, Margaret Garner, was on the verge of being caught by her master and brought back into slavery, along with her four children. This put her into a crazy rage in which she killed one of her babies. Morrison develops this into an enigmatic story. In other words, Morrison puts into the backdrop of slavery a cast of characters that are from her own imaginative subjectivity, managing to give the blacks that actually experienced slavery personalized voices transcending time. Particularly, this performance, in the novel and its cinematic adaptation, installs affective connection, bringing to life the events of the past and educating the minds of a modern-day audience.



enslavement. However, instead of being a dialectical historiography, Sethe's eighteen-years-old memory continues to be 'reflected' in her everyday life practices. The film displays this narrative through three interesting articulations: the experience of slavery itself, its historical background, and the ways in which that experience allows us to see its relation today with silent suffering. In this way the past and the present are made to coexist, thermodynamically. This articulation of thermodynamic temporal and spatial coexistence is similar to the process of 'becoming' suggested by Deleuze, 1996:37.

Baby Suggs, the children's grandmother and Sethe's mother-in-law, on her deathbed, carries this same in-temporal memory each time she opens her eyes. As a Griot, she passes her memories on to Denver, the only child then living with the family, because Buglar and Howard (the brothers) had left the house, frightened by Beloved's ghost in 124. From Baby Suggs, whose absent son bought her freedom with the money he earned during five years of hard working, Denver learns that 'self-dignity', 'determination', and the ability of 'self-representation'

are the most precious things for blacks, and that their absence is the deepest regret a black man can experience.

This 'picture' of Baby Suggs's memory allows us to articulate its continuity in the representation of Sethe's everyday life experience. Sethe combines her experiences at Sweet Home with similar (a sameness) violent episodes experienced by Baby Suggs of being brutalized and raped. These are only some of the ways Sethe's body and soul have impregnated the memory and life of her mother-in-law.<sup>29</sup> The secret relationship between Sethe and Beloved, and particularly Beloved's quest for appearance (the ghost constantly disposed to be part of the actualized world at 124) parallels the desire of the black peoples worldwide to reconnect to their mother and the intrinsic beauty of their motherland.

This relationship permits us to see precious affective connections between distinctive subjectivities, such as those vocalized in the poetical expressions of *Négritude* and the *New Negro* movements. In the film *Beloved*, this affective connection to the motherland is

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<sup>29</sup> In *Sankofa*, the same practices of passing memories are also articulated in the passage in which Shola received the Sankofa bird from Shango. Here she says: - *Shango trusted me for the first time. He gave me this handmade bird that he had carved out of wood. He called it a Sankofa bird and he put it around my neck. Shango said the Sankofa was passed on to him by his Papa. But I tell you whatever that bird was all about after he put that on my neck, I became a rebel...* (Excerpt of *Sankofa*)

evoked by strong images of the experience of enslavement and the true *labyrinthic* search for home that the character of Beloved implies. Her family isolation and antipathy have contaminated the collective memory as well as individuated fragments of collective past, e.g. Sethe's abandonment of her child. Beloved looks after her homeland to purge her family's will, so that they all truly become free. This is also where the imaginative signification of the authors, Morrison for the novel and Demme for the film, allows them to perform the same social role as the black Griots of the present day.

Transcending the conceptual obstacle of slavery, of which neither Morrison nor Demme have experienced, this memory was positioned within a contemporary conjunctural location, allowing them to move the historical experience to the arena of current events. This simultaneous articulation of multiple temporalities in a particular venue of expression (or according to Deleuze, the emergence of coexisting temporalities to become a non-temporal process), manifests as "an eternity of self-generating becoming" (Bhabha 1990a:298), or "a chronic process" building the relationship between a collective past and the present (Schlesinger (1991:171). Here, we

are totally submerged within intermedial locations of expression and practice, in which temporal and spatial concepts become new forms of conjunctural production.

In *The Site of Memory* (1995), Morrison argues that memories and recollections are not sufficient to provide total access to the "unwritten" and voiceless struggles of black peoples. One must instead articulate, conjuncturally, the imaginary and imaginative significations to fill in the gaps and enrich the narrative with recognized details. This conjunction of imaginary and imaginative practices produces the conditions of expression of intermediality, thus an articulation impacting black affective consciousness. The articulation of these affective expressions, as in the concept of metalanguage, is enacted both before and after the production of the knowledge of events.<sup>30</sup>

As in Gerima's *Sankofa*, the same conjuncture of the past with the present in *Beloved* is driven by the affective love among the members of the community.

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<sup>30</sup> Generally, the concept of metalanguage signifies an articulation occurring 'with' or 'after' denoted significations. The narrative process of self-referentiality, i.e., a film showing its own making procedures is also called metalanguage. Metalanguage is further the vertical diacritical discourse occurring (in)between (with or after) denoted narrative structures. For example, 'in-between' the denoted level of 124 in *Beloved*, I have decoded specific diacritical Signifying(s) those of absence/presence, and the relationship between mother/child, as well as *Beloved's* search for appearance.

Through *Beloved's* mystical absence/presence in the narrative, her expression of 'tough love' is an oxymoron figuration, forcefully making the connections between everyone in the family. To free oneself from amnesia is painful, not only for the subject, or the body experiencing this loss of reference, but for those communities witnessing the experience. To free is not to become, but rather to expose the becoming ground of the process of freedom.

My characters are basically human, engaged in something universal. Something human. Wanting to be free. Wanting to be free is a human notion. They are not freed by somebody else, and they don't get the idea inserted into them by Lincoln or a Quaker saying, "You are a slave and you need to be free." They are all like any human being would be in that situation trying to be free. (Haile Gerima, in the *Sacramento Bee*, 31 March 95).

Here the notions of resilience and affectivity 'become' interconnected as a conjunctural articulation producing new expressions. This a-logical articulation cannot be culturally or nationally expressed. It is rather, a painful memory (affective structures of feeling), a trans-geographical belief, or ideation, as well as a non-semantic structure of expression. In *Beloved*, the resilience is performed as a mystical, frightening force, a ghost, and then a visual "becoming" of *Beloved*, an apparition or revelation of the baby Sethe killed to

avoid her being captured and put into slavery. *Beloved* becomes a ghostly body, which gradually dominates Sethe's every moment, and that of her family, in driving away Sethe's husband (Halle), and surviving sons (Buglar and Howard), controlling her thoughts and gestures. Sethe's virtual memories and her actual everyday life experiences 'coalesce' in this intermedial space of expression.

*In Temporality and the Culture of Intervention*, Silvestra Mariniello argues that "when film resists the literary model and explores its own materiality, a different temporality is produced in the images, a temporality that challenges the linearity of Western historiography and the dialectic principle founding it" (Mariniello, 1995:134). This is exemplified in both *Sankofa* and *Beloved*. In fact, we cannot talk about a different temporality, but rather an inter-mediated becoming of times and places. The relationship with the past is always embodied in everyday life practices, as if both temporalities and spatialities are "most of all, the simultaneity, the 'all-at-onceness'" proposed by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore.<sup>31</sup> The power and specificity of

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted by Mariniello, 1995, p.135.

cinema rests in this intermediality, as a terrain within which the categories of time and geography disappear, and allows us to articulate a non-linear connection positing the interdependence of the absent (past) and the actual (present) that are thus legitimized by the medium of cinema.

I contend that there is no 'changing same' in the performative expression of black identity illustrated in both films. Rather I argue that virtualized memories (however, fragmented) are actualized through imaginary and imaginative narratives that reveal, through their conjunctural articulation of Africanicity, a new space of expression, thanks to cinematic techniques. Before we discuss the Deleuzian process of "crystallization" between actuality and virtuality, let us stay in the Americas, in Cuba and Brazil, lands of deportation/migration of other important Diasporic settlements of black people.

In Cuba, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's film *Guantanamera* (1995) resituates Afrocuban ties with Africa using Yoruba mythology to critique, spirituality, the nation and culture in contemporary Cuba.

Alea's cross-cultural adaptation of Yoruba mythology ironically represents Afro-Cuban religion on both a local and global scale: the film medium allows for its (re)presentation in multiple cultural contexts. The reinterpretation of Yoruba mythology as Cuban political commentary challenges understandings of nation and cultural agency vis-à-vis African traditions (Solimar Otero (1999:124-25)).

The reenactment of Yoruba mythology through the figure of Ikú, an Orixha<sup>32</sup> of Voodoo, foreshadows the contributions and participation of African practices in the formation of an Afrocuban identity. Such diacritical *Signifying(s)* of orality allowed Alea to criticize Cuban political systems. As a traditional Griot, Alea's *Guantanamera* mobilizes virtualized *Signifying(s)* of the oral tradition to talk about the everyday life experience of Afro-Cubans.

The use of Ikú reaches a high point when the narrative stops to recite a Yoruba myth explaining the origin of Ikú from death in the world. The myth is told in Spanish, against the backdrop of Yoruba chanting, the sound of rain and images of the island. This linguistic, cultural, and religious layering highlights how Yoruba epistemology is being adapted to offer an Afrocuban understanding and critique of Cuban nationhood. Alea drives the point closer to home

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<sup>32</sup> Orixhas (pronounced Orisha) are deities of traditional West African religion. In Yoruba, these deities imply the general beliefs that their divinities have the attributes the Supreme Being, Olodumare, and that they are in consequence His offspring. According to Yoruba theology, they were brought forth to serve as messengers of the theocratic government of the universe. They are many, and their number varies between 201, 401, 600, and 1,700. They have their shrines, temples, devotees, priests and priestesses, and they are offered worship and receive day-to-day sacrifices. Technically they are intermediaries between God and man, the same as the Griot, a storyteller or my Grandma are intermediaries between the past and the present. For extended research on these deities see: P. A. Dopamu (1988), Modupe Oduyoye (1983), E. Bolaji Idowu (1962), and Mircea Eliade (1987).



by disrupting the narrative in order to present this interlayered text. (Otero, 1999:125)

The same reenactments of the diacritical *Signifying* of African practices of expression can be found in black Brazilian cinema. Carlos Diegues's *Quilombo* (1984) is based on a historic community of the same name in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Brazil. Runaway slaves from the northeast Canavieiras plantations organized a free republic, the Quilombo of the Palmares, which existed for more than 70 years until its destruction in 1695. The film depicts the African beliefs and 'tactical' practices of the 'marronage' of these freed slaves in guarding themselves against repeated attempts by the Portuguese Empire and the Catholic Church to destroy the group's ritualized practices.

The film *Quilombo* is more than a theatrical presentation of African folklore; it is an actual visual repository of African practices of 'marronage' reenacted in Brazilian society, such as the Candomble,<sup>33</sup> as well as an active demonstration of Afro-Brazilian expressions of

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<sup>33</sup> The Candomble is the name given to the cult of the Orixas. It refers mainly to the religion of the Yoruba-speaking peoples brought from Nigeria, but also encompasses the variations of other cultural groups such as the Angola-Congo. It has played a revolutionary role in Brazil, where the Catholic Church has for centuries maintained a position of power as the official state religion. Attacked by Catholic priests, persecuted by the police, and as shown in *Quilombo* by the army of the King, the Candomble temple – *terreiros* – had to be hidden in woods, hillsides, and all sorts of places of difficult access and visibility for the enemies. The religion, however, remains the deepest source from which flows the inspiration and the basic lines of Black creativity (see A. Do Nascimento (1978).

Africanicity. For example, many scenes of the film reveal the artistic influence of the Cadomble, whose practices played an important part in Afro-Brazilian self-affirmation. *Quilombo*, then, is a visual enactment of the articulation of 'marronage'.

The film is set in the year 1630, in the northern regions of the Santa Francisco River in Alagoas, Brazil. The free state of Quilombo comprises an area of approximately 27,000 square kilometers, from Alagoas to the neighboring lands of Santa Augusto in Pernambuco, a region of difficult access. This land contained numerous palm-trees, which is why it was named Quilombo de Palmares. The film's establishing shot shows a dark mountain against the background of a red sky. Over this image, a scrolling text of the story of Quilombo is accompanied by the sound of Roberto Gill's guitar and voice.

Within *Quilombo*, we can find the same articulations of time, a memory, and the child's quest for the mother and motherland, as those developed in *Sankofa* and *Beloved*. The leader and designated chief, Ganga Zumba (Antonio Pompeo), recalls the contemporary activist speeches of Malcolm X or Lumumba: — "*We are not slaves*

*and will never be again;*"<sup>34</sup> and the poetical expressions of Négritude or the New Negro movements: — "*I never heard anyone say 'My piece of wind', or 'My piece of cloud'. What's the world's is the world's; as the land is no one's; what it produces belongs to all.*"<sup>35</sup>

In addition to this discursive similarity between Ganga Zumba's speeches and those of contemporary black activist movements, the film *Quilombo* suggests the importance of the notion of 'destiny' as a new articulation both of black people's attitudes of resilience and expressions of affectivity. The leitmotiv of this articulation is that, before becoming the chief of the runaway slaves, Ganga Zumba needs to make peace with the slave-masters, but his destiny prevents it, as if this destiny is against any personal subjective choice. Accompanied by a white man while visiting Acotirene (the *Old Lady*, a traditional doctor, and memory keeper of the Maroons), the first question Ganga Zumba must answer is: — "*Why did you bring a foreigner to Palmares?*" "*We're all foreigners in this land [he argues], and in a land where all are foreign, what's a*

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<sup>34</sup> In the first sequence showing the negotiation between colonialists and the members of Quilombo de Palmares.

<sup>35</sup> In the scene in which a man claims his belongings (the basket of corn) against two women.

foreigner?" By the end of this dialogue he is chosen as leader and named Ganga Zumba. — "...this is the way of the young Xango speaks: You're are the chosen one; you're Ganga Zumba," concluded Acotirene. While this destiny is framed as frightening, to carry the name of Ganga Zumba is the ultimate responsibility a young man can hold.

In *Quilombo*, the figure of Ganga Zumba adopting his name shows blacks "as active agents who take their destiny into their own hands" (Robert Stam, 1995:298). Many other Brazilian films<sup>36</sup> display similar orientations, and articulate the "Fanonian ode to Black liberation, here taken as a metaphor and inspiration for the broad contemporary struggle against neo-colonialism" (ibid.).

I contend that this reading of *Quilombo*, which discusses political and poetical positions similar to those in the *Négritude* and *New Negro* movements, and as expounded by early black activists, is more than figuration of resemblance. In fact, it manifests a

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<sup>36</sup> Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Rio Zona Norte* (1957) and *Amuleto de Ogun* (1975) both deal with issues of blackness and everyday life practices such as African religion and Samba. Anselmo Duarte's *Pagador de Promessa* (*The Given World*, 1962), is critical view of the practice of Candomblé displaying at the same time the larger struggle of this African religion and Catholicism. Carlos Dieges's *Ganga Zumba*, another historical revision of the role played by this personage in Brazilian life. Umberto Dias's *O Anjo Negro* (*The Black Angel*, 1992), is an homage to the Candomblé. Walter Lima Jr. *Chico Rei* (1982) is a historical recounting of a African King (Francisco, a named given by Portuguese colonialists) sold as slave along with his entire family. And many other titles such as *Arte Sacra Negra* (1978, Part I), *Ylê Xoroquê* (1981), *A Força de Xango* (1979) all dealing with Afro-Brazilian expressions of identity.

"sameness," the figuration of regularity of a concept revealing more than similar articulations of feeling and resilience, despite the difference in historical context, time and space. This regularity of practices of expression corroborates Amadou H. Bâ's conceptualization of the functions of oral practices of expression. For Bâ, in oral performances, the form can change, but the content (the 'body') remains unaltered because it is constantly under the inherited subjugation of ideational *Doxa* (Bâ, 1971:25).<sup>37</sup>

African filmmakers and artists commonly use the same discursive articulation to express their Africanicity. As I was writing this chapter, on March 24, 2002, the 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Academy Awards competition was taking place, just an hour away from my temporary American residence in California. The day before, I was admiring Hattie McDaniel in the 1939 Victor Fleming picture, *Gone with the Wind*. McDaniel was known as the Hollywood's eternal

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<sup>37</sup> "Dans les civilisations orales, la parole engage l'homme, la parole EST l'homme. D'ou le respect profonds des récits traditionnels légués par le passé, dont il est permis d'embellir la forme ou la tournure poétique, mais dont la trame reste immuable à travers les siècles, véhiculée par une mémoire prodigieuse qui est la caractéristique même des peuples à tradition orale. [...] Dans les civilisations moderne, le papier s'est substitué à la parole. C'est lui qui engage l'homme. Mais peut-on dire en toute certitude, dans ces conditions, que la source écrite est plus digne de confiance que la source orale, constamment contrôlée par le milieu traditionnel?" (Bâ, 1971:25). Thus, black oral practices of expression are similar to what Michel de Certeau identifies as the articulation of 'repetition' of the same oral culinary recipes that remain unaltered, such as "*Authentic Family Cooking*" books, because they "make up a kind of minimalist text, through their internal economy, their conciseness, and their minor degree of equivocation, aside from technical terms..." (de Certeau, 1998:216).

black housekeeper, lady of the house, and nanny of many narratives. Nevertheless, she was the first black woman to ever be awarded an Oscar. This is what she said while receiving her award:

*Academic and Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, fellow members of the Motion Picture Industry and their Honored guests, this is one of the happiest moments in my life. And I want to thank each one of you... for selecting me for one of the awards... It makes me feel very humble. And I want you to know that anything I can do for the future, I sincerely hope to be a credit for my race and to the Motion Picture Industry, my heart is too full, to let you know what I feel.*  
...<sup>38</sup>

As I listened to Halle Berry's speech for being awarded the 2002 Oscar for Best Actress (an actress who will stand forever as the one through which Hollywood's doors have definitely opened) it seems that my study of black practices of expression through film's narrative and objects of cinema such as artist's speeches, took on an even stronger epistemological value. Let us listen to Berry:

*I'm sorry... This moment is so much bigger than me. This moment is for Dorothy Dandridge, Lena Horne, Diahann Carroll. It's for women who stand beside me, Jada Pinkett, Angela Bassett, Vivica Fox, and the nameless, faceless women of color now stand a chance tonight because the doors have been opened. I thank the Academy for choosing me to be the vessel...<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> Hattie McDaniel is the first black female to win the Best Actress in A Supporting Role Oscar in 1939's "*Gone with the Wind*."

<sup>39</sup> In 2002, Halle Berry was the first black woman to win the Best Actress Oscar with "*Monster's Ball*."

The advanced concepts of 'hybridity' and 'authenticity' become pure fantasy here. Here, black artist's expressions have not 'changed' despite drastic transformations of the context and platforms in which they perform. They enact a regulatory articulation between the struggle of the past and the opportunity of the present. They constantly 'reenact' their historical experience in their everyday life practices. Thus, the affective articulation in Berry's and McDaniel's speeches helps us questioning culture studies' discourses of unavoidable hybridity, and Afrocentrism's search of authenticity.

The 33-year-old Berry, almost word for word, 'reenacts' the speech of McDaniel, 63-years earlier. This might be a coincidence, however, both women articulate a *sameness* of affective feelings as a discursive regularity.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> This two other examples: "I accept this award in **memory** of all the African American actors who went **before** me in the **difficult** years and on whose shoulders I was privileged to stand to see where I might go..." said Sydney Poitier upon receiving an Oscar at the same 2002 Academy Awards ceremony (Sidney Poitier was the first black actor to receive in 1963 the Best Actor Oscar for his performance in *Lilies of the Field*. In 2002, the Academy Award and Motion Picture Industry honored him for his five-decade career). "For 40 years, I've been chasing Sidney," said Denzel Washington, "and what do they do? They give it to him in the same night (smile). I'll always be following him, there is nothing I'd rather do." (Denzel Washington, 2002, Academic Award Winner, for his performance in *Training Day*, became the first black actor to win the Best Actor Oscar since Sidney Poitier in 1963).

This close connection and *continuity* of fragments of historical experience with expressions of everyday life shows the ways in which some groups of people articulate or constantly reenact common practices of identity. As Ella Shohat has pointed out, in quoting Henry L. Gates Jr. (1991) and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1986), a trans-geographical notion of such practice of Africanicity speaks: "today in a theoretical context where the notion of a coherent subject identity, let alone a community identity, is endlessly fragmented and de-centered, even epistemologically suspect" (Shohat, 1995:174). It is thus understandable that most practices of expression in black films posit virtualized memories actualized through imaginary and imaginative experiences of subject identity, resisting respectively the deterministic categories of the authentic political identity and the hybridized cultural identity.

Through this contextualism of black cinema, it has become clear that black peoples articulate, again and again, the same regularity of affectivity in reenacting their historical experience of colonialism, slavery, economic exploitation, and racism. The content of their discourses enables us to underline the symptom of their



system of *Signifying* regularity, a sort of cache-cache, *marronage*, rendering it a treasure for academic research. Therefore, how can one talk about the '*ruptures*' between specific history and modernity, or between the past and present, when there is evidence of an ideological continuum of specific expressions that tactically reenacts the same figuration of the 'original'? How can one advance the idea of unavoidable hybridity, if conceptually the 'commentary' as suggested Foucault (1971) is always part of the original, particularly in relation to the practices of expression of identity?

Yet, is such commentary authentic? In the introduction to this study, I argued that those in favor of authenticity have established hierarchical relations of race, limiting the expressions of blacks to dialectical formation, empowering the purity of the black race. In other words, in Afrocentrist discourses, the purity of the black race suggests the 'impurity' of a differentiated Otherness, obviously the white. But if we admit that the black race is already a hybridized biological category, i.e., black-Indian, black-American, black-Caribbean, black-Zulu, black-Bantu, black-Tsutsi, black-Hutu, black-so-and-so, then the notion of purity is

purely mythological. And from such a perspective, the conjecture of authenticity remains irrelevant in its social constructs or projections, because it manufactures a classical site of purity difficult to sustain in modern times.

By introducing the concept of sameness in fragmented practices of expression in black cinema, we have illuminated the ways that everyday life practices of blacks in many parts of the world, are exposed through the medium of cinema. Africanicity is a practice of expression, a state of mind. Africanicity is a practice of 'difference' in manner that it expresses a non-epistemological articulation of political diversity. Rather it claims a 'differentiated-self' that "is constituted out of and by difference, and remains contradictory, and that [the practice of] cultural forms are similarly in that way, never whole, never fully closed or 'sutured'" (Hall, 1986:145).

My analysis has followed the progressive political description suggested by Grossberg (1998:78) to be re-imagined beyond local fetishism and micropolitical

celebration of cultural studies. Consequently, I have made a cogent case for viewing black practices of identity in the context of what I define as an 'impregnated experience' that goes beyond Africa and the limited boundaries of nation-states. In other words, the fragmented experiences of blackness that exists among black communities in the world contributes to the wider articulation of a trans-geographic identity. This identity transcends the contingent questions concerning authentic, cultural, and political identity, which are tempo-spatially and socially fixed in given geo-political spaces. As Lawrence Grossberg argued:

theories of difference [particularly in relation to mass media texts] emphasize the multiplicity and disconctedness within and between text and audiences. By erasing the identity of the terms of the relationship, the relationship itself becomes impossible or at least necessarily absent.

[...]

Such theories of difference have not abandoned the structure of communication model. The critic can only join into the endless and seemingly random movement of fragments, deconstructing any and every claim for stability, unity and necessity, but he or she can never succeed [because] in the end, "difference" not only negates the possibility of any guarantee, it reestablishes its own guarantees... (Grossberg, 1997:40).

The Afro-Cuban and Brazilian expressions of Africanicity, and especially the examples of the figuration of 'marronage' in *Quilombo* and *Guatanamera* allowed us to

identify specific articulations of black practices of identity. These articulations function through their trans-geographic expressions of identity, which produce conjunctural linkage or connectedness, unlike a unifying diversity of an illusive or abstractive identity.

Many other motion pictures dealing with the question of Africanicity articulate this trans-geographical Signifying conjuncture constantly renewing the trans-location of home. I suggested that the same practice of expressions can be found in the films *Beloved* and *Sankofa*, and that they can allow us to produce the knowledge, or the articulation behind these practices of identity as an onto-theological expression of love.

I contend that such expressions of identity calls upon religious re-enactment of knowledge and practice that binds or articulate them together. Yet, it is more than a belief that this onto-theological articulation of love amongst blacks provides insights into the singularity of the notion of Africanicity as an identity based on the practices of expression.

In *Dialogues* (1996), Gilles Deleuze suggested that crystallization between actuality and virtuality is an "individuation" of distinctive practices of

multiplicities. The 'multiplicities' of sites are intimately connected — or getting close to each other up to the level of immanence — in creating the coalescence between their distinctive 'categories', actuality and virtuality. However, the relationship between actuality and virtuality constitutes an oscillating trajectory containing, at the same time, specific 'virtual' and 'actual' units, which become the "crystal."

Deleuze illustrates the formation of this crystal through the metaphor of marriage subverting these categories and their intrinsic potential subjectivity. In other words, the 'destiny' of the actual is to become virtual, at the same time as the virtual becomes actual. It is, according to Deleuze, "*a double capture*," not unlike the sexual relationship between a bee and an orchid. Both coexist, at the same time. It is not something that will be inside something else, — hybridization — where an exchange absolutely takes place, it is simply something (in)between and out of the in-between, at the same time.

Becoming, is neither to imitate, nor to do like, nor to follow a model of justice or truth, howsoever. There is not an original term where we initiate our journey nor one where we end up or should end up. Nor are there two concepts that interchange. The question "what are you becoming?" is particularly stupid. Thus as

someone becomes, what he becomes changes as much as he does. Becoming is not a phenomenon of imitation nor of assimilation, but rather of a double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of wedding of two reigns. The weddings are always against nature. The weddings are the contrary of a couple. [...] There is no binary machine anymore: questions-answers, male-female, man-animal etc... It could be this, an interview, there mere track of a becoming. The bee and the orchid give the example. The orchid seems to cast an image of the bee, but there is in fact a bee-orchid becoming, an orchid-bee becoming, a double capture because what each of them become is less a changing of the one who is becoming. The bee becomes part of the genital organism of the orchid, at the same time as the orchid becomes a sexual organism for the bee. A same and only one becoming, or as Rémy Chauvin states, an "a-parallel evolution of two beings that do not have anything to do with each other." There are the human ways of becoming-animal which does not consist in imitating the dog or the cat since man and animal only meet on the path of a common deterritorialization, altogether dissymmetrical. It's like Mozart's birds: there is a becoming bird in this music, but taken into a becoming music for the bird, both forming a unique becoming, one piece, an a-parallel evolution, by no means an exchange, but a "confidence without potential interlocutor" as indicated by a Mozart commentator- in short an interview" (Deleuze, 1996:8-9, my translation).

This concept of "becoming-crystal," or crystallization has been, however, translated as a formation of hybridity, or unavoidably 'changing same," a "mediation" between distinctive phenomena. But a close reading of Deleuze's analysis illustrates a figuration positing the crystal as a conjunctural space within which figures of mediation become possible. The crystal is not a space of mediation, within which, *a priori*, specific units formulate their decoding potentiality of hybridity. The

question is, in fact, elsewhere; because a crystal is rather a space of 'constellation' — a meeting-point of becoming of differentiated weddings in Deleuze's sense — in which figurations of mediation or hybridity become possible. The crystal is not a 'frozen moment' through which the formation of hybridity, i.e., cultural hybridity, becomes decodable as forms of identity.

As Lawrence Grossberg suggests, instead of focussing solely in the logic of mediation as a non-racial, non-power, and non-ideological relation in cultural production, one must also look at the practices of expression "at the various levels of its articulation as productivity or meaningfulness, and hence that such expressivity is neither distinctly human nor mediating (Grossberg, (1998b:76). In welcoming new analytical conjecture attempting to map the complex spaces of people, discourse, [and] social practice, [...] what Mikko Lehtonen has called "intermediality," Grossberg concludes that the central question of cultural studies is to understand the ways in which "inequality, injustice, exploitation, etc.," are articulated "in all their complexity" (1998a). That reasserts Grossberg's notion of the "mattering map" as "a socially determined structure

of affect which defines the things that do and can matter to those living within the map" (Grossberg, 1992:398). In the case at hand, a chain of effects circulates between current practices of expression in black cinema, and historical articulations of trans-geographical community.<sup>41</sup>

I agree with Grossberg who suggests that theoretical frameworks permitting us, for example, to circumscribe the intersection of cultural practices need, also, to be addressed "outside of the limits of our own theoretical and political positions" (Grossberg, 1998b:78). Therefore, I want to emphasize that the notion of 'reenactment' — in its denotation of 'view from memory, i.e., re-enactment of a preexisting activity, recollection, or reproduction — leads us to reconsider the communicational concept of affectivity, particularly with regard to the constantly re-actualized memory of black peoples through their creative practices.

By affectivity, I do not mean a biological formulation; rather it is the epistemological articulation of a crystallized ground of expression. This

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<sup>41</sup> That is, also, to admit that the fragmentation attached to modernity legitimates the ability to locate effects of specific expression of identity. Modernity, therefore, is not a negation of specific potentiality, but rather a space of multiple effects and conditions of possibilities.



is similar to what Stuart Hall (1990:11-4) calls the *inferential* articulation of histories connected to ideologies, (i.e., enslavement, colonialism and imperialism) through which virtuality (memory) and actuality (expression) are revealed. It is as if a leaving body 'becomes' the conduit of an historical sign(ification), as we saw in the film *Beloved*, or in the *Making-of of Roots*, when Haley recounts the way in which he was 'affected' by the story of an un-known old man.

This notion of affectivity works as an embodied historical symptom, which becomes revealed when a body finds a ground for diffusion. By analyzing black cinema in this process, I create the conditions for the discovering of the crystallization of virtualized memory and actualized practices of expression. Here, crystallization is not the equivalent of hybridity, but rather a discursive terrain (a terrain in which figures of mediation become possible) exposing ideological expressions.

Black articulations of the *Signifying* regularity of their identities are virtuality actualized in the practices of expression in black cinema. This actualized practice of expression "becomes" an exposition of their

specific expression of identity, a "parallel evolution" of their Africanicity. In other words, black cinema is a space (the crystal) within which fragmented expressions of identity became an event for analysis. Black cinema does not search for the origin of black identity; it is not a phenomenon of imitation nor of assimilation, but rather, a double capture of parallel evolutions of black peoples, expressing diverse rhizomic experiences (Deleuze, 1996:8). Therefore, black cinema is a conjunctural space of practices within which figurations of rhizomic black expressions "become" the practice of expression of their identity, Africanicity.

In his analysis of *African Writing Systems*, Ayele Bekerie (1999) insisted that the onto-theology of language, for example, taken aside from its simply cultural, linguistic and technological articulations, provides complex and rich sources of human intellectual activities, such as the links of culturally and nationally distinctive groups of people.<sup>42</sup> For example, the language is an articulation of life that can be based on a society's belief systems and moral values as they

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<sup>42</sup> For example, Bekerie's study suggests that African writing systems are more than a technological tool to languages confined to linguistics structures. For Bekerie, a close and careful examination of African writing systems reveals layers of knowledge close to human intellectual activities, such as history, philosophy, social order, psychology, and aesthetics." (Bekerie, 1999).

relate to a higher being. Therefore, the practices of expression in African languages are connected to the form of articulation that one cannot separate from black oral performances.

This articulation of onto-theological linkages in the practices of expression in black cinema needs to be understood as a ground for conjunctural investigation. This conjuncture allows for new forms of articulation, especially, concerning the concepts of identity, and "problems related at the intersection of everyday life and the larger, long-term 'tendential' forces struggling to determine it" (Grossberg, 1998:78). Following Grossberg, perhaps the underlined concept of the 'sameness' of expression in black cinema suggests the long-term struggle — a sort of inter-generational 'gained' or 'impregnated' experience — of black people around the world. According to Raymond Williams, such ability constitutes the main vertebrae of any social production. For example, the knowledge of language, which is viewed as a social practice constituting "a process of human activity" implying written and spoken words, as well as multiple different kinds of symbolization, gesture, silence, and art whether or not related to

discourse, "are a form of material production [expressing] a human end" (Williams, 1977a:170). In fact, Williams articulates such practices as related to social experiences belonging to the level of new form of collective identity.

For Joan W. Scott, however, "treating the emergence of new identity as a discursive event is not to introduce a new form of linguistic determinism, nor to deprive subjects of agency" (Scott, 1991:792-3). Put in our context, black filmmakers, actors and actresses acknowledging their blackness, as a common frame of recognition, confirm that their individuality, subjective experience and discursive expression have all 'gained' from accumulated collective experience, because:

Experience can both confirm what is already known (we see what we have learned to see) and upset what has been taken for granted (when different meanings are in conflict we readjust our vision to take account of the conflict or to resolve it—that is what is meant by "learning from experience," though not everyone learns the same lesson or learns it at the same time or in the same way) (Scott, 1991:793).

Indeed, the speeches of artists and black cinema in the broader sense are charged with social obligation. They question their social conditions — or substantial constructed imagination — in terms of social conventions and values related to black expressions of liberty. This

articulation is no an idealized practice of an individualized cultural authority. Here, I address the issues of speech, authority, contextual '*situationality*' and intentionality suggested by Raymond Williams (1977 and 1985). Yet, the subjacent question is how do these figures can illustrate diverse subjective expressions of black identity, revealing rhizomic articulation of common affectivity or Africanicity?

In differentiating the functions of writing systems and orality, Raymond Williams suggests that their very notations are always "radically dependent on the cultural system [...] within which they are distributed." Thus, writing systems illustrate "the whole and complex process of notation [in which we can] find the reality of this specific [...] social process" or dynamic expression (Williams, 1977a:170).

This view of notation was already anticipated in *The Long Revolution*, particularly in the chapter concerning the analysis of culture, in which Williams suggested that the whole social system of communication depends on the "particular living result of all the elements" structuring "the most delicate and least tangible parts of [human] activity" (Williams, 1966-1961:48).

Nonetheless, Williams argued, we seem to be lacking an adequate vocabulary for describing this structural economy of feeling.

One generation may train its successor of the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have come 'from' anywhere. For here, most distinctly, the changing organization is enacted in the organism: the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling (Williams, 1966:49).

Here, I contend that affectivity, and particularly the effective 'duration' of communicative articulations of affectivity in black cinema, loudly expresses what can be described as an 'impregnated' regularity of the *structure of feeling*, "enacted in the organism" of emerging generations inheriting their historical experiences.<sup>43</sup> This structure of feeling is, according to Williams, the expression of "social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated* and are more

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<sup>43</sup> By duration, I am precisely expressing the sense of re-enactment of historical experience into contemporary everyday life expression, which, according to Levinas, "handling as handling, affectivity as affectivity, that Heidegger [...] notices [...] that the so-called states of consciousness are not simple quiddities, but *modes of existing*, and thereby [...] time that is intimately bound up with them, that inheres in them as such and such an essence, and not simply that encompasses them like a container into which they flow. [...] We insisted, as far as knowledge is concerned, that the passage from subject to object, which seemed to owe to time no more than its place of action in the flux of duration, as it harbored time, only had in human existence one single direction — that of time, if it is even necessary to speak here of direction (Levinas, 1996:28-9).

evidently and more immediately available." By using the notion of '*feeling*', Williams emphasizes "a distinction from more formal concepts of 'world-view' or 'ideology,'" to focus on "specifically affective elements of consciousness," that of meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt." (Williams, 1977b:133-4; 132).<sup>44</sup>

In a similar manner to the structure of feeling proposed by Williams, Boris Cyrulnic (1995) explains the conditions for the perpetuation of 'resilient' expressions as also being articulated, effectively, within human memory and transmitted from generation to generation. For Cyrulnic, this modality of communication is not limited to western dialectical frameworks of acquisition, or to inheritance. Both function as an "avatar of western classical thought, theologized, then philosophized as the division of the soul and the body" (Cyrulnic, 1995:92-102).

Cyrulnic notes that while it is evident that 'intelligence' pre-dates the acquisition of language or words and the capacity to speak, infants, for example, learn to solve problems before they are able to speak. Although our world is structured with complex signs,

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<sup>44</sup> Rightly quoted by Glenn Hendler, 1999:149

indices, images, symbols and languages, one need not have concepts and conventions in order to decode them. What one needs is an 'affectivity'.

Further, in arguing that this affectivity is less concerned with the question of 'inherence' (biological impregnation or origin) and 'acquirement' (learning system) than the 're-enactment' of historical experience, Cyrulnic has opened an epistemological conjuncture of the structure of feeling not addressed in Williams's study. In other words, Cyrulnic permits us to understand 'How' through the structure of feeling erects specific practices of identity that are reenacted from generation to generation, similar to the articulation of "eternal succession historical moment that represents an eternity produced by self-generation" (Bhabha, 1990a:298).

Pierre Bourdieu has suggested a similar articulation, explaining the interconnection of history and everyday life practices as a result of the space of possibilities.

But through the stakes of the struggle between the dominants and the challengers [...] these strategies also depend on the state of the legitimate problematic, that is, the space of possibilities inherited from previous struggles, which tends to define the space of possible position-takings and thus orient the search for solutions and, as a result, the evolution of production (Bourdieu, 1998:183-84).



These overtures offered by Cyrulnic and Bourdieu allow us to move our reflection beyond, for example, the Althusserian concept of ideology. At the difference that we admit any social reproduction exists only in relation to preexisting production of meaning. According to Althusser, this investment of social expression of identity may take place through a pre-established series of acts of identification in the values imposed by the laws of religion, family, ethics, politics, etc, allowing an individual to become a subjecting subject.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, the notion of Africanicity cannot be aligned with such an ideological process of reproduction actualizing dominant sets of values in which social practices reproduce the unavoidable relations of power maintaining hierarchical levels of social classes. Such articulation are diminished in black cinema. Rather, social practices — or practices of expression in black cinema — forge the becoming blackness according to specific discursive regularities, 'revising' pre-existing relations of production. In addition, this process does not attribute an identity to individuals. Rather it produces a practice of identity, an articulation based on

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<sup>45</sup> (See Althusser, 1971, particularly the chapter on "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses).

'virtual' experiences (historical constituent elements) and actual practices of struggle. Indeed, Africanicity operates at the level of affectivity rather than ideology.

I contend that affective articulations of love in black cinema, develops what Williams understood as the changing (a new unexposed expression of) social organization enacted by the social organism. That is, in part at least, one of the 'true contexts' of black cinema, in Grossberg's sense, permitting black filmmakers, actors and actresses to explore the conjunctural terrain of cinematic expression. This articulation shows the ways in which blacks re-appropriate the medium of cinema-art to transmit their trans-generational expressions of Africanicity. As this dissertation repeatedly argues, the effectiveness — or *effectivity*, in Heidegger's sense — of this affectivity is significant because it allows us to circumscribe issues of resilience, memory, myth, and historical transcendence. This affectivity opens the terrain of new conjunctures explaining, for example, the ways in which African-based knowledge has or has not been communicated

from generation to generation. Perhaps that is one of the ways our analysis is relevant to Cultural Studies, because it questions and seeks to understand the ways in which black peoples build inter-generational, communicational articulations despite their multiple geographical and political identities. And most importantly, despite the limiting contingencies of social, cultural, and national meaning system.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

My focus in this section is the expression of identity in black cinema as it operates through a 'constant narrative reenactment of affective-feeling'. We explored the work of black filmmakers as modern griots, as well as black artists and actresses articulating a discursive continuity. Through an exploration of communal expressions of feeling of distinctive subjectivities, I discussed the work of Bhabha, Anderson, Chatterjee, and Fanon to illustrate the ways in which the onto-theological formation of communal love are articulated within political and cultural spaces. Anderson proposed a horizontal articulation of comradeship, through which I

integrated the pan-geographical practices of expression of Africanicity, beyond the inherited conditions of nation and culture.

In analyzing specific articulations of love in *Sankofa*, *Beloved*, *Guatanamera* and *Quilombo*, I underscored the conditions of expression of Africanicity. There, I saw that black cinema reenacts historical experience to explain current conditions of black peoples. This way of expressing black identity proved problematic to concepts of historical time and space. However, as Mariniello and Deleuze suggested, this tensions is alleviated by the nature of the medium of film, because film's narratives and images permit us to overcome the dialectical dichotomies of Western historiography.

Scott's analysis of the concept of experience was very helpful to articulate the means by which black filmmakers and artists expressed, according to Williams and Cyrulnic, an oxymoron structure of feeling based on their trans-generational experience. These trans-generational expressions of feeling in black films, as well as in discourses related to cinema, permitted us to understand the complexity of the expressions of identity

taking place above national, cultural and racial concepts, but rather in the practices of expression.

The key argument in this section concerns the diacritical potentiality of the a-logical articulation of specific experiences that must be examined, not only to determine the location of the meanings of practices, but also to understand the substantiated conjunctures shaping those meanings. The transhistorical articulations linking the ideational expressions of black people command this conjunctural posture as a premise of its analysis, because the identification of their nature is primarily figurative.

#### 4. GENERAL CONCLUSION

Sankofa: returning to your roots,  
 recapturing what you've lost and moving forward,  
 because no matter how far away one travels,  
 he/she can never forget his/her home.  
 (Haile Gerima)

In the concept of becoming,  
 the past and the future do not exist,  
 as well as history. In the process  
 of becoming one must, anyway,  
 'involuer' [de-involution and de-evolution];  
 it is not to regress nor to progress.  
 Becoming is to become more  
 and more sober [moderate, well-balanced],  
 and more and more simple;  
 becoming more and more an emptied  
 field [désert] and by that being  
 heavily populated at this same time [peuplé].  
 (Gilles Deleuze)

This dissertation analyzes some cinematic practices under which it has become possible to articulate trans-geographical expressions of Africanicity. These practices of identity generate the articulation of expressions of Africanicity. First, I suggested that the notion of Africanicity is a practice of expression, a conceptual authority of blackness, an experience not limited to the color of the cultural authority representing black social reality. In fact, I disregarded the proposition of cultural authority suggested by Diawara, because, according to Shohat, "to represent a given community [is not] limited to carrying epidermically suitable representatives of that community" (Shohat, 1965:167).

Maryse Condé once argued that she

made an important discovery in Africa: I did not share the same language as the people in Guinea. We did not eat the same food-this may seem trivial to you, but it is important. We did not dress the same way, we did not enjoy the same type of music, we did not share the same religion. In a few months, I found myself terribly isolated. I could not even communicate with my Guinean husband. So I made a second discovery: race, in fact, is not the essential factor. What is important is culture. As I did not share the culture of the Guinean people, of the African people, I left Africa, and, as a result, my marriage ended (*The Unesco Courier*, "Maryse Condé: grand dame of Caribbean literature," 2000, p.47).

Interestingly, Condé situates her literary practices less as an act of the black race, but rather as a political practice based on her blackness. At the same time, she acknowledges the cultural and national dissimilarity in her relation to other blacks, particularly Guineans. However, her practices bring forth her 'multiplicity' of fragments to express her Africanicity.

Such expression of identity is one of 'multiplicity' in Deleuze's sense. It implies that distinctive discursive categories dynamically inter-mediate to express parallel affective feeling on the same object. As we have learned from Hall (1997) and Deleuze (1996), that does not mean that the preexisting categories of race are banned, or excluded, but rather that they reflectively participate as a parallel existence in the performance of

this Africanicity. As with many categories, race is a sociological concept, not a transhistorical "regime of truth" grounded in biology (Hall, 1990:290). Therefore, performative expressions of identity are always a process, not unlike the formation of a crystal; they are not a static decoding model of identity, culturally or racially.

Nor is Africanicity a 'synecdochetic' rhetoric or reconciliatory concept of unifying differences that will somehow become hybridized. Rather, it is the 'becoming' ground of 'differences' for investigating dynamic, oscillatory struggles on, and about, black practices of identity. As in the process of crystallization, in which distinctive *rhizomic* roots come together to form new category of identification, Africanicity becomes more a site of crystallization — a questioning ground for its constituting differentiated elements than a decoding location of black identity.

In Section I, I looked at multiple literatures on the issue of black identity-politics as a collective and subjective formation. This exploration permitted me to underscore some epistemological and methodological problematics based on the concept of cultural and



political identity. To better develop the complexity of the notion of Africanicity, I used intermediality as an analytical paradigm and methodological posture to observe the dilemma of discursive tensions in an attempt to render black practices of identity intelligible. I argued that the premise of black practices of identity is neither nationally nor culturally analyzable, but rather, can be understood by examining the complex trans-local and trans-global expressions under which specific articulations become discernible. To illustrate the genesis of such trans-geographical practices, I used the literature of the *Négritude* and the New Negro movements. Such figurations have permitted us to evoke multiple conjunctural possibilities in which new forms of expression of Africanicity have emerged far beyond national and cultural contingencies, but rather as an intermedial affectivity, an expression of struggles, and a common 'exclamation'.

In Sections II and III, I analyzed the conditions under which black cinema develops implies reflective articulations based on the active rejection of Eurocentric transcendental historical and

characterizations of the black race. The first chapter of Section II establishes the parameters under which black people were generally characterized in some dominant western films. The second chapter illustrated the modality of some complex discursive articulations of blackness. I qualified these complex discourses as an activity of 're-appropriation'; i.e., that is the ways in which black expressions of the 'collective-self' 'reactivate' and 'recycle' prior discursive characterizations of their humanity. Through this modality we can observe the intrinsic formation of affectivity that black cinema employs as a trans-geographical practice of expression.

Here, trans-geographic is a non-spatial and in-temporal phenomenon. It shows the articulation between dynamic practices of expression in film and other venues of representation and historical practices of some 'agent's knowledge'.<sup>46</sup> Unlike a universal history or universalist discourse imposed on black people to suggest their animalistic identity, the trans-geographical practices of identity in some black cinema connect the

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<sup>46</sup> The term is from Taylor (pp.36-7) who borrowed it from Elisabeth Anscombe, in *Intention*, Oxford: Blackwell (1957). It signifies that the relationship between a temporarily situated meaning and any current issue discussed by an agency is funded by and through historical knowledge. Put in a different way, it means that the knowledge of an agency unavoidably emerges from history, and not immanently.

moments of history and the moments of enunciation to represent specific practices of expression that I call Africanicity.

Through Michel de Certeau's (1990) articulation of shared conditions of such in-temporal and non-spatial practices of knowledge, I argued that black history in black cinema is brought to bear by the ideational concern of the filmmaker (the agent-knowledge) who, *a priori*, can only apprehend the knowledge of (him/her)self in conjunction with 'recognizable' historical constituent elements. These, in return, are absolutely conceived with performative *détournement* of the formal systems of modernity, its hegemonic conditions of production (i.e., neocolonialism, colonialism, and slavery, and its dominant ideologies that construct an exotic black-Otherness). Such performative transhistoricity links specific objects and cultural practices to moments of history, and explains, for example, the impossibility of imagining "the civil rights struggle of the sixties without the long traditions of black struggle that historically go back at least as far as the beginning of slavery" (Hall, 1997:293).

The articulation of marronage in the second chapter of Section II, which established the continuum relationship between black historical experiences and emerging everyday life expressions explains the trans-geographical practice of expression. In addition, this articulation permitted us to legitimate not only the process of 'duration' through which, as Bhabha and Grossberg have suggested, certain eternal struggles produce conjunctural practices of difference, but the 'sameness' of discourses compatible with diverse expressions of identity in some black films. In other words, my investigation of the duration of eternal struggles of expression and of the similarity of discourses in black cinema allowed me to diagnose the symptoms of historical representations in contemporary black practices of expression. The notion of duration reinforces our understanding of the process of those in-temporal practices of Africanity, and directed our investigation to the symptom of such practices.

Section III focused on the symptomatic ideation of such practices of expression. While Levinas understood the relationship of time as a proceeding non-temporal factor in the Heideggerian *Dasein*, my investigation

outlined the performative connection of history to non-ruptured practices in some selected black films. First, I reviewed the role of the Griot in some African narratives. I suggested that this cultural personage represents an interesting political positionality. The Griot in African narrative is the basis for any sort of exposed articulation, specifically, actualizing the virtualized (affective) experience of human beings with their everyday life concerns. For example, analysis of the discourse behind the expression of Africanicity in films allowed us to understand how deeply black cinema emerging discourses were already grounded in historical practices of expression. The appearance (actualization) of this history also exposes its ideational enunciation or preferred modes of representation.

Through the works of Anderson, Chatterjee, Fanon, and Schlesinger, I directed my investigation into what constitutes Africanicity, as an ideational affective expression of identity, articulated with multiple fragments of trans-geographical expression of love. Here, as an emerging ground for investigation, the notion of Africanicity allowed us to outline its conjunctural narrative process. Drawing upon Schlesinger and Bhabha I

suggested that the discourse of a notion such as Africanicity must be seen as an ongoing process negotiating past and present, at the same time however, narrating the pre-imaginary process of signification suggested by Mbembe. Further, this construction of affective belonging continually mediated by traditional practices and figuration (i.e., *marronage* and *Signifying*), and historical experiences (i.e., the effects of colonialism and slavery) constitutes the imaginative reenactments of Africanicity in the films I analyzed.

A central finding of this dissertation is the ways in which I analyzed the horizontal linkages between historical informed constituent elements and current practices of expression in black cinema. Indeed, I was able to illustrate the ways in which in-temporal and non-spatial connected practices were related to affective practices of expression. In addition, I articulated such trans-geographical and in-temporal connectivity in the margins of the conceptual contingencies of citizenship, locality, nationality, culture, and experience, because I was able to identify similar practices of expression in Africa, the Americas, and North-America.

This process allows us to understand the complex discursive conjuncture in some black films that I call the *Horizontal Labyrinth of Trans-geographical Practices of Identity*. By itself, this metaphor connotes a strong *Signifying* or rhetorical figure, such as an oxymoron, because the labyrinth usually denotes non-horizontal spaces, but rather angles, corners, and subdivided compartments through which one seeks for liberation. Indeed, I posited this analysis as an articulation of a horizontal labyrinth — that is the ocean, the north-south-north Atlantic axis — across which I navigated from North to South, West to East, and vice versa, looking for diverse *rhizomic* traces and symptomatic fragments expressing the continuum historical representations, social struggles, and articulation of Africanicity in film. I reviewed various literary fragments and objects of cinema, using diverse epistemological positions, whose conceptual complexities cause and manifest their own labyrinthine structures.

The articulation of Africanicity becomes possible within the conjuncture of political tensions. Throughout this dissertation, I cite black filmmakers and artists defending their voice, history, and image, based on

reflective re-appropriation or 'recyclage' of prior characterizations of their culture and humanity as animalistic. Black cinema exemplifies the inestimable ground of common creativity and agency revealing new forms of expression of identity. The whole process of struggle and search for self-expression in black cinema shows the power of inter-mediation, which allows artists to articulate the 'linkage' between historical knowledge and in-temporal and non-located everyday life practices. At the same time, the medium of cinema permits us to see the creativity of black artists, blocking therefore their potential 'assimilation' because the 'finality' of their practice always surprised dominant cultural authority.

As de Certeau (1990) has noted, the conditions of such practices silently create their own itinerary, which is not a structural discursive procedure, technologized and institutionalized by the dominating powers' ideology. It is, rather, similar to a walker inside the city trails "(Wandersmänner)" who re-appropriates or recycles his own identity from a non-panoptic view. Such fragmentary practices reveal the 'marvelous misfortunes' of an emerging but necessary historical exactness that



endlessly reconstructs and regulates the space and landscape of the instituted borders of power.

From these wonderful images, opposing the panoptical representation of history to the practice of *détournement*, I placed the films of Griffith and Rouch as an entry point, illustrating the 'panoptical view of history, and the films of Abderrahmane Sissako, Spike Lee, and Bassek Ba Khobio for 'marvelous misfortune'. Whereas Griffith and Rouch construct the history of blacks from the lofty standpoint — which is actually the standpoint of their social ideology — the black filmmakers get 'down' to the city streets', without any panoptical perspective, to write their own history. It is nonetheless this necessary presence of obstacles in the city (the labyrinth: buildings, corners, red lights, high traffic...), highlighting the absence of any sort of horizontal perspective, that licenses their marvelous misfortune, i.e., the figure of oxymoron that is the particular regularity of their expressions of Africanicity.

The absence of a horizon illustrates the labyrinthic context through which rhizomic units of the fragmented historicity and experience conjuncturally create new

expressions of Africanicity, intrinsically related to trans-historicity, contemporary experiences, intergenerational history, and everyday life practices. Specifically, my analysis of the films *Lumumba*, *Malcolm X*, *Quilombo*, *Sankofa*, and *Beloved* introduces this articulation of trans-historicity which allows us to see the re-enactment of history shaping everyday life expressions.

Indeed, the 'reality' of black peoples in black cinema becomes a structure of affects or a structure of feeling (Williams, 1966), marked by a multiplicity of planes of effects and the ways they intersect, transverse and disrupts each other (Grossberg 1992).

In exercising their right to independence from the colonization of their bodies and ideas, and their endless exploration of freedom as noble slaves, blacks have posited their historical assertion of self-projecting experience through their narratives. Such practices of identity emerge, as Bakhtin suggests, as a "surplus" of knowledge, as a conjuncture, as an articulation of differentiated fixed categories. And this ideational activity of subverting those categories sets the goals to re-appropriate — that is to recycle, to clean something

— and overturn once and for all those pre-constructed colonial discourses, panoramically fabricated on the top of landscapes, without any interaction with their object of history, and to offer another constitutive expression.

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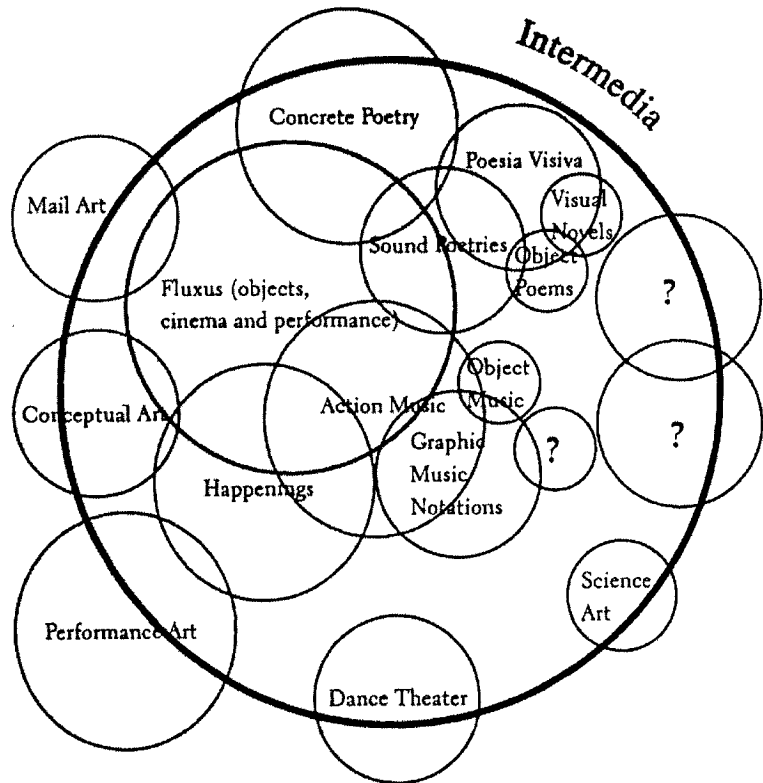
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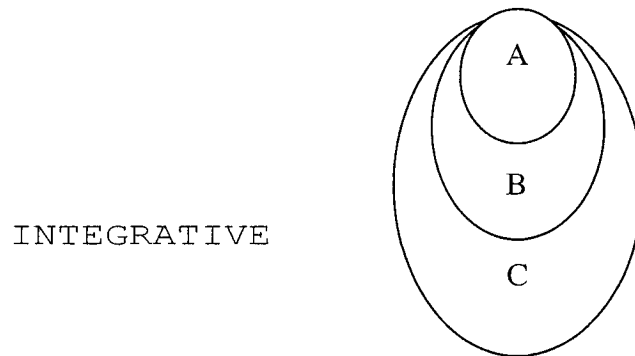
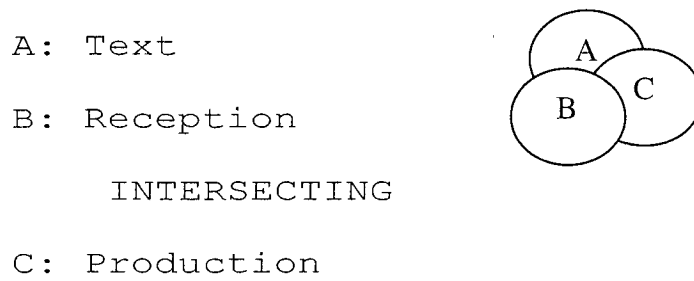
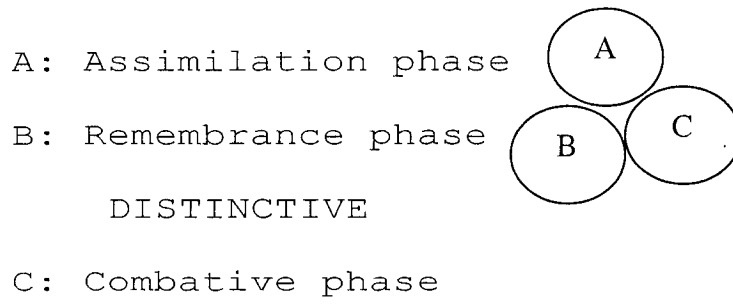
6. FIGURES

Intermedia Chart  
Dick Higgins



Molvena Italy  
19 January, 1995

FIGURE 1: Higgins's Figure of Intermediality



**FIGURE 2: Gabriel's Encoding/Decoding Figure**  
 ("*Development of Film Culture and*  
*Institutions*")

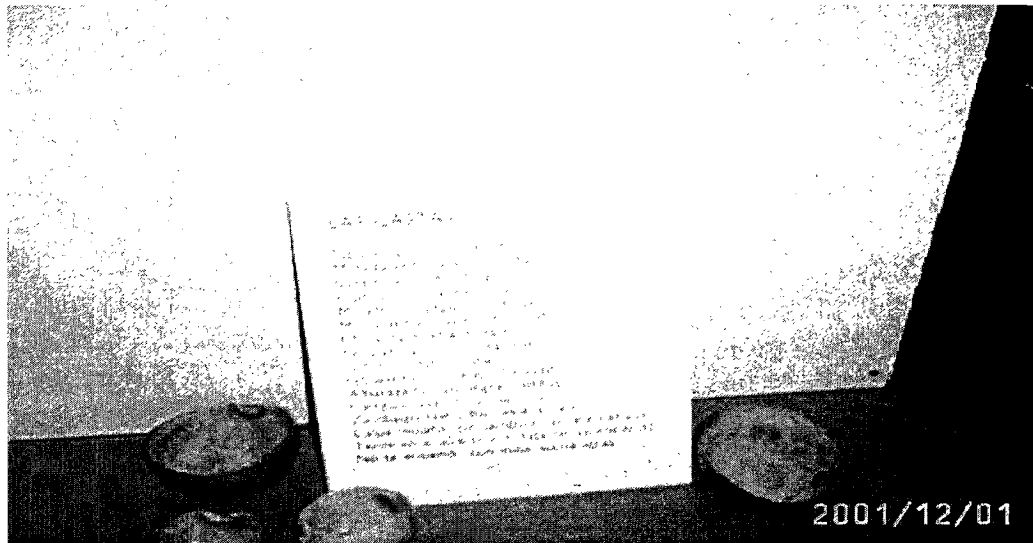


Photo from the *Afromestizo museo del Cuajinicuilapa de los ponentes* (Guerrero, Mexico) by Boulou E. de B'éri, 2001

### Las Castas (Castes)

- Español con india, mestizo (Spanish white man/Indian: half-breed)
- Mestiza con español, castizo (Half-breed/Spanish white man: Pure Spanish).
- Castizo con española, español (Pure Spanish/Spanish white women: Spanish).
- Española con negra, mulatto (Spanish white women/negress: mulatto)
- Mulata con español, morisco (Female Mulatto/Spanish white man: moorish).
- Morisco con española, chino (Moorish/Spanish white woman: Chinese)
- Chino con india, salta atrás (Chinese/Indian: jumped from behind = back-door-child, in-house maid, servant etc).
- Salta atrás con mulata, lobo (Jumped from behind/female mulatto: wolf).
- Lobo con china, gibaro (Wolf/Chinese: back-copulated).
- Gibaro con mulata, albarazado (Back-copulated/female mulatto: leprous)
- Albarazado con negra, cambujo (Leprous/black female: half-mask)
- Cambulo con india, zambalگو (Half-mask/Indian: half-Indian-half-black).
- Zambalگو con india, calpa mulato (Half-Indian-half-black/Indian: tented mulatto).
- Calpa mulato con cambujo, tente en el aire (Tented mulatto/half-mask, conceived through the (air) spirit).
- Tente en el aire con mulata, no te entiendo (Conceived through the spirit/female mulatto, I do not understand you).
- No te entiendo con india, torna atrás (I do not understand you/Indian: turned up-side-down or from behind).

FIGURE 3: Race and Racial Sub-Categories

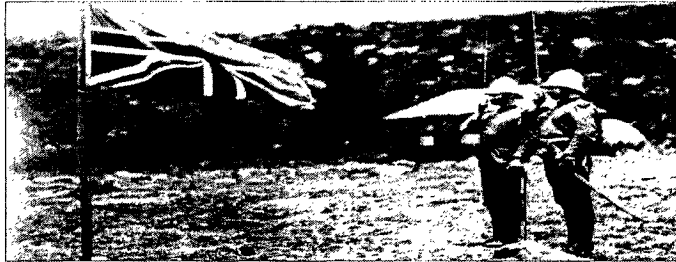


Une partie du *Colonialpanorama* à Berlin:  
l'attaque des marins allemands contre les « rebelles » noirs du Cameroun (1885).

**FIGURE 4a: Colonial and Imperial Hunting**

The Imperial Imperative

Pier Retief and his men  
arrive at Dingaan's  
Kraal.



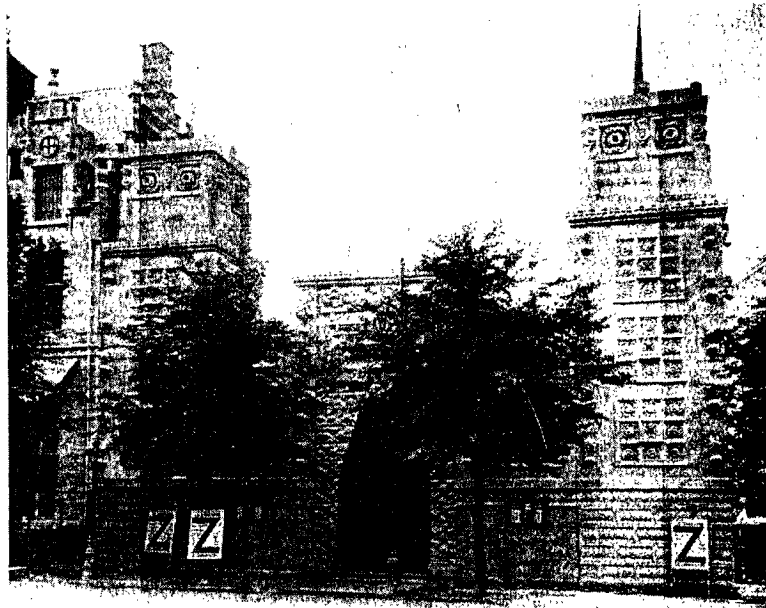
*Symbol of Sacrifice, 1918.*

...they sign a pact with  
the Boers...



and they are slaughtered.  
*De Vootrekker, 1916.*

FIGURE 4b: Colonial and Imperial Hunting



Le «zoographe» à l'Exposition Universelle à Bruxelles/Tervuren 1897, où les premières tentatives des coloniaux belges d'utiliser le cinématographe comme arme de propagande coloniale.

Photo © OCIC Collection/Guido Convents, 1986

**FIGURE 5: Colonial Exposition**