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ADAM LAUDER

IMAGINATIONS

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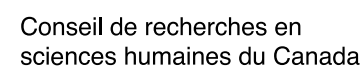
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Front Cover Image - *Como era gostoso o meu francês* - Dir. Nelson Pereira Dos Santos (1971)

CARIBBEAN CINEMA NOW: INTRODUCTION

DORIS HAMBUCH

The idea for this special issue originates in the realization that there has not been a follow-up of Mbye Cham's *Ex-Isles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* (1992), published more than two decades ago.¹ The book review included in this issue highlights the only exception, but the book in question, *Explorando el cine caribeño* (2011; Exploring Caribbean Cinema), edited by Luis Alberto Notario and Bruce Paddington, was published in Spanish and with a very limited number of copies. According to the editors, an English translation of their book is forthcoming soon and, as Kristian Van Haesendonck predicts in the end of his review, such a translation should prove invaluable for future studies in Caribbean cinema. A symposium whose theme was identical with the title of the present issue brought together a series of academic presentations during the recent 10th-anniversary edition of the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival (TTFF), indicating a more optimistic outlook for the future of Caribbean film studies.

Scholarship in Caribbean film studies has been scarce even within individual linguistic entities in the region, with the notable exception of Cuba. Important examples of such research include Keith Q. Warner's *On Location: Cinema and Film in the Anglophone Caribbean* (2000), Joaquín 'Kino' García's *Historia del Cine Puertorriqueño* (1900-1999) (2014 [1984]), as well as parts of Carolyn Cooper's *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (2004) and Lieve Spaas's *Francophone Film: A Struggle for Identity* (2000). The essays and interviews included in Caribbean Cinema Now highlight that the small amount of widely available Caribbean film scholarship is not due to a lack of material. The combination of the diverse analyses and filmmaker commentaries further emphasizes the benefits of cross-Caribbean exchange between producers, other participants in the regional industries, as well as among critics, whether in the region itself or in its so-called diaspora.

The launch of the first Caribbean Film Mart and Regional Film Database at this year's Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival (<http://www.ttfilmfestival.com/>) may be an economic manifestation of the creative vision expressed by Surinamese director Pim de la Parra in the interview with Emiel Martens:

Caribbean cinema consists of all [the] individual initiatives in the region that have brought about, and brought together, a diverse body of films that are somehow connected through our history, culture, geography and climate. There will always be young Caribbean people who will rise and produce films—and so every now and then such a film could reach the whole world. We just have to keep hoping and to keep dreaming. (8 "A Paradox in Caribbean Cinema?")

The fact that the Caribbean Film Database is accessible in English, French, and Spanish but not Dutch reflects a chronic underrepresentation of the Dutch-speaking Caribbean in cross-regional studies. Despite extensive efforts on my part, the present collection was not able to remedy this persistent problem to the anticipated extent. The interview with Pim de la Parra and a comparative analysis of Felix de Rooy's *Desirée* (1984) in Ricardo Arribas's "Hacia una estética relacional del cine caribeño" ("Towards an 'Aesthetics of Relation' in Caribbean Cinema") are in fact the only representations of Dutch Caribbean cinema in this issue.

The combination of interviews and critical essays otherwise provides a diverse and necessarily eclectic glimpse into recent developments in Caribbean cinema. The issue begins with Storm

Saulter's guest artist portfolio, which aptly illustrates the achievements of an impressive career. The subsequent interview with Emiel Martens explains in detail the challenges that apply to filmmaking conditions throughout the region. As a founding member of the New Caribbean Cinema Movement (<http://www.newcaribbeancinema.com/>), Saulter is a model activist whose perseverance and creativity have found yet another well-deserved recognition in his recent appointment as filmmaker-in-residence at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus.

The third interview places Hyacinth Simpson in dialogue with Frances-Anne Solomon, the founder of Caribbean Tales (<http://www.caribbeantales.ca/>), a registered Canadian charity responsible for numerous opportunities in support of Caribbean

Fig. 1. Caribbean Tales Festival Poster

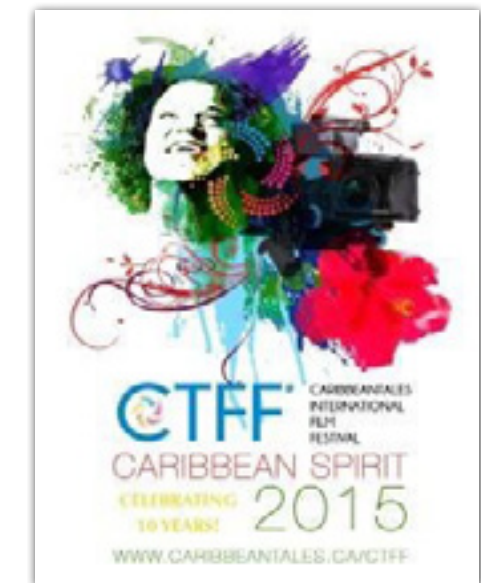


Fig. 2. Caribbean Film Mart

filmmakers, including scholarships, workshops, and the annual Caribbean Tales International Film Festival (<http://www.caribbeantales.ca/CTIFF/>). Like the Trinidad and Tobago Festival, Caribbean Tales celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. Solomon's interview illuminates her dedication to these institutions as well as her own experiences as prolific filmmaker.



Fig. 3. Opening Night of the 10th Trinidad and Tobago International Film Festival

Two of the critical essays are island-specific, providing surveys of production efforts in Puerto Rico and Jamaica, respectively. Maria Cristina Rodríguez scrutinizes landmarks of Puerto Rican film production throughout the nascent 21st century. She further traces the debt of young Puerto Rican filmmakers to their late-20th-century predecessors in “The Island Image and Global Links in Puerto Rican Cinema of the 21st Century.” Sabrina Ceccato’s essay “Cinema in Jamaica—Legacy of *The Harder They Come*” underlines the legacy of one particular predecessor for Jamaican filmmakers. Perry Henzell’s *The Harder They Come* (1972) is still a model for Jamaican film production. Saulter affirms Ceccato’s argument towards the end of his guest artist interview, stating that Henzell’s film “still serves as a blueprint for Jamaican filmmakers.” A decade after Jamaica became an independent country Henzell’s film started a movement that challenged representations of Jamaica’s geography, society, and culture in foreign movies. Similar searches for self-representation on screen are detectable throughout the films discussed in this issue. While inspiration and material for indigenous stories abound, the financial burden of high production costs is a prevalent topic throughout the contributions. Do It Yourself (DIY) filmmaking proliferates throughout the region and, as Rodríguez emphasizes, recent technological developments such as digital technology have been conducive to this method.

Christian Lara from Guadeloupe is an exceptional director whose extensive filmography includes comparatively big-budget co-productions. Meredith Robinson’s contribution is a detailed analysis of Lara’s *Sucre Amer* (Bitter Sugar, 1997) and *1802, l’Épopée Guadeloupéenne* (1802, The Guadeloupean Epic, 2005), both cinematographically impeccable costume dramas. Based in Paris, Lara decided to fill the gap in “commercial Antillean cinema” (Cham 280). In “Christian Lara: Reconciling Vision and Execution in *Sucre Amer* and *1802, l’Épopée Guadeloupéenne*,” Robinson advocates an interpretation of the interrelated films that allows a postcolonial recovery of Guadeloupean collective memory.

Ricardo Arribas departs from Édouard Glissant’s concept of the “Poetics of Relation” to advocate cross-Caribbean film studies in “Más allá de la fascinación y el horror: hacía una estética relacional del cine caribeño” (Beyond Fascination and Horror: Towards an ‘Aesthetics of Relation’ in Caribbean Cinema). Aided by thoughtful and revealing analyses of representative films by Félix de Rooy, Fernando Pérez, Fránces Negrón Muntaner and Luis Molina Casanova, he suggests that Caribbean film criticism better captures the region’s emancipatory potential in light of a relational film aesthetics. A French translation of this essay will follow in the next issue of *Imaginations*.

Co-authored by Matthias De Groof and Kathleen Gysels, “Give Me Back My Black Dolls’: Damas’ Africa and Its Museification, From Poetry to Moving Pictures” adds a final unique angle to this issue’s discourse on Caribbean cinema. Not only does their essay remind readers of the wealth of inspiration found in literary Caribbean heritage for future film production, it also includes an actual example of a short film inspired by Guianese Léon-Gontran Damas’ poem “Limbé.” Many poems, plays, and novels from across the region would lend themselves, likewise, to audiovisual adaptations. Such adaptations, in turn, revive studies of the writers whose texts engender the films. In this vein, the second part of De Groof and Gysel’s essay focuses on the writer, Damas himself.

Inspired by literary texts or any other source involving Caribbean themes and subject matter, future productions within the Caribbean and its diaspora will certainly benefit from more, and more diverse, widely available Caribbean film scholarship. *Caribbean Cinema Now* will hopefully encourage many other film scholars to build on the legacy of Cham’s *Ex-Isles*, of Notario and Paddington’s *Explorando el cine caribeño*, soon available in English, as well as on the many other sources referred to throughout the included essays and interviews.



Fig. 4. TTFF15 Awards Ceremony

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- Caribbean Tales:
<http://www.caribbeantales.ca/>
- Caribbean Tales International Film Festival:
<http://www.caribbeantales.ca/CTFF/New>
- Caribbean Cinema:
<http://www.newcaribbeancinema.com/>
- The Caribbean Film Academy:
<http://caribbeanfilm.org/about-cafa-2/>
- Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival:
<http://www.ttfilmfestival.com/>

¹ Many thanks are due to Mbye Cham, Kathleen Gysels, Luis Alberto Notario, Bruce Paddington, Sandra M. Casanova Vizcaíno, Giovanna Montenegro, and Jerry White for their various kinds of support.

Image Notes

- Figure 1: Caribbean Tales Festival Poster
(<http://www.caribbeantales.ca/CTFF/festival/>)
- Figure 2: Caribbean Film Mart
(<http://susumba.com/film-tv/news/15-features-first-caribbean-film-mart>)
- Figure 3: Opening Night of the 10th Trinidad and Tobago International Film Festival
(<https://www.facebook.com/ttfilmfestival/photos/a.10153625311902171.1073741901.20187852170/10153625320452171/?type=3&theater>)
- Figure 4: TTFF15 Awards Ceremony
(<https://www.facebook.com/ttfilmfestival/photos/pb.20187852170.-2207520000.1450328682./10153645679232171/?type=3&theater>)

**GUEST ARTIST PORTFOLIO –
SHORT FRAME NARRATIVE STORM SAULTER**

PORTFOLIO COMPOSED BY STORM SAULTER AND EMIEL MARTENS

In January 2015 Storm Saulter was appointed as Filmmaker in Residence at the Department of Literatures in English, University of the West Indies (UWI). During his tenure, which lasted until May of that year, the Jamaican filmmaker contributed to the Department’s Film Studies programme by teaching the course, Creative Writing: Screen/Stage, and offering guidance to students interested in the world of filmmaking.

“I wasn’t sure what to expect teaching this class but very early I realised that there was a room full of great storytellers with really strong and deep ideas and who were passionate about film. We ran it like a script development workshop and each student had their own idea to develop into a feature film. Young Jamaicans are way more exposed to all kinds of media and are influenced as much by Japanese anime as they are by Hollywood studio films. Thankfully they are trying to break-out of the Hollywood storytelling archetypes and develop a new aesthetic. That is what I encouraged and that is what the students set out to achieve, and the results were really surprising and powerful. I definitely want to see some of those stories on the screen. I never went to a classic university myself so working with students that age was a new and energizing experience for me as well.”

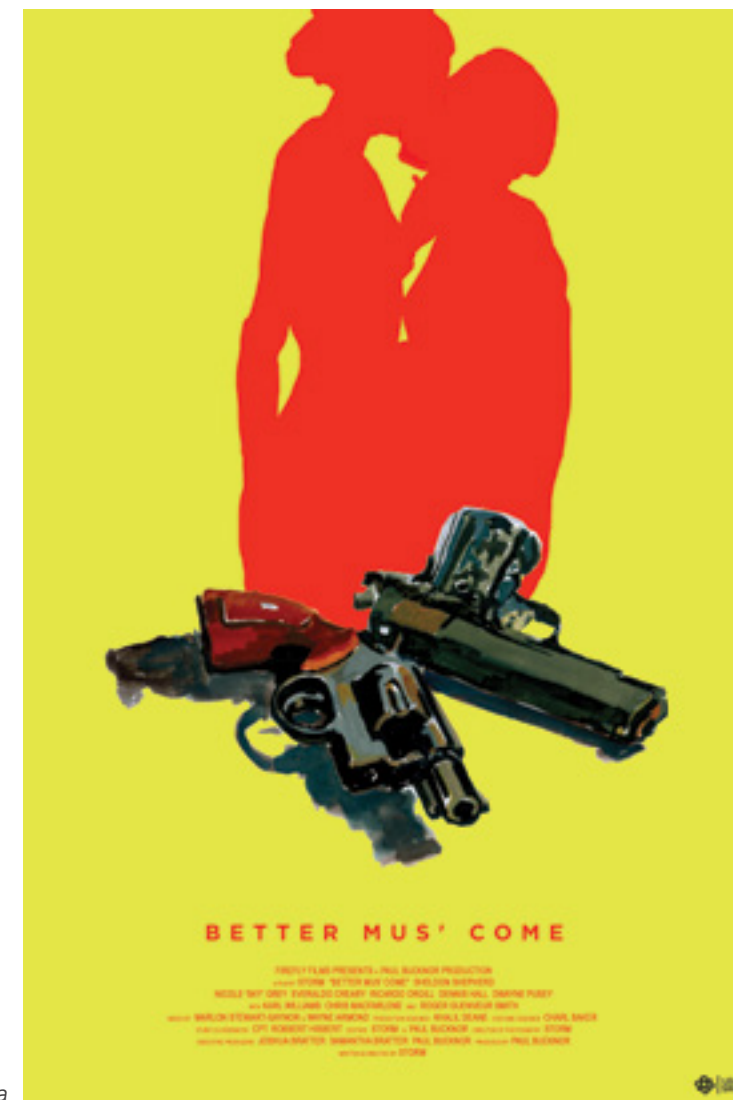
Besides teaching, Storm also participated in the annual ‘March is Movie Month at Mona’ series hosted by the Department. He named his talk, which was supported by different excerpts of his work, ‘Towards a New Caribbean Cinema’, after the title of this interview.

“In my talk I really tried to hammer home the importance of developing our own aesthetic. In looking at the things that make the Caribbean unique, our landscape, the physicality of our people, the mixed up languages and sounds, the richness of colours in our world. Not to shy away from those things but to intentionally weave them into the fabric and texture of our filmmaking. To create a filmmaking language that transcends any one film. This was also the aim of a short film workshop I ran in the summer months. This workshop consisted of four intensive weeks where participants came with ideas and left with a fully developed script that was ready to be produced.”

Photograph of Storm Saulter by Jamaican photographer [Marlon James](#).



<http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.CCN.6-2.2>



a
d



a - Commissioned film poster of *Better Mus' Come* made by Jamaican artist and graphic designer Leasho Johnson. ‘It became clear that, for me, the ultimate story of the Cold War era was about the poor people who were the sufferers, so the story had to represent them.’

b - Still from Storm’s early work *Waterboot*, a 2003 video art piece that was part of the exhibition ‘Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art’ at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. ‘I regularly returned home and just documented everything with my digital camera, little random Jamaican things, which I then edited in a certain way.’



b



c

c - Poster of the third and last edition of the *Flashpoint Film Festival* in 2008 in Port Royal. ‘I believe Flashpoint kicked a lot of people on the island in the butt in terms of realizing that this is what we need to do to get the film industry going.’

d - Official film poster of Storm’s first feature film *Better Mus' Come* (2011) featuring [Sheldon Shepherd](#) and [Sky Nicole Grey](#). ‘I really wanted to make a film about the seventies. I had always been fascinated with the Cold War and the international geopolitics at the time.’



a - Film still from *Better Mus' Come* featuring main actor Sheldon Shepherd. 'The Green Bay Massacre became the endpoint of my story which I then built backwards – into a journey of one character in particular.'

a

b



STORM SAULTER & EMIEL MARTENS

c - Production still of *Better Mus' Come* showing Storm at work.

c

Following the residency, Storm was selected to take part in the inaugural Caribbean Film Mart at the tenth edition of the Trinidad + Tobago Film Festival. Co-financed by the ACP Cultures+ Programme, funded by the European Union (European Development Fund) and implemented by the APC Group of States, "the primary goal of the Caribbean Film Mart is to foster direct relationships between the Caribbean and the international film industry, by stimulating and creating viable cinematic co-productions" (tffilmfestival.com). In total fifteen filmmakers were selected to pitch their projects (in development or pre-production) to international film producers, commissioners, sales agents and funds—and one of them was Storm with his fiction film project, Spinter.



b - Film still from *Better Mus' Come* featuring Everaldo Cleary (front), Sheldon Shepherd (middle) and Ricardo Orgil (back). 'We pretty much auditioned anyone in the community who was interested. This is how we found Ricardo Orgil, who plays Flames.'



d

d - Four members of the [New Caribbean Cinema](#) team, from left to right, Nile and Storm Saulter, Joel Burke and Michelle Serieux (photo by Jamaican photographer [Marlon James](#)). 'New Caribbean Cinema became a mix of a feeling of getting work done and a method of how to get it done – a 'by any means necessary' approach to filmmaking.'



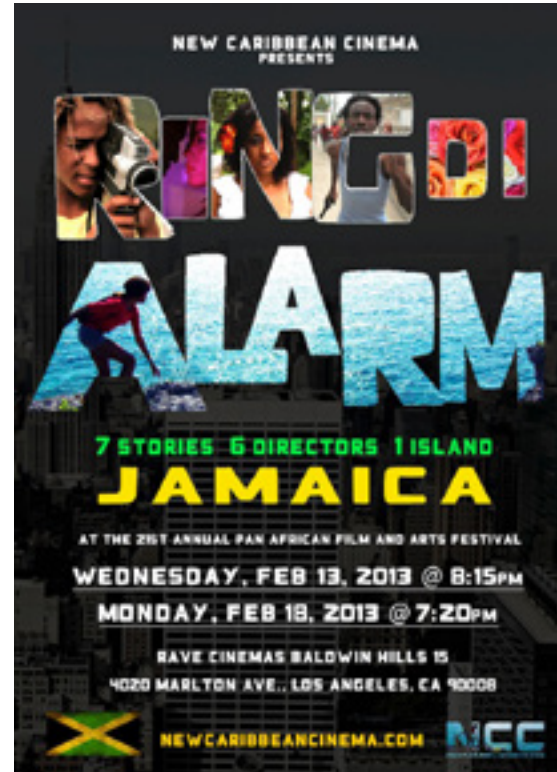
e

e - Storm together with Michelle Serieux, co-founder of [New Caribbean Cinema](#), at the British Film Institute in London (photo by freelance photographer [Frederique Rapier](#)). 'Michelle and I decided to join forces to create opportunities for young filmmakers to produce work that could put them on the map.'

'Although we did everything in a really low-budget way, we were very meticulous with getting the look and feel right.'

a

b



c

"This was one of the most helpful development programs I've participated in because of its focus on Caribbean films specifically and because of the quality of industry professionals brought in to meet with us about our projects. The collection of filmmakers there was a great representation of the new wave of Caribbean cinema and all projects involved in the mart moved forward in some way. This was the unanimous feeling of the filmmakers. I developed new partnerships for Sprinter and I know the seeds planted there will bear fruit."

d - Film still from Coast, the Ring di Alarm film directed by Nile Saulter on which Storm worked as a cinematographer and co-producer. "The Caribbean film aesthetic is still very much open, but it is definitely magical, colorful, kaleidoscopic, language-rich and musical."



d

e

a - Film poster of *Ring di Alarm* (2013), the first round of films by the members of the New Caribbean Cinema team. "We all made one short film and worked together on each other's films."

b - Announcement of the screening of *Ring di Alarm* at the 2013 Pan-African Film Festival in Los Angeles. "I definitely think New Caribbean Cinema is a driver for Caribbean cinema in general. I just see it."

c - Film still from *Watching Him Kissing Her*, the *Ring di Alarm* film directed by Storm. "Although the *Ring di Alarm* films are very different from each other, I do think they have something in common and that is a slight interest in the dark side of life."

e - Image from Storm's photo shoot of the band Arcade Fire at the Trident Castle in Port Antonio, Jamaica, published in the *Rolling Stone* magazine (2013). "Throughout the week I am often in touch with a couple of production companies."

a - Photograph by Storm of Trinidadian fashion designer Ayana Riviera, also published in the Rolling Stone magazine (2013). "I oversee treatments, I deliver edits, I go to meetings, I scout locations, I am in pre-production or I am actually shooting."



a

b

b - Production still of Storm shooting the music video "Who Knows" by the Jamaican artists Protoje and Chronixx. "I usually have a few of these projects going on at the same time, in different stages of development."

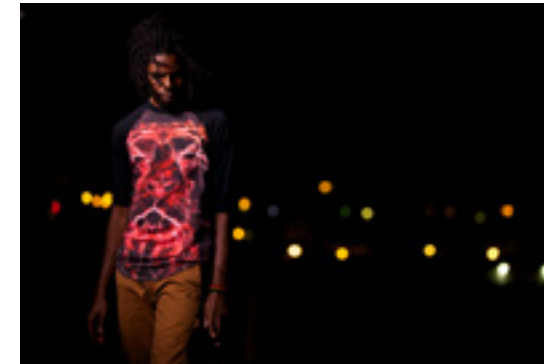


c - Still from the music video "Who Knows" featuring Protoje and Chronixx. "When I have a deadline, I just have to stay up for a few nights and get it done."

c

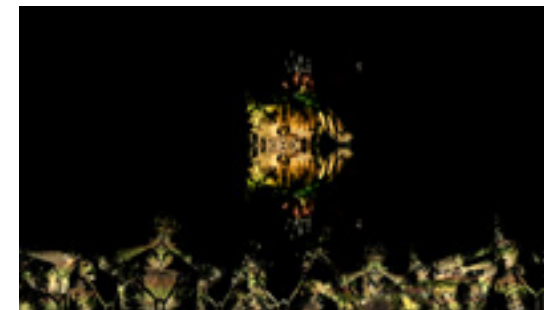


d - Photograph by Storm of Chronixx as part of a campaign for Lifted Research Group (LRG), a creative lifestyle clothing company (2014). "I do quite a bit of commercial work; that is actually what I do most of the time."



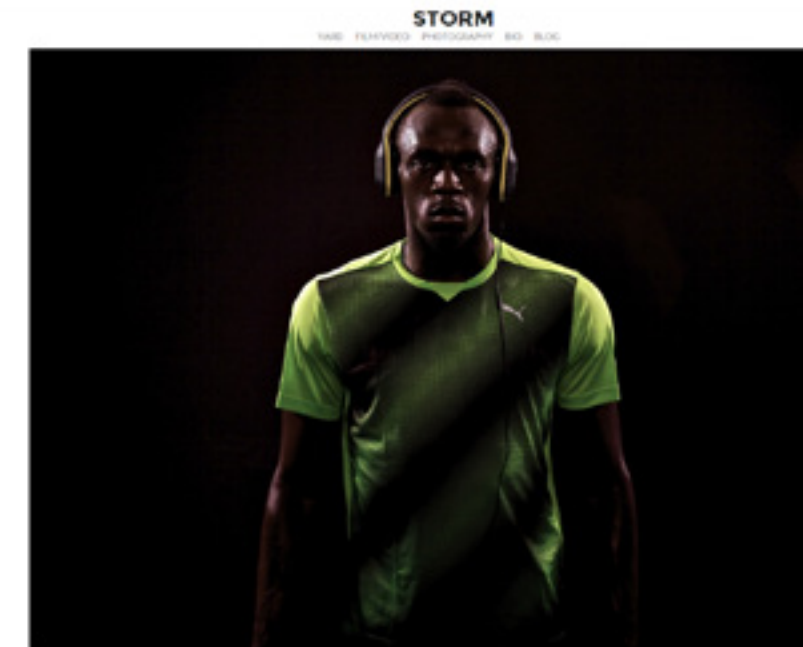
d

e



e - Film still from a video piece Storm did for the Canopy Guild, a community photography, fashion, and object-design project-cum-exhibition initiated by Trinidadian artist Rodell Warner. "I feel any moment now we can make the big hit films, I definitely feel that."

f



f - Screen shot of Storm's homepage <http://stormsaulter.com> featuring a photograph by Storm of Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt for media technology company Soul Electronics. "I want to make the films that epitomize Caribbean cinema."

Links

[Better Mus' Come Official Trailer](#)

[Interview with Storm and Better Mus' Come lead actor Sheldon Shepherd](#)

[Feature on the Better Mus' Come premiere in Philadelphia on the Lavonne Nichols Show](#)

[New Caribbean Cinema Featurette](#)

[Feature on New Caribbean Cinema on Dutch television \(VPRO Cinema\)](#)

[Ring di Alarm Official Trailer](#)

['Who Knows' Music Video](#)

[Storm's Official Homepage](#)

TOWARDS A NEW CARIBBEAN CINEMA? AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMAICAN FILMMAKER STORM SAULTER

EMIEL MARTENS

Résumé

Storm Saulter, l'artiste invité de cette publication, est un photographe jamaïcain, artiste visuel, et cinéaste. Il est le réalisateur de *Better Mus'Come* (2010) et le cofondateur du mouvement *New Caribbean Cinema*. Dans cette entretien, qui accompagne le portfolio, il échange avec Emiel Martens sur les principaux défis de sa remarquable carrière, et sur la situation de son œuvre dans le vaste contexte du cinéma caribéen et de sa société.

Abstract

Storm Saulter, the guest artist of the present issue, is a Jamaican photographer, visual artist, and filmmaker. He is the director of *Better Mus'Come* (2010) and co-founder of the *New Caribbean Cinema* movement. In this interview, which accompanies the preceding portfolio, he discusses with Emiel Martens the main challenges of his remarkable career and the ways in which he situates his work in the wider context of Caribbean cinema and society.

Storm Saulter (www.stormsaulter.com) is a Jamaican filmmaker, photographer, and visual artist. He is best known for directing the award-winning Jamaican feature film *Better Mus'Come* (2010) and for co-founding *New Caribbean Cinema*, a DIY (Do It Yourself) collective of young filmmakers in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean dedicated to creating a new wave of Caribbean filmmaking (www.newcaribbeancinema.com). Together they have already produced a series of short films under the title *Ring di Alarm* (2012), which was shown around the world before coming home to packed theatres in Kingston earlier this year. In this interview, which took place via Skype on November 12, 2014, Storm Saulter talks about his career as a filmmaker in Jamaica and discusses his work in the context of Caribbean cinema and society.

Martens: Could you first briefly introduce yourself? Where were you born, where did you grow up, what sort of education did you have, and how did you get involved in filmmaking?

"I was born on September 21, 1983, in Negril, Jamaica. I was number seven of, eventually, eight kids—four boys and four girls—from Bertram and Greer-Ann Saulter. Both of my parents were artists in their own right. My father was a builder and an architect and my mother was a designer, businesswoman, and just a pioneering woman in many regards, including motherhood. They always encouraged us to express ourselves creatively and we all developed some kind of artistic skill, even if not all—though many—of my brothers and sisters are making art for a living now. There was a very strong artistic streak embedded in us at an early age, which has over the years resulted in a major creative output by my family. Growing up in Negril, which was still pretty much a hippie beach town, was a real country

life. We were very free. We got lost in the bush and came back home when it was dark. We ran along the cliffs and jumped into the ocean, that sort of thing. So, I was very much having my own adventures when I was young, and I was always aiming to create something. As a teenager, I started taking pictures, as in still photography, and later I got into filmmaking, from the side of cinematography more than from the side of the story. After finishing high school in Kingston I didn't really know what I exactly wanted to do. One of my sisters had moved to Los Angeles and I had the opportunity to join her, to leave Jamaica and to see something of the world. Somewhere in that period, around 2000, the idea of becoming a filmmaker became a real possibility. I moved to L.A. and entered the Film Immersion

Program of the Los Angeles Film School, with a concentration on cinematography and editing. It was a very hands-on experience. In between my school schedule I also worked on music-video sets. I was the hardest working PA you could ever meet. I was out to prove it! One day on set, I met hip-hop video director Little X, who kind of took me under his wing. He encouraged me to move to New York to work with him, which I did. I worked on a lot of his sets as a second-unit director and just rolled a lot with him. For a late teenager, this was of course an amazing experience. At the same time I somewhat established myself as a visual artist. I started doing video art, mainly based on images I shot in Jamaica. I regularly returned home and just documented everything with my digital camera, little random Jamaican things, which I then edited in a certain way. At one point, I decided to move to Miami to work with Joshua Bratter, an immigration lawyer and friend of the family who wanted to invest in my first feature film. As I did not really want to become a hip-hop video director, the path I was heading in New York, this seemed a good opportunity for me. I wanted to make movies! I happened to move to Miami Beach at the beginning of a particularly vibrant moment in the local art scene, due in part to it becoming a new home for Art Basel. I began to really experiment with video and photography. The first exhibition I participated in was at The Museum of Contemporary Art Miami. It was called "Optic Nerve" and it was strictly for up-and-coming local video artists. I went on to exhibit with a number of Miami-based galleries for Art Basel, then the Caribbean Biennial and throughout Europe and North America. After a few years I had to go back to Jamaica to renew my visa; the visa was taking a long time to come, and I realized I wanted to make films there. So I decided to stay and to give it all."

Martens: How did you set out to make your ambition to become a filmmaker in Jamaica a reality? At the time, there was no real film industry to speak of on the island, so how did you go about it to start?

"Well, my brother Nile also returned to Jamaica after finishing film school in London so we decided to pursue our filmmaking passion together. We also linked up with a few other young filmmakers on the island, notably Joel Burke, whom I already knew from before. Our families

were close together and I had stayed with his family for a while when I moved to Kingston to finish high school. While I was in L.A., Joel got into editing through Paul Bucknor, who had his own film studio in the hills of Kingston. We just came together and started to make short films, with Paul being our executive producer. He covered the initial costs to put forward the money and to make things happen. My parents, along with Bucknor, came up with the idea of hosting an annual film festival in Negril. This became the Flashpoint Film Festival and our shorts provided most of the content. The festival was very influential for us as beginning filmmakers. We all of a sudden needed to create content—we just had to. I came up with a script called *Twang!*, Nile with *Forward*, and Joel with *Bad Lucky*. It was a different kind of filmmaking—it was extremely guerilla, low budget, not necessarily scripted, experimental filmmaking. *Twang!* was originally intended as a short film, but eventually we tried to make it into a feature. We spent one summer shooting our films and after that we edited our own projects with advice and suggestions from each of us. We literally finished editing only a few hours before the showings. When we hosted the festival for the first time in 2005, the films were not fully there yet; they were a little rough, but I believe Flashpoint kicked a lot of people on the island in the butt in terms of realizing that this is what we need to do to get the film industry going. It was all very hectic because we had so little time to finish our films—I will never do that again because you put out something that isn't your best work—but we premiered a bunch of stuff and I think it woke a lot of people up about making local films. We probably made all the mistakes that you can make as filmmakers, but after experiencing that whole process, from production to editing, I was really much more equipped to do my next story. It was a major learning ground. Eventually we did three editions of the festival, one more in Negril in 2006 and, after my Mom passed away, one in Port Royal in 2008. It was at the third and last edition that I showed a very early cut of my first real feature film, *Better Mus'Come*, and people started to feel something serious was coming."

Martens: When did you come up with the idea of *Better Mus' Come* and how did this project materialize?

"As mentioned earlier, when I was living in Miami I worked with Joshua Bratter on the development of my first feature-length film project. At the time—I was about nineteen—I wrote a script of a film entitled *Fedda* (patois for *Feather*) about a 12-year-old boy, but it just never came together fully. Something wasn't ready; I guess

My parents and their friends often told stories about the 1970s, that it was such a wild and violent period on the island that everybody now wants to forget about it. It was so magnetic for me, I just had to make a film about it.

I wasn't ready. But a few years later, when I was doing all that stuff in Jamaica, I reconnected with Josh and everything was right. We had these long conversations about Jamaica, about geopolitics, about storytelling. And I remember we had a meeting one day and I was just sharing some ideas with him. I ended up explaining the rough premise for *Better Mus' Come* and Josh immediately said, "This is the one." It was there and then that the film began to feel like a real possibility for the first time. His support gave me the confidence to develop the script I had in mind. I really wanted to make a film about the seventies. I had always been fascinated with the Cold War and the international geopolitics at the time. I read a lot about the Cold War and watched a lot of espionage films such as *Bond* and more subtle stuff. I became particularly interested in the effect the Cold War had on Jamaica's two-party politics. My parents and their friends oftentold stories about the 1970s, that it was such a wild and violent period on the island that everybody now wants to forget about it. It was so magnetic for me, I just had to make a film about it.

I started to explore the archives of the *Jamaica Gleaner*. I read all these articles about the tensions on the island that resulted in various states of emergency and had such a murderous impact on our nation and I began to construct scenes from those articles. It became clear that, for me, the ultimate story of the Cold War era was about the poor people who were the sufferers, so the story had to represent them. At one point I came across the information about the Green Bay Massacre—the secret operation carried out in 1978 by a special unit of the Jamaica Defense Force under a People's

National Party—in which five supporters of the Jamaica Labour Party were shot dead after they had been ambushed at Green Bay. That dramatic event helped me to anchor my story. I pieced together snippets of information and loosely reconstructed the lives of the people who ended up at Green Bay. This moment really showed the circle of tricking people, using people, and finally getting rid of people once they act up. So the Green Bay Massacre became the endpoint of my story which I then built backwards into a journey of one character in particular. I focused on a guy in the lower ranks of society and the decisions he has to make as a consequence of the communally segregated political parties of the 1970s."

Martens: *Better Mus' Come* became the first feature-length historical film to come out of Jamaica. How did you recreate the look and feel of the 1970s?

"Well, the person who needs much respect for that is our production designer Khalil Deane. He found all the props, from the cars and the signs to the guns and the clothes. He did an amazing job, because we don't have prop houses here in Jamaica that keep 1970s stuff. He had to find it all from actual people together with our costume designer Charl Baker. They had to

hunt down all the individuals who had that stuff in storage or whose grandparents had all these old clothes. They really scavenged Kingston to find the genuine versions we needed. We might have made one or two dresses, but we mainly refurbished old wardrobes. Also, there was a hotel in town that had all this old stuff as part of their decor—old radios, televisions, beer signs, and so on. When we discovered that place and had some arrangements with them to rent their stuff, that helped us a lot. Besides a really strong production design department and wardrobe department, we also had a strong make-up department. The hairstyles, and in particular women's hairstyles, were drastically different in the seventies. The people who ran the departments did a great job. Although we did everything in a really low-budget way, we were very meticulous with getting the look and feel right. The same goes for the locations we selected. Our main location was Sandy Park, which is a neighborhood in the Barbican/Liguanea area that is not in Downtown, even though we were filming there to represent Downtown Kingston. We just developed a good relationship with the residents there, especially with a group of young guys who were very active in the community. They had a recording studio, they were making music, they were putting on shows, they connected us to other members of the community and just got the rest of the community on our side. To recreate the arena of a 1970s ghetto, we basically only had to strip the new signage and remove all the cars. Sandy Park, like many communities in Jamaica, has these little ghetto parts, very rough and rustic, which do not look a lot different than in the seventies. They are still places that are run down, unfinished, and underdeveloped, wallowing in incompleteness."

Martens: Many people living in Sandy Park ended up appearing in the film, not only as extras but also in some of the title roles. How did you go about casting the production? Have you been able to show the film to the community afterwards?

"Most of the residents functioned as extras, but some indeed became lead actors. After a first round of auditions at the Edna Manley School of Visual and Performing Arts, we went to Sandy Park and pretty much auditioned anyone in the community who was interested. Literally hun-

dreds of people came out to sign up. We gave them all little scenarios to play out in order to see who was talented. This is how we found Ricardo Orgil who plays *Flames*, one of the main characters. He was just so overpowering at the audition that we knew this guy was special. Then there was another great guy from the neighborhood, Duane Pusey who got the part of *Dogheart*, the PNP bad boy who is the nemesis of the lead character. So we ended up giving them major roles in the film. The other gang members that you see in the film were also guys from the neighborhood. They may not have a bunch of lines, but they definitely hold a look on camera. And of course many residents became extras in the crowds. At the same time, we hired a lot of people on set. We for example hired people to cook food and to do craft services. We also rented a couple homes from the residents there. Whenever we were shooting, we had a house or two as production offices. So we were really doing business there and the people of the community were involved on many levels. This is also the reason why we were able to move around,

Although you will never find it, you have to strive for perfection.

to create any set we wanted, and to shoot all night there. When the film was ready, they were the first people to see it. We had our very first screening with them at the Palace Amusement cinema at Sovereign Centre, the closest cinema to them. They could just walk over there. So before the premiere we had this cast-and-crew screening, mainly with people from Sandy Park. It was amazing. They were so excited because it was all them in the film, all people and places they know. A few months later, we organized another screening in the community itself. We just

put up a big screen in the middle of the town. We also screened the film in Tivoli Gardens, the garrison community and JLP stronghold in West Kingston. The story of *Better Mus' Come* was and still is in many ways very much their reality. When the film came out in 2010, Tivoli Gardens was the scene of violent confrontations between gunmen and the security forces, associated with the hunt for Christopher "Dudus" Coke. For me, the Tivoli Incursion bore resemblance to the Green Bay Massacre. So at the one-year anniversary of that event we did a free screening in Tivoli Gardens as part of an effort by a group of young Jamaican activists to bring some uplifting energy through creativity to the neighborhood. Needless to say, this screening was very emotional.

Martens: Besides these community screenings, *Better Mus' Come* also had quite a successful film festival run. Could you tell a little more about this?

The film was first shown in theatres in Jamaica. It was a big hit and made a lot of noise. We did not really have an international film festival strategy, but we wanted to get the film out there, so we decided to bring it to the 2011 Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival. It was really the best decision. *Better Mus' Come* not only won the Viewer's Choice Award for Best Narrative Feature Film, but the film also created such a stir and the energy around the film was just so powerful that the film started to roll. The people who saw it at that festival alone started to get it placed in other festivals. For example, we were way passed the deadline for the Bahamas International Film Festival, but through a connection we got in and it also won Best Picture there. We were also in the Havana Film Festival and the Dominican Global Film Festival and we just did a lot of special screenings throughout the region. We unfortunately haven't been able to do a proper theatrical run in Caribbean islands other than Jamaica. For some reason that wasn't happening. At the time Caribbean cinemas were not very keen yet on showing Caribbean films. They saw it as a risk, but that is now changing. They have had some local hits and are beginning to open up to screening Caribbean content. For me that is a no-brainer. Clearly, when you put up the content, people are going to come, even if it's not amazing. Anyway, after a few festivals in the Caribbean, *Better Mus' Come* went to the Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles, where I won the Award for Best Director, and eventually it

went to the American Black Film Festival, where lead actor Sheldon Shepard won Best Actor. Beyond that, we got the chance to screen the film with the Toronto International Film Festival as part of TIFF Cinematheque as well as places such as New York, London, and Amsterdam. Also, I have done a lot of academic screenings. I had the opportunity to travel to various universities internationally to present the film. I really enjoy these kinds of screenings, as students get the most engaged. They are looking at your film with a critical eye, so you always get really interesting questions and discussions, which is great. So basically, I have travelled the world with the film—and there are of course also tons of places the film has gone to that I haven't gone to. We eventually received North American distribution with AFFRM, the African-American Film Festival Releasing Movement. The film had a theatrical run in New York and Los Angeles and special screenings in cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. It then got on Netflix and iTunes and last year it was broadcasted in the UK on BBC2. So although we did not follow a standard distribution path, I think *Better Mus' Come* definitely made waves. It was all very indie, but for a Caribbean film it was pretty ground-breaking. It has cut a small path in the international world of cinema.

Martens: In 2010 you co-founded New Caribbean Cinema, a movement to foster filmmaking in Jamaica. Why did you decide to launch this initiative? How would you evaluate *Ring di Alarm*, the first series of short films you released under the banner of New Caribbean Cinema?

I founded New Caribbean Cinema along with Michelle Serieux, a St. Lucian-born filmmaker living in Jamaica, basically because we felt a need to put out work. Not only our own work but also the work of other Jamaican filmmakers. We saw a good amount of young and talented people on the island doing commercials and music videos who wanted to make the step towards short films and eventually feature films. So Michelle and I decided to join forces to create opportunities for these young filmmakers to produce work that could put them on the map. The idea was to write stories that could be shot in a single day, so that it could actually be done. There was no money to spend; it had to be as cheap as possible. So New Caribbean Cinema became a mix of a feeling of getting work done and a method of how to get it done—a "by any

means necessary" approach to filmmaking. We know we can always call on each other to do things, even if we are not making films under the New Caribbean Cinema banner. The first round of films that we made together, which was ultimately put out under the title *Ring di Alarm* (2013), was the combined effort of the directors Nile Saulter, Joel Burke, Kyle Chin, Michael 'Ras Tingle' Tingle, Michelle, and myself, with the support of a group of amazing actors and crew that shared our vision. We all made one short film and worked together on each other's films. Although the *Ring di Alarm* films are very different from each other, I do think they have something in common, and that is a slight interest in the dark side of life. All the films seem to have an element of death, whether it is death coming and not knowing how to deal with it or the premeditation of a murder or its aftermath. They are all morality tales. Each film has a character who is faced with a moral dilemma—they all have to choose which way to go and they all get what they ask for. It's a common plot device in much storytelling, but I definitely see it very directly in the *Ring di Alarm* films. Even the comedic work is darkly comedic. Looking at our work, I think it gives you some insight into what the Caribbean person of our age is thinking about and maybe slightly obsessing about. The issue of life and death is really an issue we think about a lot, particularly in Jamaica. I definitely see that as a day-to-day reality. At first, I didn't even notice the violent scent in most of the films, until other people started to make comments about it. I think we are obsessed with death—we are all dealing with death; it feels omnipresent. In filmmaking, these things tend to rise to the surface. One of my next film projects also involves death, a lot of death. It will make a social commentary on meaningless death and the cheapness of life in our society. I cannot tell too much about it yet, because it's quite controversial and I don't want to get shut down. Another project I am working on, *Sprinter*, has nothing do to with death; it's a coming-of-age story about the next great Jamaican sprinter. It's a story about the world of athletics, but even more so about a modern Caribbean family and the rivalry between siblings. It also deals with issues of migration, with separation due to economic opportunities elsewhere. So that's a very different story. Despite our slight obsession with death, we need variety.

Martens: I know that you do a lot of the organizational work related to your film projects yourself, from funding to marketing and everything in between. Could you tell us how you manage the execution of your projects? Does it provide you a sustainable income, or to put it more generally, do you think it is possible to develop a sustainable film industry in Jamaica?

Well, *Better Mus' Come* was funded by private investors who believed in my work and *Ring di Alarm* was basically financed by myself. I was the executive producer. Funding came from other jobs, such as doing regular commercials on the side. For my next projects, I am looking at all directions and angles to get funding. The Jamaican government unfortunately has no money available. Hopefully, they will be paying more attention to enable local filmmaking, whether it is making the process less bureaucratic or making incentives for investors. Whatever they have, I will be using. At the moment, I am mainly looking at private investors and international grants. I have already received a lot of support and interest for my new projects, so I hope to go into production next year. I am currently in the process of figuring how to put together a strong team that I can rely on to carry through work all the way to the end and to share responsibilities. When you do a lot of Do It Yourself filmmaking, you end up controlling almost everything by default, but that is not necessarily the best way to do things. You cannot do everything. You need a team of dedicated people. I have tried to do everything myself for a long time and I am just now accepting that that's not possible. Honestly, when my week starts, my phone starts ringing. And sometimes the week does not end, because my phone is ringing in the weekends too. There is no set schedule. I do quite a bit of commercial work; that is actually what I do most of the time. I usually have a few of these projects going on at the same time, in different stages of development, on which I work as a director or cinematographer or both. Throughout the week, I am often in touch with a couple of production companies. I oversee treatments, I deliver edits, I go to meetings, I scout locations, I am in pre-production, or I am actually shooting. I am also one of the primary people doing the marketing of our films through social media. While I have

people helping me with that, I am the engine. And on top of all that I am supposed to be writing, because I always have scripts to write. I am often cursing pure *bombaclat* about when I get to write. But in the end everything kind of completes itself in its own time. When I have a deadline, I just have to stay up for a few nights and get it done. In order to create a sustainable film industry in Jamaica, I think two types of projects need to be made: projects made for \$100,000 or less that are aimed at the local and diasporic audience with the hope of crossing over into the indie cinema market; and larger projects that are made in Jamaica primarily for an international audience. When you are making films here just for the local and diasporic audience, you have to be very good at producing decent work for cheap, because making your money back in Jamaica and the diaspora alone is difficult. But it is doable. It has been done in the past and will move forward in the future. In fact, you already see various great low-budget filmmakers in the Caribbean working like this, putting out film after film. This is one method of sustainable filmmaking. The other method is attracting more international productions, especially episodic television series. These kind of productions would bring massive investment and employment to the island, as television series usually run for a year or even years. This alone could create an industry. So yes, mastering low-budget indies on the one hand and bringing in big-budget productions on the other hand is the way to do it. I think it is possible and I think it will happen.

Martens: Taking a regional perspective, how do you see your work fitting in the wider development of Caribbean cinema? Do you consider New Caribbean Cinema as a driver of a new wave of Caribbean cinema?

I definitely think New Caribbean Cinema is a driver for Caribbean cinema in general. I just see it. I see local filmmakers in Jamaica making short films using our DIY method and I see it when we go to other Caribbean islands. People there have seen our work; they know what we are doing and it is energizing them to make their own films. I want to get filmmakers from all across the region involved. Our first major effort, *Ring di Alarm*, was done by filmmakers living in Jamaica, but I want our movement to be more Caribbean-wide. There are currently great filmmakers emerging from Trinidad, from Aruba, from the Bahamas—they are just making quality pieces.

We run into each other at film festivals and feel something serious is going on. So yes, together with these filmmakers I believe our movement is definitely pushing things forward in the Caribbean. With that, I mainly mean the Anglophone Caribbean. Of course the Latin-American film movement, with its main production centers in Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba, is already much older and more ingrained. But there is a huge language barrier. In the Anglophone Caribbean we are not really exposed to Latin-American cinema. I got exposed to it when I went to Cuba for the film festival and realized not only the sheer size of it, but also how unaware we are of what's happening there. I do very much identify our work with the Latin-American film movement. First of all, I identify with the social realities. When I watch a film coming out of Rio de Janeiro or Mexico City, it pretty much could be Kingston. The people look a little different and the language sounds different, but the social dynamics are very similar. The films that inspired me majorly are the Brazilian film *City of God* (2002) and all the films that came out of that Mexico City movement in the early 2000s, such as *Amores perros* (2000) and *Y tu mamá también* (2001). More recently, *Miss Bala* (2011), a Mexican drama film, was excellent. I also see similarities with our practical methods, political statements, and cultural aesthetics. I consider Latin-American cinema as where we are heading and probably should be heading. I think we are on the brink of something amazing. I have been saying this for a long time, but I am now really seeing it. For example, a place where I am really seeing it is the Trinidad & Tobago Film Festival. They have the best selection of work from the Anglophone Caribbean and related work from the other Caribbean islands, from Latin America, from Africa, from elsewhere. You see all our films getting way better. So I feel any moment now we can make the big hit films, I definitely feel that. If we would be able to get funding more easily, it would already be happening. In the next few years, we will be there. Pay attention."

Martens: You observe several similarities with Latin-American cinema. What is Caribbean cinema bringing extra to the table? Is there something like a Caribbean film aesthetic?

"There is. The Caribbean is so mixed up with influences—from Europe, Africa, Asia, North America, and South America. I think the Caribbean film aesthetic is a bit more kaleidoscopic, more saturated, and more colourful. Films from Latin America are often harsh and rigid and I think there is room in Caribbean cinema to be more vibrant, more playful, and more experimental—also using folklore and magical realism as a real mainstay in the work. You already see that happening, especially in films from Trinidad & Tobago. It is really Caribbean and has a great role to play in world cinema. So the Caribbean film aesthetic is still very much open, but it is definitely magical, colourful, kaleidoscopic, language-rich, and musical. The two Jamaican films that really inspired me are *The Harder They Come* (1972), of course, and *Rockers* (1978). *The Harder They Come* was just ground-breaking. It was classical storytelling applied to a very Jamaican reality. It still serves as a blueprint for Jamaican filmmakers; it will always be. *The Harder They Come* reminds us that making a great Jamaican film is possible. Before Perry Henzell, the film's director, passed away in 2006, I was fortunate to pick his brain once in a while. Although we didn't meet very often, I definitely learned a lot from him. One time I tried to pitch him the story of *Fedda*, because he asked what I was working on, but every time I was talking for not even a minute, he asked me to start over again. He taught me that if you can't encapsulate what your story is within a few sentences, then something is off. At the time I thought it was very harsh, and I didn't agree with him, but as I have grown older I have come to understand what he meant. You have to know the essence, the soul of the film. The last time I saw him, about two weeks before he passed, I asked him some editing advice. At the time I was editing *Better Mus' Come* and doubting some scenes that people seemed to love but made me cringe every time. So I asked him if I should delete them or leave them in. He just looked at me and said: "When I cringe, I cut." So I did that and of course *Better Mus' Come* lost about half an hour of scenes, but it worked. He was very succinct, to the point, and it meant a lot to me. It's what I have been doing ever since. If I cringe now, for anything, I am cutting, no mat-

ter how much the test audience seems to like it. Although you will never find it, you have to strive for perfection. *Rockers* was another great piece. It was almost like a documentary—it did not even have a real plot! They just filmed actual people as they were and then figured out how to flow a little plot in there. In doing so, it captured Jamaican language and culture. It was like a time capsule. I made all the people involved in *Better Mus' Come* study *Rockers*, because we were making a film set in Kingston in the late 1970s and *Rockers* was filmed in Kingston in the late 1970s. For us, *Rockers* was our Bible with regard to language and dress, a manual about the way Jamaican people rolled in that particular period."

Martens: How do you see your role in the future development and direction of Caribbean cinema? What do you aspire to achieve with your films?

"Maybe this sounds competitive, but I want to make the films that epitomize Caribbean cinema. I want to make the films that introduce a new way, a new aesthetic. I want to develop a style. I want to be as great as the filmmakers I look up to. I want to have an impact on cinema like Hitchcock, Scorsese, or Kubrick. I want my work to be seen by all film lovers. Although I am making films that are very Caribbean, my aim is to get on the radar of people who, for example, watch the films of Michael Haneke—that's where I want to go. I am very aware of the fact that my most immediate audiences, and the audiences that can allow the film to travel, are the local and diasporic audiences. They are paying attention to what's happening on the island. When an article comes out in the *Jamaica Gleaner*, people here and in the diaspora are seeing it. They are plugged in already. So I see the value of these audiences, as a source of support and a gateway to a larger global audience, but I want as many people as possible to see my films. I want millions. At the end of the day, I want to have a big presence in the world of cinema."

**In the next few years,
we will be there.**

Pay attention.

THE ISLAND IMAGE AND GLOBAL LINKS IN PUERTO RICAN CINEMA OF THE 21ST CENTURY

MARÍA CRISTINA RODRÍGUEZ

Résumé

Cet essai se penche sur la production cinématographique portoricaine des années 1980 et 1990, contexte nécessaire pour comprendre la montée des jeunes réalisateurs portoricains de la première décennie du 21^e siècle. Même si les contenus et les points de vue de cette nouvelle génération sont différents les uns des autres, ils présentent des éléments communs relatifs au mode de vie insulaire et aux mouvements diasporiques, et continuent à se demander qui nous sommes et comment on se définit. Les problèmes de la production locale et de la distribution internationale continuent à prévaloir dans tout projet cinématographique. L'essai analyse un certain nombre de films signés par un groupe divers de réalisateurs dans le but de repenser le concept d'un cinéma portoricain.

Abstract

This essay looks back at the production of Puerto Rican films in the 1980s and 1990s as the point of departure for young Puerto Rican filmmakers in the first decades of the 21st century. Even as the stories of this newer generation differ, their concern with the island image and diasporic movement continue to question Puerto Rican identity. Problems of local film production and outside distribution remain for each film project. This essay analyzes a number of key films by a diverse group of directors whose goal is to rethink the concept of a Puerto Rican cinema.

A thriving group of young Puerto Rican filmmakers in the first decade of the 21st century have produced debut and sometimes second feature narrative productions. They present a vision of a postmodern Puerto Rico with an emphasis on sensationalist news headlines, everyday violence, public family feuds, and sex as commodity, shunning earlier visions of a nostalgic pre-modern society with issues of family greed, state repression, and countryside tranquility as old-fashioned. The essay explores the 21st-century vision of Puerto Rican cinema as it emerges from individualized film proposals of the last 30 years of the previous century.

At the end of the 1970s, American commercial films reigned in Puerto Rico's movie theatres. Spanish-language films from Spain, Mexico, and Argentina, historically enjoying great popularity, had virtually disappeared because of the prevalence of Hollywood productions in theatres throughout the island. Furthermore, the public had lost interest in Puerto Rican movies, which consisted mainly of comedies and musicals emulating local television shows. Most of these productions were made with foreign capital by foreign directors and could not compete in screening time with U.S. commercial productions. In spite of this competition, several Puerto Rican projects were underway during this decade, with Jacobo Morales' *Dios los cría...* (*And God Created Them...*; 1980) in its final production stages. This film along with two other Morales films—*Nicolás y los demás* (*Nicholas and the Others*; 1985) and *Lo que le pasó a Santiago* (*What Happened to Santiago*; 1989)—opened the possibility in the 1980s of re-defining Puerto Rican cinema and establishing a film industry in the island with an urban vision of the country that could travel throughout Latin America and the United States. For several years, Puerto Rico benefitted from an existing filmmaking infrastructure, a result of the expertise and sophistication of the advertising industry. The only step needed was to put advertising technicians and equipment to work on fiction films in 35mm, targeting a wide audience and aiming for box office revenues that would make it possible for producers to get a return on their investment.

Jacobo Morales did not present a new vision of filmmaking, but rather his work refocused Puerto Rican cinema by looking at specifically Puerto Rican topics—subjects, history, characters, idiosyncrasies—and drawing on that reality to propose an original, nationally rooted definition of this art form. Just as Guadeloupean filmmaker Christian Lara attempted to define a national cinema in his 1992 interview with Mbye Cham (Cham 281), *Kino García in Breve historia del cine puertorriqueño* (*Brief History of Puerto Rican Cinema*; 1989) expresses a similar concern by suggesting a series of parameters towards identifying what constitutes a “genuinely” Puerto Rican film. According to García, the values the film presents should respond to an interpretation of reality that is essentially Puerto Rican. The film should be a Puerto Rican production, or have a significant number of Puerto Ricans taking part in the production effort, whether in the artistic, technical, or financial aspects. The subject or content should respond to a situation or an issue approached and developed from a national point of view; and the film should contribute to the development of a Puerto Rican national cinema (4-5).

Puerto Rican filmmakers in the 21st century appear to show little interest in encasing their own cinema in these parameters, although they stress their commitment to showcasing the vibrant day-to-day happenings of Puerto Rican life by focusing on the dynamic youth and young-adult culture and lifestyles; these directors include Raúl Marchand, Roberto Busó, Carlitos Ruiz, Juan Dávila, Cristian Abner, and Jean-Carlo Pérez. Their various film projects, both short and long features attached to TV sitcoms and made-for-TV movies, propose a visual style that appeals to a younger generation: unsteady camera movement, mixture of angle shots, quick action, street and colloquial language, and technologically sophisticated use of lighting and camera. Francisco González focuses on Raúl

The subject or content should respond to a situation or an issue approached and developed from a national point of view

Marchand's *12 horas* (*12 Hours*; 2001) in "La noche te llama: '12 horas' cumple diez años" ("The Night is Calling You: '12 Hours' is celebrating 10 Years") as the film that set a new trend in Puerto Rican cinema with its use of digital filmmaking on a long feature. Another innovation of this film was the use of different scenarios for stories dealing with an 18-34-year-old Puerto Rican urban population that transcends class and gender issues. González also points out the influence of the Danish film, Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen* (*The Celebration*; 1998), which set the example for making independent, low-budget films with easily accessible digital cameras.

The availability of the digital camera was certainly a breakthrough in a local industry that required budgets of at least \$500,000 for a medium-length or long-feature film. As an example of this surge in film production, in 2007 five feature-length films were shown in commercial film theatres: *Angel* (Jacobo Morales), *El clown* (Pedro Adorno and Emilio Rodríguez), *El cimarrón* (Maroon; Iván Dariel Ortiz), *Maldeamores* (Lovesickness; Carlitos Ruiz and Mariem Pérez-Riera), and *Ruido* (Noise; César Rodríguez). These films stand out in their realistic approach to social and historical issues and the technological care and sophistication used to tell their stories. In *Angel*, Morales shifts from his previous glossy 35mm films to construct a gritty drama of political repression that conflates events in the 1960s with contemporary issues and presents these concerns with skilled artistic and acting direction. *El clown* uses metaphorical imagery to tell the story of a talented local actor who is discovered and becomes successful as an advertising emblem and then loses touch with the everyday life of his former community. *El cimarrón* is a rarity as a historical film that rescues part of the Puerto-Rican-African heritage. While Cuban filmmakers made plantation society and slavery a recurrent theme, Puerto Rican literature and film have for the most part sidestepped this history. *Maldeamores* attempts to follow a more Latin American trend of [dis]connecting dissimilar stories, à la Alejandro García Inárritu's *Amores*

perros (*Love's a Bitch*; 2000), but relying too much on stereotyping, overused street language, and exaggeration for easy laughs. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the film had wide distribution and critical recognition because of its endorsement by Puerto Rican Hollywood actor Benicio del Toro and its inclusion in the TRIBECA Film Festival. *Ruido* focuses on the new middle classes in which young professionals measure their success by their cars and distant townhouses; meanwhile, family relations take lower priority, creating continuous friction between parents and children. All these stories are set within a Puerto Rican socio-historical reality with which the audience can identify and empathize. As one might expect, audiences most enthusiastically responded to comedies rather than dramas.

Although migration has been a component of Puerto Rican society since 1898 when the United States invaded the island, very few films base their stories on Puerto Ricans' residence in Hawaii (before statehood in 1959) and the



Fig. 1. Film poster *La Guagua Aérea*

continental United States, or migrants' subsequent return to the island. A notable exception is Luis Molina's *La guagua aérea* (*The Airbus*; 1993), based on a collection of essays and stories by Luis Rafael Sánchez, whose narrative works were widely read when first published in Argentina and later translated to English by Gregory Rabassa. The film was extremely popular because of its marketing strategies and financial backing by a prominent higher educational institution (Universidad del Sagrado Corazón) and private enterprises. Before "the making of the film" became a standard feature on the island, Molina used it as a promotion tool that also involved a travel package from San Juan to New York where the film would be featured for the first time. Puerto Rican communities in both locations had an interactive relationship with the film as they became travelers mirroring the film's story. The film poster aptly illustrates this relationship, as a bus literally takes to the air (fig. 1).

Molina's experience in filmmaking began with documentaries on Puerto Rican cultural history such as *Boleto de ida* (*One-way Ticket*; 1983), *El teléfono: ayer y hoy* (*The Telephone: Yesterday and Today*; 1985), *Zafra* (*Sugar Cane Harvest*; 1990), *La historia de la farmacia en Puerto Rico* (*The History of Pharmacy in Puerto Rico*; 1992), *Allá viene el temporal* (*The Storm Is Coming*; 1985). For his 1990 debut feature film Molina adapted several short stories and vignettes of local colour by Puerto Rican writer Abelardo Díaz Alfaro. He directed some of the best actors on the island and established a link with the Department of Education's public television network that guaranteed the purchase and distribution of the film. In 1997 Molina returned to Alfaro's stories to produce the film *Cuentos para despertar* (*Wake-Up Stories*), which was not as successful. He also attempted another film on migration in 2005, *El sueño del regreso* (*Boricua Homecoming*), which centered on the return experience by having 10 people from the United States win a Puerto Rican vacation package, which supposedly included airfare, hotel, and sightseeing. This time around there was no literary adaptation and its comic elements resembled local sitcoms.



Fig. 2. Scene from *Maldeamores*

The reliance on familiar and overused comic elements has been one of the key drawbacks in recent Puerto Rican cinema. Critics hailed *Maldeamores* (2007) (fig. 2) as a rupture with tradition and the beginning of a youthful and vibrant new style. It had a long run in local commercial theatres and was also selected as the Puerto Rican entry in the Foreign Film category at the Oscars. It won praise from local film and entertainment critics with the lone exception of the weekly *Claridad*. One of the individual stories deals with a mama's boy in his 30s who decides to hijack a bus in order to force its driver to accept his marriage offer. Another story is about the hysteria of a dysfunctional family that has to deal in close proximity with the death of an elderly relative and the unfaithfulness and abandonment of the husband. In the third story, a ménage-à-trois delights the lives of a woman and two men in their 80s. The bookend story, which makes fun of what appears to be a case of domestic violence, is perhaps the most controversial in a machista culture where [ex]girlfriends and [ex]wives are seen as objects to possess and dispose of when no longer useful or submissive.

Raúl Marchand's 2012 film *Broche de oro (Finale)* was a box office hit—as was his 2000 *12 horas*—that appealed to a wide audience across generations. Pablo, Anselmo, and Rafael, longtime residents of an elderly compound, accept the latter's grandson's invitation to spend the day at the beach where Carlos will participate in a surfer's competition. To do this they have to evade the vigilance of the Mother Superior and the standing guard and Carlos has to "borrow" his father's car. The story becomes a celebration of friendship, sustained love across generations, and the in/significant things that hold us all together. The film is not exempt from TV-sitcom situations, but has enough storyline and talent to go beyond slapstick humor.

Although women directors are almost absent from this new generation, Sonia Fritz, Mexican-born long-time resident of Puerto Rico, has led an uninterrupted career in filmmaking. She began her career in Mexico as an anthropological film archivist. In Puerto Rico, her documentary-film trajectory has focused on fine arts and women artists: such as *Myrna Báez: los espejos del silencio (Myrna Báez: Silence's Mirrors; 1989)*, *Puerto Rico: arte e identidad (Puerto Rico: Art and Identity; 1991)*, *Barro, una celebración (Clay, a Celebration; 2014)*, and *Un retrato de Carlos Collazo (A Portrait of Carlos Collazo; 1995)*. Her films on historical figures and women's movements include *Luisa Capetillo: pasión de justicia (Luisa Capetillo: Passion for Justice; 1995)*, *Julia en tres tiempos (Julia in Three Waves; 1996)*, and *La alianza de mujeres viequesenses (The Alliance of Vieques Women; 2000)*. She also examines cultural movements in such films as *Bandas, vidas y otros sonos (Bands, Lives, and Other Rhythms; 1985)*, *Las caras lindas de Tite Curet Alonso (Tite Curet Alonso's Pretty Faces; 2004)*, and *Música 100x35, notas de una transformación (Music 100x35, Notes of a Transformation; 2013)*. Some of her work deals particularly with migration: *Visa para un sueño: la inmigración de las mujeres dominicanas a Puerto Rico (Visa for a Dream: The Immigration of Dominican Women to Puerto Rico; 1990)*, *Sueños atrapados: la migración dominicana a Nueva York (Trapped Dreams: The Dominican Migration to New York; 1994)*, *Cruzando fronteras: puertorriqueñas y mexicanas en Nueva York (Crossing Frontiers: Puerto Rican and Mexican Women in New York; 2000)*, and *Puertorriqueñas de aquí y de allá (Puerto Rican Women from Here and Over There; 2001)*.

As might be expected, with limited infrastructure to produce feature films Fritz's incursion into fiction is not as prolific as her documentary filmmaking. Nevertheless, she has directed two features and produced four others. *El beso que me diste (The Kiss You Gave Me; 2000)* is based on the thriller novel *Porque el beso que me diste no lo olvidaré jamás (Because I Will Never Forget the Kiss You Gave Me)* by up-and-coming Puerto Rican writer Stella Soto, who framed her story of the politically charged and violent atmosphere of the island from the standpoint of a journalist. Her second feature, *América (2010; Figure 3)*, had the professional and financial backing of actor Edward James Olmos; the film is based on Esmeralda Santiago's novel *América's Dream* and set in Vieques, a small off-shore island near Puerto Rico, during the Navy occupation (1941-2003). *América's Dream* tells the story of a woman who is able to initially break away from a cycle of gendered violence by accepting a job as a nanny and maid and moving to a small Eastern town in the United States, away from the father of her 15-year-old daughter.



Fig. 3. Film poster *América*

Depending on the policies established by the governing party elected every four years (there are two major ruling parties in Puerto Rico—Popular Democratic, pro status-quo; and New Progressive, favouring annexation to the U.S.—and other smaller ones endorsing sovereignty and independence), the state television channel may promote filmmaking through screenwriting competitions, seed money for making films for TV, and primetime screening.

During the time that Sila María Calderón was the first woman governor of Puerto Rico (2000-2004), the state channel sponsored a series of films on labour and women's issues directed by Sonia Valentín: *Sudor*

Amargo (Bitter Sweat; 2003) on the closing of a tuna factory in the western part of the island; and *Las combatientes (The Combatants; 2004)* on women in different stages of breast cancer. Valentín was also able to develop two successful series: *Parece que fue ayer (It Seems Like Yesterday)* and *Psicosis (Psychosis)*. This opening in the state channel was closed when, in 2008, the government enacted drastic economic cuts and suspended almost all locally made TV productions.

Although most of the programming in local network channels is imported from Mexico or the United States, there have been some opportunities for local production. Vicente Castro, an experienced and successful stage director, has shown his made-for-TV films on commercial channels by tapping a variety of sponsors to assure that his films have a wide audience. These films have been well received because they dramatize the everyday violence that has characterized Puerto Rican society during the past decades. For example, *La recompensa (The Reward; 2008)* and *Locos de amor (Crazy Love; 2001)* had very high ratings on local TV. Even though neither of their directors had attempted to make films for the big screen—mostly because of the high cost of production and the difficulty of distribution outside the island—in December 2014, Castro took advantage of the audience's taste for action films and presented *Los Reyes: la verdadera historia del Búster y el Camaleón (The Kings: The True Story of Búster and Camaleón)*, which screened in local movie theatres for four weeks.

If film production is an extremely difficult task, selling the film in U.S. markets and entering the stateside distribution circuit has proven the greatest burden for independent filmmakers. In the 1990s, Molina's *La guagua aérea* penetrated the circuit of Spanish-speaking films in U.S. cities with large Hispanic populations. Although other films have attempted the same strategy, none has been able to recover its overall financial investment.

The filmmakers prioritized involvement with community affairs, interviews with everyday people, and the use of PBS and other networks to insert themselves in the news of the day.

Notwithstanding this drawback, Puerto Rican films—including the recent New York-based *Under My Nails*—have established their presence at a great variety of film festivals

in Phoenix, Chicago Latino, New York Latino, TRIBECA, and Montreal, and other locations. In terms of cable TV, HBO Latino has greatly contributed to the exposure of Puerto Rican films.

Even though most Puerto Ricans in the United States categorize themselves as Puerto Ricans and reject attempts during the 1970s and 1980s to rename them as Nuyoricans/Chicagoricans/Hartricians/Philiricans, etcetra, several factors stand out when comparing cinema produced in Puerto Rico and that produced in the United States. Lillian Jiménez and Ana María García, both documentary filmmakers, have written extensively on the variety and quality of film productions by Puerto Ricans residing in the U.S.. The vast majority of these films document the struggles and achievements of this population as they face ethnic and racial discrimination and poor housing facilities, schools, and medical services. The filmmakers prioritized involvement with community affairs, interviews with everyday people, and the use of PBS and other networks to insert themselves in the news of the day. They tapped city and state funds and non-profit foundations to produce their projects. As might be expected, narrative films were seldomly produced during this time because of the overall investment and difficulty of distribution, with the exception of a limited number of short films including Luis Soto's 1986 *The House of Ramón Iglesia* and María Norman's 1987 *The Sun and the Moon*.

Ana María García in her 2000 book *Cine y video puertorriqueño/Puerto Rican Film and Video* (and previous work in the 1995 *San Juan Cinemafest* video exhibition) attempts to write the overlooked chapter on Puerto Rican cinema in the United States, missing in previous books and special issue journals since the 1980s. She selects 22 filmmakers and includes interviews and a selected filmography for each one. Some were prominent in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Lillian Jiménez, Bienvenida Matías, Diego Echevarría, with independent productions or PBS-sponsored documentaries. In the 1990s there is “a marked preference for fictionalizing their messages” (García xlv) as evidenced by Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s experimental filmmaking in *Brincando el charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican* (1994), Karen Torres-Cox’s *Pleasant Dreams* (1996), Néstor Miranda’s *Destination Unknown* (1997), and Rose Troche’s *Go Fish* (1994) and *Bedrooms and Hallways* (1998). Some have moved to other cities and states and continue to work as producers and teachers. Others, as in the case of Dylcia Pagán who spent 19 years in a federal prison, moved to Puerto Rico and have inserted themselves in complex and localized community organizations.

Diego Echeverría and Ricardo Méndez-Matta, with work experience in both places, highlight the issue of language as an element that defines and separates films made by Puerto Ricans located in either Puerto Rico or the United States: “In Puerto Rico, people speak Spanish. Film has to reflect this reality [...]. There is also Puerto Rican film made in the States and this one needs to be made in English in order to reflect the fact that Puerto Ricans here speak more English than Spanish. They have lived a process of cultural transformation” (García 65). Méndez-Matta, who lives in Los Angeles and works in the film industry there, disregards any notion of a national filmmaking: “People in the industry do not make films about other nationalities. And Puerto Ricans in general work separately, not together. I don’t think there is such a thing as a Puerto Rican cinema in the United States because the work is produced sporadically

and it is not thematically cohesive” (149). Miguel Arteta is a case in point since he has a successful career in independent film in the U.S. but none of his films deal with the Puerto Rican or Hispanic Community: *Star Maps*, *Chuck and Buck*, *The Good Girl*, *Youth in Revolt*, *Cedar Rapids*. Besides the language in which a feature film “speaks to spectators,” other major differences are that the American-made productions address a reality firmly located in a U.S. context. In these stories, characters’ conflicts are initiated, resolved, or changed within the American reality of jobs, housing, schools, health, and social conditions, including racialization and ethnization. The films are made with localized production funds (community, city, state, independent) and are inserted in the independent and Latino film distribution circuit. The question posed here is whether films such as *Under My Nails*, *El Clown*, and even *12 horas* can successfully navigate between island and mainland appeal in local and diasporic communities.

Bruno Irizarry’s *200 cartas (200 Letters; 2013)* accommodates Spanish- and English-speaking voices with shared experiences in New York and Puerto Rico by grouping four characters in a road movie: a Puerto Rican from New York, his Mexican coworker and travel companion, a Puerto Rican multi-tasker, and her Mexican friend on vacation on the island. 2014 records a major advancement in Puerto Rican cinema on the Island. *Vacas con gafas (Cows Wearing Glasses)*, the first feature by Alex Santiago Pérez, showcases the *minimalista* (minimalist) style—shoestring-budget, interior settings, use of non-professional actors, static camera, stories of everyday life—preferred by independent Latin American filmmakers. It tells the story of a once highly regarded artist and art teacher who is going blind; he chooses a strict daily routine so he can trace his steps as if he were still in control of the little he sees and what he is able to do. These films incorporate the sophisticated photography and sound that Puerto Rican film productions used to lack.

Even though the focus of this essay is the narrative long feature in this 21st century, the short film has been extremely important in the proliferation of a new generation of potential filmmakers. The accessibility to digital cameras, ability to film in a short time and with a low budget, in a collective enterprise made up of friends and close acquaintances (no one gets paid, but they have fun together) has made this format a valuable vehicle for inexpensive and highly sophisticated film projects. The internet also provides easy distribution and the many outlets provided for their exhibition in international festivals and specialized ones.

There are two important outlets for the making and promotion of short films. The Corporación de Cine de Puerto Rico/CCPR (Puerto Rican Film Commission), established in 2001 with the purpose of promoting filmmaking in Puerto Rico, has had a rocky history because directors and policies change according to the directions of the governing party. At one time, only film projects in English could apply for funds; at other times, most of its budget went to promoting the island as a film site for international productions, the great majority from the U.S. In recent years, the PR Film Commission has promoted “micro films/microcortos,” 5 to 15 minutes in length. Because these initiatives tend to be inexpensive compared to long features, the selected projects receive seed money upfront (\$5,000 to \$10,000) and are assured exhibition through closed-circuit transmission in government offices in addition to international promotional ventures. The second outlet is CineFiesta, the privately run festival that began in 2002 and is now the most important short film festival held in Puerto Rico. This festival draws the participation of hundreds of filmmakers from around the world who submit their 1 to 20-minute films to compete for Best Short and Best Screenplay. From the beginning of CineFiesta, the goal has been to promote Puerto Rican filmmaking and, to that end, they not only have a screenplay competition but also a separate award category for the Best Puerto Rican short film. In 2012, Álvaro Aponte-Centeno’s *Mi santa mirada (My Holy Gaze)* was the

highlight of CineFiesta because the film had also been chosen by the Cannes Festival to participate in their Short Film category. This 15-minute short about the daily life of a drug dealer unveils the violence and intimidation that abounds in drug-related turf wars with a minimum of dialogue. Shot mostly in interiors or at night, the director displays a Puerto Rican reality that does not fit in tourist advertisements or in politicians’ pictures designed to attract the favour and money of the U.S. government.

The Asociación de Productores Cinematográficos y Audiovisuales de Puerto Rico (Association of Cinematic and Audiovisual Producers or APCA), an organization that brings together film and audiovisual producers, has created an alliance with IBERMEDIA—a film fund sponsored by Spain, Portugal, and 13 Latin American countries—that offers the opportunity of co-productions and distribution in the Portuguese and Spanish circuit. Because of its emphasis on language, Puerto Rican filmmakers residing in the United States who want to participate in this fund would have to redirect their film projects to a different audience and distribution circuit. On the other hand, the Puerto Rican Film Commission (PRFC), through its own film fund, has already sponsored bilingual film projects such as *Under My Nails* (2012) and tends to favour the U.S. distribution circuit.

In celebrating 100 years of Puerto Rican cinema, an abundance of forums, panels, discussion groups, screenings, and other activities have stressed the uniqueness of a film production that has developed through its links to the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and diasporic communities in the United States. Whether purposely or not, Puerto Rican film productions in the 21st century, from the island or abroad, have maintained an uninterrupted conversation that transcends language and geography, always in search of a common culture.

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Image Notes

Figure 1: film poster *La Guagua Aérea* (<http://filmgates.com/title/tt0024665>)

Figure 2: scene from *Maldeamores* (<http://www.salt-co.com/index.php/titles/maldeamores>)

Figure 3: film poster *América* (http://www.tinseltine.com/2013_04_01_archive.html)

MÁS ALLÁ DE LA FASCINACIÓN Y EL HORROR: HACIA UNA ESTÉTICA RELACIONAL DEL CINE CARIBEÑO

RICARDO ARRIBAS

Résumé

Dans cet essai, je soutiens que les pratiques entourant le cinéma des Caraïbes pourraient être mieux compris dans les principaux tropes essayés par Édouard Glissant dans son livre *Poétique de la Relation*. Une grande partie de la récente cinéma des Caraïbes articule un cumulus d'expériences réfléchissant la nécessité pour un film esthétique «relationnelle» qui non seulement défait des notions importées de ce que les peuples des Caraïbes ont été, sont ou devraient être, mais plus fondamentalement d'une esthétique qui effondre notre compréhension habituelle de la notion même d'«identité», à savoir comme une expérience intemporelle, fixé, territoriale et d'exclusion, selon cela a été reçue et transmise à partir de l'héritage colonial et souvent perpétué dans les pratiques de films grand public. En examinant comment les notions de Glissant de 'relation' et de 'l'errance' mettent en évidence les contraintes de demandes identitaires contenues dans des mots clés tels que «nation», «race», «genre» et «sexe», mes commentaires autour des films représentatifs de Félix de Rooy, Fernando Pérez, Frances Negrón Muntaner et Luis Molina Casanova, visent à suggérer que le potentiel émancipateur des pratiques du cinéma et de la critique dans la région serait mieux saisi si elles sont faites à partir d'une esthétique relationnelle du film.

Abstract

In this paper, I contend that the main tropes rehearsed by Édouard Glissant in his *Poetics of Relation* help us better understand the practices surrounding Caribbean filmmaking. Much of recent Caribbean filmmaking articulates experiences that reflect the need for a "relational" film aesthetics. These experiences fundamentally question the common understanding of "identity" as a timeless, fixed, territorial, and exclusionary, inherited from the colonial legacy and often perpetuated in mainstream film practices. Departing from Glissant's notions of "relation" and "errancy", I highlight the constraints of identity demands contained in keywords such as 'nation', 'race', 'gender'. This understanding informs my analyses of representative films by Félix de Rooy, Fernando Pérez, Frances Negrón Muntaner and Luis Molina Casanova, in order to suggest that Caribbean film criticism better captures the region's emancipatory potential in light of a relational film aesthetics.

Error, exceso, dislocación, asimetría

Somos el futuro, somos toda
la mezcla de todos aquellos elementos
que siempre han estado
separados el uno del otro.

Félix de Rooy¹

La constelación de problemas que intento articular en el presente ensayo parte de la posibilidad de pensar el cine caribeño como un lugar privilegiado para dar cuenta, tanto desde el punto de vista de los procesos que intervienen en su producción, como desde su captación fenomenológica como imagen visual y sonora, de lo que Édouard Glissant denominó una "poética de la Relación" y del papel que otra noción central en dicha poética, la de la *errancia*, pueda jugar en la tarea de definir el campo estético de las prácticas de realización y de recepción de la experiencia fílmica en la región (33).

Antes de proseguir, vale reseñar brevemente pasajes claves de su libro y, de manera más bien esquemática, precisar a qué se refiere Glissant cuando habla de una poética de la Relación. Glissant establece que "en la poética de la Relación, el errante, que no es un viajero ni un descubridor ni el conquistador, busca conocer la totalidad del mundo y sabe ya que no lo logrará" (33). La errancia, por otro lado, supone una experiencia transversal a "la edición universal, generalizante, que resumía el mundo en una evidencia transparente, pretendiéndole un sentido y una finalidad pre-supuestas." El pensamiento de la errancia renuncia, pues, "a la pretensión de su suma o de su posesión" (33). Glissant opone lo relacional a la "generalización totalitaria;" lo múltiple a la "depredación de la raíz única." La errancia, por su parte, es aquello que niega "todo polo o todo metro-polo (*métropole*)."¹ Vale la pena enfatizar, por otro lado, el coeficiente cuasi-religioso que Glissant le adjudica a estas dos nociones. En un pasaje crucial de su *Poétique de la Relation*, Glissant define al pensamiento errante como "postulación de lo sagrado" y a la Relación como "una forma moderna de lo sagrado," en donde una "afirmación del rizoma de las relaciones múltiples con el Otro" presupone la puesta en práctica de una "dialéctica del desvío" (108). Dicha religiosidad sincrética, o en todo caso de lo múltiple, recurriendo a un juego conceptual que recuerda al *barroco furioso* de Severo Sarduy, Glissant la propone como una estética del mundo-caos o de lo Múltiple (en oposición, habría que entender, al totalitarismo monoteísta de las civilizaciones europeas).

No es mi interés entrar en los debates interpretativos, ya de carácter filosófico o meta-crítico, que la noción de lo *relacional* pueda suscitar. El presente esfuerzo está más bien enfocado, en primer lugar, en preguntar acerca de la capacidad de tales nociones para impartirle los caracteres propios a un lenguaje y cultura fílmicos en el que las experiencias del exilio, el sincretismo y la hibridez, que le parecen ser tan constitutivas, se han visto con frecuencia compelidas a circunscribir su esfera de sentido desde las imposiciones de una lectura de la carencia, en la que aquello que el cine puede ser, está siempre ya sometido a lo que no es. En segundo lugar, mi interés radica en inquirir acerca del poder de tales articulaciones para rendirle justicia a la tradición fílmica en la región, esto es, desde un lenguaje que la interpele desde un punto de cercanía máxima con respecto a la esencia de su vocación histórica. En última instancia, mi intención es contribuir a la discusión

acerca de la creación de un lenguaje fílmico que sea más fiel a la paradójica universalidad de la experiencia caribeña, lenguaje que encuentra una corroboración palpable en sus realidades, pero que quizás no ha advenido al giro subjetivo que implica, al decir de Susan Buck-Morss, "devolver el cuerpo a sus sentidos."

El trabajo hecho al efecto por Michael Taussig, David MacDoughall, Linda Williams y Susan Buck-Morss subsume, por un lado, el llamado a devolver "el cuerpo a las imágenes," que son "espejos de nuestros cuerpos" (MacDoughall), un llamado a la "magia" mimética de la captura en representaciones de los 'demonios' de la colonización (Taussig), o más generalmente, de un "devolver el cuerpo a sus sentidos" (Buck-Morss).² Este retorno a lo corpóreo como problema ha tomado lugar dentro del contexto de los estudios visuales norteamericanos durante las últimas dos décadas- en oposición más o menos implícita a las teorizaciones semióticas o estructuralistas que recurrían, ya a una ortodoxia abstracta y reduccionista de las teorías psicoanalíticas (la mirada y la voz como instancias incorpóreas o puro efecto psíquico), o al dogmatismo político que Toby Miller ve en "las hermenéuticas de la sospecha" de corte marxista, que sólo puede ver en el cine de consumo de masas la operación de las "ideologías del imperialismo cultural." Como el protagonista de *Accattone* de Pier Paolo Pasolini, donde la máxima de Santo Tomás "ver para creer" asume el valor de una creencia en el valor histórico y colectivo de la irreducible materialidad del pensamiento; una materialidad que Deleuze, invocando la historia moderna de los intentos de restitución sensorial del pensamiento a su imagen corpórea, le atribuye a una nueva función atea de la creencia (Deleuze 227-31). La máxima significa, desde el contexto que nos ocupa, saber mirar la realidad caribeña desde la causalidad material de la repetición histórica de sus formas visuales, en donde el ver y el ser visto puedan asistir a la presencia, en el mismo cuerpo, de una acción y un pensamiento proyectables en el espacio y en el tiempo (Pasolini 209; 270). Esta "forma moderna de lo sagrado" está ligada a la idea de una creencia atea que en *Cinema II: Imagen-Tiempo*, Deleuze sugiere, en particular conexión con la poética del cine del "discurso indirecto libre" que Pasolini propone en su *Empirismo Eretico* y que pone en práctica en sus películas. En sus incursiones teóricas en el "Tercer Mundo," Pasolini proponía la idea de un idioma del cine como "la lengua escrita de la realidad" buscando acaso articular un

idioma fílmico desde el punto inaugural de una co-presencia desalienante entre sujeto y objeto.³ Se trata, en fin, de aprender a ver la realidad caribeña desde su aspecto intersticial, donde el devenir caribeño se dé en el cortocircuito afectivo de las dialécticas de la maravilla y el terror, que son como el “chorro imaginario” de esas identificaciones que hoy sobre-determinan la lógica consumista del cine en su dimensión transnacional.

Si consideramos que lo más propio de una dialéctica es no ser simétrica consigo misma ni con los términos que la constituyen, cabría pensar que en el flujo internacional de las imágenes, el balance de la misma siempre deja restos que quedan “fuera de campo,” pero que la sostienen como el inconsciente del cine. Si tomamos como punto de partida una concepción del cine como una experiencia que hay que entender desde el intersticio que se tiende entre la imagen móvil, como resultado final de un modo específico de producción, y su momento de captura sensual por el espectador, un lugar que piense el cine desde el afuera suplementario de la dialéctica de las identificaciones, en otras palabras, desde los residuos afectivos que siempre resten por integrar al circuito de reducciones simbólicas, entonces el cine en general se revela ya como el lugar por excelencia donde esa “dialéctica del desvío” de la que habla Glissant se pueda verificar. En otras palabras, entre lo que se produce y lo que se consume, lo que me interesa es el desecho de los sentidos que no han llegado aún a su cuerpo, lo que resta por materializarse en una imagen en su tránsito de lo real a su representación. Varias preguntas surgen: ¿Qué mirada cinematográfica puede ser producida, que sea algo así como la del *exceso* de esa dialéctica del desvío? Desde el extremo de la

recepción, ¿qué puede ser leído desde ese exceso, que pueda ser interpretado como la posibilidad, aún por realizarse, de una vocación relacional del cine caribeño?

Una lectura de la experiencia que ofrecen las clausuras de los estatismos altomodernos- ya bajo el signo democrático-parlamentarista o de los socialismos “realmente existentes”- demuestra que los despliegues programáticos de “lo nacional” han adquirido concreción histórica a partir de sistemas de alianzas y genealogías, de divisiones y exclusiones, que inevitablemente generan sus visibilidades y reconocimientos, alternativa o concurrentemente en función del lenguaje, del género, del sexo, y lo racial. Subrayo esto porque me parece un hecho incontestable que el cine caribeño ofrece, cuando menos, una representación problemática de las categorías identitarias, tal y como éstas se manejan y trafican en el tal llamado cine de consumo de masas (*mainstream cinema*), incluso donde la categoría de identidad misma se presenta como un problema más que como una solución (Condé 370-1). Como muy bien lo señala Stuart Hall, “el nuevo cine Caribeño, así como las corrientes emergentes del cine Afro-caribeño en el exilio, cuestionan la categoría misma de la identidad cultural” (27). O para decirlo en los términos articulados por Miriam Hansen, ¿cómo el “vernáculo modernista” del cine puede ser reinscrito, en el cine caribeño, como un “vernáculo de la Relación,” a fin de que pueda dar cuenta de la experiencia caribeña, si en el ámbito de la experiencia estética, dicho vernáculo estuvo asociado desde sus orígenes a la cultura cinematográfica como respuesta a la transformación del aparato sensorio-motor por los modos de producción industrial tayloriano y fordista?

La guagua aérea, Luis Molina Casanova

Quisiera comenzar a esbozar una contestación a algunas de estas preguntas tomando el caso de Puerto Rico, contraponiendo el film *La guagua aérea*, de Luis Molina Casanova, con el film de Frances Negrón Muntaner, *Brincando el Charco*, donde la mirada de la protagonista re-suscita todas las contradicciones, por ejemplo el olvido que retorna de las soluciones establecidas por el culturalismo nacional que determinó en su momento la respiración política de Puerto Rico.

¿Cómo la experiencia de lo *queer* caribeño puede delinear el horizonte de una manera distinta de asumir la nación como problema, al revocar la hegemonía institucional de las suturas estatales sobre nuestra comprensión de lo nacional? Partiendo de la premisa de que

hacia Nueva York. Remontándose en un *flashback* (fig. 1) hacia el 20 de diciembre de 1960, el film captura el momento en que la nación puertorriqueña se re-crea, literalmente, en el tránsito hacia la modernidad como un trance interminable entre el margen colonial y el imperio.



Fig. 1. *Flashback*: el hijo despidiéndose del padre antes de partir hacia Nueva York. El padre ausente, encarnada en la voz nostálgica del Hijo, es el eje narrativo en el filme de Casanova.

dichas contradicciones parecen sufrir un segundo enterramiento histórico en la adaptación del ensayo narrativo de Luis Rafael Sánchez por Casanova, lo que me interesa resaltar acerca de estos dos filmes es ver cómo lo *queer*, como el espacio que subvierte las ontologías duras de la diferencia sexual, le da cuerpo y expresión a las aporías de las identidades nacionales. En la adaptación fílmica de Casanova, esa mirada relacional, y la *errancia* que la supone, entran en un juego de signos ambivalente con el espectador, al replicar las condiciones de auto-visibilidad de los presupuestos populistas-nacionalistas que el discurso neo-colonial del *muñocismo* le impuso a la producción cultural en la isla. El film narra la travesía en un mismo avión de un grupo de emigrantes puertorriqueños

Se trata, entonces, de ver cómo la nación entera experimenta las inevitables paradojas del fenómeno de la modernidad nacional cuando ésta se vive desde el imaginario de una interioridad que está tendida, literalmente, en el vacío geográfico e histórico entre ambos lados del “charco.” En el film, la mirada panóptica de un narrador masculino totaliza el horizonte de sentido de este tránsito: las diferencias de clase, de género, racial, y sexual que componen el espectro de los personajes, entran en un flirteo de miradas, equívocos, dobles sentidos, e insinuaciones que encubren el sustrato violento de desigualdades y violencias que condicionaron la posibilidad de “la gran familia puertorriqueña.” El prólogo y el epílogo en *voz en off* del narrador masculino,

en el registro codificado del *jíbaro*⁴ digno, y en un tono que se reparte entre lo melancólico y lo nostálgico, funciona como fulcro ideológico que le imparte una singular inteligibilidad y cohesión a la heterogeneidad multitudinaria que constituyó el fenómeno migratorio a partir de la proletarización sistemática de las fuerzas de trabajo en la isla durante los primeros decenios del siglo veinte. Al gran *flashback* inicial que comienza en un pasado casi mítico, le siguen otros en los que las historias íntimas de algunos tipos emblemáticos de la sociografía puertorriqueña se van revelando.

Muy significativamente, la única historia que es relegada a un segundo silencio, es la historia de traición, persecución y silenciamiento político

que tuvo que ocurrir para que esta historia- la del éxodo masivo de la gran familia como un viaje de ida y vuelta entre la colonia y el imperio- pudiera ocurrir. Al que no haya leído el original literario, le será imposible descifrar cuál es la verdadera historia detrás de la imagen de un hombre con mirada angustiada esposado a un agente del Buró Federal de Investigaciones. (F.B.I por sus siglas en inglés.) (fig. 2).

La clave para leer esta historia radica, entonces, en saber detectar el palimpsesto ideológico que el film escenifica al mismo tiempo que encubre. Todos aquéllos ideologemas del culturalismo puertorriqueño- en resumen, los signos de una nacionalidad masculina, heterosexual, blanca,



Fig. 2. Única toma en la que se presenta a un agente federal, llevando esposado a un nacionalista puertorriqueño. Este elemento es mucho más importante en el texto original de Luis Rafael Sánchez.

católica y pequenoburguesa- articulados por Antonio S. Pedreira, e impuestos por el populismo de Luis Muñoz Marín, estampan una segunda impronta en el film, al volcar sobre el argumento narrativo todo el arsenal de dispositivos de significación propios del lenguaje cinematográfico. Desde la manipulación de la dimensión aural del film, tanto en su nivel diegético como extra-diegético, las tomas de cámara que parecen privilegiar el sesgo crepuscular propio de la estampa costumbrista, los procedimientos de montaje, cuya gramática y sintaxis emulan los códigos sentimentalistas de una telenovela, hasta el efecto neto de la entonación, las pausas, la recurrencia a las cartografías sancionadas del idiolecto *jíbaro* en los diálogos, recubren con una cordialidad y dulzura familiarista el relato del trauma de uno de los aspectos más brutales del fenómeno de movilización de fuerza laboral excedente que significó la entrada de Puerto Rico a la modernidad nacional bajo la bandera ideológica de la *gran familia*. El largo etcétera de patrocinadores del proyecto- en el que las fronteras entre la demandas estatales de la policía cultural y la de los intereses económicos de la burguesía nativa y norteamericana se vuelven indiscernibles-, y que culmina con una gran pancarta que lee “Feliz Navidad les desea el Banco Popular” (fig. 3), es en este sentido elocuente. Mucho más podría decirse en la clave de esta hermenéutica de la sospecha, pero lo interesante es que la mirada que el film muestra es el suplemento “irracional” de esa mirada avergonzada del espectador local- en fin, el “yo” moderno, que es literalmente como un “otro” sinvergüenza y exhibicionista, encarnado en el film por el *jaiba* que representa Sunshine Logroño-, al (no querer) reconocerse en ninguna de las tipologías nacionales representadas por los protagonistas.

El film, quizá con una efectividad mucho mayor que su contraparte literario, por exacerbar ese componente inherentemente pornográfico de la imagen móvil del que habla Fredric Jameson, re-trata y materializa el sustrato promiscuo de esa vergüenza nacional. Como bien critica Keith Q. Warner, existe en el Caribe una incomodidad y vergüenza casi connaturales al hecho de verse representados en una película, ya no como partes indiscernibles del paisaje, sino como actores principales (44-5). El film



Fig. 3. Logo del Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, principal patrocinador de las producciones cinematográficas de Puerto Rico, aparece aquí en la primera toma panorámica del film.

vale la pena verse, al menos porque interpela precisamente la mirada nacional del espectador desde una especie de *slapstick* vergonzoso de esa per-formación nacional. En efecto, el film no alcanza a articular ese “vernáculo modernista” del que habla Hansen. Posiblemente, la promesa de un cine genuinamente puertorriqueño y cosmopolita radique en saber sumergirse en las aguas de esa vergüenza. Quizás el cine puertorriqueño tenga que comenzar a pensar la nacionalidad, no desde el orgullo que esconde obsesivamente sus contradicciones, sino desde el coeficiente erótico y *queer* de esa vergüenza, una especie de “Puerto Rican shame” que lo ubique en el mismo registro crítico con que los proponentes del gay shame se han atrevido a cuestionar su *gay pride*, esto es, repolitizándolo, abriéndolo a los diálogos infinitos de la internacionalidad.



Fig. 4. La muerte de su padre es el detonante de la búsqueda de la protagonista. Recuerdos de la protagonista de la confrontación con su padre.

"Glimpses of a New Place": Brincando el charco, de Frances Muntaner

Without knowing, they allowed us
to imagine a space for a body
that had no image
. . . what a wonderful fiction!

*Brincando el Charco*⁵

En *Brincando el charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican*, la mirada de Frances Negrón Muntaner describe ese gesto al lanzarse a ese espacio rizomático en donde el puertorriqueñismo perimido y nostálgico que se celebra demasiado literalmente en *La guagua aérea* se revela como la ocultación de un problema laberíntico y lleno de trampas, cuyas soluciones tienen que incluir todas aquellas disonancias y divergencias que quedaron afuera de la solución inicial al problema de la nacionalidad colonizada que cristalizó en la isla a principios de siglo XX. En un estilo de narrar donde el documental atraviesa de parte a parte lo fictivo, *Brincando el charco* narra el solapamiento de la necesidad con la imposibilidad de actualizar, en lo real, un proyecto nacional que no escamotee el secreto histórico de sus exclusiones (fig. 4).

El film narra la historia de amor entre una artista gráfica, Claudia Marín, y Ana, abogada y activista, en su lucha por desentrañar el enigma de cómo inscribir su lesbianismo en una puertorriqueñidad cuyos predicados surgieron de su negación. Esa interrogación se hace visible como un tránsito por todos los emblemas tradicionales de la nacionalidad puertorriqueña antes reseñados. La muerte del padre que se negó a reconocer el lesbianismo de su hija marca el comienzo de un cuestionamiento de la artista acerca de su lugar y pertenencia dentro de la gran ficción nacional puertorriqueña. Es así como el luto por el padre se convierte en gran medida en la autopsia- que implica a su vez una exhumación y un examen "post-mortem"- de un cuerpo llagado por las coartadas y secretos históricos del "delito" de la nacionalidad.

La mirada histórica que ofrece Muntaner pertenece a un gesto que se podría denominar el de una memoria conjetural. Es una mirada cuya memoria se da en el trance entre la ficción y la realidad, como si la verdadera identidad hubiera que encontrarla en la ruptura que provoca el corte que se abre entre ambos.

Este gesto, sin libretos y sin brújula, conlleva un viaje hacia la conversación infinita, conversación que, por un lado, desnaturaliza la promiscuidad engañosamente cordialista entre la familia y lo nacional, y por el otro, reabre los códigos de lo familiar a los signos inquietantes de lo extranjero. En lugar de ofrecer de la nacionalidad puertorriqueña un cuadro replegado sobre sus fantasmas identitarios, la mirada preguntona de Muntaner irradia desde el despliegue que corroe y desanuda desde adentro los significantes maestros del discurso que regula la economía semántica del cuento nacional en el film de Casanova. En lugar de una experiencia narrada desde el interior subjetivista de una única voz nostálgica y crepuscular, el documental-ficción de Muntaner se sitúa mucho más cerca de las contradicciones que el ensayo-ficción de Rafael Sánchez intenta iluminar. Al trabajar desde la co-presencia disyuntiva del documental y la ficción, el film se abre hacia una polifonía urbana del desarraigo en donde la insistencia de todas las contradicciones remite el síntoma obsesivo de la pregunta sobre lo nacional puertorriqueño al enigma de aquellos límites innombrables de la exclusión sexual, racial y de género. Para Claudia Marín, ser lesbiana, mulata y mujer, no tiene que significar necesariamente un atrincheramiento

de las identidades en su marginalidad. En el film, tales significantes denotan más bien la subversión de la renegación fetichista que trabaja al interior de aquellos confines articulados por la lógica exclusionista de la violencia identitaria. Muntaner, por cierto, no parece renunciar al horizonte de universalidad que delinea, necesariamente, una caribeñidad significativa de la contingencia. A una contestación que se sostuvo en una ceguera fundamental, el film de Muntaner le devuelve la pregunta cuya obliteración fue, desde un principio, la misma condición de posibilidad para su retorno.

Para Muntaner, la única gran familia posible, en donde la utopía moderna que subyace todo proyecto nacional tiene un porvenir, parece ser, paradójicamente, la familia de los huérfanos, de los hijos ilegítimos de la puertorriqueñidad, desheredados y desterrados por el Padre, y cuya desposesión- cultural tanto como material- es compartida. No hay acaso una mejor definición de la caribeñidad que el gran diálogo en el exilio que la protagonista sostiene en varias ocasiones con los integrantes de esa gran familia rota de las nacionalidades latinoamericanas- y del resto del mundo. Al final del film, vemos el avión regresando a Puerto Rico llevando a Ana, como el indicio de una revisita a la cuestión nacional que parece pasar por un saldo de cuentas histórico. Si *La guagua aérea* inicia con el viaje a Nueva York de esa interioridad y se presenta como la mirada lanzada hacia el futuro de una respuesta, el regreso del avión a San Juan en el film de Muntaner es la pregunta insistente que regresa de las violencias míticas del pasado. De manera similar, Gilles Deleuze observa que el cine del Tercer Mundo debe realizar, "no el mito de un pueblo pasado, sino la fabulación de un pueblo que vendrá" (294-5).

Madagascar, de Fernando Pérez

“Toda época, de hecho,
no sólo sueña con la siguiente,
sino que, soñándola,
precipita su despertar.”

Walter Benjamin. *Das Passagenwerk* ⁶

Si el poder navegar sin zozobra en las aguas cosmopolitas de la cultura fílmica ha llegado a señalar el instante en el que una nación sale de la cueva del subdesarrollo y adviene a la modernidad industrial plena, también es cierto que, a partir de este momento, dicha nación entra frecuentemente en el atolladero de tener que incurrir en los exorcismos obsesivos de las afueras que niega. El caso cubano en este sentido me parece emblemático. En el film *Madagascar*, de Fernando Pérez, la interioridad asfixiante del espacio diegético, en el que los elementos oníricos se precipitan como una omnipresencia



Fig. 5. Laurita y sus amigos en la azotea del edificio, invocando el nombre de “Madagascar”, como si fueran antenas humanas...

ominosa sobre la vida de la protagonista, parece doblar los barroquismos delirantes del ensimismamiento político

y económico de la isla. La indistinción entre la realidad y el sueño tiene como efecto neto el evocar la ausencia misma de la vinculación de la modernidad nacional con la doble vocación nacional-transnacional del cine.⁷ En tal sentido, la invocación constante e hipnótica del nombre “Madagascar” (fig. 5) remite en último caso al cine como a una solución relacional a dicho problema, sugerida en el film con la presencia perturbadora del artista visual Molina, quien opera como “mediador evanescente” entre los tres tiempos históricos que se reparten en la trama con las tres generaciones de mujeres que viven en un mismo techo, y como agente catalizador de una osmosis de afectos entre el *aquí* concreto nacional y un *más allá* transnacional indefinible.

El film narra el dilema de Laura, una doctora en física nuclear y catedrática en la universidad-“divorciada dos veces y sin volverse a casar, por decisión propia”-, quien no puede soñar sino con “la realidad de todos los días.” El film transcurre en el entresueño alucinante de esa realidad de todos los días, donde la cotidianidad en primera persona que constituye el eje narrativo del relato se vuelve “radioactiva,” al asaltarla eventos que, precisamente por quedar fuera de los circuitos de verificación científica y moderna dentro de los que circula la protagonista, se convierten en una enfermedad- una especie de cáncer en metástasis- a la que Laura intenta impartirle objetividad física. (La referencia al desastre nuclear de Chernobyl no es casual: el “¿qué pasó?” que se hace Laura evoca la inminencia del fracaso del modelo soviético, a la vez que evoca el despertar de una utopía cuyas imágenes han perdido su contorno). La aparición enigmática de Molina en la casa de Laura marca el momento en que dicho cáncer comienza a tomar residencia en la casa semiderruida de Laura, emblema del cuerpo mismo de la nación socialista. La negativa de Laurita, su hija, de asistir a la escuela, acompañada por su súbita religiosidad y sus arranques de caridad humanitaria, al traer a su casa, querer alimentar y dar techo a un grupo de niños que se encontró en la calle, apuntala la presencia inquietante del proselitismo y el rechazo “bárbaro” al llamado socialista a “vivir de acuerdo a la Idea,” así como a la ética hipócrita del altruismo humanitario. De la misma manera, los pseudo-discursos anestésicos de la moda

New Age hacen presencia en esa interioridad con la voz mecanizada del audio-casete de auto-ayuda (“cierre los ojos, usted está cada vez más relajado, se siente cada vez más ligero... repita mentalmente el # 3...”). La absorción de la abuela en el juego *Monopolio*, perdida en la fantasía de convertirse en una magnate capitalista, sugiere la insidia de la impulso supremacista de dominación y control, cuya ferocidad parece surgir, ominosamente, de la sombra ancestral de un pasado nacional (fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Molina y la Abuela jugando Monopolio en casa de Laura. La abuela: “¡Soy rica, rica, rica!! Tengo tres hoteles...”

Filmada en pleno Período Especial, el film narra cómo la auto-evidencia del socialismo estatal que fundamentó su existencia se encuentra interdicto por el disloque simultáneamente generacional, geopolítico e histórico, de un afuera que ya es imposible nombrar. La ofuscación del sueño y la vigilia funciona en el film como eje metonímico que irradia desde el registro ideológico del sueño revolucionario para extenderse e invadir como un cáncer el ámbito de lo familiar y lo cotidiano. A final de cuentas, lo que el filme pone literalmente en entredicho es la capacidad del sueño de la Revolución para volver a fraguar un adentro posible, esta vez desde el afuera de los límites discursivos estatales y burocráticos de la Guerra Fría.

La invocación hipnótica de los protagonistas de la palabra “Madagascar”, no debe ser leída meramente como metáfora del deseo disidente, en donde Madagascar significaría algo así como un “lejos de aquí, donde quiera que sea” - producto de la supresión ideológica por parte de los instrumentos de censura estatal, ni siquiera como deseo turístico por “lo exótico”, si bien queda claro que dentro del impulso de intercambiabilidad uniformizante del capitalismo global, decir “Madagascar” da exactamente lo mismo que decir “Francia” o “Rusia.” En todo caso, el automatismo y la indeterminación de tal invocación- acompañada por las miradas ausentes y sin punto fijo de quienes la pronuncian- remiten más bien al hecho de que hay que aprender a re-conocer y transitar por el desierto de los nombres y los lugares sin genealogía y sin historia, o como diría Deleuze a propósito de los desiertos de Pasolini, por “la esencia co-presente a nuestra historia, el zócalo arcaico que revela bajo la nuestra una historia

interminable” (322). El llamado relacional que instituye el film como respuesta a este impasse es histórico, donde el presente siempre es el fruto de la negociación precaria entre el futuro y el pasado, al mismo tiempo que geográfico, donde esa negociación asume el papel de una memoria cuya función es establecer un corte entre el adentro nacional y el afuera “exótico”. Es Molina, el artista visual, quien ofrece esa mediación, cuando intenta fijar la indeterminación del significante “Madagascar” a un proyecto concreto de representación que suponga un salto hacia la semilla histórica de la modernidad, al enseñarle a pronunciar a la abuela el nombre de la capital del lugar geográfico usualmente designado por el significante *Madagascar*. Es Molina quien representa en el lienzo a la abuela, acaso el arquetipo de la Cuba hispana, colonial y premoderna, con gafas de sol y maquillada, escuchando *heavy-metal* norteamericano (fig. 7).

Es como si la memoria no fuera otra cosa que una superficie para dividir y repartir historias, identidades y filiaciones, como si Molina fuera el cuarto término, opaco e inhumano, en la dialéctica que se desencadena entre los tres tiempos, como si querer “alfabetizar” y domesticar a la modernidad misma con sus propios caracteres y cuerpos “salvajes” fuera la vocación más propia del cine (Deleuze 287). La gran ambigüedad que la película pone de relieve es que ese disloque entre lo “cosmopolita” y lo “local”, o la debacle de sentido que implica el que, después de todo, el tren de la modernidad parezca siempre estar del lado de la barbarie, es la pesadilla por el que el sueño utópico del comunismo tiene que pasar, que no hay una utopía posible sino aquella que está siempre dada, no en oposición sino *en relación*, en *conversación infinita*, usando la metáfora de Maurice Blanchot, con el aspecto más animal y siniestro de lo humano. Y acaso hoy sea Cuba el único sitio en el mundo donde esa conversación aún ocurre.



Fig. 7. Pintura de la Abuela con gafas, escuchando Heavy Metal...

Desirée, de Félix de Rooy

“...individuos sin ancla,
sin color, sin raíces- una raza de ángeles...”⁸

Franz Fanon. *Piel negra, máscaras blancas*

Una pregunta parece, en efecto, obsesionar a Glissant a todo lo largo de su *Poética*: ¿Qué clase de familia somos? Es ciertamente una pregunta que toca a la filiación y al parentesco, pero que remite también a los fetiches arborescentes de las genealogías nacionalistas. Glissant sabe que no es una cuestión fácil porque la pregunta pasa por el laberinto del idioma, que se empeña en plantarnos en etimologías y hundirnos en el pantano de los significados. Pero Glissant también sabe que, si un idioma no existe porque haya filiación o genealogías, tampoco éstas existen porque haya un idioma. ¿Qué idioma nuevo dar a esta comunidad sagrada? ¿Cómo fundar una familia fuera de las líneas de la filiación?



Fig. 8. Desirée vagando por las ruinas de la ciudad...



Fig. 9. Desirée dialogando con el fantasma de su hija...

Éstas son las preguntas que subyacen la historia de *Desirée*, de Félix de Rooy, un film que presenta al espectador con el “fuera de campo” delirante de la modernidad y con el reto de aprender a leer la experiencia de la “locura,” no con respecto a aquello que le falta, sino con respecto a aquella “raza de ángeles” de la cual Desirée podría ser el nombre. El delirio errante de Desirée por las calles de Brooklyn (fig. 8), así como ese “complejo de Medea”, que figura al mismo tiempo como la causa y el efecto de una historia verídica, pueden servir como emblema de esta disyunción relacional entre lo público y lo privado, donde la pregunta “¿de qué comunidad es el Caribe su nombre?” quizás encuentra su punto de formulación más intenso (Glissant 59-75).⁹ La historia toma lugar como apertura intempestiva en los intersticios que se abren entre lo político y lo familiar, el presente y el pasado, la memoria personal y la historia colectiva.

El film retoma, en efecto, la pregunta planteada por Laura en *Madagascar*- “¿qué pasó?”-, pero esta vez desde la catástrofe personal.

El efecto neto de este des-anudamiento es que es imposible ensayar un relato meramente psicoanalítico o post-colonial, en clave marxista, del film. Este delirio del Caribe es el término para invocar y conjurar el fantasma de los excesos que median entre lo normal y lo anormal. En todo caso, el film parece entretejer la vida de Desirée, la protagonista, desde las imposibilidades que transitan entre ambos discursos- si entendemos que ambas disciplinas nacieron en extremos opuestos del mismo intento por interrogar y dar respuesta al problema de lo corpóreo- planteado por Nietzsche y vuelto a articular años después por Heidegger-, como lo impensable del pensamiento

occidental. El mensaje implícito en *Desirée* es que hay que retomar la cuestión concerniente a un posible lenguaje relacional del cine caribeño desde el punto de vista de su gesto fundacional, como esa transformación inaugural del vínculo del ser humano con su cuerpo y con el mundo que Walter Benjamin pudo reconocer. Pareciera ser que cuando una época sueña con la que está por venir, siempre lo hace con los caracteres aterradores de una pesadilla. Paradójicamente, en *Desirée*, la agonía de su locura es el mundo pesadillesco compuesto por las figuras normativas de la familia, del padre o del amor, las que al final se revelan ellas mismas como delirantes, tiránicas, falseadas, como el mal sueño de un amo agonizante (fig. 9). Todas las escenas que constituyen el pasado de la protagonista están sometidas a esa fórmula falseada, al mal guión de unos personajes en cuya historia ya es imposible creer.

No se puede olvidar que el delirio y la fragmentación simbólicos en *Desirée* son una respuesta violenta a una demanda implacable de normalidad. Lo que el film hace visible, bajo la forma monstruosa y homicida del delirio de la protagonista, son los demonios de la mirada colonial- el racismo ilustrado de Miss Resnyck o el fanatismo mesiánico y voluptuoso del Padre Siego. Incluso Freddie, el portero en el condominio de Miss Resnyck, forma parte, quizás más que ningún otro, de las coartadas y traiciones de ese simulacro de normalidad. Su único deseo es pactar los términos de su opresión, jugar de acuerdo a las reglas del juego, no armar demasiado escándalo. Desirée, en cambio le devuelve a la modernidad la verdad delirante de ese simulacro de normalidad, al asesinar a su hija recién nacida, Joyce, como el negativo de esa pureza que ya no le es posible, el credo de una nación.

¿Cómo conjugar todos esos fragmentos, cómo devolverlos a un cuerpo, cuando la modernidad, todas sus obsesiones y violencias históricas, pasan por el cuerpo desquiciado de Desirée, como las grietas del Uno tiránico y monstruoso? Digamos que lo que queda “fuera de cuadro,” al margen de los paraísos turísticos del Caribe, lo que sostiene la mirada que luego le será vendida al precio de su desaparición, es la pesadilla lumpen de los ghettos urbanos y los arrabales rurales, la perplejidad de las multitudes arrancadas de las islas y empujadas a las grandes ciudades norteamericanas. Es por eso que, para el ser caribeño- aquél que, como Desirée, ha quedado fuera del encuadre de la aventura mercantilista o del romance tropical, aquél que sólo se hace visible a condición de confundirse con el paisaje local-, el mundo por el que transita todos los días ya no es real, no cree en él, niega ese mundo con la misma ferocidad con que las imágenes de hoteles y modelos de revista lo niegan a él. Su mundo ha sido falseado, trucado, por las imágenes transnacionales de “lo exótico”, donde no hay sino playas desiertas y carnavales; por la escena del goce coreográfico de la mulata lasciva que tienta y seduce, o por la estampa del macho gozador que roba o asesina. En fin, el ser caribeño es una imagen de exportación por el que transitan, bien el sueño metafísico del buen salvaje hospitalario, o bien la pesadilla del monstruo caníbal. Como diría Taussig, le han robado el alma y ahora es sólo el autómatas de un Dios ausente que, cuando no baila o copula, le sirve un coctel a un turista en la playa. Para salir de este teorema de la muerte hay que aprender a conversar con lo impensable, esa es la “esquizofrenia universal” de la que habla Deleuze y que quizás Desirée pone en juego, al recordarnos que su locura es la nuestra.

Este, también, puede ser el mensaje de la mujer Tupinambá que le devuelve la mirada al espectador, en el plano con que culmina el film *Como era gostoso o meu francês* de Nelson Pereira dos Santos. Esta “mirada excesiva,” tanto en términos formales como conceptuales, cuando ya el asesinato y el festín totémico del prisionero francés- cuya verdadera nacionalidad no le puede importar menos a sus captores- ha sido ya consumado, le da retrospectivamente el suplemento de verdad a la matriz devoradora subyacente en todo el discurso de lo “exótico” (fig. 10). Una mirada que parece interpelar, ante todo, el terror que subyace a ese imperativo de consumo con que el *Cinema Novo* y los adherentes del *Manifesto Antropófago* quisieron apropiarse del tropo europeo del caníbal: el caníbal apropiándose- *engolendo*- la mirada que el Otro colonial le ha impuesto, sólo para devolvérsela al espectador como exceso inconsumible. El cine caribeño, más allá de todos los deseos de fijarlo a tal o cual determinación particular de su historia- las formas de la *négritude* (Haití, Martinica, Guadalupe), la cacofonía performativa de los nacionalismos culturalistas (Puerto Rico), o la ortodoxia ciega y sorda de los marxismos nacionalistas (Cuba)- debe dar cuenta de este aspecto *excesivo* de la mirada que le devuelve al mundo- y acaso no pueda hacerlo sino siempre como un bricolaje, de manera excesiva, interrumpida y monstruosa- el suplemento mortificante y salvador de la relacionalidad.

Fig. 10. Mujer Tupinambá, devolviendo la mirada a la cámara, luego de haber devorado al francés. Final de *Como era gostoso o meu francês* (1971).



Notas

1. Entrevista con Karen Martínez y Mbye Cham, *Ex-Îles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*. En el texto original: "We are the future, we are all the mix of all these elements that have always been separated from each other." En lo subsiguiente, manejaré el texto original en francés. Todas las traducciones al español de todos los textos son mías, excepto cuando indique lo contrario.
2. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*; MacDoughal, *The Corporeal Image*; Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*.
3. Pasolini, *Empirismo Eretico*. En el original: "la lingua scritta della realtà" (Mi traducción.)
4. El término *jíbaro* se acuñó en el siglo XIX para designar la. Pronto pasó a formar parte del imaginario popular puertorriqueño.
5. Muntaner, *Brincando el charco*. "Sin saberlo, ellos nos permitieron imaginar un espacio para un cuerpo que no tenía imagen... ¡que ficción tan maravillosa!" (Mi traducción.) *Brincar el charco* es la frase comúnmente usada para denotar el sentido de proximidad geográfica que las continuas migraciones puertorriqueñas hacia y desde Nueva York crearon en el imaginario isleño.
6. Ver, Benjamin, *Arcades Project*. Trans. H. Eiland y Kevin McLaughlin.
7. Ver, Durovikova, "Vector, Flow, Zone: Towards a History of Cinematic *Traslatio*". Para un análisis en clave alegórica de la película, ver Mennel, "Dreaming the Cuban Nation: Fernando Pérez's *Madagascar*," 89-107.
8. Fanon, *Piel negra, máscaras blancas*. "Individuos sin ancla, sin color, sin raíz- una raza de ángeles."
9. De Rooy toma el argumento de una historia verídica.

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- Figure 1-3: screenshots *La guagua aérea*. Dir. Luis Molina Casanova (1993)
- Figure 4: screenshot *Brincando el Charco*. Dir. Frances Negrón Muntaner (1994)
- Figures 5-7: screenshots *Madagascar*. Dir. Fernando Pérez (1994)
- Figures 8-9: screenshots *Desirée*. Dir. Félix de Rooy (1984)
- Figure 10: screenshot *Como era gostoso o meu francês*. Dir. Nelson Pereira Dos Santos (1971)

CINEMA IN JAMAICA— THE LEGACY OF PERRY HENZELL'S *THE HARDER THEY COME*

SABRINA CECCATO

Résumé

Le cinéma traditionnel représentant la Jamaïque et les Jamaïcains a toujours utilisé des clichés et des stéréotypes. Le cinéma jamaïcain a débuté en 1972 avec le film de Perry Henzell et a immédiatement commencé à donner une nouvelle image du pays et de ses habitants. À partir de *The Harder They Come* jusqu'au dernier film, le cinéma Jamaïcain a utilisé les mêmes styles, techniques et thèmes pour fournir une nouvelle vision du pays. Les films ne sont peut-être pas de grande qualité artistique, mais ils donnent une idée de l'authentique Jamaïque et de la richesse de sa culture. Regarder les films Jamaïquains donne aux spectateurs le sens d'une petite mais croissante tradition cinématographique.

Abstract

Mainstream cinema representing Jamaica and Jamaicans has always made use of clichés and stereotypes. The emergence of a local Jamaican cinema—beginning in 1972 with Perry Henzell's movie—immediately started to give a new image of the country and its inhabitants. From *The Harder They Come* up to most recent movies, Jamaican cinema has used consistent style, techniques, and themes to give a new vision of the country. Jamaican movies may have low production value, but they provide a more authentic representation of Jamaica's culture. Viewing Jamaican movies gives the audience a sense of a small but growing cinematic tradition.

In the present essay, I will demonstrate that even though Jamaican cinema is not an established industry, it has nonetheless created a tradition with the primary and founding goal of giving an authentic depiction of Jamaicans. I will first contrast representations of Jamaica in foreign production with movies produced by Jamaicans to show the different perceptions of the country from these two perspectives. After having defined Hollywood's distorted depictions of Jamaica, I will briefly analyse Jamaica's first locally produced feature film, Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come* (1972), to demonstrate why this film is such an important step in self-representation and differentiation from Hollywood cinema and still an influence on younger Jamaican directors. Finally, I will enumerate some of the themes and devices used by selected Jamaican directors and their debt to Henzell's movie to trace the development of the moviemaking tradition on the island. I will demonstrate that the unfair stereotypes of Jamaica that Hollywood cinema promotes have led to the desire for more authentic depictions of the country. I will outline a general definition of Jamaican cinema, the many social, economic, and cultural problems facing this national cinema, and the common characteristics of Jamaican films. In the end, I will demonstrate that Jamaican movies follow a tradition of rehabilitating Jamaica's reputation and boosting Jamaican pride about their cinematic representation. Regrettably, little criticism has been written so far on this subject; probably due to the small number of works, scholars have neglected Jamaican cinema and thus researchers who confront this issue have to rely on popular cinema criticism, the few scholarly articles focusing on Jamaican cinema, and, above all, on discussions with people involved in this domain—the primary source for this study. Actors, producers, and especially directors are eager to share their vision of Jamaican cinema for scholarly appraisal. My study is

largely based on what I perceived during these discussions with various figures of Jamaican cinema.

Cinema has been prominent in Jamaica from its beginnings. Yet this popularity does not mean that Jamaica has always been an active filmmaking nation, but rather that the island served as a favourite location for foreign companies looking for “exotic” settings. Hollywood has been shooting “on location” in Jamaica since 1903, starting with the documentary *Railroad Panorama Near Spanishtown, Jamaica* (1903), and more regularly since the 1910s, shooting movies such as *Flame of Passion* and *The Pearl of The Antilles* (1915), *A Daughter of The Gods*, *The Ruling Passion* and *A Woman's Honor* (1916), and *Queen of The Sea* (1918). Since then, Hollywood has produced dozens of movies with this island as a scenario. The main reason why Jamaica is such a popular location for Hollywood companies is that the geography offers a great variety of locations, promoted by the governmental office dealing with filmmaking on the island through the Internet and on dedicated filmmaking circuits. Jamaica can also stand in for other countries, especially those on the African continent. Indeed, the country offers not only beautiful beaches, but also mountains with lush vegetation, valleys and plains, woods and waterfalls, and some important historical sites. Moreover, Jamaica is less expensive for American companies than any location in Africa.

The distortion emerging in foreign movies made in Jamaica is that they often unintentionally suggest old stereotypes and reinforce prejudices. A common stereotype is that of showing Jamaica only as a natural paradise where life is beautiful and free of problems. The gorgeous landscape features as a symbol of happy people. Unfortunately, such idyllic scenes do not correspond to the actual life on the island, but only what is presented to the eyes of foreign tourists. The country has several problems characteristic of former colonies or developing countries and the majority of Jamaicans face harsh conditions in their everyday lives. The country displays an enticing

landscape, but its socio-political environment limits opportunities for its inhabitants. The false image of the happy Jamaican is used only for deceiving plots.

Another more dangerous stereotype involves the use and trading of marijuana. Many directors connect narco-traffic to Jamaica; in many international movies a drug dealer has the appearance of a (Rasta) Jamaican. This representation mirrors the prejudice that began during the 1980s with the great migration of Jamaicans to the USA, since Jamaican immigrants were thought of as criminals and Rastas as ganja smokers. This prejudice, though diminished, is still present today, and many directors rely on easy clichés when they need an “evil” character in an action movie (fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Two “evil” characters reminiscent of Jamaica.

Following the preconception that Jamaicans are criminals, another stereotype portrays Jamaica, and particularly Kingston, as one of the most dangerous places in the world. For a large audience who knows nothing about Jamaica but what movies depict, these stereotypes provide a much-distorted image of the country. Marijuana smokers and drug dealers exist in Jamaica, like anywhere else, but Jamaican society is much more diverse than the misleading mainstream images suggest. Hollywood movies exploit these stereotypes to give a deceptive vision of Jamaica. The industry has developed three main roles in which it casts Jamaicans: the subservient character, the threatening one, and the drug dealer. Into the 1930s, directors tried to avoid using natives in their “Jamaican” movies. They started to cast locals from the 1940s to the 1970s, but these Jamaicans were always silent. They were allowed to act only short lines with strong Jamaican accents in order to emphasize their difference from the other actors. They were limited to roles such as waiters, servants of various kinds, slaves, and so on. They represented only a touch of folklore, useful for the white protagonists’ stories, but they were never necessary to the narrative. These roles typically reflect docility and subservience.

Sometimes, Jamaicans are given the part of antagonists trying to harm white characters (e.g., in *Wide Sargasso Sea*³). In these cases, they are condemned to annihilation by the white characters themselves. Obedience or annihilation usually accompany Hollywood screen representations of Jamaicans. The drug dealer cliché allows Jamaicans to become protagonists, but only in violent situations. They still belong to the stereotype of subservience and defeat: at the end of every movie, they are either imprisoned or dead. Each movie demonstrates that their characters are weak and doomed to destruction because of their evil nature, while the white hero is always strong and winning, (as in *Marked for Death* [1990], for example).

These stereotypes reveal Hollywood’s latent and unacknowledged racism. The impression one gets in watching these movies uncritically is that white characters are superior to black ones and that Jamaicans are dangerous or ready to sell themselves to white tourists to get money or a visa (as in the movie *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* [1998]). Consequently, Jamaicans do not generally identify with the characters of these movies and do not like to see themselves depicted in such a way.

Countering the stereotyping of both Jamaica and its people has fuelled the vision of many Jamaican filmmakers to create a cinema of their own, depicting Jamaican stories and following Jamaican sensibilities. Building on the scenario described by Victoria Marshall in “Filmmaking in Jamaica: ‘Likkle But Tallawah’” (1992), Chris Browne confirmed in 2007, Jamaican filmmakers did learn how to make movies from Hollywood crews on the island and adapted those techniques to their own context. This essay focuses on filmmakers who started a cinema that diverged in both aesthetics and politics from mainstream Hollywood cinema and was often critical of American influence on Jamaica—an example of what critics Ella Shohat and Robert Stam prominently discuss as “Third World Cinema” in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (1994).

We may define a Jamaican movie as a feature film in which most, if not all, of the crew and staff are Jamaicans. Most of all, the film must have a Jamaican story that Jamaicans can view as a representation of themselves. In fact, contrary to what Marshall argues in the mentioned article, that “foreign markets are usually seen as the principle target markets for Jamaica’s best films” (100), the primary audience of a Jamaican film is Jamaican, both at home and in the Jamaican diaspora. Only after having reached that target audience does the movie reach a (possibly) worldwide circulation.

A Jamaican national cinema started in 1972 with Perry Henzell’s *The Harder They Come*. His work has inspired many local filmmakers since. Despite severe problems, mainly related to funding, filmmakers have formed activity groups, encouraged cross-regional cooperation, and locally produced films regularly participate in festivals in the Caribbean, such as the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival and Caribbean Tales.

The primary problem for Jamaican directors is that of funding. Since foreign filmmaking has become such a lucrative industry for the island, the local government prefers supporting foreign companies through incentives and tax breaks in return for economic stimulation rather than helping the local industry. Indeed, local companies benefit from incentives and tax breaks too, but they are unable to find the necessary funds to make a movie and thus cannot rely on government help. In Jamaica, few investors are willing and able to provide

The Harder They Come retains its exemplary status in Jamaican cinema because it is a complete movie in terms of form, content, and national sensibility. The film is first of all Henzell’s realistic portrayal of Jamaica, even as it promotes old and new stereotypes—especially with regards to the representation of ganja consumption and the “glamorous” Jamaican gangsters, the main source of criticism of the movie at home. It has a very specific style: Henzell was committed to realism and thus used non-professional actors, shot true to

The Jamaican cinematographic industry properly started in 1972, when Perry Henzell released his first movie *The Harder They Come*, a feature film rightly considered a masterpiece today.

funding for cinema. As I learned from talking to people involved in the film industry, apart from the unsupportive government, many people who have the capital underestimate cinema, viewing it as unimportant. Moreover, profits are unsure, and this risk is a strong deterrent for possible investment. Thus Jamaican directors often have to find the necessary capital on their own. Many of them, including Perry Henzell, have invested their own resources. As Chris Browne explained a few years ago, “When Perry made the film in ’72, and now in 2007, we’re still in the same place where he was. Only, of course, with the technology it’s easier to make films. [...] But it’s just as hard.” Financing is a vicious cycle: no one is willing to invest substantial capital in a movie because it will not bring big return, but until a movie has enough money to get proper distribution, it will be impossible for it to make large profits. Forty years after *The Harder They Come*, the situation of movie-making in Jamaica has not changed much and does not seem likely to do so.

The Jamaican cinematographic industry properly started in 1972, when Perry Henzell released his first movie *The Harder They Come*, a feature film rightly considered a masterpiece today. This movie was revolutionary both in thematic content and aesthetic form; Henzell’s film was a precursor for later Jamaican cinema and is still a model and point of comparison for Jamaican film since.

life, and did not use a rigid script. Moreover, he was often behind the camera and edited much of the movie himself. The movie has a very specific ethic: it is a reflection on and of Jamaica and is politically committed, asking for complete freedom for Jamaica without American interference in the island’s culture, politics, and economy.

The Harder They Come contains many layers of signification behind Ivan’s apparently simple story. Through the plot, Henzell directs an analysis of various sectors of his country and shows the causes and effects of Jamaica’s political, economic, and social difficulties. In fact, the main theme Henzell presents in his movie is that of corruption in every segment of society—the music business, the ganja trade, the police, and the government.

In his journey into and through Kingston, Ivan comes in touch first of all with religion, offering hope for the afterlife and only patience for the here and now. The Preacher character depends on the U.S. to fund his church and arrogantly believes Ivan to be his social inferior because he does not accept the church’s way of life. Ivan represents freedom and rule-breaking and thus the Preacher cannot accept him. Then, Ivan encounters the music business, controlled by a single person, Mr. Hilton, who decides whatever happens in this industry. Ivan tries to break the rules here too but soon understands the extent of Mr. Hilton’s power. Finally, Ivan collides with the police, who in turn collude with the government. In this arena, he discovers that the police have their share in the

ganja trade and do not hesitate to act against the small dealers if they fail to pay. The government, for its part, is aware of this collusion and probably collects a part of the profits too.

Thanks to this film, Henzell explored Jamaica. He criticized the country's politics, which allows for foreign intervention in its decisions, consenting to American regulation of how and when to react against the ganja trade. He also criticized the country's economy, again controlled by the U.S., through the example of the ganja trade. This denunciation of American influence is clearly reflected in the movie: the marijuana trade has an insurmountable hierarchy that exploits the poor—the lower levels of small farmers and dealers earning a pittance for their job—and allows the higher levels to get richer and richer. As Ivan's story demonstrates, there is no possibility of rebellion: to revolt against the hierarchy means death.

The Harder They Come is also a metaphor of Jamaica in 1972. Ivan was young and so was the country, in search of freedom and of its own way, in search of wealth and independence, but also vibrant, full of energy, and "a bursting of creativity," as Trevor Rhone defined it. The film mirrors these characteristics in the plot and characters.

Yet this optimism does not mean that the country was free of problems and Henzell shows in his movie how society was divided, with huge differences between rich and poor. He not only shows the obvious difference in wealth—through means of transport, houses, and belongings in general—but also through such details as fences, windows, and other physical barriers between people belonging to different social classes.

...Henzell shows in his movie how society was divided, with huge differences between rich and poor.

Finally, in his movie, Perry Henzell repeats common tropes, such as that of the countryside opposed to the city (though he did not show a negative view of the city), the country boy who goes to town, the loss of innocence, and so on. Clearly this movie portrays a complex story and through all these devices Henzell managed to create an influential and enduring masterpiece.

In this chaotic world, Ivan searches for justice, not only for himself but also for others living in the same conditions. Every character in this movie represents a different aspect of Jamaican society and the conflicts among them reflect those happening in society at large.

No later Jamaican movie equals *The Harder They Come*, but all of them follow its example, appropriating some themes and technical devices and adapting them to the changing times to reach the same goal. What Jamaican cinema has tried to do from its beginning is to assert a national identity, regardless of mainstream marketability. Obviously, every director would like his movie to be a blockbuster, but few are willing to sacrifice authenticity for this reason. Jamaican directors took a precise position against mainstream cinema, deciding to use their own language, recover their own voice, speak for themselves without intermediaries, and tell the world how they see themselves. These tactics served emancipatory purposes, following the will to assert the country's independence and authority. Local filmmakers found authentic Jamaican identity in centuries-old traditions that have survived thanks to the lower classes, the "low culture" generally considered unsophisticated but shaping the identity of many Jamaican people. These movies rehabilitate the Afro-Caribbean culture surviving in Jamaica, in almost every facet of life, at the expense of Euro-American culture seen as external and inauthentic to the country. Jamaican cinema also attempts to show Jamaica as close as possible to reality, to give foreigners a close look at Jamaican life, and Jamaicans themselves an established sense of identity. These filmmakers achieve what Stuart Hall thought Caribbean cinema should do: "by allowing us to see and recognize different parts and histories of ourselves, to construct those points of identification, those personalities we call a cultural identity" (236).

Among the characteristics shared by Jamaican movies to assert the country's identity, the first one that strikes a non-Jamaican viewer is that the language is not Standard English. Jamaican directors consciously chose to use vernacular in their movies. Though this choice prevents a wide distribution of the movies, it is nonetheless an act of resistance against foreign cultural imperialism. Jamaican movies value using Jamaican Patwa as representative of the people, as the unofficial national language.

Henzell wanted *The Harder They Come* to be a purely Jamaican experience. Henzell used the language to mirror Jamaican society, and he used it as another means to divide the rich from the poor. In fact, rich people talk in Standard English (though they all know Jamaican), while all the lower-class people speak Patwa. In this way, language provides a hierarchy that correlates with colour, wealth, and education. In this hierarchy, lighter skin and the use of Standard English are associated with education and snobbery. Upper-class people despise poorer people, considering them unsophisticated and uneducated because they are Patwa-speakers. However, what clearly emerges from these movies is that this lower class constitutes the core of Jamaican culture and tradition, and that speaking Jamaican Patwa is a sign of authenticity.

Some directors went even farther, making movies using only Jamaican, sometimes also presenting the Rasta dialect. For these directors, the use of Jamaican is the only authentic way to represent the country. When there are no conflicts with the upper classes, Jamaicans tend to use Patwa, and as such this dialect is used in these authentically Jamaican movies.

Another feature always closely interwoven with movies is music, which is extremely important in Jamaican life, as music is present in every moment of the day. Many of the directors also work in the music-video industry and music appears in various ways in Jamaican movies. The movies show the evolution of Jamaican music from the 1960s to the present. *The Harder They Come* captured the 1960s music's vitality and creativity and, as many other directors after him would also do, Henzell used a singer as main actor and protagonist. The songs of the soundtrack are essential to the film, commenting on the scenes and emphasizing what is shown. Indeed, the story is partly set in the music business.

Jamaican cinema post-Henzell can be classified into four broad categories. In the first group are movies in which one or more actors are popular singers. In the second group, music is part of the plot and the story is set in the music business (e.g. *Rockers* (1979) and *One Love* (2005)). The third and largest group includes movies in which the soundtrack comments on and participates in the scenes (*Rockers*, *Countryman* [1982], *The Lunatic* [1991], *Dancehall Queen* [1997], *Third World Cop* [1999], and *One Love* [2003]). In this category of movie, different genres of music often characterize different social groups: the talent scout is linked to dancehall, the church to gospels and the Rastas to reggae. The last group abandons Henzell's example (music is unimportant in *Smile Orange* (1974), *Children of Babylon* (1980), and *Glory to Gloriana* (2007)), which was, as Trevor Rhone acknowledged, to the detriment of the movies' success.

Music is related to dance and dancehalls appear in many movies. In this regard, however, generic debates surrounding dancehall do not appear in the stories. Generally, dancehalls are only places where to have fun. In *The Harder They Come*, for instance, the downtown dancehall is a joyful place where people dance and do not think about problems. In *Third World Cop* the space becomes a symbol of peace; dances celebrate a truce between two formerly hostile groups. In *Rockers*, neighbours meet together in downtown dancehalls to enjoy the music and their company. In this movie, a key scene occurs in an uptown club, where the Rastas take possession of the DJ cabin and of the music, asserting their (and the ghetto's) values and music.



Fig. 2. *Dancehall Queen*: two of Marcia's disguises in the dancehall

The movie most involved with dancehall is *Dancehall Queen*, celebrating this phenomenon unconditionally. Here, the dancehall becomes the factor that allows Marcia to develop economic independence, but it is also the place where appearances are most important—the “bare-as-you-dare” women’s outfits. In Carolyn Cooper’s *Sound Clash* (2004), the dancehall allows Marcia autonomy over her own body and the way she is perceived by others. She indulges in the “pleasure of disguise” (fig. 2) in doing what is not expected of her, particularly resisting the conventional image of a mother. In this movie the gaze is very important, both of the film camera and of the diegetic photographer. Marcia offers her image willingly to both. She accepts being objectified, because it is one of the conventions of dancehall, where women behave as (sexual) objects, albeit retaining the power to control their sexuality. At the end of the movie, however, the return to “normal” life and the abandonment of the disguise is essential to maintain her identity. Though I do not agree with all of the film’s claims, especially those presenting the dancehall as a liberating space—as female freedom endures only during the time of the dance—in this movie too, the dancehall is perceived as joyful, a place to have fun and assert popular values and not to worry about problems and cultural debates.

Another important aspect of Jamaican life in local movies is that of religion. Christian denominations are generally viewed with little sympathy, more as the “people’s opium” rather than as a comfort in harsh conditions. In *The Harder They Come*, the Preacher is supposed to be the guardian of morality and sex, but he is corrupted by his social role. He dislikes Ivan because Ivan represents everything he stands against: freedom (in music, dress, love, and sex) and the lack of moral and social values. Only *Rockers* shows sympathy toward Revival, underlining the many similarities between this religion and Rastafari, especially through the rhythmic chants and dances. Other religions and belief systems (Pentecostalism, Kumina, Obeah) are viewed with scepticism.

Yet almost every Jamaican director depicts and idealizes one religion: Rastafari. Four movies have a Rasta as a main character. Among these four only *Children Of Babylon* presents a negative Rasta—the newly converted Luke, who asserts male dominance on his partners, reflecting his social environment. By contrast, in *The Harder They Come*, Pedro (fig. 3) is an almost heroic figure, Ivan’s opposite and his only friend. *Rockers* is a Rasta movie, shot in the Rasta communities in Trench Town. The characters are all Rastas, the point of view is Rasta, the language is Rasta talk, and the entire movie spreads the One Love philosophy. In this movie we find the utopia of a

Rasta society as an ideal society, as an example of an alternative way of life. *Countryman* also idealizes Rastafari philosophy with a completely positive depiction. The idealization and the romanticising of Rastas is obvious, avoiding any representation of the movement’s imperfections and contradictions. This unabashed glorification of Rastafari is probably the main criticism of these movies: they idealize Rastafari, forgetting that Rastas are human beings who err as any others. Yet these representations create a new positive stereotype for Jamaica.

One movie in particular focuses on religion as a main theme: *One Love*, in which Pentecostalism, Rastafari, Obeah, and Bobo Ashanti are mixed in a love story crossing different beliefs. Despite a constant rivalry between the religions, Rastafari and the Rasta environment are depicted as positive, as the Garden of Eden. Rastas show open minds and sympathy. Pentecostalism, in contrast, is unsympathetically depicted as strict, close-minded, and full of prejudices. The blind faith in

Obeah of Selector G is ridiculed, so that, again, the only positive religion appears to be Rastafari. A happy conclusion can be reached only through compromise and the development of respect for the other religions. In the end, everybody is happy because they have all sacrificed something to be enriched by the other faiths.

The majority of the movies mentioned take place in downtown Kingston, the city’s ghettos; few movies are set in the countryside. Henzell’s movie, shot in Trench Town, established the trend towards the urban. Henzell thought he could find authentic Jamaican culture among the common people. In those years, this place represented the core of Jamaican creativity, what Henzell wanted for his films. *The Harder They Come* was shot in the streets, in almost exclusively exterior scenes. The city is chaotic and overcrowded but also joyous, vibrant, and a place of solidarity. This perspective on the city would be continued by all the later directors shooting in Kingston: the city can be violent but it is also the only place where



Fig. 3. Ras Daniel Hartman as Pedro in *The Harder They Come*, the first Rasta ever to appear in a feature film.



Fig. 4. The chaotic but joyful Kingston in *The Harder They Come* (top) and the dreamy aura of the Rasta village in *One Love*.

lower-class Jamaicans can find solidarity—for instance, in *Rockers*, *Dancehall Queen*, and *Third World Cop*. Jamaican directors have elected Kingston as their major location, with their striking commitment to a “realism” that depicts the city in all its contradictory facets. In contrast, the directors who chose to shoot their movies in the countryside offer an idyllic portrayal of the rural life, maybe with a foreign audience in mind. This happens, for instance, in *Children of Babylon*,

which tries to show a positive image of Jamaica; furthermore, in *One Love*, the countryside appears in all its splendour, giving a dreamy aura to the movie, pervaded by harmony and beauty. The Rasta environment—clean, happy, self-sufficient, respectful of Nature—appears in *Countryman* too, while in *The Lunatic*, the most important aspect of country life seems to be that owning a house defines one’s a place in society.

What appears from these movies is Jamaica, beautiful and full of contradictions, in its lived reality. The directors try to discredit the negative stereotypes about Kingston and its ghettos; in fact, through the movie’s perspective, the city appears hard but encouraging (fig. 4).

The characters’ appearance (not only dress but also accessories, means of transport, houses, and belongings), is important because it provides a sense of social status. In *The Harder They Come*, Ivan’s conscious use of fashion is quite striking. He changes his wardrobe and means of transport when he climbs the social ladder; the more his social status grows, the more he changes his appearance: from the simple clothes he had at the beginning to the flashy clothes of the gangster (including the symbolic guns; fig. 5); from the public bus to a bicycle, then a motorbike, then a convertible Mercedes. The climax arrives when he objectifies himself by having some photographs taken as “the bad man.” However, he acquires no real power; he is the form without the substance. For Ivan, appearance is more important than anything else, as G.L. Yearwood argues in his analysis of myth and signification in this movie .

In every movie, appearances denote the character’s status. However, two movies are interesting for their *absence* of clothes. *Countryman* shows the life of a man living close to nature, at the lower strata of society. Thus, he wears no clothes and owns no means of transport. On the contrary, *Children Of Babylon* is set among the upper strata of society, but here it seems that money and education allow women to take off their clothes quite freely. The film depicts a kind of role reversal between Penny and Dorcas, Luke’s two women. At first Penny is free; she wears few or no clothes and has sex with anyone. At the end, when she becomes Luke’s woman, she follows his orders and appears entirely “covered.” On the other side, Dorcas, Luke’s wife, is totally covered and nobody notices her. She is never naked and when she commits suicide she chooses a symbolic red dress from the landlady’s wardrobe. Penny and Dorcas are two sides of the same coin: Penny represents the “city,” sophisticated, emancipated, uninhibited, smart, while Dorcas represents the “countryside,” backward and uneducated. In the end, however, the film shows that there is little distance between them.

Fig. 5. *The Harder They Come*: Ivan portrays himself as a gangster-star.



In *The Lunatic*, clothes are relevant because, as with houses, owning or not owning clothes means belonging or not to certain groups in society. Once the characters are accepted in society, they start wearing the appropriate clothes. In the gangster movies, such as *Third World Cop*, clothes and jewellery are important because they characterize the gangster's status (fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Countryman in the movie of the same title (left); some gangsters in *Third World Cop*.

Jamaican cinema is mainly a male domain and does very little to discredit the stereotypes of the violent, rough, and tough Jamaican Man. In Jamaican movies men are aggressive, sometimes violent, and street-wise. This portrayal is particularly true of gangster movies. Yet the gangsters in movies are admired, renowned, and their status is aspirational for much of the Jamaican audience, especially the ghetto people who respect them. Thus, to please the Jamaican audience, all men in Jamaican movies are assertive, tough, “macho,” self-assured, and violent when needed. If, however, Jamaican movies reinforce the stereotypes about Jamaican masculinity, these films are also different from Hollywood's stereotypes about Jamaicans. In Hollywood movies, they are only drug dealers, prostitutes, pitiless, and unabashedly evil. In Jamaican movies, there can be machos, but these figures always retain their humanity: the audience sympathizes with them, likes them despite whatever they do.

All these features are common to the Jamaican movies that have followed *The Harder They Come*'s example. Obviously, later movies have also introduced new themes and techniques to keep the pace with the changing times. Jamaican cinema may be accused of being too commercial, but this has been a deliberate choice. In fact, a profitable movie needs to be accessible to all audiences, with mass appeal, which explains the great number of action movies. Marketability is also the reason why Jamaican movies are realistic, in that they represent likely situations and mirror the country's popular culture. This mass culture is valued because Jamaican cinema represents Jamaica; it is an expression of identity in which Jamaicans can recognize themselves.

To conclude, a Jamaican cinematographic tradition has finally appeared in the wake of *The Harder They Come* and the films that followed. Directors face similar themes with similar methods and address the same social classes. Jamaican cinema is local and tries to show the country and its people as close as possible to reality. The films promote Jamaican lower-class culture as the most valuable sign of authenticity and identity of the island. Above all, Jamaican cinema gives a new vision of the country and its population, one with which Jamaicans can identify. The relatively new local movie production provides alternatives to negative images created from abroad, and engenders a new sense of self-consciousness and pride. Jamaicans can watch a movie depicting themselves without prejudices and be gratified by the “pleasure of recognition.” Self-representation offers them a new range of possibilities, from simple identification with the characters, the story, or setting, to the satisfaction that popular culture is finally showing a more authentic depiction of the country and its population. *The Harder They Come* set the trend; significantly, the desire for self-representation coincided with Jamaican independence. Since then, Jamaican cinema has followed the tradition Henzell's astonishing movie established, not only in style and themes but also in purpose. Every Jamaican cinematic self-representation has valued the country, its culture, traditions, and above all its population in order to give to every Jamaican, no matter what social class, education, or religion, and to non-Jamaicans as well, a fresh and realistic portrayal of Jamaica. Hopefully, as local production develops, more studies will appear to add new insights to the much-needed criticism on this national cinema.

Above all, Jamaican cinema gives a new vision of the country and its population, one with which Jamaicans can identify.

Notes

1. For a list of movies shot in Jamaica, see *Titles for Jamaica filming locations*. Web. 26 May 2011; and *Welcome to Film Jamaica*. Web. 03 June 2011.
2. Basil Wallace as Screwface in *Marked For Death*. Web. 11 Feb. 2013, and Kevin Peter Hall as The Predator in *Predator 1* and *2*. Web. 11 Feb. 2013. Stephen Hopkins' *Predator 2* (1990) is an American movie with Danny Glover, Gary Busey, and Kevin Peter Hall in the role of the predator. Here the alien monster is constructed as a Jamaican Rasta, in that he is given dreadlocks. There are also other characteristics that link him not only to the Jamaican drug gangs of the period in Los Angeles, but also to Vodun—another instance of the use of clichés by the director, who did not realize that Vodun is practiced in Haiti and not in Jamaica. Moreover, Vodun is a religion, not the set of stereotypes promoted by Hollywood cinema. An interesting analysis of this aspect of the film can be found in Tasker Yvonne. *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993, 47-53.
3. John Duigan, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 1993. For a full citation of this and all the other movies quoted in this article, see the Works Cited list.
4. Kevin Rodney Sullivan, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, 1998. It is true that in this movie, based on a true story, the Jamaican character does not seem to need a visa or money, but his behaviour resembles that of a prostitute searching for an escape from the island.
5. Browne Chris. Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2007.
6. I list major productions since Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come* in my Works Cited. The following sites provide further details: <http://caribbeanfilm.org/> and <http://www.newcaribbeancinema.com/>
7. Browne Chris. Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2007.
8. Rhone Trevor D. Personal interview. 16 Nov. 2007.
9. As noted by Yearwood Gladstone L. "Myth and Signification in Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come*." *The Reordering of Culture: Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada in the Hood*. Eds. Alvina Ruprecht and Cecilia Taiana. Canada: Carleton University Press, 1995. 437-455. Print.

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- Flame of Passion*. Dir. Tom Terriss. Perf. Tom Terriss, Ellaline Terriss, Rienzi de Cordova. 1915. Film.
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Predator 1. Dir. John McTiernan. Perf. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Carl Weathers, Kevin Peter Hall. 1987. Film.

Predator 2. Dir. Stephen Hopkins. Perf. Danny Glover, Gary Busey, Kevin Peter Hall. 1990. Film.

Queen of the Sea. Dir. John G. Adolphi. Perf. Annette Kellerman, Hugh Thompson, Mildred Keats. 1918. Film.

Railroad Panorama near Spanishtown, Jamaica. Edison Manufacturing Company. 1903. Short Documentary.

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The Pearl of the Antilles. Dir. Tom Terriss. Perf. Tom Terriss, Tessie de Cordova, Paul Harvey. 1915. Film.

Third World Cop. Dir. Chris Browne. Perf. Paul Campbell, Mark Danvers, Carl Bradshaw. 1999. Jamaica, Palm Pictures and Island Jamaica Films in association with Hawk's Nest Productions. Palm Pictures, 2000. DVD.

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Image Notes

Figure 1: Wallace, Basil. *Screwface*. 1990. <http://www.reelbastards.com/10-reasons-steven-seagal-still-rocks/>. Web. 11 Feb. 2013.

--- Hall, Kevin Peter. *The Predator*. 1987 and 1990. <http://villains.wikia.com/wiki/Predators>. Web. 11 Feb. 2013.

Figure 2: Reid, Audrey. *Dancehall Queen*. Dir. Don Letts and Rick Elgood. Perf. Audrey Reid, Carl Davis, Paul Campbell. 1997. Jamaica, Onion Pictures Corporation, Palm Pictures, 1998. DVD.

Figure 3-5: Cliff, Jimmy; Hartman, Ras Daniel; Kingston. *The Harder They Come*. Dir. Perry Henzell. Perf. Jimmy Cliff, Carl Bradshaw, Janet Bartley. 1972. Jamaica, International Films Ltd, Xenon Pictures Inc., 2006. DVD.

--- Rasta village. *One Love*. Dir. Don Letts and Rick Elgood. Perf. Ky-Mani Marley, Cherine Anderson, Winston Bell. 2003. Jamaica/Denmark, Film Council and Baker Street in association with BV International Pictures, Take4 Production, One Love Films/ Euromax / Exposed / Nik Powell FilmVP Music Group Inc., 2005. DVD.

Figure 6: *Countryman*. Dir. Dickie Jobson. Perf. Countryman, Hiram Keller, Carl Bradshaw. 1982. Jamaica, Onion Pictures Corporation, Palm Pictures, 2004. DVD.

--- Danvers, Mark. *Third World Cop*. Dir. Chris Browne. Perf. Paul Campbell, Mark Danvers, Carl Bradshaw. 1999. Jamaica, Palm Pictures and Island Jamaica Films in association with Hawk's Nest Productions. Palm Pictures, 2000. DVD.

CHRISTIAN LARA: RECONCILING VISION AND EXECUTION IN *SUCRE AMER* (BITTER SUGAR, 1997) AND *1802, L'ÉPOPÉE GUADELOUPÉENNE* (1802, THE GUADELOUPEAN EPIC, 2005)

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Résumé

Evoquer le passé dans un film, c'est un geste politique. Ce geste permet que le passé soit lu et interprété dans une nouvelle façon selon les choix du réalisateur. Christian Lara, le réalisateur guadeloupéen étudié dans cet article, représente la rébellion de 1803 dans ses deux films. Dans ses propres mots, il construit « une fresque historique » des événements, foisonnée des changements fréquents des scènes, des costumes élaborés et une gamme de personnages. À travers ses éléments, Lara expose des méfaits coloniaux et il interroge l'engagement métropolitain dans son île. Cet article démontre que l'effort de Lara, malgré sa théâtralité, souligne un désir urgent de corriger et de confirmer l'histoire distinctive et inspirante de Guadeloupe.

Abstract

Invoking the past in film is a political gesture because it suggests new interpretations of historical events. French Caribbean director Christian Lara portrays the Guadeloupean rebellion of 1803 in two of his films. In his own words, he builds "a historical fresco" of the events, abounding with frequent changes of scenery, elaborate period costumes, and a wide range of minor and major characters through which he exposes France's colonial wrongdoings. He further questions present French involvement in Guadeloupe. My aim in this paper is to demonstrate that his cinematic efforts, though criticized for their theatricality, underscore an urgency to correct and confirm the islands' distinctive and inspiring local history.

Christian Lara is inarguably the most prolific French-Caribbean director alive. He was the first French-Caribbean director and created the first film set in the Antilles, *Coco la fleur, candidat* (1979). Already 24 feature films to his name, he is currently in post-production on his latest film, *The Legend*, which takes place in French Polynesia. With an earnest ambition to promote and dignify Black culture, specifically of the Caribbean, he is also referred to as the Father of French-Caribbean cinema¹. Despite having such a vast, aspirational body of work in a field that requires more scholarly attention², Lara has not received favourable reviews in academic film criticism. In my view, this negative criticism³ highlights an acute conflict between rhetoric and aesthetic. That is to say, Lara has articulated his desire to revisit and valorize Guadeloupean history and to inspire political change, but critics have not lauded the ways in which he has carried out these objectives. As a result, this Guadeloupean director continues to straddle a precarious position in French-Caribbean filmmaking.

We must unpack this severe criticism: can negative reviews be taken at face value or is there another angle from which to examine the films so as to shed light on the concerns over Lara's vision and choices? Although his research subject is different, film scholar Bill Nichols offers relevant insight into this question. In his article on Iranian film, he examines the critical expectations of non-Western cinema, arguing that film critics who analyze non-Hollywood film seek to recover "the strange as familiar" (Nichols 18). In other words, one way critics make sense of non-Western films is to find commonalities in their style. To develop a common critical process to formulate generalizations about foreign films, critics establish a set of expected characteristics for any non-Western film. Evidence of these characteristics is found in the film's formal aspects, thus solidifying the "acknowledgment of an international film style (formal innovation; psychologically complex, ambiguous, poetic, allegorical, or

restrained characterizations; rejection of Hollywood norms for the representation of time and space; lack of clear resolution or narrative closure; and so on)" (Nichols 17).

One consequence of this critical strategy is that it engenders a sphere of expectation for non-Western filmmakers. Critics have created an informal code of production, consisting of, but not limited to, the presence of didactic, allegorical, and anti-capitalist thematic material; the employment of non-professional actors to create a more authentic representation; and the dismissal of commonly deemed stalwarts of Hollywood cinema (sex, violence, expensive special effects, and the classic happy end, etc.). Regarding French-Caribbean film, one contributing factor to the precariousness of Lara's position has been that he does not abide by this informal code. The presence of Western-influenced techniques such as professional actors, ornate costumes, and ostentatious special effects techniques in *Sucre Amer* and *1802, l'Épopée Guadeloupéenne* destabilizes assumptions about non-Western films. Scholarly work must consider the critical dilemma that the presence of these techniques creates. The present essay aims to provide a new perspective from which to analyze Lara's filmic choices and explain his contrarian aesthetic.

Sucre Amer (1997)

Rather than perpetuate criticism of Lara's films for imitative tendencies or politically incorrect viewpoints, I aim to bring the complexities of his filmic techniques to the fore, demonstrate his fascination with memory, highlight his numerous socio-cultural references, and provide an explanation for the theatrical quality of the films. Offering a new interpretation of Lara's films exhibits their highly polemical quality, the nuanced and intelligent attack on racism and the *béké* society, and the clear, purposeful representation of the past.

More than 20 years after the release of *Vivre libre ou mourir* (1980/81), Lara returned to its principal theme, the Guadeloupean revolt of 1802, in his two relatively recent films, *Sucre Amer* (1997) and *1802, l'Épopée Guadeloupéenne* (2005). Although Lara released these two films separately, they are stylistic replicas, with consistent the lighting, dominant colors, and costumes. The films partly feature the same actors and setting and represent

several major battles, the relationships among officers, the enthusiastic participation of the Guadeloupean people, and the French decision to send troops in anticipation of Guadeloupean resistance to the reinstatement of slavery. Yet the films differ in one substantial way: *Sucre Amer*, whose title ostensibly references the entwined history of sugar production and slavery in the New World, does not focus solely on the historical period of the rebellion. The narrative alternates between three settings: the 1802 battle, the modern-day imaginary trial of Joseph Ignace, and the deliberations in the jury room. The trial involves additional historic and invented characters and a secondary plotline that delivers a scathing indictment of colonial France. The alternating depiction of these three settings creates a chronological but discontinuous and episodic narrative structure that continues for the duration of the film.

During the opening sequence of *Sucre Amer*, Lara introduces this structure and foreshadows the conflict that at the very heart of the plot. First, he briefly films the Guadeloupean context preceding the revolt. He begins with a close-up tracking shot of horse legs galloping through water. As the horses pull a carriage, the slow-motion of the racing hooves, with water spraying in every direction, infuses the moment with controlled urgency and suspense. This urgency is also conveyed through sound; the extradiegetic rapid rhythm of beating drums accompanies the images of the horse and carriage. The sight of this dated means of transportation immediately transports the modern-day viewer into the past and establishes the time period of the primary plot.

To further illustrate this time period, Lara cuts several times to young Guadeloupean girls dancing the *menuet* (minuet), an elegant and formal French court dance that originated in 17th-century France. Despite the decorum and elegance, this scene evokes a controversial trend in Mulatto society. The imitation of French music and clothing suggests cooperation and support of French rule and, by extension, the enslavement of fellow Guadeloupeans. The melody of the minuet, layered over the sound of the drumbeat, also has an underlying connotation that establishes a societal division that dominates the Guadeloupean population: the drum beat establishes the Afro-Antillean cultural presence and the *menuet* gestures to the influence of colonial France.



Fig. 1. *Sucre Amer* (1997), arrival of the jurors.

Abruptly, the scene changes when a gavel strikes a judge's bench and a jury files into a modern-day jury room. The appearance of the jurors (figure 1) indicates that they belong to different eras and hail from a variety of homelands.

In the courtroom, Joseph Ignace (figure 2) is on trial for treason against France. The prosecution relates his three crimes. The man who appears before the court is called Ignace, a freed slave who has become a commander in the French army. He is accused of high treason because of his rebellion against the Republic's army after Napoleon Bonaparte restored the Code Noir, an edict dealing with slavery and related issues. He is also accused of establishing a separatist government and of fighting France's army.



Fig. 2. The accused, Joseph Ignace.

After the prosecutor makes her opening remarks, the sound chimes in as the camera hits Ignace. The next image is a close-up of Marie, emphasizing this juror's particular significance and responsibility in the ruling. The defendant's lawyer, an older distinguished Guadeloupean, states that he will present "the same events but a different story." His opening argument concludes with the statement that Ignace is the "victim of historical manipulation." This remark represents the political orientation of the film: an artistic rendering of events and figures that will right the wrongs of recorded history. The final, salient words of the scene come from the judge, who instructs the jury, "A Man's honor is at stake. You must clear his name or find him guilty. Your duty is to separate the facts from what may be imaginary to reach a unanimous verdict."

Henceforth throughout the film, Lara consistently juxtaposes past and present, designating the three key settings in the film: the reconstruction of the failed Guadeloupean rebellion, the courtroom where the trial of Ignace takes place, and the jury room where the eight jurors must reach a unanimous verdict. The first of these settings depicts the earliest emancipation of the Guadeloupean slave population, in 1794. The French shrewdly enacted the emancipation to encourage enlistment in the fight against the British. Lara's film shows the French arming and outfitting Guadeloupeans and then returns again to the courtroom where Ignace's wife begins her testimony. Describing the emancipation, she says, "Whites and Blacks made peace, then we got to work...It was like a celebration." To present the emancipation and short-lived camaraderie between French and freed Guadeloupeans, Lara inserts a scene in which Ignace defends a French soldier from a British attack and cradles the dead White man who carried the official emancipation document. The French Governor Lacrosse, who arrived in Guadeloupe with his aide-de-camp Louis Delgrès in 1801, had instructions to reinstitute slavery according to the French 1799 Constitution.

Flashbacks throughout Lara's film demonstrates his broad knowledge of Guadeloupean history. The flashbacks that constitute the reconstruction of the rebellion are atypical in a fundamental way. In classic narrative cinema, "in its most common form, flashback is signaled when an older character's memory of the past leads to a cut to a scene or series of scenes representing that past" (Satterlee 64). For example, if an older character flashes back to his/her life many years before, the director will maintain the verisimilitude of the film by ensuring that this character looks and behaves in a way that is appropriate to the younger age. In Lara's films, however, the characters that appear in flashback are the same age and wear the same attire in both settings: the 1802 rebellion and the contemporary trial. Lara's main character, Ignace, is not featured as an old man in one era and as his younger self in this film's flashbacks. In other words, although the trial seemingly takes place two hundred years after the rebellion, Ignace looks exactly the same in either setting. In fact, every character is depicted as him/herself, at one age and with one appearance, whether he/she appears during a flashback or in the contemporary scenes. All characters from Guadeloupe's past that have been integrated into the modern setting of the courtroom dress and behave as they would have during their actual lifetime.

This narrative structure enables Lara to educate the audience about the current prevalence of racism. For instance, after a psychiatrist takes the stand later in the film, Lara films the jury room where members deliberate the difference between Whites and Blacks, particularly White and Black men. The Black writer and head juror Privat D'Anglemont asks Marie (figure 3), the young French woman, to explain her opinion of the difference between White and Black men.



Fig. 3. *Sucre Amer* (1997), prevalence of racism.

Racist statements also surface in the courtroom when a self-proclaimed eyewitness named Duboyer describes the Black rebels as zombies. He accuses Louis Delgrès of commanding the rebels to burn everything and kill all the Whites. The jurors, in particular Marie, take note in the deliberation room that Duboyer could not have seen anything. As Lara adds testimony from Ignace's mother, Ignace, Rougier (the man who kills Ignace), Victor Schoelcher, and Empress Josephine, he continues to cross-cut frequently between the courtroom and jury room to convey, in quick order, the jury's responses to the witnesses' remarks. Although juries do not typically deliberate after every testimony, this narrative structure overrides realism to create a back-and-forth dialogue.

Hence, past events that come to light over the course of the trial have an immediate impact on the impressions of the various jury members. Collective memory progressively influences the opinions and attitudes of the jury. At the end of the film, the trial is almost over and the lawyers give their final arguments. The defense recounts the history of slavery and the lack of official apology from France. He demands that the past be "a clean slate...with above all a recognized importance... it's our obligation to remember."²⁴ The battle scenes reach their climax and, in a flashback to the end of the rebellion, the French forces defeat the Guadeloupeans. Ignace is assassinated in battle. Immediately, Lara cuts back to the jury. The abrupt

final shot presents silence in the jury room. The imaginary trial identifies the accused as a fallen hero with a trumped up charge.

No verdict in the courtroom is ever given. Snatching Ignace's fate from the French legal system, Lara indicates that the jury, representative of Guadeloupean society, is responsible for his legacy. At its core, Lara's film engages in this retelling of the past in order to demonstrate the heroism of Guadeloupean rebels, propose a representation of major events in Guadeloupean history, condemn France for its colonialism, and challenge French involvement in modern-day Guadeloupe.

In *Sucre Amer*, the *mise-en-scène* varies depending on context of the two time periods the film depicts. In all of the scenes involving the rebellion, the *mise-en-scène* is a studied application of factual elements—from locations to clothing, hair, accessories, and weapons—in a closely replicated timeline of verifiable events and probable interactions. In both the courtroom and the deliberation room, the appearance of the characters takes precedence over the background. Costumes dominate this invented space, an authentic and lackluster replication of a judicial environment. In every context, Lara purposefully configures each image in order to lay bare his political reading of Guadeloupean past and current culture.

From the onset of the beginning of the film, Lara's careful construction is evident. The racing carriage, *menuet* music, and the appearance of the characters comprising the audience of the small outdoor concert establish the first setting of the film: Guadeloupe prior to the arrival of colonial administrator Richepance. The elegance of the costumes, the peacefulness and seclusion of the setting, the choice of music, and the composed behavior of the audience strongly suggest the Mulatto population's French tastes.

The film also verbally articulates and visually expresses the contemporary relevance of the rebellion. During a recess from the trial, Ignace and his anonymous lawyer stand face-to-face in a prison. With only two men in the scene, this image serves to define their private interaction and the significance of this moment. In a tense conversation, the lawyer encourages Ignace to take the stand. Ignace resists, saying, "I am not a hero. I am a Black man from Guadeloupe, that's all."²⁵ The lawyer responds: "For us, your trial is important."²⁶ In this statement, Lara expresses the idea that Ignace's heroism resonates with living Guadeloupeans because it satisfies a desire for self-knowledge, cultural pride, and historic preservation. Essentially, the lawyer is urging Ignace to testify because it brings this heroism to life.

Yet, despite the noble message of the lawyer and the favorable and detailed portrayal of the rebellion, multiple techniques of the *mise-en-scène* could detract from a positive impression of this film. For instance, there are repeated instances of endless death scenes, exaggerated dialogue, grandiose personalities, and overt symbolism. We must address the manifestation of these choices in order to make sense of Lara's project as a whole. A critical viewer must question the role and effectiveness of such commonplace techniques in the innovative and intellectual framework established by *Sucre Amer*'s narrative progression. There are two possible interpretations for these types of techniques. Arguably, in attempting to bolster the emotional impact of the film, Lara has been caught in the trap of relying too heavily on clichés. However, a second interpretation of the epic battle scenes and dramatic acting views such as intensification and excess as unmistakably conveying the heroism of the Guadeloupean figures, elevating the stakes of combat, condemning the French colonial empire, and attacking the continued prevalence of racism and colonial ideals.

When weighing the differences between these two interpretations, we cannot overlook one important factor. Lara has been outspoken and explicit about his objectives in the film,²⁷ seeing film as a way to influence history and shape Guadeloupean identity. The principal actor in both *Sucre Amer* and *1802*, Luc Saint-Eloy, supports this agenda in a comment on his own motivation to participate in Lara's films. In his statement, he underscores the connection between the films and the contemporary social concern of continued oppression in Guadeloupe:

*We are proud of our past and it is for that reason that we want to revisit it in order to build the foundation that we are missing. We do not want the foundation that was established for us, but on the contrary to construct our own. The fight we lead is in their heads and ours. It's a veritable power struggle between the colonizers and the colonized. We are obliged to speak about oppression and the rediscovered freedom.*²⁸

These remarks underscore how deliberate Lara's choices in filmmaking have been. They suggest that Lara is perfectly cognizant of clichés and their exploitation, but has decided to use them to his advantage. Lara creates film with a deliberately theatrical *mise-en-scène*.

The theatricality in the film also emphasizes the trauma of slavery and the violence of the rebellion. In a series of scenes toward the end of *Sucre Amer*, Lara films an encampment of rebels. Pivoting the camera, he depicts women crying and moaning while others dance and eat. The film then cuts to Ignace's wife, who confesses, "I hate my color."²⁹ She exposes her back, horribly scarred from lashings inflicted during her enslavement. Against the dark backdrop of night, her back is illuminated by firelight—a painful sight meant to convey the suffering of the Guadeloupean people and rationalize their decision to rebel.

On the eve of Ignace's final battle, Lara features a group of individuals who exhibit a range of emotional responses to their distressing condition. Ignace's preparation for battle involves the decision to paint his face white, following tradition. Within earshot of Ignace, another soldier reproaches

Ignace's reliance on tradition, stating, "Africa is long gone." In this mini-dialogue, Lara exposes the tension between the reliance on African roots and the damage to these beliefs as a result of generations of struggle and failing revolt. To ensure that Ignace's opinion overrides this cynical attitude, Lara films him as he quickly retorts, "Today we are reborn!"¹¹ By depicting a protagonist who asserts the value of tradition, Lara demonstrates the way in which he imagines and configures the presence and significance of African beliefs amongst the rebels. This face painting is another example of how Lara uses the appearance of the characters to create meaningful visual symbols in the film. When the battle begins, many of the fighting men and women have painted their faces like Ignace, proving the significance of African cultural influence.

Over the course of the fighting, a woman is decapitated. Her body convulses as her head rolls to face the camera in close-up. Sparing no gruesome corporeal detail, Lara purposefully highlights the sacrifice of the Guadeloupean rebels. Ignace dies during this battle and Lara then ends the film with a shot of the very somber jury. The usually animated cast sits silent and dejected, clearly conveying their understanding of Ignace's sacrifice. The *mise-en-scène* of this shot epitomizes the political implications of the entire film. Lara effectively establishes that the rebellion continues to have direct and undeniable effects on modern-day Guadeloupe.

In addition, Lara adeptly evokes the spirit of the French Revolution in the Antillean context. One example of this influence is apparent in the decision of certain Guadeloupean soldiers to continue to wear the *tricorne*, or three-corner hat, long after their break from the French army. Other Guadeloupeans sport the *bonnet phrygien*, a headpiece popularized by French Revolutionaries, though its first documented use was in Ancient Greece to distinguish manumitted slaves. The Guadeloupean soldiers even sing the *Marseillaise*,

the French national anthem. The presentation of these customs and symbols serves to solidify that the Guadeloupean rebels have adopted the ideology of the French Revolution. This co-opting is possible because they interpret revolutionary ideology as separate and distinct from the French state. Akin to a similar phenomenon in Haiti, the main principles of the French Revolution were a unifying rhetoric amongst the colonized, despite the nation being at war with the French state.

Hence, when Lara captures a *tricorne* floating abandoned in the water after Ignace's defeat, the *mise-en-scène* drives home a key point about the rebellion and the French Revolution, the style of the shot uncovering a message about the relationship between Guadeloupe and France. Instead of using an eye-level shot, the camera is held in a dominant position over the water and floating hat. High-angle shots often emphasize the weakness or dependence of the figure featured in the image. In this case, the high angle calls attention to the failure of the rebellion, represented by the hat. Furthermore, because the hat serves as a double metonymy for the French Revolution as well as the Guadeloupean uprising, this shot accentuates the failure of ideals of the French Revolution in the Guadeloupean context. Because the French army defeated the Guadeloupean rebels, this shot also exposes the irony of the entire conflict. By selecting very noticeable symbols of the French Revolution and incorporating them in the appearance of Guadeloupeans, Lara highlights the unique blend of French Revolutionary and traditional African elements. The face paint adds to this effect.

1802, *L'Épopée Guadeloupéenne*

The film *1802, L'Épopée Guadeloupéenne* does not include Ignace's trial. Instead, the narrative is a causal, chronological account that remains strictly within the bounds of the 1802 battle. Lara does not insert any contemporary scenes, but rather chooses to explore the events of the past in greater depth. His focus is on the leadership of the Guadeloupean rebels—particularly Louis Delgrès—the colonial anticipation of a rebellion, the arrival and involvement of French forces, several key battles, and the mass suicide organized by Delgrès.

The film begins with the soundtrack of instrumental string music accompanying a widescreen shot of fields and open road. Superimposed on the image of the fields are giant golden numbers indicating the year "1802," followed by blood-drenched letters spelling "L'Épopée guadeloupéenne." In a caption, Lara then briefly introduces the historical context: the abolition of slavery in 1794 and Napoleon's later reinstatement. The first two scenes stage the opposing players: the Guadeloupean rebels gathering in a large home versus Napoleon and Josephine discussing the colonies in Paris, November 1801. In the latter scene, Lara presents a dialogue in which Josephine pleads with Napoleon to return to Martinique. When the question of slavery arises, Napoleon quickly states that the emancipation was never actually legitimate. Napoleon's dismissive remarks convey his notorious arrogance and highlight the fundamentally conflicting positions regarding the emancipation. The alternation between the Guadeloupean and Parisian settings raises the significance of the revolt, placing it in a wider historical context and justifying the Guadeloupean resistance to the reinstatement of slavery.

When Richepance arrives in Guadeloupe, he immediately purports his mission to "re-establish order," a euphemism for reinstating slavery. Richepance begins by disarming the Guadeloupeans. As the Guadeloupeans shed their uniforms, White soldiers laugh and point at their vulnerable, disrobed figures. Order, then, is actually a demeaning process that reflects the racial hierarchy. Fully aware that this disarmament is the first step in re-enslaving the local population, several Guadeloupeans attempt

to run away. Lara films vicious dogs and French soldiers chasing these men until he cuts to portray Ignace informing Delgrès of the recent events. The film continues to follow the chronology of the rebellion with the enlistment of Guadeloupean men and women followed by Delgrès' rousing speech at Fort St-Charles (now known as Fort Louis Delgrès) in which he states: "We will fight this oppression to our death."¹² Subsequently, the Guadeloupean leadership crafts a proclamation outlining their grievances and strategizes late into the night; Lara represents these figures as resourceful, contemplative tacticians who fight only as a last resort.

Significantly, *1802* includes scenes involving British interest in Guadeloupe. Lara depicts the White English governor of Dominica receiving a letter from the French requesting help to counter the Guadeloupean slave rebellion. To convey the outside involvement in Guadeloupean affairs, the Governor discusses the French request with an American Army Major present at the Governor's mansion. The two men discuss how neither the French General Leclerc nor Richepance are succeeding in quelling the rebellions in Haiti and Guadeloupe. They admonish the preceding lack of consultation. Following this meeting, Richepance receives munitions from the English and rearms the Guadeloupeans who have chosen to fight against Delgrès' men. With the inclusion of American and British involvement, Lara again raises the stakes of the Guadeloupean rebellion by highlighting its international effects. Moreover, Lara implicates other powerful countries in the history of slavery and the casual, dismissive way they address the topic. In his decision to bring the colonial context forward, Lara denounces the colonial powers and their self-serving agenda.

In what remains of the film, Delgrès continues to evolve into the more prominent protagonist. After the next bloody battle between Delgrès and Richepance, Delgrès decides he must evacuate the fort and descend into Point-à-Pitre to fight. During a meeting, the rebel leaders express their hope for munitions from Toussaint L'Ouverture. This meeting contrasts with the previous scenes involving the colonists and their loyalty to one another.

The next day, Ignace and Delgrès lead different groups into battle. Lara films Ignace's death on May 25th, 1802 in Baimbridge, at a fort outside of Point-à-Pitre. Viewers also see Delgrès as he receives news that Ignace's head is on display at Place de la Victoire in Point-à-Pitre. Lara then depicts the violent battle of Matouba at the Danglemont plantation on May 28th, 1802. After losing this battle, Delgrès counts the wounded in the rebel camp. With no more munitions, he announces defeat. In the final scene, Delgrès looks upon the losing Guadeloupean forces. The film does not overtly announce the suicide. Instead, Delgrès sits upon a rocking chair on the veranda of a Creole-style home. Smoking a pipe, he observes his fellow rebels. Suddenly, the home explodes. As the credits roll, Lara lists all known names of those who lost their lives in the rebellion. The closing quotation is from Oruno Lara (1879-1924), Lara's grandfather and a prominent historian: "Each day of our progress is due to each day of their sacrifice." The statement reinforces the film's indictment of colonial France and its effort to recuperate the courage and endurance of Louis Delgrès.¹³

Comparative Analysis of *Sucre Amer* and *1802, l'Épopée Guadeloupéenne*.

The general characteristics of the *mise-en-scène* of *1802* are identical to *Sucre Amer*. Lara does not manipulate the setting through lighting in either film. The color appears with low contrast; thus, by using a small ratio of dark to light, the colors are more naturalistic. Furthermore, Lara refrains from the digital alteration of the images. Unlike Euhzan Palcy in the opening sequences of an earlier French-Caribbean film *Rue Cases-Nègres* (1983), Lara does not use sepia tones to stylize the environment and signal a bygone era. Another cinematic technique common to *Sucre Amer* and *1802* is the specific choice of shots. As Martine Beugnet explains, "choice of shot can be stylistically experimental. Shots can be motivated by style or by narrative" (99). Lara does not shoot either film in an experimental or radical manner. Rather, Lara chooses shots that allow the narrative to take precedence over style; he uses common shots in traditional ways. Given the naturalistic lighting and familiar shots, the *mise-en-scène* suggests a certain realism.

Nevertheless, the alternating settings in *Sucre Amer* disturb this illusion of realism. The appearance of the characters in *1802*, on the other hand, always corresponds to the time period. As a result, the period attire and bold colors in this film do not stand out as they do in the drab courtroom of *Sucre Amer*. What makes accessories (*tricorne* or *bonnet phrygien*) and weapons of the Guadeloupean soldiers visually striking in *1802* is that the uniforms were supplied by the French. Instead of serving as evidence of juxtaposition between past and present, the uniforms are significant because they are a central part of the *mise-en-scène*, always acting as visual reminders of the fluctuating demands of the colonizer. Hence, in the battle scenes that monopolize *1802*, the costumes do not always distinguish the opposing sides as much as racialized skin color does.

In addition to the open fields where fighting took place, Lara also features another more rugged natural environment that plays a significant role in *1802*. Both Guadeloupean and French forces trek through the tropical forest at different points in the narrative. Because Guadeloupe is covered in thick, lush vegetation that presses in on civilization, the dense greenery surrounds and almost swallows these groups as they make their way through the jungle. This *mise-en-scène* demonstrates how the natural environment dominates humankind. In the jungle, the French colonial soldiers march without the same certainty and composure of the Guadeloupeans. The Guadeloupeans navigate more easily, cutting through the forest at a swifter, more confident pace.

Apart from the additional battle scenes, the narrative of *1802* focuses more on the colonial involvement. Early in the film Lara constructs a scene in which Napoleon and Josephine conspire at the bureau. To correspond with historical accounts and portraits, Lara dresses them each in their signature apparel: Napoleon appears in a scarlet and gold embellished uniform and Josephine wears a flowing ivory gown. The *mise-en-scène* of this room is distinctive: brightly lit, filled with large wooden furniture and vividly colored fabrics. To emphasize their exuberant flirtation, Lara films them intermittently in close-up. Their voices constitute the primary sound of the scene and are at times boisterous, then soft, playful, and coy. Josephine is more active, filling



Fig. 4. *1802, l'Épopée Guadeloupéenne* (2005), Delgrès' organizational meeting with rebel leaders

the screen with her coquettish movements. The excessive, luxuriant *mise-en-scène* conveyed through the colors, shots, and movement creates a portrayal of an indulgent lifestyle far removed from the realities of slavery and slave revolts.

As a counterpoint to the visual excess surrounding Napoleon and Josephine, the leader of the Guadeloupean revolution, Delgrès, often appears in the more austere environments of the 1802 rebellion. The *mise-en-scène* of an organizational meeting between Delgrès and his subordinates exemplifies this type of setting (figure 4). Seated at a round table that occupies nearly the entire room, Delgrès receives preferential treatment in the images, enabling Lara to exhibit his immaculate dress, calculated mannerisms, and visible authority.

Nonetheless, the circular arrangement of the men also suggests collaboration, focus, and order. The soundtrack of the scene consists of steady, medium-tempo orchestral music and infuses the

room with a refined, somber quality. The men decide collectively at this moment, "If we do not act, history will condemn us."¹⁴ One by one the men (among them Ignace, Commander Alain, Captain Dephin) swear to defend their freedom.

The slow pace of the action maintains the solemn atmosphere. The music then stops as they determine the title of their manifesto. Working late into the night, the candles dripping with wax and the sound of hooves in the background, the final line of the manifesto is written at last: "We will die, satisfied."¹⁵ The document is then passed from one leader to the next to be signed and the screen fades to black.

Lara portrays Delgrès as a man playing for the highest stakes, aware of what his contribution would mean to future Guadeloupans

Unlike in *Sucre Amer*, the main characters of 1802 all play a role in the revolt. Despite their historical significance within the context of Guadeloupean culture, however, the manner in which Lara represents these characters has been cause for controversy; the characters, more so in this film than in *Sucre Amer*, employ acting techniques more commonly seen on stage. On stage, louder voices, greater articulation, and a wider range of movement are tools that enable an actor to emphasize his character's emotional composition for the benefit of the entire audience. On film, however, a character's voice, pronunciation, and gestures can be more understated.

Rather than over-direction, the theatricality of the performances in 1802 is a deliberate choice. Emotional acting manufactures the intensity of the era and magnifies certain personalities to expose either the flaws or the courage of these individuals. The most noticeable example of a character exhibiting such behavior is Saint-Eloy's performance of Louis Delgrès. He delivers his lines slowly, enunciating fully and often pausing between each word. Dialogue also forms a part of this kind of theatrical performance: for example, Delgrès' statement upon the writing of the manifesto, "I, Louis Delgrès, swear to defend our freedom even if it means I must sacrifice my life," and when he makes the following announcement at the fort, "We will fight this oppression to the death."¹⁶ When speaking of death, liberty, and freedom, as he frequently does, his facial expression is markedly somber, his gestures controlled, his body stiff and unmovable. His interactions with Ignace are also unmistakably intense. Before they split their forces, they stare directly into each other's eyes and slowly shake hands. Delgrès confesses, "I'm counting on you, Ignace."¹⁷

Lara portrays Delgrès as a man playing for the highest stakes, aware of what his contribution would mean to future Guadeloupans, and possessing a strong bond with the other rebels, especially Ignace. Lara clearly directs Saint-Eloy to represent Delgrès as the embodiment of a great hero (figure 5) driven by a single, momentous cause. By giving such weight to his performance, Lara elevates the importance of his sacrifice.

To emphasize the dichotomy between the Guadeloupean heroes and the colonial leadership, the representations of Napoleon and Richepance are immensely unflattering. Rather than representing Napoleon as a master tactician, Lara repeatedly shows him in the presence of Josephine.

The French colonials are also dismissive of the rebellion and its cause. During the fighting, wealthy Whites and Mulattos gather for a ball at Demeure de M. de La Brunerie, a plantation in Basse-Terre. Richepance struts haughtily around the home, dancing with chic, arrogant women.



Fig. 5. Luc Saint-Eloy's performance as Delgrès.

Their flirtation continues in a scene in which they return to their extravagant home. In a caption at the bottom of the screen, Lara indicates the date is May 20th, the height of the Guadeloupean rebellion and just days before the deaths of Ignace and Delgrès. In an ornate carriage, the two flirt ostentatiously, Napoleon affectionately (and inaccurately) calling Josephine his "câpresse."¹⁸ Their laughter and boisterous behavior underscore their lack of concern for the ongoing rebellions in the French Antilles. At one point, Napoleon even mispronounces "Guadeloupe": "gag...gag."

Filming the group from above in an overhead shot, Lara underscores how the opulent lifestyle of the colonials is uninterrupted by the revolt. The women carry on superficial conversation, joking about infidelity as merely "a question of organization."¹⁹ This evening affair in 1802 maintains the portrayal of Richepance from *Sucre Amer* as a hedonistic commander.

Richepance's soldiers, on the other hand, do not enjoy any of these pleasures. Similar to the character's portrayal in *Sucre Amer*, Lara depicts the French soldiers in a positive manner. For example, he cuts repeatedly to a platoon of French soldiers hiking in the forest while attempting to track down the insurgents; in any given altercation with Delgrès' troops, and particularly in this scene, the French soldiers are nearly always shown as scared, battle-scarred, and fatigued. Such sympathetic portrayal shows men who find themselves fighting against the rebellion but who are also victims of the war, not vicious colonizers.

In a later instance, the French soldiers discuss the fact that political matters are responsible for this fight in Guadeloupe. This conversation displays their humanity and reinforces the absurdity of their role in the reinstatement of slavery. After this conversation, the soldiers continue marching until they decide to rest and set up a camp. Suddenly, they discover a French soldier hanging from a tree. When they bring his dead body down to the ground, he wears a sign in blood that reads "Français... rentrez chez vous (Frenchmen... go home)." Reacting to this sight, the young Lieutenant in charge informs them that if they want to return to France one day "vous devez tuer! Amen (you have to kill! Amen)." At the mercy of events beyond their control, the Lieutenant calls upon the men to kill not to enact a colonial agenda but for personal survival.

Immediately after this incident, Lara films a group of Guadeloupean women bathing in a secluded grotto. To the sounds of string instruments, whistles, and laughter, the women entice the dirty, fatigued White soldiers to join them. The soldiers give in instantly, demonstrating their incredible naïveté. As soon as the soldiers drop their weapons and disrobe, the women grab hidden weapons and ambush the soldiers. Mulâtresse Solitude, the most famous female participant in the rebellion, slices a White soldier's throat, yelling out the rebellion's trademark motto "Vive la liberté! (Long live freedom!)." Caught literally with their pants down, the men scamper away, dodging bullets. With the French soldiers defeated, the women cheer and shout, intensely proud of their successful ploy.

There are two important aspects of this scene. First, rather than abide by the common trope of historical dramas to feature the dominance of powerful male figures over the women of the opposing group—usually in the form of rape or murder—this scene reinforces the notion that the French soldiers frequently function as victims rather than aggressors. Lara represents the French soldier as another cog in the colonial machine, similar to the average Guadeloupean. Secondly, this scene is one of the most memorable instances of the cunning and sacrifice of the women. Historical evidence confirms the prominent role of the women in the rebellion. As Bernard Moitt explains, "During the wars in Saint-Domingue and Guadeloupe, women demonstrated a striking strength of character: slave women also transported ammunition, food, and supplies, served as messengers, cared for the sick, acted as cover for men under fire, and chanted revolutionary slogans which kept spirits high in the insurrectionary forces of Delgrès, Palerme, and Ignace" (130). Ensuring that the film represents historically documented actions, Lara replicates nearly all of these contributions in the film.

The main female figure in the film, Mulâtresse Solitude, exemplifies the zealous participation of the women in the struggle. When she appears in the enlistment scene, for example, a soldier inquires whether she can actually fight. In response, she snatches his gun and with a loud bang shoots off his *tricorne*. The soldier's mouth gapes open, astonished at Mulâtresse Solitude's accuracy. In 1802, Mulâtresse Solitude is a strong-willed, able-bodied force whose theatrical behavior enhances Lara's positive, exuberant representation of the Guadeloupean rebels.



Conclusion

Sheila Petty articulates the stakes of both *Sucre Amer* and *1802, l'Épopée Guadeloupéenne* in her work on Black Diasporic cinema, explaining the relationship between memory and history: "memory, valorization of oral history, and the challenging of racist precepts become driving forces in reassembling and reconceiving fractured histories" (3). Petty's insight highlights the role of memory in rehabilitating the fragmented identities and histories that resulted from the cycle of slavery, colonization, and neocolonialism in the French Caribbean and other Black Diasporic communities. In *Sucre Amer*, the act of remembering and the memories recalled immediately inform and affect the contemporary scenes. This film therefore provides a convincing example of how cultural production relies upon both memory and spectatorship to reassemble fractured histories.

In fact, the present representation of historical events is so intensely important in contemporary Guadeloupean culture because it allows the public, the Guadeloupean audience most notably, to "reassemble" and "reconceive" of fractured histories, to use Petty's terms. Lara's films have a calculated purpose of bringing the past to light. Lara envisions film as a means to revisit the past in order to reconstruct a missing historical foundation. Both *Sucre Amer* and *1802, l'Épopée Guadeloupéenne* are part of a cultural effort to pay tribute to the Guadeloupean rebels, condemn colonial France, and overcome the lasting tangible and intangible effects of colonialism by (re)awakening Guadeloupeans to painful moments of their past.

Fig. 6. Film posters; *Sucre Amer* (1997) and *1802, l'Épopée Guadeloupéenne* (2005).

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Notes

1. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=705GIlo2Wm4>
2. For a genealogy of French-Caribbean cinema, see my article in *small axe* (November 2010): "Ciné voulé, ciné en progrès."
3. For examples of criticism of Lara's work, see Audé, Boukman, Cham, and Spaas.
4. "une table rase...avec surtout une dignité reconnue...C'est notre devoir de mémoire." Translations are mine.
5. "Je ne suis pas un héros, Je suis un nègre de la Guadeloupe c'est tout."
6. "Pour nous, votre procès est important."
7. http://www.guadeloupe-informations.com/article.php?id_article=45 Active reference: July 21, 2006 - Dec. 12, 2008. Accessed: August 20, 2008
8. "Nous sommes fiers de notre passé et c'est pour cela que nous voulons le faire ressurgir pour bâtir le socle qui nous manque. Nous ne voulons pas du socle qu'on a établi pour nous, mais au contraire bâtir nos propres repères. Le combat à mener est dans leurs têtes et dans nos têtes. C'est un véritable rapport de force entre colonisateurs et colonisés. Nous sommes obligés de parler d'oppression, de liberté à retrouver." <http://www.fluctuat.net/cinema/interview/eloy.htm> Active reference: Dec. 4, 2000 - Sept. 7, 2009. Accessed: June 15, 2009
9. "Je hais ma couleur."
10. "Afrique, c'est fini."
11. "Aujourd'hui nous renaissions!"
12. "Nous combattons cette oppression jusqu'à la mort."
13. "Chaque jour de notre progrès est fait de chaque jour de leur sacrifice."
14. "Si nous réagissons pas, l'histoire nous condamnera."
15. "Nous mourons, satisfaits."
16. "Moi, Louis Delgrès, je jure de défendre notre liberté même si je dois pour cela sacrifier ma vie." "Nous combattons cette oppression jusqu'à la mort."
17. "Je compte sur toi Ignace."
18. Female inhabitant of the French Antilles, daughter of a White and a Mulatto. <http://www.esclavage-martinique.com/uk/def/capre.htm>
19. "une question d'organisation"

Image Notes

Figures 1-3: screenshots *Sucre Amer* (1997)

Figure 4-5: screenshots *1802, l'Épopée Guadeloupéenne* (2005)

Figure 6: film posters for *Sucre Amer* (1997) and *1802, l'Épopée Guadeloupéenne* (2005)

A PARRADOX IN CARIBBEAN CINEMA? AN INTERVIEW WITH MINIMAL MOVIE FILMMAKER PIM DE LA PARRA, PRAGMATIC DREAMER FROM SURINAME

EMIEL MARTENS

Résumé

Pim de la Parra est un cinéaste surinamais qui a commencé sa carrière aux Pays-Bas une décennie avant l'indépendance du Suriname. C'est le réalisateur de *Wan Pipel* (*Un Peuple*; 1976), le premier long métrage surinamais jamais réalisé, et de *l'Odyssée d'Amour* (*Odyssey of Love*; 1987), le premier long métrage néerlandais situé sur une île caribéenne néerlandaise, Aruba. Dans cet entretien avec Emiel Martens, De la Parra parle de son modèle de «production cinématographique minimaliste», ainsi que des défis spécifiques de l'industrie du cinéma postcolonial dans une région fragmentée comme les Caraïbes.

Abstract

Pim de la Parra is a Surinamese filmmaker who started his career in the Netherlands a decade before Suriname's independence. He is the director of *Wan Pipel* (*One People*; 1976), the first Surinamese feature film ever made, and *Odyssée d'Amour* (*Odyssey of Love*; 1987), the first Dutch feature film set on a Dutch Caribbean island, Aruba. In this interview with Emiel Martens, De la Parra discusses his model of "minimal moviemaking" as well as the specific challenges of a postcolonial film industry in a fragmented region such as the Caribbean.

Pim de la Parra (Paramaribo, 1940) is a seasoned and prolific Surinamese filmmaker with over 50 years of experience in independent feature filmmaking. His film career began in the Netherlands in the 1960s where De la Parra rapidly established himself as a charismatic pioneer of Dutch film. Together with his former school friend Wim Verstappen, he shook up the Dutch film industry by producing a profitable series of low-budget erotic feature films, of which *Blue Movie* (1971) still ranks in the top five of most successful Dutch theatrical films. This success enabled De la Parra to make two more expensive movies outside the Netherlands, one in his native Suriname. In the 1970s, the filmmaker produced *Wan Pipel* (1976), the first Surinamese feature film ever made; in 1980s, he made *Odyssée d'Amour* (1987), the first Dutch feature film set on the Dutch-Caribbean island of Aruba. Both films flopped at the Dutch box office, which forced De la Parra to return to low-budget filmmaking. He became a master of what he calls the *minimal movie* and put out multiple films in only a few years' time. In 1995, after successive disillusionments, De la Parra retired from the world of filmmaking and settled in Suriname. However, his passion for filmmaking remained strong and eventually led him to launch the Surinamese Film Academy in 2005. The Academy's learning-by-doing program benefits from De la Parra's extensive experiences in the field of low-budget filmmaking. In pursuit of his dream of a local film culture in Suriname and the rest of the Caribbean, the now 75-year-old filmmaker tirelessly passes on his pragmatic model of *minimal moviemaking* to the next generation. This interview, which took place in two parts via Skype (January 18 and February 1, 2012), chronicles De la Parra's long illustrious career spanning over five decades.

Martens: Could you first briefly introduce yourself?

I was born on January 5, 1940, in Paramaribo, Suriname, which was at the time still a Dutch colony. My father was a descendent of Sephardic Portuguese Jews who arrived in Suriname around 1644. My mother was half-Creole and half-English. She passed away when I was seven, after which my paternal grandmother and five aunties—the sisters of my father—looked after my younger brother and me. They did not raise us in the Jewish tradition, but in the tradition of the Moravian Church—Protestant missionaries hailing from the city of Herrnhut in former East Germany. My father was very busy earning money to maintain our household. He ran a pharmacy and was a wholesaler of medicines.

Martens: How did you get interested in filmmaking?

I developed an interest in filmmaking from an early age. In the 1950s, my father was the co-founder of the Suriname Film League and organized monthly screenings of predominantly European art films for its members in a rented cinema in Paramaribo. I never missed a screening. I started to read several film magazines that my father received from the Netherlands, in particular, *Film Forum*, which was in the 1950s the most prominent film criticism magazine in the Netherlands. I read about Dutch films, Italian



Fig. 1. Pim de la Parra on the upper veranda of his childhood home in Paramaribo, Suriname. He lived there from age seven to twenty with his father, brother and five aunties. De la Parra used to have his bedroom on the first floor while the ground floor functioned as his father's pharmacy. "My father was very busy earning money to maintain our household. He ran a pharmacy and was a wholesaler of medicines." Photo credit: In-Soo Productions / Fu Works.

films, French films, German films, British films, Hungarian films, Swedish films, you name it. And I thus saw some of these films at the screenings the Suriname Film League organized. I found it all very interesting and there and then I decided to become a filmmaker. I initially wanted to go to Hollywood, to the Los Angeles Film School, because for us teenagers Hollywood was the mecca of the movies. At the time, the movie theatres in Paramaribo chiefly showed American

movies, often already—and illegally—within one week after their U.S. premiere. The appeal of Hollywood was very evident in Suriname. However, my father did not have the money to pay for my studies in Hollywood, so instead I went to the Netherlands, where my brother already attended university. In the time it was considered normal, almost required, to study in the Netherlands, in the “real world.” You just didn’t remain in Suriname if your parents could afford it. My father was not rich, far from it, but he was able to support me and my brother in the Netherlands. I went to Amsterdam in 1960 and decided to study Political and Social Sciences, interests which my father had stimulated. During my second year I attended a lecture series on film by the director of the then-just-established Film Academy, which instantly grabbed my attention. I wasn’t really interested in the other courses anymore—I didn’t pass any of my exams—and the following year I switched to the Film Academy. That’s how it all started.

Martens: You didn’t finish your studies there, but you did manage to complete your first film and to launch your own film magazine during this period. How did you experience your time at the Film Academy?

From the beginning I was primarily interested in the practical side of filmmaking. How does it work and what does it cost? I went to the cinema about 20 times a week, mainly to watch bad B-movies, just to get the feeling that I could do that too. The theoretical courses didn’t interest me at all—and I didn’t try my best to pass them at all. As a result, I became the first student of the Academy who was not allowed to advance to the second year of the program. However, I did become the first student who actually made a film. In 1962 my fellow student Rudi Kross and I gathered some funds and produced *Megalopolis I* (1963), a one-hour film about a Surinamese man who is living in the Netherlands but does not feel connected to the Dutch state. In the same year, together with the like-minded students Nicolai van der Heyde and Gied Jaspars, I founded a new Dutch film magazine after the example of the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the leading French magazine of radical film criticism. We titled it *Skoop* and published articles that challenged the establishment of Dutch film criticism. Since we were now film critics, we could visit all the press screenings. One day I watched Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Mamma Roma* (1962), though I

couldn’t stay until the end as I had a theoretical exam. But I was so gripped by that film that I decided to skip the exam and just abandon my studies at the Film Academy altogether. This was in 1964.

Martens: One year later, in 1965, you started your own film company, *Scorpio Films*, together with Wim Verstappen, another student of the Film Academy who had joined the editorial staff of *Skoop*. From that time you put out film after film and also became successful both in the Netherlands and abroad. How did you manage to realize such a constant stream of film work?

I think it had to do with the temperaments of Wim Verstappen and me. We were young and eagerly wanted to make films. We operated under the motto, “it doesn’t matter what and how you film, but that you film.” We would rather make 10 bad movies than not make one movie at all. We produced our first feature film for 10,000 Dutch guilders [almost US\$6,000], which was the lowest production budget for a Dutch feature film ever. The film, entitled *De minder gelukkige terugkeer van Jozef Katús naar het land van Rembrandt* (1966, *Jozef Katús’ Less Fortunate Return to the Land of Rembrandt*), garnered some critical acclaim on the international stage for its *nouvelle vague* style—for example, Jean-Luc Godard spoke highly of it at the Cannes Film Festival. The buzz helped to get a constant production going, though it was always a battle to find funding. Our big breakthrough came with our third feature film, and my first feature film as director, *Bezeten: Het gat in de muur* (1969, *Obsessions*). For this film, we were able to secure a budget of around 700,000 guilders [US\$400,000]. It was a Dutch-German co-production and, because we had international ambitions, spoken in the English language. We got support from Martin Scorsese, whom I had met in 1967 at a film festival, and American music composer Bernard Herrmann, who was introduced to us by François Truffaut. I had always wanted to make a thriller à la Hitchcock and *Obsessions* was it—a film about murder and mystery and, like many other European films made in the 1960s, the decade of sexual liberation, about sex. *Obsessions* became the biggest Dutch box office success of the decade. Abroad the film did even better. In total we sold *Obsessions* to 120 countries worldwide. At the time explicit nudity in Dutch films was still relatively new and clearly selling, so our next batch of

movies all had candid sexual content. Most of them were films about cruel love that challenged the conventional relationship model of the time; I think that was, in retrospect, the greatest common divisor of the *Scorpio* films. Of all our so-called “erotic” movies, *Blue Movie* (1971) became by far the most successful. The film attracted over two million moviegoers in the Netherlands and made us instant millionaires. It gave us the financial freedom to make films that we really wanted to make, films that reflected our personal experiences and interests. Verstappen went on to direct *Dakota* (1974), a film about a Dutch man who runs an airline on the Dutch-Caribbean island of Curaçao, following his passion for planes and Curaçao, where he had spent most of his childhood. I decided to direct *Wan Pipel* (1976, *One People*), a film about a young Creole Surinamese student in the Netherlands who returns to Suriname when his mother is nearing her dying day. *Dakota* and *Wan Pipel* were our most expensive films so far—in fact, they went way over budget—but they both flopped at the Dutch box office. We fell deeply into debt and two years later, in 1978, *Scorpio* was officially declared bankrupt and “Wim & Pim” went their own way again.

Fig. 2. “Pim & Wim” in front of the Cineac Damrak theatre in Amsterdam, the second week of the Dutch release of *Bezeten: Het gat in de muur* (1969, *Obsessions*). “*Obsessions* became the biggest Dutch box office success of the decade.” Photo credit: Frans Bromet. Courtesy: *Scorpio* Films



Martens: *Wan Pipel* is often considered the first Surinamese feature film ever made. You shot the film in 1975-1976, a time when Suriname was gaining independence from the Netherlands, officially granted on November 25, 1975. What did you want to achieve with your film during this critical transition period? And why do you think it flopped in the Netherlands?

I already wanted to make *Wan Pipel* since 1962. When Rudi Kross and I made *Megalopolis I*, we agreed that we should make a Surinamese feature-length fiction film; that was what it was all about, that was our mission, our dream. But then the fame and money came and we put

the idea on the shelf for a while. However, the success of the *Scorpio* films not only enabled us to put more of our own money into a feature film about Suriname, but also to get funding from the Dutch Production Fund for such a film. When we heard that Suriname would become independent, we realized that this was the right moment to write the script and submit it to the

fund. So that's what we did and we got the funding. It was still not sufficient, but the Surinamese government supplied us with finishing funds. From that moment we knew that *Wan Pipel* would become the first full-fledged Surinamese feature film—and one with a clear political statement about the relation between the Netherlands and Suriname. You have to remember that Rudi and I were some kind of Surinamese revolutionaries. We strongly believed in the independence of Suriname—and this belief also inspired *Wan Pipel*. The three main characters of the film served as metaphors: the Dutch woman Karina for the Netherlands, and the Creole man Roy and Hindu woman Rubia for Suriname. Though Roy and Rubia don't have the same ethnic background, they share the same nationality and together are responsible for the future of their new country, independent from the Netherlands. The ending of the film, when Roy and Rubia say goodbye to Karina at the airport, is very much a symbolic farewell from their former colonizer. At the same, the permanent homecoming of Roy speaks to all the Surinamese people living in the Netherlands, inciting them to return to Suriname to build the new independent nation. During the 1970s, almost half of the country's entire population, about 300,000 Surinamese people, migrated to the Netherlands because they thought they would be better off there. With *Wan Pipel* we tried to show them that they could, and should, succeed in their home country. When the film was completed, we first released the film in Suriname; we just had to, because it was above all a Surinamese film. The premiere, which was attended by Johan Ferrier [the first president of the Republic of Suriname], was a very memorable night and the film became a huge success. The people of Suriname went to see it one, two, three, even four times in the theatre. I think they could all recognize themselves in the main characters, who spoke—in the three languages commonly spoken in our nation, Hindi, Dutch, and our lingua franca Sranantongo—to the imagination of the entire Surinamese population. Though I don't believe that a film can change the world, *Wan Pipel* was a story of the world and a document of the time. Some people even considered, and still consider, the film to be the anthem of our new nation.

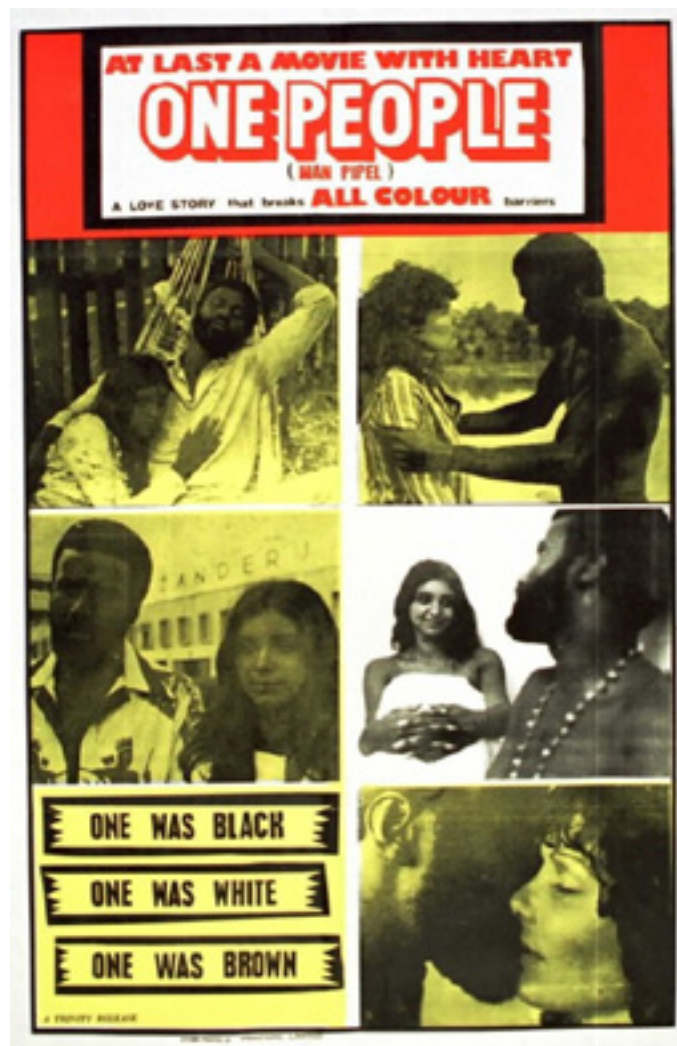


Fig. 3. The poster of the first Surinamese feature film, *Wan Pipel* (1976, *One People*), which was used for the film's theatrical distribution in Guyana. "The three main characters of the film served as metaphors; the Dutch woman Karina for the Netherlands, and the Creole man Roy and Hindu woman Rubia for Suriname." Design: the Theelucksingh family.

However, when we brought *Wan Pipel* to the Netherlands, only three Dutch cinemas were interested in screening the film. The others did not want to screen it because, I realize in retrospect, it was a film with Black people in it. At the time it came as a great shock to me. Now I understand. It was pure racism. I contacted the prime minister of Suriname, Henck Arron, with the request to provide some extra funding to print more copies, so that *Wan Pipel* could have the same big opening as all the other *Scorpio* films. He agreed and the film got the release I wanted, in 25 theatres nationwide. However, the Dutch people did not show any interest in the film and the Surinamese people in the Netherlands did not really know of it—they were not yet united at the time—so only a few weeks later *Wan Pipel* was out of the theatres again. It was a huge disappointment.

Martens: After the disappointment of *Wan Pipel* and the bankruptcy of *Scorpio* Films, you decided to stop making movies all together and to move to the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba. Why did you decide to make this move? And how did you get back into the Dutch film scene?

After the bankruptcy of *Scorpio* Films, I decided to write my autobiography, *Prins Pim: Overdenkingen van een levensgenieter* (1978, *Prince Pim: Thoughts of a Bon Vivant*). It contained many critical passages about the Dutch film funding system, including that the Production Fund did not want to finance films taking place overseas featuring Black people. After that, it was finished with me. I couldn't get any subsidies for my film projects anymore. I did make one more low-budget film, *Dirty Picture* (1980), an artistic black-and-white movie recorded without any sound, a silent movie that wasn't a success; one week after its release it was already taken out of the cinemas. I got more and more disillusioned with the Dutch film climate and when my marriage also ended after 18 years, I just wanted to leave the Netherlands.



Fig. 4. The promotional leaflet of De la Parra's autobiography, *Prins Pim: Overdenkingen van een levensgenieter* (1978, *Prince Pim: Thoughts of a Bon Vivant*). "It contained many critical passages about the Dutch film funding system, including that the Production Fund did not want to finance films taking place overseas featuring Black people. After that, it was finished with me." Photo credit: Berry Stokvis. Design: Marius van Leeuwen.

I didn't want to return to Suriname, where a violent military coup d'état led by Desi Bouterse had just happened, so I left for Aruba with a one-way ticket. My period there started out as a sabbatical, but in next to no time I got the idea for a feature film about a love affair on the island. I approached Hetty Los, a young filmmaker who had just finished the Dutch Film & Television Academy, and we decided to make this low-budget production as co-scenarists and with ourselves in the leads. For us it was mainly a way to show Aruba to the Dutch audience. The result became *Aruba Affair* (1981), a 74-minute television film that we shot in six days during the annual Aruba Carnival. After that, I continued my sabbatical until a few years later I met a Dutch woman, Djoeke Veeninga, who invited me to come and live with her in the Netherlands. Back in Amsterdam, I founded a film production

cooperative, Altamira Film, together with producers Ruud den Drijver and Lea Wongsoredjo—thus not a company with limited liability but a cooperative without liability—which seemed wise after my previous experiences. If one of our films would now flop, creditors would only be able to collect the debts from the cooperative and not from our private money. In practice, this meant that we started a new cooperative for each new film we were about to make. In total I made three films under the umbrella of Altamira Films: *Paul Chevrolet en de ultieme hallucinatie* (1985, *Paul Chevrolet and the Ultimate Hallucination*), *Als in een roes...* (1986, *Intoxicated*), and *Odyssée d'Amour* (1987, *Odyssey of Love*). So that, in a nutshell, is how I got back into the Dutch film scene.

Martens: Of these three Altamira films, *Odyssée d'Amour* was yet another film made in the Caribbean. In the 1970s you were one of the few filmmakers in the Netherlands with an interest in the newly independent nation of Suriname; in the 1980s you seemed to be one of the few to pay attention to the Dutch Caribbean, that is, the islands of the Kingdom of Netherlands located in the Caribbean. Why did you, after *Aruba Affair*, want to make *Odyssée d'Amour*?

I just felt a need to make another film in the Dutch Caribbean. In fact, I wanted to make one feature film in all three ABC islands, Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao. *Odyssée d'Amour* was again a film about cruel love, this time entirely set on Bonaire. It was also again a very personal film—I essentially only make films about my personal experiences and fascinations—in the sense that it featured a man who retreats into himself and into the wilderness after the death of his son, as he thinks that it's his fault that his son passed away. At the same time, I sought to portray how Dutch male expats living on the ABC islands use their privileged status to wreak havoc on the love lives of the local women by playing multiple mistresses against each other. *Odyssée d'Amour* tells the story of a Dutch engineer working on Bonaire who tries to escape from the monotonous isolation of island life by keeping a string of Native mistresses. The film was, like *Wan Pipel*, spoken in three languages—Dutch, English, and the lingua franca Papiamentu—while the soundtrack contained some Spanish songs to reflect the country's diverse history and culture. The film was shot in only 17 days with three camera crews; one for underwa-

ter recordings and two for regular recordings. This enabled us to shoot quickly as we could record at two different locations at the same time. The logistics were very complicated; it was almost run like a military operation. Despite all this, I was very pleased with the result. I personally find *Odyssée d'Amour* one of the most beautiful films I have ever made. However, the film flopped badly at the Dutch box office. Nobody came out to see the film. I think Dutch people were still not interested in a story that was set overseas featuring Black people. Besides, the film was probably too intellectual and artistic; there was, for example, no happy ending, which is what most people want to see when they go to the movies. The film got very bad reviews in the Netherlands and only two weeks after its release it was taken out of the cinemas.

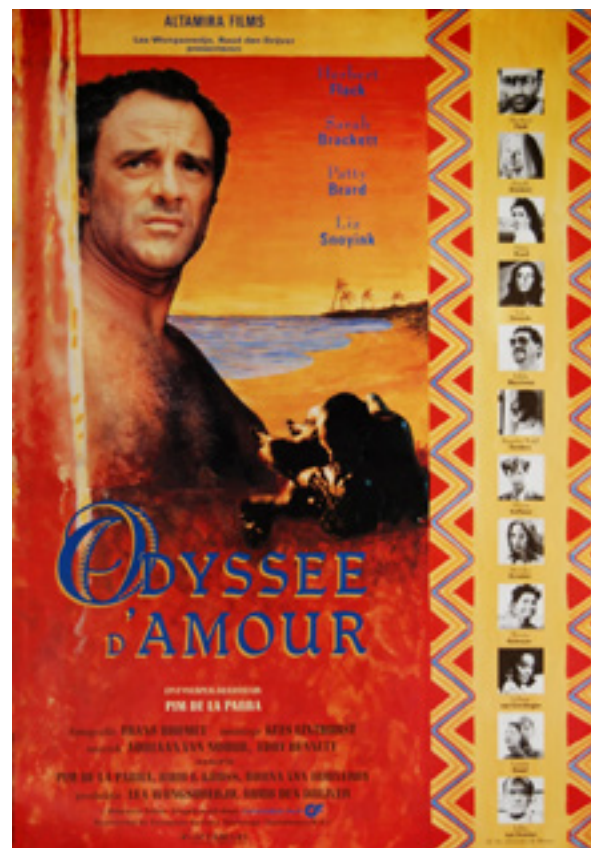


Fig. 5. The original film poster of *Odyssée d'Amour* (1987). "I sought to portray how Dutch male expats living on the ABC islands use their privileged status to wreak havoc on the love lives of the local women by playing multiple mistresses." Design: Fenna Westerdiep. Illustration: Ton Leenarts.

Martens: Your three Altamira films marked the early development of what you would later call *minimal movies*, a highly pragmatic mode of low-budget independent filmmaking. Could you explain the concept of *minimal movies*, which would become your trademark?

The period of the *minimal movies* started officially after *Odyssée d'Amour*, but you are right, the concept originated while making these three earlier films. In fact, I was already immersed in the craft of low-budget filmmaking from the very beginning of my career, when we put out film after film with *\$corpio*. These films were all made in a short time span with a low budget. *Paul Chevrolet* was made in 12 days for approximately 350,000 Dutch guilders [less US\$200,000], while *Als in een roes...* had only eight shooting days and a budget of 300,000 guilders [almost US\$175,000]. Then, *Odyssée d'Amour*, became, with a budget of 1.2 million guilders [almost US\$700,000], the most expensive film I was ever able to make, but the production still greatly reflected *minimal* moviemaking. When the film became such a box-office failure, I again couldn't get subsidies anymore. However, because the project was funded through a cooperative, this time I didn't end up in debt. I was determined to continue making films outside the regular grant scheme and, in order to do so, I had to perfect the craft of low-budget filmmaking. This is when the idea of the *minimal movies*—low-budget and super-fast-produced feature films—came into full practice. First of all, I started to offer profit shares instead of salaries to the members of the cast and crew, since I didn't have money to pay them. These shares were based on a distribution code, with the director, producer, and cameraman receiving the highest percentages, namely five percent each, and the other personnel working their way down to even half a percent of the well-defined revenue performance. This way I was able to reduce the budget of my films significantly. Secondly, we never worked with a script. We had an overall idea of the story, but only on set would the storyline be developed, largely through improvisation, a key feature of the *minimal movie*. Thirdly, returning to a strategy I mentioned earlier, for each new film we founded a new cooperative, with a different board per film. Often I acted as chairman, while the cast and crew filled the remaining board positions. These strategies were not only designed to reduce the cost and risk of making a film, but also, and importantly, to cre-

ate openings for starting filmmakers, producers, and technicians to actually work on films. *Minimal movies* were intended to provide them with opportunities to acquire the skills relevant to the reality of filmmaking. We shot our first official *minimal movie*, *Lost in Amsterdam* (1989), in 11 days for a budget of 75,000 guilders [approximately US\$40,000], and in the following years we released many more.



Fig. 6. The original film poster of De la Parra's first *minimal movie*, *Lost in Amsterdam* (1989). "I was determined to continue making films outside the regular grant scheme and, in order to do so, I had to perfect the craft of low-budget filmmaking." Photo and design: Johan Vigeveno.

Martens: Yes, you were very productive during this period, particularly in the early 1990s. After *Lost in Amsterdam*, you successively worked on no fewer than 15 feature films (!) in the capacities of writer, director, producer, and/or actor: *Max & Laura & Henk & Willie* (1989), *De nacht van de wilde ezels* (1990, *The Night of the Wild Donkies*), *Let the Music Dance* (1990), *Two People, Analysis of a Seduction* (1991), *Labyrint der lusten* (1991, *Labyrinth of Lust*), *Het gelukzalig lijden van Derek Beaujon* (1991, *The Blissful Suffering of Derek Beaujon*), *Extravaganza* (1991), *How to Survive a Broken Heart* (1991), *Openbaringen van een slapeloze* (1991, *Revelations of an Insomniac*), *Fear and Desire* (1992), *Vrouwen van vandaag* (1993, *Women of Today*), *Dagboek van een zwakke yogi* (1993, *Diary of a Weak Yogi*), *The Best Thing in Life* (1993), *Round of Prisoners* (1995), and *De droom van een schaduw* (1995, *The Dream of a Shadow*). Why did you decide to move back to Suriname in 1996, when you were achieving such a high production output in the Netherlands? And when did you conceive of the idea to start a film academy there, when you had seemingly left the world of filmmaking after your return to Suriname?

Life decided my fate for me. By 1993 I had moved from Amsterdam to Rotterdam to pursue minimal movie projects there, but again I got pretty fed up with the boxed-in and narrow-minded environment of the Dutch film industry. I was producing films, but there was no money, no glory, no nothing. It felt I was stranding as a filmmaker. Around this time I learnt that my 88-year old father needed someone back home, so I returned to Suriname to take care of him. Before I left the Netherlands, in 1995, I handed over my entire personal and professional archive, including all my film tins, to the Dutch Film Museum. It really felt like my final break from filmmaking, at least in the Netherlands. During my first period in Suriname I mainly occupied myself with doing nothing. My father passed away in 1998, and out of the blue my son died in 2002, which kept me emotionally busy for quite a while. It was not until 2005 that I got involved in film again. A few years earlier, in 2002, Aruba-born film producer Eddy Wijngaarde and his wife Henah Draaibaar initiated The Back Lot Foundation with the objective to revitalize film culture in Suriname. In a time when our country did not have any cinemas at all anymore, he started to organize film festivals at the Thalia Theatre in Paramaribo. All of a sudden there was a place to screen films—that's when the idea for a film academy was conceived, because now we could actually release locally made films in the cinema and after that they could be broadcasted on local television. So in March 2005 I launched the Surinamese Film Academy and, with the assistance from Dutch subsidies and filmmakers, I composed a learning-by-doing program consisting of five short film courses:

*scriptwriting, cinematography, sound, acting, and directing/producing. During these courses, the students, approximately 60 in total, worked together on the production of a pilot film, *Ala Di...* (2006, *In the Mean time...*). Upon completion, the 150-minute long film premiered at The Back Lot Film Festival in April 2006 and was subsequently broadcasted four times on local television, non-stop without any commercial breaks. It was a great experience—we really wrote history—so the following year we wanted to run the program again. We received another grant from the Dutch Ministry for Development Cooperation, which again enabled us to get three professional Dutch filmmakers for two weeks in Suriname to teach the different courses. While being educated, the students participated in the making of the feature-length experimental film *Het Geheim van de Saramacca Rivier* (2007, *The Secret of the Saramacca River*). Like Wan*

Pipel, this film revolves around a Surinamese man living in the Netherlands who returns to his country of birth, this time a middle-aged university professor who visits Suriname for the first time in 40 years to celebrate his 50th birthday. He is joined by his younger wife, a Surinamese woman who came to the Netherlands when she was 20. The story, a psychological thriller, follows the couple on their trips through Suriname, during which they get entangled in a marital crisis—and a secretive conspiracy. The film premiered at The Back Lot Film Festival, after which it was once more broadcasted on local television.

Fig. 7. A still from the third feature film put out by the Surinamese Film Academy, *The Secret of the Saramacca River*, with Kenneth Herdigein and Lucille Roberts in the roles of husband and wife in crisis. "While being educated, the students time participated in the making of the feature-length experimental film *Het geheim van de Saramacca Rivier* (2007, *The Secret of the Saramacca River*)." Photo by: Tom Erisman.

Life decided my fate for me.



Martens: The learning-by-doing program of the Suriname Film Academy educates students in the craft of low-budget filmmaking. What is the overall objective of the Academy?

The objective is to develop a continuous production of feature films in Suriname with an educational program that is based on my vast experience of low-budget filmmaking. Throughout my career I became an expert in making films with minimal resources and almost no money. Therefore I think I was the obvious person to return to Suriname to set up a national film academy. The program completely reflects the principles of *minimal moviemaking*. We always work with small, almost non-existent budgets. Public and private funding covers the operating costs of the Academy, replenished by the tuition fees paid by the students. The biggest overhead always consists of the travel and accommodation expenses incurred by the Dutch filmmakers who come and teach here. For the remainder, we only have to pay rent for a classroom and some equipment. We do not own any equipment—I have never owned any equipment, not even during my successful *Scorpio* period. Also, we don't have to hire a cast or crew, because the students work both behind and in front of the cameras. Sometimes local professional technicians offer us their services for free to help us out. Finally, to get our films on television, we always have to find a sponsor who pays for the airtime. In order to guarantee the continuity of the Suriname Film Academy, we aim to release one new film on each edition of The Back Lot Festival, which is now taking place at TBL Cinemas, a great modern multiplex cinema they opened in 2011—only then do we feel we have a right to speak. So far we have succeeded in this aim. The first film we put out with the Academy, *Ala Di...*, had a running time of 150 minutes and was made in one week of shooting, costing around US\$15,000. The second film, *Hori Yu Srefi* (2006,

Blijf je zelf; Remain Yourself), marked the first co-production between the Suriname Film Academy and Film Institute Paramaribo, which was founded by Arie Verkuijl, a well-known architect who attended the classes and volunteered as a producer. This film was shot in 11 days with a “no-budget” of US\$10,000. The third film, *Het geheim van de Saramacca Rivier*, was made with a small grant of €30,000 and consisted of a 12-day learning-by-doing program followed by 22 students. The fourth film, *The Last Desire* (2008, *A Kriboi Angri / Het laatste verlangen*), was entirely financed by a Dutch real estate broker who just wanted to have his own film, to give away as an original Christmas present. He gave me €30,000 and for that money we could improvise another *minimal movie* within 10 days. After that, Arie Verkuijl largely took over the directing stick. He had already produced the first three films of the Academy and now it was time that I would produce films for him. He rapidly directed three movies, *Wat de vrouw wil... is de wil van God* (2008, *What a woman wants... is God's will*), *Ontworteld* (2008, *Uprooted*), and *Elk eind is een begin* (2009, *Every Ending is a beginning*)—but then he sadly passed away in 2010. Now I want to make one last feature film, *Krin Skin (Clean Skin)*, a remake of the Italian film *L'avventura* (1960) with a black protagonist, to try to rejuvenate the Academy for the next generation of Surinamese filmmakers.

Martens: With the Surinamese Film Academy you have managed to put out an unprecedented number of Surinamese feature films in only a few years' time. Do you think the production of *minimal movies* can contribute to the development of a sustainable film industry in Suriname and the Caribbean in general?

Not at all. I think it's simply impossible to develop a film industry here in Suriname. It's already difficult to make films in a country such as the Netherlands. When I started to make films there in the 1960s, the field of filmmaking lied fallow. Now there is something that could be called a Dutch film industry—an industry that, due to the support of all kinds of funding programs, is able to put out around 25 feature films per year. There is such a great infrastructure for filmmaking, but that's only viable because the Netherlands is a rich and populated country in Europe. In Suriname, one of the poorest countries of South America with a population of just over 500,000 people, such an infrastructure is just unconceivable. The country is too small in both capital and population to establish a national film industry. We have only one cinema here, TBL Cinemas, so you cannot generate any profit from locally produced films. You would thus need somebody who is either from a wealthy family, or funded with grant money, or just crazy enough to produce a film. I think I mainly belong to the latter category, the dreamer who just tries and tries, because he just wants it that much. As said earlier, I am currently trying to get my last feature film off the ground. It's very difficult, but I will continue my efforts until I have found the money. I want to show the young generation here that you can incidentally make a Surinamese feature film. However, the idea of a Surinamese film industry is not realistic. There is simply no economic power and political will. I think the same goes for the wider Caribbean region, with the possible exception of Cuba, Jamaica, and Trinidad, considering their size in terms of capital and number of people, also in the diaspora. Yet still, in these islands, like ev-

erywhere else in the world, feature films are almost exclusively made by people from wealthy backgrounds. In Jamaica you see, for example, that most of the filmmakers are from the small, white- and brown-skinned elites, while the poorer, often darker-skinned people do not really get to enter the world of professional filmmaking. Also, I think that the Caribbean islands are too fragmented in terms of language to build a strong and unified Caribbean film industry. I am sorry, I am quite sombre, but I am afraid I am too old to deliver merely positive sounds. However, this does not mean that Caribbean cinema does not exist. Of course it exists! Caribbean cinema consists of all these individual initiatives in the region that have brought about, and brought together, a diverse body of films that are somehow connected through our history, culture, geography, and climate. There will always be young Caribbean people who will rise and produce films—and so every now and then such a film could reach the whole world. We just have to keep hoping and to keep dreaming.



Fig. 8. A portrait of De la Parra in Suriname, 2011. "I think the method of learning-by-doing can be the savior of Caribbean cinema." Photo credit: Guus Dubbelman.

Martens: Do you feel that your learning-by-doing way of filmmaking could serve as a model to realize the dream of creating a film culture in the Caribbean?

*Definitely, I think the method of learning-by-doing can be the savior of Caribbean cinema. I am now trying to export the method to the rest of the Caribbean. As of late, I have been regularly invited to show my films in other Caribbean countries, mainly because *Wan Pipel* and *Odyssée d'Amour* have been restored and subtitled in English by the Dutch EYE Film Institute. Both my early and more recent works are thus just now, sometimes decades later, being discovered in the region. My travels provide me the opportunity to meet the young people involved in Caribbean filmmaking and also to spread the idea of the minimal movie throughout the region. For example, last year I visited the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival, where I not only showed two of my films, but also gave a workshop about minimal moviemaking to teachers and students at the Film Department of the University of the West Indies. They were all very enthusiastic and this year I will hopefully*

return for 10 days to produce a feature-length film with their students according to the principles of the minimal movie, which they can then release at their annual festival. This way I try to chip in and contribute my part in the development of Caribbean cinema. On the other hand, who listens to an old man like me? I don't feel that the young generation always wants the advice of senior filmmakers. They do things their own way and that's no problem. Life is all about dynamics, about movements, about developments. Young people will always reinvent the wheel again. And they should make their own films. But maybe they want to take, at least, one advice from an old Surinamese man, and that is that they have to remember that they can already make a feature-length film in 10 shooting days and with a budget of US\$10,000. It's difficult, but it's definitely possible. If there is one thing I have proven over the years, then it's that.



A recent portrait of De la Parra near the Palmentuin (Palm Garden) in Paramaribo, Suriname, 2015. Photo credit: Emiel Martens.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Pim de la Parra for taking the time to share his thoughts and experiences with me for this article. For a gripping documentary on his illustrious film career, please look out for In-Soo Radstake's *Parradox* (2010; <http://in-soo.com/nl/2012/03/04/parradox/>)

THE CARIBBEAN, ON SCREEN: A CONVERSATION WITH FRANCES-ANNE SOLOMON

HYACINTH M. SIMPSON



Frances-Anne Solomon

For the past decade, Toronto has played host to the annual **CaribbeanTales International Film Festival**, an important milestone marking the global emergence of a rich and vibrant Caribbean film and television industry. Each year the festival brings some of the best Caribbean-focused feature-length dramas, documentaries, and shorts to audiences in Toronto. Running for approximately 10 days in September, the film festival is one of the more visible undertakings of the **CaribbeanTales** brand.

Founded by the UK-born, Trinidad-raised, Canadian filmmaker Frances-Anne Solomon, **CaribbeanTales** is comprised of a group of companies whose mission is to create infrastructure and build networks to facilitate the growth of a film and television industry that bolsters the Caribbean culturally and economically and cements fruitful connections between regional and diasporic populations. **CaribbeanTales'** three-pronged business model—production, marketing, and distribution—is aimed at ensuring the industry's sustainability over the long term as well as its reach into international markets.

CaribbeanTales and Solomon's collaboration with film commissions, broadcasting companies, governments, funding bodies, and content makers across the region and the diaspora promotes complementarity; these synergistic relationships will go a long way in ensuring a strong and vital Caribbean-centred industry that can hold its own alongside the Hollywoods, Bollywoods, and Nollywoods in the years to come.

I sat down with Solomon in 2014 to talk about the **CaribbeanTales International Film Festival**, the vision behind and the work being done under the **CaribbeanTales** banner, and her own work as a filmmaker.

HS: You were telling me just now that you were born in the UK, grew up in Trinidad, and then first came to Canada when you were eighteen.

Yes, I attended university here. I studied Theatre Arts at the University of Toronto. I went to Europe after I finished my studies. I wanted to travel and, as I was a British citizen, I ended up in England where I got a job at the BBC. This was right after the riots in 1986.

HS: Brixton?

Yes, Brixton, Handsworth, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds. Everything was in flames. Black people were burning the place down, and in the aftermath of that the BBC was looking for people of colour. That was maybe the one and only time. They're not doing it now [laughs]. I was accepted into the two-year BBC production trainee program. It gave me up to six months' practical work experience in different departments: television drama, local radio, news, and documentaries. I applied for and worked as a radio drama producer for three years, then moved back to television where I worked as a script editor in the Drama Department, and later as a producer and an executive producer.

HS: So you were at the BBC for a number of years?

Yes, 12 years. It was an extraordinary experience for me because at that time the environment was highly politicized. In the late eighties, a lot of interesting things were going on. There was the Black Workshop Movement. John Akomfrah, with the Black Audio Film Collective, was a contemporary. There was also Sankofa—a group of young, black filmmakers that included Isaac Julien and Nadine Marsh-Edwards. There was another workshop called Ceddo led by Imruh Bakari Caesar and Menelik Shabazz. They were all producing very interesting, experimental, and political work from a Black British perspective. Especially after the riots, there emerged an analysis around class, race, gender, and sexuality in the late eighties that really opened my mind. It was a very different scene from what I had experienced in Canada and Trinidad.

*And then the BBC itself was an extraordinary institution because here you had a vertically integrated organization that created, produced, and broadcast original content for a rapt audience. British audiences were then completely involved in local television. Everyone sat down to watch **Coronation Street** and **Eastenders**. Everyone watched event dramas like **Prime Suspect** or the deteriorating relationship between Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Everyone knew what was going on in the country. They were involved in the politics, in the place, in the events, and the personalities. It was very much a community, and television tied the community together. The BBC was part of that. Also, at that time everything was produced in-house. There was a very direct relationship between what the Corporation produced and its audiences. People would call producers on the phone and write letters. They were involved. So you felt like you were doing something integral and worthwhile, that you were part of something. In Britain, public television and radio, the BBC, is paid for by the audience, by the viewers. Everyone who owns a television set pays a license fee and that money goes back into program production. It's an extraordinary model, actually. As far as I know, nothing quite like it exists elsewhere. Public television in the States is very different, for example. It's dependent on donations, whereas in Britain public television is based on the principles of "Inform and Educate." It's the people's money. They're engaged with it; they own it.*

HS: So you honed your skills in those years at the BBC. Was that where you began working on your own films, the early ones such as *What My Mother Told Me* and *I Is A Long Memored Woman*?

*As well as working for the BBC at that time, I also had my own company, Leda Serene Films. Initially, there were three of us: Ingrid Lewis, Inge Blackman, and myself, all Black women who wanted to develop work by Black women. I produced several films, like the ones you mentioned. We also produced a series of short films called **Siren Spirits** that were written, directed, and produced by women of colour. They includ-*

ed short films by Ngozi Onwurah, Rahila Gupta, and Pratibha Parma. Parallel to that, at the BBC, I also initiated and produced a series of full-length dramas called **Black Screen**. These were 60-90 minute films written, directed, and produced by people of colour. Among these were *Flight*, written by Bengali writer Tanika Gupta, and *Speak like a Child*, directed by the British-Ghanaian John Akomfrah.

HS: What made you return to Canada?

I hit a glass ceiling and really needed to be out of that environment. In the 1990s there was a huge pushback against diversity in Britain. Stephen Lawrence, a young Black man, was murdered around that time. Do you remember that? From the way that the case was handled by authorities and reported in the press, I realized that little had changed despite all our efforts. Racism was alive and unmoveable. Simultaneously, all the diversity programs were cut and the progression forward that we had achieved was reversed. There did not seem to be any future for the work I wanted to do in England.

HS: The British were set in their ways?

It was more like spiralling backwards, a surreal and crazy-making experience. So I decided to come to Canada. I had a romantic image of this country based on my experience of studying theatre here at the University of Toronto. I imagined that Canada was a more inclusive place than Britain and that there would be more support here for the diverse and independent work I aimed to do. My mother also lives here. So I decided to come back and commit myself full-time to my life-long dream of being an independent, rather than working from within the constraints of an inevitably racist institution. I decided to work full-time to build a body of work that reflected my beliefs, my heritage, my own background, and stories. It was rather naïve, I suppose.

Like I said, working for the BBC was a great learning experience for me because you had this organization that created, produced, exhibited, and sold content to a rapt audience who paid for it. It's a vertically integrated model and it is sustainable. I felt that's really what we as Black people, as people of colour, as Caribbean people, needed to develop in terms of **our own** work. That's what we don't have.

At that time, the Internet was coming on stream. Marketing was becoming easier because of the global reach of the World Wide Web. Production equipment was becoming affordable as a result of digital technology. All those things that usually made it prohibitive for people without access to the means of production to reclaim their stories were beginning to open up. I started *CaribbeanTales* with that vision in mind.

HS: This was around when?

CaribbeanTales was incorporated in 2001. The vision for *CaribbeanTales* from the very beginning was this: creating a vertically integrated and sustainable production, promotion, and distribution vehicle that uses the Internet, digital technologies, and new media to engage audiences. Right away we created an audiovisual Internet platform called CaribbeanTales.ca and we created projects like *Literature Alive*.

HS: I remember watching the *Literature Alive* profiles of Caribbean-Canadian writers and artists when they aired on Canadian television back in the mid-2000s. You produced a lot of content for that series.

Yes, we made 20 of those short films as well as an interactive website.

HS: You seem to have an interest in creating content for schools, in providing students and their instructors with material that wouldn't normally be readily available to them.

It's a pet peeve of mine that when I was growing up we didn't have much access to Caribbean literature, to Caribbean history, or to stories about ourselves. I had to discover all that—who we are, where we came from—on my own. Since then, I have seen how especially young people can be transformed through discovering and reconnecting with their heritage. I find that in Caribbean diasporic centres like Toronto a lot of young people feel lost. They find themselves marginalized by the larger society and they end up defining themselves by that exclusion rather than from a positive sense that they come from somewhere and that they are part of an important and rich heritage. Through this understanding, they learn that, as Caribbean people, they are part of an incredible story that belongs to them, and that story goes way back to indigenous cultures, to Africa, India, China, Lebanon—to all major civilizations.

HS: I've used some of the *Literature Alive* films and audio materials in the classroom with great success on occasions that I've taught Caribbean and Canadian literature at Ryerson. Students of different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities relate very well to the intimate portraits of Caribbean-Canadian authors provided in the documentaries. I've also found that my Canadian students of Caribbean heritage seem to find a sense of validation in these materials. They find a sense of belonging.

That's wonderful. Thank you. Belonging, community, identity, confidence, role models, yes. It's hugely important. Colonizers and slave masters knew exactly what they were doing by taking away our stories, and even now our culture, and trying to get us to be like them. Because by doing that, they take away a person's and a community's strength. We find it more difficult to resist when we don't know who we are. But once we start resisting, those in power must negotiate Equality and Difference. This is why I believe so strongly in the power of storytelling. It is not a luxury. It is essential to the survival of human beings, of cultures, of races. We need to talk about the things that have happened to us and tell our stories, individually and as communities, of how we got through and how we survived. We need to pass our stories on from generation to generation in order to continue to evolve.

HS: *Literature Alive* was an important venture into content production for *CaribbeanTales* and is a valuable resource for many of us. Around that time weren't you also producing content through Leda Serene Films?

Yes, there was *Lord Have Mercy!* and *A Winter Tale*.

HS: I remember when *A Winter Tale* first came out [in 2007]. It hit hard at the heart of the tense racial atmosphere that's always there bubbling under the surface in Toronto, sometimes exploding into violence—with the attendant stigmatizing and profiling of Black/Caribbean communities. As well, all 13 episodes of *Lord Have Mercy!* were so enjoyable and affirming to watch when they aired on Canadian television back in 2003. The series generated quite a buzz among television audiences at the time and it was great when the show was nominated for two Gemini [Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television] awards. What's the relation between *CaribbeanTales* and Leda Serene Films?

Well, *Leda Serene* was a company that I created in England to develop my own work and I have continued to use it for that purpose in Canada. *CaribbeanTales* was a larger vision with a wider ambition and mandate than my personal vision and stories. The goal for *CaribbeanTales* is to create a global Caribbean diasporic film industry using the Internet and digital technologies. In 2013 *CaribbeanTales* became a charity and that cemented its public-service mandate.

HS: A very visible part of *CaribbeanTales*' mandate is the annual *CaribbeanTales International Film Festival (CTFF)*, held in Toronto. How and when did CTFF begin?

In 2006 a friend of mine approached me and said: "Wouldn't it be nice to have a film festival during Caribana [the annual Caribbean carnival celebrations in Toronto]? You have so much content between *CaribbeanTales* and *Leda Serene*. All we have to do is get a cinema and you could show all the films—all the wonderful stories of authors like Ramabai [Espinet] and Honor [Ford Smith] and many others." So I said OK, and that weekend we were screening films in the cinema at the National Film Board of Canada's facilities on John Street in Toronto. We had managed to get the cinema for free. I felt like, OK, is it really this easy? You see, one of the biggest challenges for us as so-called "niche" content creators is exhibition. It's getting people to see our work. It's engaging audiences. It's getting distributors and film festivals to take you on when they don't recognize that there is even a voice. At the time we did not have a brand, a presence. You know what I mean? For example, there's no such thing at this time as Caribbean Film Studies.

HS: I've heard that so many times.

It's a big problem. But once we created the festival and saw the audience response—saw that we could get our own theatre and show our own films, and that people would come, and we could create a brand, we could build an audience, and grow an appetite for our own stories—then I became hooked on the idea of having an annual festival to market, create a brand, and engage. The second year, in 2007, we partnered with the new Trinidad and Tobago Film Company which was, at that point, emerging as well. The recent developments in the industry in Trinidad have emerged parallel to *CaribbeanTales*. That second year we showed films from Trinidad and its diaspora—from Horace Ové, Inge Blackman, and other filmmakers in England that I knew well.

HS: All of Trinidadian heritage?

Yes, Trinidadian. Horace was the first Black filmmaker to make a feature film, ever. He's from Trinidad. Inge, now Campbell X, is also from Trinidad. She's an extraordinary and important queer filmmaker of colour. There were also films

from Canada, for example from the Chinese-Trinidadian filmmaker Janine Fung, among others. It was very interesting to draw together all the different voices from around the diaspora and have them under one banner as filmmakers of Trinidadian heritage.

The next year the Jamaican Consulate invited us to do the same thing for Jamaica. That was great because Jamaica has such a recognizable brand. We got bigger audiences that year than before just by promoting, you know, Brand Jamaica.

HS: Was the film festival still connected to Caribana in those years? I recall that the earlier film festivals were all done in late July to early August, the same time period for the Caribana festivities.

Yes, it was. Then in 2009 we partnered with the Caribbean Studies program at the University of Toronto and its then-director Alissa Trotz. The festival was held at the University for a couple of years.

2010 was a turning point. I went to Barbados that year. I had cancer. I was offered a teaching job at the university there and thought that would be a nice thing to do while I was recovering. I couldn't work too much because I was undergoing chemo. I ended up holding a film festival there that year, and the *Best of CaribbeanTales Film Festival* ran in Barbados for three years.

HS: You also held the film festival at the Harbourfront Centre a couple of times. That's a prime Toronto location for the best of cultural events.

We held the festival there from 2011 to 2013, thanks to the kind support of Melanie Fernandez.

HS: Did using such a well-known cultural hub give the film festival greater visibility?

Yes, and legitimacy, I believe.

HS: Now [in 2014] the film festival is at The Royal [a second-run indie/art movie theatre cum post-production studio on College Street in Toronto]. What response has the film festival had from the Caribbean community and the film-going public at large in Toronto over the years? For example, did holding CTFF at a high-profile venue like the Harbourfront Centre help bring in larger audiences?

Actually, we had bigger audiences this year than when we were at Harbourfront. The Royal is more accessible to our audiences, more central. But Harbourfront is a fantastic venue.

HS: We've talked so far about two of the media companies under the *CaribbeanTales* banner: CaribbeanTales.ca and the *CaribbeanTales International Film Festival*. There is also *CaribbeanTales Worldwide Distribution (CTWD)*. When and how did CTWD come into being and what's its purpose?

Being in Barbados was an opportune moment. I was fortunate to come into contact with The Barbados Business Enterprise Trust, a company that was offering small amounts of venture capital to entrepreneurs to develop innovative ideas aimed at diversifying the Barbadian economy. There was talk about developing the cultural industries as an alternative to our traditional agriculture- and tourism-based models. I partnered with Dr. Keith Nurse, then Director of the Shridath Ramphal Centre for International Trade Law, Policy and Services in Barbados; Dr. Terrence Farrell, an economist from Trinidad; Mary Wells, the Jamaican writer and director; and also Lisa Wickham, an established producer from Trinidad. Within the context of the film festival we had in Barbados, we felt that it was important not just to show films but also to begin a discussion in the region about making our content marketable. In order to develop an industry for the Caribbean and not just a brand "in foreign," we felt we needed to conceive of, and construct an infrastructure for, a sustainable industry that allows for creating jobs, building complementary sectors, and developing income streams to monetize and professionalize the potential of the audiovisual industries to enhance the region and contribute to its economic growth.

As we began to talk in those terms, it became important that we engage the emerging filmmakers in questions like: Who is your audience?

Where is your market? How do you go from "Oh, I want to tell this story" as a hobby to "I want to have a career and hire people and contribute to the economy and be part of the whole picture?"

We began to talk about building a Caribbean film industry. That was very important because the islands are insular in their tastes and concerns. When you're in Barbados they're talking about Barbados. In Trinidad they're talking about Trinidad. But you cannot build an industry from separate audiences of tiny fragmented islands.

HS: Because it's all the Caribbean.

From an international perspective, it's all the Caribbean. In terms of building an industry this becomes even more important. Trinidad cannot have an industry all by itself because it's only one and a half million people. Barbados is a quarter of a million people.

HS: And Jamaica is only, like what, a little over two and a half million?

Yes. These are not large enough audiences to sustain and recoup the costs of production and turn a profit. There needs to be a wider regional, diasporic, and global audience base to sustain the industry.

It's necessary to draw on all the populations that might have an interest in these kinds of stories—our stories—and look at the potential for audiences across linguistic lines and across bodies of water, and then draw in the immigrant populations in the diaspora who have a hunger and nostalgic need to be connected to the Caribbean. There are huge populations of Caribbean people in North America and in Europe.

And it's not just where people in the Caribbean have migrated to, but also where they've come from. So you're talking, then, about the whole of the African diaspora as well as South and Central America who share with us, very fundamentally, many aspects of our history and culture. There is also India and China, the Caribbean has populations of Lebanese and Jewish immigrants, as well as communities with many different European ancestries (French, Spanish, Dutch, German, and Portuguese). All these heritage cultures are potential audiences for our stories.

We started *CaribbeanTales Worldwide Distribution* with this mandate right after the festival in Barbados in 2010 and we decided to have an international launch for the company in Canada. Well, it didn't make sense to launch a film-distribution business during Caribana, so we decided to do it during TIFF [the Toronto International Film Festival] in order to make the world know that we're here. And since we were launching our company during TIFF, what better way to do it than pair it with our film festival? So we moved CTFF to September to run alongside TIFF.

HS: How do you go about ensuring that you have a steady stream of the quality content you talked about to show, market, and distribute? Does the *CaribbeanTales Incubator Program* play a role in this?

The idea for the *Incubator* came about because of our decision to develop Caribbean filmmaking as a business through CTWD. We decided to link CTWD's mandate to a training program that gives Caribbean diaspora filmmakers the opportunity to experience an international market environment. Because in order to sell content we need to have content that is both marketable and saleable. We need to train filmmakers about the requirements for selling content internationally. So that's how the *Incubator* started. That first year we brought together 26 filmmakers and 15 stakeholders from all over the Caribbean, and it was interesting because the impact was that they bonded and they got an education. A lot of them had never been to an international film festival or market before. They were able to meet lots of industry people.

HS: Other Caribbean filmmakers?

Other Caribbean filmmakers, yes. But they also got a chance to see close-up the monster that is the international film and television industry. Their attitudes beforehand were along the lines of: "I'm a filmmaker because I'm making a five-minute, no-budget film about my bellybutton, or my mother." Or something. Of course, I exaggerate. However, in reality, what they are

up against is a 60-million dollar film by James Cameron, which has a 10-million dollar marketing budget. As a filmmaker you need to really deal with that. Not just with James Cameron and his power and his budget, but also with the machinery and marketing power of Hollywood. And you're who? A what filmmaker? From where? You have to deal with the reality of just how rough the business is in terms of market domination. How difficult it is to create not just a brand for yourself but for a whole region. It is for us as a region to say OK, this is not just one person making a film. We come from somewhere. We have a voice and an identity. We are a movement. We are a brand. And because there were over 30 people here that year, we were able to make a small splash. One of our filmmakers put it well. She said, "There is more power in more people." Before we produced the first *Incubator* many people told me, "Don't do it. Don't even bother to bring your little team of whoever to TIFF. It's not a good idea because first of all, the industry, and TIFF, aren't into Black people." And that's the elephant in the room, right?

HS: Ha! And can Black people produce anything of quality anyway?

That's right. We don't create quality. I was told: "We know this, and so it would be a waste of your time. It will be embarrassing for you. Don't do it." But over 30 people were noticed. There was a sense that there's a contingent here from the Caribbean. It made a difference. So, I thought, OK. Fine. Now we build on that.

HS: Let me see if I have this right. The *CaribbeanTales International Film Festival* was moved to September in 2010, the same year that *CaribbeanTales Worldwide Distribution* was launched during the Toronto International Film Festival? And the inaugural *CaribbeanTales Incubator* was also held, in collaboration with the Toronto International Film Festival, that same year? And since then both CTFF and the *Incubator* are held at the same time as TIFF?

Right.

HS: So, are the incubatees able to attend sessions alongside other TIFF participants and see how Warner Brothers and other bigwigs manage sales and distribution? They get to see how deals are made, how to present their work to potential buyers, and that sort of thing?

Exactly. They get an opportunity to see how the big guys "run things." We have a deal with TIFF where our incubatees get a special price on industry passes so they can participate in TIFF while they are doing the *Incubator*. We also produce our own pitching session at the end of each *Incubator*. The pitching session is becoming more and more popular.

HS: How does the pitching session work? Who attends?

The pitching session—called *The Big Pitch*—takes the form of a *Caribbean Breakfast and Pitch* and takes place at the Lightbox [the TIFF Bell Lightbox Building, headquarters of the Toronto International Film Festival]. We are inside the TIFF building. It's very easy for industry delegates, who are attending TIFF from all around the world, to come to us. This year, there were six thousand people in Toronto for TIFF and we had around 80 in attendance at our *Big Pitch*. We feel that it was a success.

HS: Are you targeting the behind-the-scenes people in the industry? The movers and the shakers?

That is the idea, yes. We carefully hand-select and invite from that international group those delegates who might be interested in our content.

HS: Hollywood people too?

Hollywood is not our audience, though. I think it's been important for me to say this. We are building our audiences. We're not competing for these so-called mainstream white audiences because they don't business with us, right? We are building our own industry. We're not interested in being part of an industry that is not interested in us. It's like trying to have an affair with somebody who doesn't want you, has no interest in you. At all. Why would you do that to yourself? It's stupid. We're doing something completely new and different. We are building our own audiences. Our target audiences are global.

Frances-Anne Solomon, BBC; 1990



For example, at our *Incubator* last year a producer stood up afterwards and said, "I thought all the pitches were fantastic. The stories were amazing. I think it's wonderful! The only thing I wondered about was why you guys didn't talk about how any of this is relevant to Canadian television. This is Canada and you really need to think about how you're going to target your content for Canadian audiences." And our Facilitator replied, "*CaribbeanTales Worldwide Distribution* is just that. We create content from a Caribbean perspective for worldwide distribution. We do not cater to narrow niche audiences whether in Canada or elsewhere." I was just so pleased with the way she said that we are the world. Our audiences are everywhere, and we are not a minority. If anybody is narrow and in a minority it's perhaps Canadian broadcasters who have no clue about the global context beyond the couple hundred-thousand people who watch their local programming. Really, I'm not interested in them any longer. I've moved beyond that. We need to embrace the paradigm shift from trying to cater to what white, colonial (whether American or European) buyers and audiences want to focusing instead on what we as people of colour working in a global context want to create; on what our audiences expect in terms of authentic, fresh, and original film and television storytelling that reflects our diverse lives and experiences now.

HS: And perhaps also rethink whether to continue to struggle with working within limiting institutional structures . . .

. . . when there is no space there for us. But now, because of the democratization of media, there's an opportunity to reach audiences everywhere through the Internet. There's no need to go through the gatekeepers or have them fund you in order to reach your audiences. You can make your own content and reach your own audiences and bypass that rubbish. Notice that we've got the Caribbean, which is a huge and diverse region, and we've got the Caribbean diaspora. We've got Africa, India, China—all of these culturally rich and different places that have fed our identities. We've got all the places that Caribbean people have come from historically and where they've migrated to in recent times. And we have so many different stories, like [Richard Fung's] *Dal Puri Diaspora*. Or *Hero*, the feature project that I'm doing now. More and more, people are seeing it's not a question

of being a victim or fighting against racism in a tiny little bubble, but about telling huge, epic, global stories about all the different ways we are connected and got to be where we are today. In *Dal Puri Diaspora*, a Chinese-heritage Caribbean person based in Toronto tells the story of the Indian and African origins of a Trinidadian dish called Roti. He travels the globe to tell that story. In *Hero*, we follow a character who was raised in the Caribbean, who fought in the Second World War, and who played an integral role in the African liberation struggles. These are the stories of the modern Caribbean. They demonstrate just how colossal our reach is.

HS: As evidenced in the sizable turnout of film industry delegates from the international community at this year's Big Pitch.

And this year also the *Incubator* has evolved. This is the fifth year we're doing it. Each year, Caribbean-diaspora content-creators bring their projects. We pick the best ones, which then get developed through the *Incubator*. This year, we decided to concentrate on long-running series because it's important for us to build sustainability. You do one film and then it's done. But with series you're able to build audiences, get advertisers, and create audience loyalty over time. You're building capacity, storylines, characters, stars, interest, and spin-offs, all the while raising money and employing people. So we committed to making long-running series from this year, and the quality of the projects was very promising.

HS: Series for television?

Television and web. The Big Pitch winner was *Defining Moments*, a Caribbean-wide documentary web series by Melissa Gomez [Antigua/New York]. The first runner-up was an animation series called *Magnificent Maggie* by Camille Selvon Abrahams [Trinidad and Tobago]. The second runner-up was a science-fiction series by Jelani Nias [Jamaica/Canada] about a young man trying to get out of a gang and he reinvents himself in a sci-fi world. Such diversity of storytelling, and all of it relevant.

HS: What's being pitched?

The creators are pitching a pilot, but they're pitching the idea of a sustainable, long-running show.

HS: That will hopefully get picked up and then reach wide audiences. Speaking of which, I think it was at the 2011 CTF that I first saw the Jamaican feature film *Ghett'a Life* [directed by Chris Browne]. I love that film. Then afterwards it was brought back to Canada for several showings in various cities across Ontario. I believe it outperformed Hollywood blockbusters when it first showed in theatres in Jamaica and became the highest grossing film in the island that year. Wasn't *Ghett'a Life* in one of the *Incubators*?

It was in the second one.

HS: There was another film, *Doubles with Slight Pepper* by Ian Harnarine, a first-time Canadian filmmaker of Trinidadian descent. *Doubles* was part of the first *Incubator*. It got made the following year, ended up being screened during TIFF, and also won an award in that film festival.

It won Best Canadian Short Film at TIFF [in 2011] and the Genie [at the 32nd annual Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television Awards show in 2011] for Best Live Action Short film.

HS: So there are possible crossovers?

Oh yes. We've had many successes. One of our first incubatees, Rommel Hall [from Barbados], came with a series concept called *Keeping Up with the Joneses*. He then went back to Barbados and made the series there. He and his partners have now produced three seasons of the show and have also made a *Keeping Up with the Joneses* Christmas special and feature film. Hall is now making his second series: a classroom-based web series called *Abiola*.

HS: That's the idea, isn't it? Because too many of us Caribbean people are still watching American TV and other non-Caribbean productions at the expense of our own. I met up with a couple of friends of mine from high school and university on Friday night to watch the screening of the Jamaican film *Kingston Paradise*, and afterwards we reminisced about growing up with Jamaican television series such as *Lime Tree Lane* and *Royal Palm Estates*. We had a good moment just remembering. So it's great to hear of similar successes for locally produced television, and now web series, in other parts of the Caribbean; and of people watching and supporting their own content that reflects their lives. That's the market.

Absolutely.

HS: We've been talking a lot about what you are doing to help others create and promote their work. But we haven't talked much about your own filmmaking. Do you have any current projects?

Right now I'm making two films. I'm making *Hero*, which is the story of Ulric Cross. We shot in Trinidad, in London, and in Ghana. It's being cut now. The film follows Cross' journey. Cross was born into colonial times, was the most decorated Caribbean ex-serviceman in the Second World War, and then was part of the independence movements in Africa. He moved to Ghana in 1957 and worked with Kwame Nkrumah. Then he was the attorney general in the Cameroon; and he was with Nyerere in Tanzania for many years. The film takes on that whole story of the role that Caribbean intellectuals played in creating the concept of pan-Africanism, and the role that Caribbean people played in rebuilding Africa.

I find it such a moving story—that we were taken from Africa and enslaved, and that 200 years later children of that event would return and turn the tools of British education to help with the rebuilding and liberation of Africa. There were lots of Caribbean people, professionals as well as revolutionaries and radicals, who went to Africa in the 1950s and 1960s to assist in this process and become part of the independence movements on the continent. For example, the Trinidadian George Padmore was Nkrumah's mentor. He trained Nkrumah's mind based on his own training under Trotsky in Russia as part of the Communist International. It's really important to understand that Caribbean people are not just the ridiculous stereotypes that we commonly hear about: thugs, and pimps, and beach bums. We've changed the course of history. And we helped to redeem the crime that was committed against Africa in the name of European capitalism. We did that.

The other film that I'm working on is based on a story written by Oonya Kempadoo about a young girl who runs away from a girls' home and makes her way on the streets.

HS: When will these films be available?

Next year. They've both been shot and they're both coming out then.

HS: Going back to *CaribbeanTales*—it has grown over the years into such a huge venture. Or should I say ventures?

*I'll tell you how it breaks down. As I said in the beginning, the business model is production, marketing, distribution. Sustainability is a cycle. Our production arm now in terms of the conglomerate is *CaribbeanTalesFlix*, and we've just produced *Kingston Paradise* [2013] by Mary Wells, the first Jamaican feature film to be produced and directed by a woman. We have the film festival, the film festival group, which represents marketing. At one point in time we also had a festival in Barbados, a festival in New York, and a festival in Toronto.*

HS: Are those *CaribbeanTales* film festivals outside of Toronto ongoing?

*I haven't done the festival in Barbados for a couple of years or the New York one either. We are concentrating on Toronto. It would be nice, but it was too much. So we've decided to consolidate our efforts. I continue to have a base in Barbados [where CTWD is based]. We would love to develop a base or roots in Africa. But the main marketing event of our year is the film festival in Toronto. That's why we decided to re-brand it as the *CaribbeanTales International Film Festival*.*

HS: And that's what people here in Toronto, in the Caribbean, and internationally will now recognize as the marketing and festival arm of *CaribbeanTales*?

*Yes. Having this platform in Toronto during TIFF is unique. And the *Incubator* has now really defined itself and stands out as a high quality training ground. This year we got many commitments because of the quality of the stories and the filmmakers. The *Incubator* has established itself as an important platform for filmmakers across the region and the diaspora.*

HS: I asked about the *CaribbeanTales* film festivals held outside Toronto because I'm thinking of, for example, the vibrant film industry in Jamaica. Jamaican filmmakers have been producing features steadily over the decades, and the films—such as Perry Henzell's classic *The Harder They Come*, Storm Saulter's *Better Mus' Come*, Chris Browne's *Ghett'a Life*, and Mary Wells' *Kingston Paradise*—have played to enthusiastic audiences locally. How does *CaribbeanTales* liaise with these and other filmmakers and the various production outlets and film commissions in the Caribbean to choose what gets exhibited during CTFF?

This year we got funding from the European Union [from the ACPCultures + Program] to build capacity and develop income streams for our work. So we are working with the film commissions across the Caribbean to help develop marketing and distribution networks for Caribbean film. What we're doing is also being reflected across the region. There is a lot of regional activity and investment in terms of film development. It's an exciting time; I mean, there still needs to be much more funding and infrastructure, but generally it's been very interesting in terms of what they're able to do. As you've said, a film comes out of Jamaica from time to time. Trinidad is vibrant. There's Guadeloupe that is able to benefit from funding from France. Cuba is always interesting. The Dominican Republic has produced several films. There's activity coming out of Barbados, even though they have no infrastructure at all for film. There's Rommel Hall as well as Shakirah Bourne and Selwynne Browne who are making their third feature film in 18 months. There is some movement on the part of governments and film commissions, but there's equally lots of movement on the part of young people picking up cameras and just doing it. And that's really exciting.

HS: On shoestring budgets?

On nothing budgets. And telling their stories. Films are getting made on smart phones. A quality camera now is \$1500. So young people are able to afford equipment they couldn't before. And they're just doing it.

HS: How do you find the films that get shown here at CTFF? Do you go to the Caribbean to seek them out? How do you vet them and decide what to showcase?

I'm a filmmaker. So at this point, after a number of years of working in this industry, I do know a lot of the people who are in the industry. In terms of the selection, we have a team of programmers across the Caribbean who communicate via Skype and view and select the films. This year, the programmers included Christopher Pinheiro, Mandisa Pantin, Mary Wells, Bridget "Bee" Quammie, and a number of others. Mary is based in Jamaica. Mandisa is in Trinidad. Christopher's here in Toronto. Bee is also here. The juries are also from all over. Because of the Internet we can get a global response to the content, both in terms of programming and judging it. So that's exciting. But the most satisfying part of all of this, for me, is building healthy communities and sharing our stories in a sustainable way. I'm sure we've all felt at one point or another that we had no context for understanding who we were; we all felt odd and isolated, and like we didn't belong. The joy of the work that we do, that I do, is in seeing people recognize themselves on the screen and realize that their story is valid and wonderful. That people care and want to see and hear their story. That others are experiencing something similar, and that they feel just as unique, and individual, and bizarre.

What defines us, in a way, as Caribbean people is difference, because of all the different places we come from, and all of the different experiences we've had, and the silence around that. All the different ways we went about constructing and remaking our existences and the sharing of that is exciting and diverse and electric and dynamic and connecting. It's wonderful when you have Chinese people, and Indian people, old people, and young people, and middling people, Rastas, and feminists, lesbians, and queer people—everybody. We're all Caribbean. We can all feel that connection because somehow we came from the same place or process of movement and migration—from colonialism.

HS: Speaking of difference, it was wonderful to see a film like *Anti-Man* [by Gavin Ramoutar of Guyana] at this year's film festival. It's sensitive, and realistic, and heartwarming, and heart-breaking at the same time. The young lead's acting was a bit stilted, but that didn't ruin the story, which is a beautiful exploration of friendship and betrayal and sexual awakening and identity and how masculinity is defined in that specific cultural context. It seems to me that for the past three or four years a programming theme around Caribbean queerness has been emerging in the festival—something like an attempt to open up space on certain areas of Caribbean experience, and queerness is one such area of focus.

*Well, I have to say that it's been very difficult to introduce that strand. For me it was important because one of the central things about my views of storytelling is difference. Because homosexuality has been such a taboo in our society, it was important just to face it head-on and say that we stand for difference. We stand for equality of human beings in every way. For human rights. I cannot tell you how difficult it was. First of all, it was difficult to stand in front of, for example, the Jamaican government representatives and say we stand for queer Caribbean. And Black audiences, you know. The first year there was a deep silence when I announced our *Queer Caribbean* strand at the press conference. People just didn't know what to make of that. And then, on the other side of it, there was initial resistance on the part of LGBT communities to participate because they assumed . . .*

HS: . . .that there's going to be a hostile reception?

I mean, just refusal on the part of a lot of people to participate. This is the first year that we've managed to make it a smooth transition. It was really bumpy prior. I'm really glad that we seem to have crossed something and are partnering with a number of queer organizations. There is real excitement now about this programming.

HS: I haven't seen any films directly addressing queerness as part of our story as Caribbean people come out of Jamaica yet. Or have I missed something?

A number of films have been made about homophobia. But you're right. Not that you want to deny the vicious homophobia in our societies, because they kill people, right? It's disgusting. It's horrendous. It's a human rights tragedy—but what would be exciting, as you say, is to get the diverse stories from the various points-of-view, Queer as well as Transgender. And not only the coming-out story or the get-beaten-up story, but all the different kinds of articulations of those identities. I'm excited by the possibilities.

HS: What you've just said reminded me of Shashi Balooja [Trinidad/Antigua/Canada/US]. He participated in the *Incubator* in 2013 with *Ariana*, a short film about a doctor and the man he was in a relationship with and the problems they had to deal with when the doctor's grandmother became ill. The film didn't hold up the men's relationship for scrutiny or comment. It was a story about family, just another of the many family stories that we can tell. And that approach was a large part of the film's power and impact.

Yes, there are all kinds of possibilities that I am excited to explore. Next year, we want to look at mental-health issues in the Caribbean. That, too, is a completely taboo, electrifying, and explosive subject.

HS: We don't talk about it. We hide them away, especially if they are in our family.

We put them into mental hospitals. They walk down the street naked. It's a stereotype, but we don't engage with the humanity of mental illness, which is too obviously so prevalent in a society traumatized by the kinds of historical experiences that we have been through. I think as a people we have all been wounded and damaged by the historical circumstances of enslavement, by the trafficking of populations, and the global migrations that created our region. In order to address this in a wider context we have to take the top off the pressure cooker and start dealing with the damage. There is so much trauma. It's not like there's one person that's mad and walking down the street. We're talking

about a region created by trauma. It's an important issue for us to start talking about. I know many people who have killed themselves. That is the silent norm. We need to open it up.

HS: I'll definitely look out for those films next year. What are the plans to develop an infrastructure to make Caribbean series and films, including some of those shown at CTFE, available to wider audiences? I see that another company, *CaribbeanTales-TV*, a VOD channel described as "a Netflix-style online film shop for Caribbean film buffs," was launched in 2013.

Well, I think one of the disadvantages of always starting something where there was nothing before is that we have to prove ourselves.

HS: Everyone's waiting to see whether you sink or swim.

*Yes, whether we'll survive, whether we'll make it, whether we are of value. We want to make sure that our content is available wherever our audiences are, right? That means on every television screen. In Africa. In the Caribbean. On the Internet. Everywhere. Our job is to create infrastructure so that people can have their *CaribbeanTales* film app on their cell phone and online. That's the aim. The funding that we got from the European Union this year will allow us to build infrastructure as well as travel to international markets, which is key. Last year, we went to a market in Africa called Discop where African broadcasters and programmers go. We got a number of sales out of that. This year we're going to different European and US markets as well. These are film and television markets where you meet with and sell content to buyers. This is something we haven't been able to afford to do up until now. This will represent a big turning point for us. It will help build global reach.*

Frances-Anne Solomon
with Gina Belafonte; Barbados



HS: Hopefully, the more you can show financial viability—because it always comes back to the bottom line—the more the funding will come in to sustain the work.

There were two things that happened this year. One was that we got charitable status as a Canadian company and therefore for the film festival, which will be transformative because we will be able to access social-giving funding. So now we can get, I hope, a sponsor that'll float the festival, make it viable. We've also got a great location now where we can sell tickets.

HS: You will keep CTFE at The Royal, then?

Yes. The festival is at the point of going to another level because of these things and now with the distribution company we are poised, with the help of this year's European Union funding, to develop our reach by travelling and taking our content to the world, which we weren't able to afford before. I'm very excited.

HS: You said earlier that this year's film festival at The Royal has been the biggest in terms of public response and ticket sales. Can you give a sense of how much growth you've seen over the years?

*It's been building steadily. It's very, very difficult programming a festival against TIFF. For a lot of years there have been people saying that we'd probably get more publicity and better audiences if it weren't during TIFF. But our reason, our justification, has been that our core audience does not go to TIFF. And then, we do get spillover from TIFF for the *Incubator*. People care about us and come. If we can reach our audiences it really doesn't matter what else is going on. And there are benefits too. The benefits that come from running parallel with TIFF outweigh the disadvantages. Even holding it during *Caribbana* brought up issues because people wanted to be outside jumping up in the street; they don't want to be inside watching films. The best time to have done it might have been *Black History Month*. We did have a festival at one point during *Black History Month*. We had the *Youth Film Festival* where we took the films to schools. But I believe in our positioning right now, and this is the first time I've felt some traction.*

*We had a great festival and incubator team in place this year. Special thanks to filmmaker and producer Nicole Brooks, our Incubator Manager; and to Timmia Hearn who, as well as being the Incubator Coordinator, also handled community outreach for the festival. We have first-class mentors who contribute their time and talents to help shape and guide projects that come through the *Incubator*. We have, for example, Christopher Laird who has over 30 years' experience as a filmmaker and documentarian. He founded and is CEO of *Gayelle: The Channel in Trinidad* [the first 24-hour Caribbean-content channel in the Caribbean] and was Chair of the *Trinidad and Tobago Film Company* for five years. Rita Shelton-Deverell, a veteran Canadian broadcaster and producer, has had a tremendous role in growing and shaping the *Incubator* over the past four years. We now have a very strong steering committee and Board of Directors that support our operational team in making decisions strategically. Among them are Denham Jolly, founder and former CEO of *Flow* [the first Black-owned radio station in Canada], and Jean Augustine [a former Member of Parliament for the Canadian Liberal Party]. The festival has momentum now.*

HS: Which also gives momentum to your overall goal of producing and marketing content in a way that is sustainable for Caribbean filmmakers and series creators.

Yes, we have a larger mission, which is about building the Caribbean industry globally. And it will work for us. You know, I am feeling the vision. It's beginning to have teeth and find its legs.

HS: That is great news. Thank you for talking with me, Frances-Anne. I know there are many others who, like me, are looking forward to CTFE in 2015, and to hearing more about the successes of *CaribbeanTales* in the coming years.

"GIVE ME BACK MY BLACK DOLLS": DAMAS' AFRICA AND ITS MUSEIFICATION, FROM POETRY TO MOVING PICTURES

MATTHIAS DE GROOF AND KATHLEEN GYSSELS

MATTHIAS DE GROOF AND KATHLEEN GYSSELS

Résumé

Dans cette contribution, nous lions la poésie de Damas à un film expérimental, "Rendez-les moi," réalisé par Matthias De Groof et basé sur le poème « Limbé ». En offrant une interprétation de « Limbé » concernant la muséification d'artéfacts africains, notre réévaluation de Damas est cadrée par le film comme intervention artistique. Le travail de Kathleen Gyssels ira au-delà de la manière dont l'expérimentation visuelle tente de galvaniser la vision artistique de Damas, et aborde la figure des Poupées Noires comme métaphore de discrimination genrée qui par-là transcende les antagonismes classiques propres à la Négritude.

Abstract

This essay links Léon-Gontran Damas' poetry to Matthias De Groof's experimental film, *Rendez-les moi*, based on Damas' poem "Limbé." By offering an interpretation of "Limbé" in relation to the museification of African artifacts, the film frames the re-evaluation of Damas as artistic intervention. Kathleen Gyssels goes beyond the way the visual experimentation tries to galvanize Damas's artistic vision and focuses on the figure of Damas' "black dolls" as a metaphor for gendered discrimination, thereby moving beyond classic antagonisms of Négritude.

The work of the relatively undervalued Négritude poet Léon-Gontran Damas allows for an inter-artistic dialogue. This contribution links Damas' poetry to an experimental film, *Rendez-les-moi* (2013), directed by Matthias De Groof, one of the authors of the present article, and based on Damas' poem "Limbé" (in *Pigments*; 1937). Preceding the artist statement on the film, Kathleen Gyssels provides a useful context for the film. Rather than expediently recycling Damas' anti-colonial poetry, De Groof's film tries to deploy aesthetics to render Damas' poetry a performative speech act, albeit fictionally. The trans-medial aspects of the film—poetry, music, sculpture—aspire towards a freeing of colonized artefacts from the discursive strictures of colonial frameworks and institutions. By offering an interpretation of "Limbé" as an intervention into the museification of African artefacts, the film participates in a re-evaluation of Damas and Négritude. This study does not aim at recasting our understanding of Négritude, nor do we attempt at re-canonising Damas' work, as Négritude is itself at odds with canonisation. Instead, we focus on the mediality of the film to illuminate its relation to the poetry. Although "Limbé" is Damas' only poem using the figure of the dolls as a pervasive metaphor, we will also analyse a selection of Damas' other poems in relation to museification.

In the first part of the essay, Gyssels recovers dimensions of Damas' suppressed history and artistic vision. Gyssels begins by scrutinizing the poet's biography in relation to his "black dolls" and the way the issue of stolen heritage re-emerges throughout his oeuvre (*Pigments & Black Label*). Then, she arrives at a focus on the figure of Damas and his marginality. The metaphor of the "black dolls" finally appears in the second contribution as a reflection on, rather than an analysis of, De Groof's film. *Rendez-les-moi* it hopes to open up unique perspectives on the oeuvre of Damas. This critical piece and artist statement facilitates a reconsideration of Damas' other works.

I. The Damas of Give Me Back My Black Dolls

1. "The Africa they ransacked, the Africa they robbed me of"

De Groof's film offers an intriguing perspective on "Limbé" by considering the black dolls as objects stolen from museums. The Musée de l'Homme, in Damas' mind, becomes a kind of "mausoleum" of the dead and the diseased. Having studied in Paris with Marcel Mauss and Paul Rivet, Damas left the institution because he felt uncomfortable with the fact that European ethnographers—and, more precisely, French ethnographers—stole entire collections of art and tribal masks. The incorporation of these artefacts into the museum space voided them of their ritual function and highlighted African "darkness" in metropolitan museums. Those public places exhibit Western supremacy and hunger for wealth more than genuine scientific curiosity, an observation that lurks in Damas' poems. The work of Paul Morand, the controversial interwar writer and traveller who has his protagonist visiting the Tervuren Museum in the short story "Syracuse ou l'homme-panthère" (from *Magie noire*, 1927), evokes Damas:

These African beliefs that make of the ritual cloths of the deceased so many extensions of the living person awoke in the heart of the citizen from Syracuse; all the diviners, the necromants who had slipped on these accursed, cast-off garments, all the souls that had been trapped in these calabashes, all the lifeless locks of hair that had been slipped into magic pounces came back to live, signalled their presence. "Flee," they said; "leave the land that you inhabit; it is fertile only in appearance, but ruin is upon it. Its progress is nothing but prestige; it has made of you a vampire. Return to the land where the trees and the stones speak in the name of the Spirit." (Morand 1992: 566, qtd in Ezra 143)

In "The Dogon as lieu de memoire" (2012), Statchan explains how Marcel De Griaule's Djibouti expedition irritated Michel Leiris, one of Damas' friends and fellow ethnographers; we must understand Damas' metaphor of the black doll in this context.

French authorities seized Damas' first and most subversive collection, the polemical *Pigments* (1937), for its outright anti-fascist and anti-colonial discourse. In one of his most famous poems, "Ils sont venus ce soir" ("They came that night," 2), Damas portrays the colonial invasion of the European colonizer as a moment that forever stops the drumbeat of the many African worshippers and dancers. The arrival of white barbarians destroyed the African ritual gatherings of dances, songs, and drums:

They came that night when the
tom
tom
rolled from
rhythm
to
rhythm
the frenzy

of eyes
the frenzy of hands
the frenzy
of statues' feet
SINCE
how many of ME ME ME
have died
since they came that night when the
tom
tom
rolled from
rhythm
to
rhythm
the frenzy

("They Came that Night")

However, by complimenting Damas on the African beat, Léopold Senghor, one of the initiators of Négritude, glossed over the actual event portrayed in "They came that night / Ils sont venus ce soir." The poem shows men (white or black) slaughtering and ransacking and discusses genocidal violence and how the poet is incapable of actually counting the relentless accumulation of colonialism's victims. Damas hints at the long-

lasting aftershocks of colonial rule, the collision between two cultures in which the oppressed turn to "statues" (i.e. inanimate dolls), to ashes, deprived of now-museified tribal masks and weapons.

This opening poem also hints at the racialized élite, the *évolués* betraying their own "race," enslaving their own "blood" ("Et Caetera" and "S O S" echo this lament). Not explicitly naming the culprits, Damas denounces both the French invader (the White perpetrator) and the Africans who sold their own brothers and sisters into slavery, complicit in their *razzias*; this vilification is most explicit in an inflammatory litany in the first movement of *Black-Label*. Additionally, he uses the *passé composé* tense to push the reader to reconsider a singular event (a specific evening of brutal colonial invasion as a sexually suggestive European "penetration,") as the inception of what became a history of brutal conquests and violent incursions by white colonizers that continues into the present.

In "Et Caetera," Damas indirectly condemns the enrolment of racialized troops, specifically Senegalese soldiers, in the French army. Thousands of soldiers for the French war machine came from Saint-Louis du Sénégal, the colonial capital on the Western coast of Sénégal. Embracing the loyalty France expected from its colonies was indeed one of the attitudes characteristic of the first generation of black and other racialized leaders in the interwar and immediate independences. Damas condemns the endless tribute paid by Africa's sons and daughters as an image of a gigantic machine making more soldiers for France's war. He blames the French occupier in Senegal for having "ransacked" the black continent and its populations. The innumerable sacrificed soldiers (from the Caribbean, America, and Africa) haunt Damas: they become his "spectral ghosts"¹ who follow him everywhere on his sails and crossings, as his ancestors did during the Middle Passage. His poem, "The Wind," describes another sleepless night as he crosses the Black Atlantic, hearing a polyphonic choir of ghosts. (Damas, *Pigments* 17) Out of the darkness, in spite of the silence, the poet captures messages from the elements and the unseen, the haunting silence of the many unheard voices echoes in his ears. The poem "Buried treasures" already demonstrates the poet's conviction that not only

human but also non-human loss is buried on the bottom of the ocean. The silenced voices in this poem impress themselves on the world under the cover of night, causing an extreme tension on the part of the enclosed, entrapped, and enlisted subjects. The ethnographer will have the same uncanny experience, in reference to what Freud calls "Unheimlich," when she or he strolls through the many museums of Paris, London, or Brussels. In "if tomorrow the ghosts," Damas writes, "I'm haunted by their memory" (*Black-Label*, M II). Ghosts are everywhere.

2. [K]Not's and Lines

The third cofounder of the literary-political movement *Négritude*, Léon-Gontran Damas embodies the Caribbean concept of creolization. His name aptly expresses this creolized heritage. Exploring the significations of his last name, Damas, inherited by some French "bagnard," the militant author intertwines the noun *damas*, which refers to an iron to forge weapons, with the image of sea knots and textile knots ("*damassé, fibre*"). Among all these polysemic uses, Damas favours indeed one specifically haunting image. Keith Walker articulates the symbolism of Damas' name and its use in his poetry in *Countermodernism* (1999):

The slipknot is also a recurring image in the writing of the Césaire-Damas generation. Like the lifelines metaphor, the slipknot has much to do with the sea and survival. It is polyvalent in its signifying power and multilayered in its richness and aptness to the history and experience of New World Blacks, evoking a string of verbal associations that plot the legacy of the Middle Passage, colonial domination, plantation experience and post-colonialism: capture, bound hands, nautical voyage, bondage, suicide, lynching, strangulation, triangulation, struggle, tics, knots prestidigitation, escape, freedom and survival. (14)

The noun "damas" by extension also refers to a "cord," a "line," which resonates with sinister images often *recycled* by the poet: indeed, Damas repeatedly inserts the intrusion of a hanging Negro, lynched at dawn for "having wanted to

cross the line." This fictional double of himself shows the poet entangled in all kinds of existential knots. In Amerindian cultures, the knot often serves to measure time, as in the Aztec and Mayan calendars. The knot comes close to the other famous "metaphor" for mixed cultures in the New World, the "branchement" (see Amselle 2001) and Glissant's "rhizome," which Amselle (1990) criticizes for risking a slide into a new "essentialism." Considering these diverse connotations, the cord with its potential to form a knot, may thus serve as metaphor that chronicles and summarizes the effects of colonization. Damas has always defined himself as "fils de trios fleuves" ("son of three rivers"), thereby objecting too strong polarities between Africa (the Niger) and Europe (the Seine). Thus, as part of his personal familial heritage, Damas has the blood of three rivers running through his veins: African blood, blood of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and European blood.

Damas – the city dweller and bohemian, the jazz lover and anthropologist, the censored poet and "député dépité" (deceived politician)²—was ahead of his time, moving beyond the antagonisms of *Négritude*. Not only did he claim African heritage alongside Amerindian and European (Gysseles 2009), but he also moved away from strong binaries regarding class and gender. Importantly, he struggled to move beyond masculinity as a cultural construction opposed to femininity (cf. infra). Regarding his own mixed identity, the poet acknowledged the important yet invisible figure of the "red-skinned Galibi,"³ "la Tigresse des Hauts Plateaux," living on the borders of the Orénoque-river in the Amazonian forest. In *Black-Label* (1956: 63), Damas poem "Roucouyennes" (BL 21) reclaims the "bone flute" ("flûte en tibia" BL 31) as both fetish and ritual instrument. Elsewhere in *Black-Label*, tribal music is evoked through the rhythms played on a "flûte de bambou" ("bamboo flute" BL 45). In these poems it seems as though the lyrical voice is trying to remember a female ancestor on the Amerindian side, "une Galibi matinée de sang Congo." This emphasis on the Amerindian population already shows Damas working between the Lines, in what Homi K. Bhabha calls the "third zone" (Bhabha 1993), between the interstices of disciplines and among varying cultural heritage(s).

Fighting alienation and racism, the Guyanese Damas would take issue with some of the most divisive issues to come out of the next generations

from the French Caribbean. First of all the "antillanité"-movement by Glissant, as well as the second "créolité"-movement founded by Confiant and Chamoiseau in the footsteps of Martinican Aimé Césaire face the material as well as cultural dependence from the colonial Metropolis. Senghor, Césaire, Glissant all claim to write in hermetic style. When Senghor states in the "Introduction" to *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* that "Damas' poetry is not sophisticated" (PUF, 1948: 5), he indirectly reinforces scholarly neglect of Damas' poetry and prose. Senghor's comment is indicative of the somewhat turbulent partnership among the founders of *Négritude*. Although marginalized within his own movement, Damas' writing has been taken up by some later critics (see Kesteloot 1963), and authors from the African Diaspora, including Glissant who in his *Discours antillais* (1981, tr. Caribbean Discourse) places Damas alongside Haitian Jacques Roumain from the *Indigénist*-movement, and Cuban Nicolas Guillén (Glissant 1989: 154). Yet other reasons have to be taken into account for the waning of Damas' canonical stature and the obfuscation of his militant work. On the margins of the French-Caribbean canon, omitted from manifestos by Glissant and Chamoiseau, Damas deserves to be reread as his work also approaches a transgression of the lines between living and dead, object and subject, male and female, homo- and heterosexual. Also, contrary to more accessible poetry, his poetry has from its inception appealed strongly to visual arts. His second collection, aptly entitled *Graffiti* (1952) already testifies to the writings on the wall, so-to-speak, of marginalized cultures and the long-lasting pictures engraved on the minds of subaltern subjects. An early voice to publicly address issues of the colonization and oppression, Damas' interwar period work proves a fertile ground for reframing Black poetry from the (post-) *Négritude* period. The following experimental short film, along with its director's artistic statement, highlight these elements in Damas' poetry, in particular in "Limbé."



Fig. 1. Still from *Rendez-les-moi* (*Give me back my black dolls*), 2013.

II. *Rendez-les-moi*: “Give me back my black dolls” through moving pictures

The short experimental film *Rendez-les-moi* (*Give me back my black dolls*) was part of De Groof’s work in 2013 during an IFAA-residency at Nijmegen.⁴ The film interprets Damas’ poem “Limbé” as an expression of longing for a suppressed African cultural heritage now predominantly found in museums. The film might be called a “visual poem,” using the technique of “caméra-stylo” or “camera pen” that Alexandre Astruc describes as a form through which an artist is able to express his thoughts, tearing loose from the image for the image of the immediate anecdote (Astruc 324-5). The camera in *Rendez-les-moi* renders a visual poem guided by a linguistic one, Léon-Gontran Damas’ “Limbé” as if Damas too is holding the pen. After the introductory exposition of a mask spinning as a Miles Davis’ record plays, camera movements work to imply the subjective viewpoint of an imaginary person standing in front of a showcase in an Africa-museum. In a voyeuristic spy-shot, the camera takes on the imagined perspective of a person. This person surreptitiously gazes at a single black doll displayed behind glass. In a subsequent shot, viewers see a series of African cultural artefacts. Just at that moment, the film’s audience hears the poet’s voice. The voice, reading Damas’ poem, infers that the subjective gaze of the camera is also the gaze of Damas, who recites:

Give me back my black dolls
so they dispel
the image of pale whores
merchants of love who stroll back and forth
on the boulevard of my ennui

Give me back my black dolls
so they dispel
the eternal image
the hallucinatory image
of stacked large-assed puppets
whose miserable mercy
the wind carries to the nose

(“Limbé”)

In this recital, Damas gives an imperative order, addressed to the museum, to “give him back his black dolls.” The film uses camera movements to translate an understanding of Damas’ shame and the taboo of the subject: the museum dominates and exploits “his black dolls.” Indeed, in the context of the poem, the artefacts function as “whores” in the public space of the museum: undressed from their ritual costumes and behind vitrines, they are dominated as historically and racially inferior. Exhibited as idols, they suggest an African cultural heritage at the disposal of colonial projects. Through their static presentation, they become negative symbols of Western historical progression. Implying a remote past, they reinforce the West’s image as developed and modern. Looted, traded, and domesticated, the dolls become the relics of Western colonialism. Referred to as a variation of a Western past existing in the present, these objects make Africa into Europe’s eternal museum. Ethnologized, the black dolls are “othered” as remote and museified, historicized as past. Put at both temporal and spatial distances, they are defined by a museum, which uses the “self as measure” and makes from Protagoras’ *Homo Mensura* doctrine: *Europa mensura*.

Categorized, the black dolls are constructed as primitive; assimilated, they are conceived of as barbarous and imagined as exotic. As V.Y. Mudimbe elucidates, African artefacts “seem to be remnants [...] of absolute beginnings” (64). Moreover:

[t]he ethnographic museum enterprise espoused a historical orientation, deepening the need for the memory of an archaic European civilization and, consequently, expounding reasons for decoding exotic and primitive objects as symbolic and contemporary signs of a Western antiquity. (61)

Ethnographic museums appropriated African artefacts in order to assimilate them in a play of otherness and sameness so that they speak to us as our contemporary history. Art museums assign these artefacts aesthetic qualities so that they speak as art. Négritude attributes them with an alterity that refuses to be reduced to a Western gaze. This view of art is distinct from the understanding formed by institutionalized Western Art History, in which art has its place outside daily life, a detachment reflected by the spatial distinction of the museum (see König 2007).

L'art nègre, by contrast, is not only fundamentally entangled with life, but its ultimate function is to manifest *l'âme noire*. In other words, Damas identifies with the artefacts he sees in the museum and sees the imprisonment of African cultural heritage as an act of alienation in which museums took part. He writes:

my courage recovered
my audacity
I become myself once again
myself once more
out of what I was Yesterday
yesterday
without complexity
yesterday
when the hour of uprooting came

Will they ever know this rancor in my heart
Opened to the eye of my mistrust too late
they stole the space that was mine⁵

("Limbé")

Uprooting the masks from their cultural context and "stealing the space that was mine" functioned within the logics of cultural colonisation and alienation: this theft was French policy everywhere in the French empire, from the *Afrique-Équatoriale française (AEF)* and *Afrique-Occidentale française (AOF)* and in the Caribbean especially. Colonialism required this politics of assimilation.

Consequently, the poet of the post-colony first and foremost tries to recover and recuperate the loss. The idea of a "restoration"—(*redevenu moi-même [...] de ce que [...] j'étais hier[...] quand est venue l'heure du déracinement*)—without hindering transformation into something "new" (*nouveau*) is typical to Négritude. Yet the work of many of its members have nevertheless at times been considered traditionalist. However, in a context of alienation, nostalgia on the part of the victim is never far-off, as demonstrated by the succession of words in the poem:

the custom, the days, the life
the song, the rhythm, the effort
the path, the water, the huts
the smoke gray earth
the wisdom, the words, the discussion
the elders
the cadence, the hands, the tempo, the hands
the stampings of feet
the ground

("Limbé")

The "colonized heritage" has been altered into "colonial heritage": the masks end up being decapitated from their costumes and their ritual meaning. Exhibited behind glass, they function within the knowledge/power structure of the modernistic *Weltanschauung* of the museum. The significance of museification is most drastically expressed in reference to Walter Benjamin's terminology from his famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936): artefacts change from the modality of ritual-value to the modality of exposition-value in the context of reproducibility (248). Nevertheless, the decapitated masks are not dead. To paraphrase the canonical 1953 French film-essay on African art *Statues Also Die* by Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and Ghislain Cloquet, the masks still maintain the power to enchant, which is why they feature in De Groof's film.



Fig. 2. Still from *Rendez-les-moi* (*Give me back my black dolls*), 2013, 3' depicting Pierrot Barra's installation artwork "Agwé."

Rendez-les-moi attempts to fulfil a transatlantic cinematic restitution of the black dolls by incorporating Pierrot Barra's installation artwork "Agwé." This contemporary piece by the Haitian artist Barra (1942-1999) has the form of a boat that carries dolls. On the boat, the film's viewers see *Iwa Agwe*, a voodoo sea-spirit, represented as captain of the ship *Imamou*, which brings the deceased back to their ancestral home of Africa. Barra's works were primarily intended to serve as "little altars" for the *initiés*, the members of the *hounfor* admiring and praying the *loas* or voodoo pantheon. Syncretising West-African animist and Spirit religions with Catholicism and freemasonry, voodoo was developed by slaves in Saint-Domingue and was a supportive factor behind the Haitian revolution (1804) that secured the world's first Black Republic.⁶

Give me the illusion I will no longer have to
satisfy
the sprawling need
of mercies snoring
beneath the world's unconscious disdain

("Limbé")



Fig. 3. Still from *Rendez-les-moi* (*Give me back my black dolls*), 2013, 3', depicting Gérard Quenum's black dolls, Courtesy of the Artist.

One of the dolls shown in the film turns a closed eye on the word *disdain*, accentuating its contempt. Damas, for his part, articulates the disdain that often accompanies mercy, as a sentiment projected by the colonizer onto the colonized. In "Limbé" he describes/illustrates the disdainful mercy expressed for the dolls by a seemingly compassionate museum visitor. Damas demands to give him *the illusion* that he could get rid of empty mercy and reanimate the dolls (and we acknowledge the fact that the dolls stand in as a metaphor for objectified women, who do not appear in the poem).

Give me back my black dolls
so that I can play with them
the naïve games of my instinct
which has remained in the shadow of its laws

("Limbé")

In the poem, the word *illusion* stresses the fatalist impossibility of what he asks: to get rid of a merciful and paralyzing attitude and to liberate his heritage from the museum in order to metamorphose it with new meaning—*his* meaning. The sad irony of Damas' work is that he cannot see past these dolls as objects: the chance of recuperation is tied to his own domination of them.

In the *visual* poem however, spoken words connect with the medium of moving images. De Groof takes up Damas' wish to get the illusion, as explained above, across two phases in the film. First, a series of vertical shots (tilts) in parallel montage connects iron objects used to chain slaves (shown with downward tilts) and the black dolls (shown with upward tilts).⁷ Second, the illusion of liberation through cinema develops in the final sequence where a succession of shots depicts artefacts in movement. Vertical and circular movements as well as abstract shots, detach the objects from their display, attempting to break these object free from their place in the museum and its connection with colonial history.

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III. Concluding Thoughts

By reading "Limbé" and other poems by Damas, we have tried to shed light on a particular metaphor used by the poet to denounce the process of dehumanization as defined in Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950). The image of the black doll might also refer to the many artistic objects stolen by French ethnographers and explorers, visitors and art collectors, in the colonies. Moreover, the metaphoric black doll crosses different lines the poet wanted to abolish: between ages, sexes, races, and classes. The reading of this poem illustrates how much Damas' poetry can be amplified through close reading and artistic practice. De Groof's film presents an audio-visual interpretation of Damas' work. It may serve as an example of the ways in which Caribbean literature can inspire contemporary film art as a recuperative and reconciliatory strategy. Resulting films then offer new interpretations and thus encourage re-reading of Caribbean writers such as Damas.

Notes

1. A strong theme recurrently reappearing in Harlem Renaissance poetry. See Gyssels Kathleen, "Damas et McKay : les démons blancs", *Riveneuve Continents* (automne-hiver 2008-2009), Hors-Série, Harlem Heritage: 219-227. Gyssels, Kathleen, "Correspondances et consonances: Bois-d'Ebène et Black-Label", in *Révolte, subversion et développement chez Jacques Roumain*, Acacia, Michel, ed., Port-au-Prince, Editions de l'Université d'Etat d'Haïti, 2009 : 231-244.

2. Trained as ethnographer and a pupil of Marcel Mauss and Paul Rivet, Léon-Gontran Damas moves beyond a third Line, the enduring *différend* around the issue of independence of the French Antilles and French Guiana. A strong opponent to the vote of "départementalisation" launched by Césaire in 1946, Damas would forever remain the rebel, the "maroon" who does not fit in the triangle of the more Francophile first Black member of the Académie française (Senghor) and life-long mayor of Fort-de-France, Césaire. In his accessible poetry, as well as in *Retour de Guyane* (1938), his subversive portrayal of his mother country in his censored travel report on the results of French infiltration in French Guyana, Damas protested fiercely against the *départementalisation* supported by Aimé Césaire and fellow Cayenese intellectuals such as Gaston Monnerville and Félix Eboué. Rejecting the status of "département d'outre-mer" for his own country and the neighbouring French islands, Damas was convinced this status between autonomy and dependence would enhance a neo-colonial regime holding the populations in a dreadful *double bind*. In line with Frantz Fanon, Damas believed that as citizens of France, they would always remain outlaws because of their origin and skin colour. Finally, his withdrawal from politics and his distancing from the Négritude movement contributed to his isolation.

3. The "Galibi" are one of the many Amerindian tribes living in French Guiana.

4. ifaa-platform.org
<https://vimeo.com/70741130> (password: bergendal)
<https://vimeo.com/70731876> (password: bergendal)

5. "Stole" is not strong enough a translation for "cambrioler." In *The Négritude Poets, An Anthology of Translations from the French* (1989 [1975]), Conroy-Kennedy, the verb "cambrioler" gives the stringent equivalent "ransacking" (Conroy-Kennedy 1989: 39-61). For Kesteloot, the first essayist to illustrate the entire movement (Kesteloot 1963), the first poems by Damas indeed had a particularly insolent and incisive character. Again the verb has not the stringent corporeal meaning of "fouiller" (nor of "cambrioler" it is: "camber" being close to "chamber," the intimate space where atrocities are going on between white master and black slave). Lillehei weakens Damas' irritation by translating "stole" instead of "ransacked."

6. octobergallery.co.uk/exhibitions/2007voy/index.shtml

7. The dolls are made by Gérard Quenum, an artist from the Republic of Benin. Like the work of Barra, Quenum makes powerful use of discarded children's dolls and draws on voodoo traditions which have resonated across the Atlantic in varied guises (octobergallery.co.uk/exhibitions/2007voy/index.shtml).

Image Notes.

Figure 1: Still from *Rendez-les moi (Give me back my black dolls)*, 2013, 3'

Figure 2: Still from *Rendez-les moi (Give me back my black dolls)*, 2013, 3' depicting Pierrot Barra's installation artwork "Agwé".

Figure 3: Still from *Rendez-les moi (Give me back my black dolls)*, 2013, 3', depicting Gérard Quenum's black dolls, Courtesy of the Artist.

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BOOK REVIEW

Explorando el Cine Caribeño (Exploring Caribbean Cinema)

eds. Luis Alberto Notario and Bruce Paddington.
La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2011

KRISTIAN VAN HAESENDONCK

Explorando el Cine Caribeño is a pioneering and fascinating exploration of Caribbean cinema, bringing together in one volume various essays, written in or translated into Spanish, on film and documentaries, as well as on the process of film production, in the broader Caribbean region. Caribbean film has long been an ignored area, not only by Film studies but also within Caribbean studies. A fairly young area of visual culture, Caribbean film and documentaries have been struggling to find both a regional (intra-Caribbean) and an international spectatorship. However, the contributors show that this is also an area which deserves scholarly attention, and that Caribbean filmmakers are likely to gain visibility in the near future.

The contributors to this volume make the case that this is also an area which deserves scholarly attention, through scholarly analyses of selected films and documentaries produced in the Caribbean. They do so by paying ample attention to the cultural context(s) and/or tradition in which these productions have emerged. All of the contributors have a Caribbean background and are active in a fairly wide range of professions, usually in the field of the arts. Most of them are scholars focusing on Caribbean culture or art; other contributors, such as Rigoberta López (Cuba), Ana María García (Puerto Rico) and Arnold Antonin (Haiti) practice the art of making documentaries or film; one contributor (Rita Estevanovich from the Cayman islands) performs as an actress; others, still, such as Tanya Batson-Savage (Jamaica) and Joel del Río (Cuba) are both art critics and journalists.

Since this is one of the first volumes on Caribbean film from a pan-Caribbean perspective, including the so often forgotten Guyanas and Dutch Antilles, the publication of the book sets a landmark in Caribbean studies. Published by the Cuban Institute for Cinematographic Arts and Industries (ICAIC), the book analyzes film and documentaries produced within and beyond the broader Caribbean region and Caribbean

diaspora, roughly during the second part of the 20th century. Caribbean visual culture has rarely been approached and analysed from a broad, pan-Caribbean perspective: the essays offer an original focus on film-makers from the different linguistic parts of the Caribbean as well as a deeper understanding of Caribbean reality through “close-ups” on films and documentaries in four different languages.

The book is structured in seventeen essays divided in five sections: the first section is titled “miradas” (“views”) and consists of four crosscultural and theoretical views on the broader Caribbean; each of the the four remaining sections focuses on one particular linguistic area of the many “Caribbeans”: the anglophone, the Dutch, the francophone, and the hispanophone Caribbean. As the editors stress from the outset, each contributor has his/her own definition of the Caribbean, thus celebrating the diversity of Caribbean culture. They also pay attention to the trans-national/territorial, trans-lingual and diasporic connections that make it possible to speak of a “Caribbean culture” in a broad sense. As one of the major historical diasporas, Caribbean culture cannot be conceived in purely geographical terms. Albeit in a limited way, the book addresses important contributions of Caribbean film made in diaspora, for example Ana María García’s essay on Puerto Rican film and video “Made in USA”. Nancy de Randamie tackles the complex relation between Surinam and the Dutch Antilles on the one hand, and the Netherlands on the other, whereby the latter deeply influence the former.

The first section, “Miradas”, discusses how images on the Caribbean have circulated across the globe since its first visual representations in early texts. In sharp contrast to the stereotypes and exoticism of the Caribbean reproduced time and again by foreign studios is the often dystopic image of the “real” Caribbean as riddled by social inequality and political fragility. Since the early documentaries to the Hollywood blockbusters filmed in the region, the imposition of the image of the Caribbean as

the exotic film location *par excellence*, as a group of fantasy islands where pirates and coconut trees abound, unfortunately did not bring any historical awareness to the spectator: traumas such as slavery, for example, were not at all addressed, or faded into the background. While most films represented the Caribbean as an exotic scenery, often with a fascination for vodou and black magic (remember the famous “Bond movie” *Live and Let Die*, 1973), an exception to that rule, Bruce Paddington notes, is *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943): the movie establishes a critical link between the history of slavery in Haiti and the process of zombification, and sketches a positive portrait of black slaves within Haiti’s complex racial landscape.

The essays in the remaining four sections deal with very different topics in various linguistic areas, but also with problems common to film production in the region. Several contributors describe the lack of proper infrastructure and funds to secure a consistent distribution (and translation) of Caribbean productions both on a regional and international level. Many productions, for example the award winning *Rue Cases-Nègres* (1983) directed by Euzhan Palcy (Martinique), were made possible by funds and support provided by French institutions. Of course, the problem of (postcolonial) dependence is not new. In a global network of (trans)national dependencies, however, it has become increasingly hard to define this as a typical (post)colonial problem, given that transnational networks and interest are what most define film production today. Another problem addressed in the book is the lack of collaboration on intra-regional projects, in a fast moving world where transnational productions are increasingly common. The disparity in access to resources (for instance, between Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago) and the lack of common efforts to create a common film tradition (including a common Caribbean Film board) among the different parts of the Caribbean is arguably one of the major obstacles to be overcome.

On a more positive note, there is a consensus among the authors that the emergence of new technologies is unmistakably helping to create new opportunities for filmmakers, especially for those on a limited budget. Once an expensive undertaking, a high quality production can now be achieved using relatively low cost and more accessible technologies and software. This technological revolution is also positively affecting a minor film genre: animation (a genre with some

tradition in Cuba, thanks to ICAIC’s Juan Padrón, and with an important potential for development in the broader Caribbean). Unfortunately, animation’s importance is not addressed in the book.

The lack of previously published comparative studies on Caribbean film can be an obstacle both for academic and non-academic readers: for most readers, this book will be the first encounter with Caribbean filmmakers and film production. Hence these artists and films need to be introduced to them, and their emergence needs to be contextualized. Fortunately, the editors and contributors of the book are clearly aware of this problem, and it is part of the pioneering character of their exploratory project: most of the contributors were careful to include in their essays a quick historical overview of key personalities, influences and trends in their particular local tradition. Moreover, many essays are based on archival searches and include interviews with film makers, thus laying the foundation for further research in the field. Especially important here is, I believe, the extensive essay on film production in the Dutch Caribbean, still an understudied area within Caribbean studies; but the same goes for Rita Estevanovich’s contribution on the Cayman Islands, also *terra incognita* for most Caribbeanists.

While the book’s main strength is to deliver its promise to explore film from the broader region, it would have been nice to see its scope extended to more “continental” countries, such as Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, as well as English Guyana. Future publications on Caribbean film might also want to approach different (national) productions from a more comparative perspective, which will shed light on common problems and possibilities for collaboration. Also, the attention given to each linguistic area of the Caribbean is somewhat unequal; the number of pages on hispanophone Caribbean film, for instance, is about the double of the sections on other linguistic areas.

Finally, it would be great if *Explorando el Cine Caribeño* would be translated into other languages (such as English and French), so that it can be read by more scholars within the Caribbean and beyond. Since many of the essays were originally written in English and subsequently translated to Spanish, at least an English version of this important book is not just desirable, but could be easily achieved.

TIME-SAVERS: BERTRAM BROOKER AND THE POLITICS OF TIME AND MATERIAL CULTURE

ADAM LAUDER

Résumé

Les écrits et les oeuvres en art visuel tardifs de Bertram Brooker (1888-1955) représentent un pont inédit entre le discours du moderniste anglais Wyndham Lewis sur l'espace-temps et la *Toronto School of Communication*. La production multidisciplinaire de cet artiste et publicitaire qui s'étend des années 1930 jusqu'au milieu des années 1950 revisite en effet son intérêt plus ancien pour les concepts bergsoniens de durée et de flux, tel qu'il avait exprimé en des tableaux abstraits et des articles durant les années 1920 pour le magazine *Marketing*. Ses illustrations pour *The Canadian Forum* et son manuscrit non-publié intitulé *The Brave Voice* (ca. 1953-55) révèlent une conscience nouvelle des limites du paradigme bergsonien ainsi qu'une reconnaissance très vive de son potentiel critique face à la modernité aux lendemains du crash boursier de 1929.

Abstract

The late writings and visual art of Bertram Brooker (1888-1955) represent an overlooked bridge between the space-time discourse of British modernist Wyndham Lewis and the *Toronto School of Communication*. The Canadian artist-advertiser's multidisciplinary production of the 1930s through the mid-1950s revisits his earlier thematization of Bergsonian concepts of duration and "flux" in abstract canvases and articles for *Marketing* magazine of the 1920s. Yet his illustrations for *The Canadian Forum* and the unpublished manuscript *The Brave Voices* (ca. 1953-55) reveal a fresh awareness of the limits of the Bergsonian paradigm as well as a deepening recognition of its implications as a critique of modernity following the stock market crash of 1929.

Introduction

The art and advertising of Bertram Brooker (1888-1955) stands at the head of a distinctively Canadian discourse on the "politics of time" and material culture (see Antliff). Even prior to purchasing the Toronto-based *Marketing* magazine in November 1924, Brooker had initiated a critical dialogue with dominant advertising culture in the pages of the leading American trade paper, *Printers' Ink*, that built upon the arguments of Henri Bergson. Drawing on the French philosopher's popular texts "Laughter" and *Creative Evolution*, Brooker pitted the "flux" of Bergson's non-rational conception of temporality as *durée* against the static, spatial bias of American "reason-why" copy and its behaviourist construction of consumer subjectivity (see Surrey, "Making Orders"; Surrey, "Are Statistics"; Spane, "Make Advertising"; Johnston; Luff; Lauder, "It's Alive!"). In retrospect, this dualistic framework can be recognized as having set the stage for Canadian political economist Harold Innis's subsequent "plea for time" in the face of what he viewed as a neo-imperialistic American culture industry in the 1950s. Brooker's innovative advertising writings and cubo-futurist visual art and graphic designs of the 1920s celebrated qualitative "becoming" in a fashion recalling the earlier Bergsonian modernisms of European Futurist, Vorticist, and Rhythmist movements, but adapted to the struggle for Canadian cultural and economic sovereignty (c.f. Brooker, "How American"; see also Dyer, "Why We Buy"; Love, "C.N.R.").

Biography

Brooker was a British-born multimedia modernist whose diverse achievements negotiated avant-garde developments in Europe and the growing influence of the American culture industry from a distinctly Canadian position of marginality. After emigrating with his family to Portage la Prairie, Manitoba in 1905, the future artist-advertiser worked as a timekeeper for the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway prior to opening a cinema with his brother in nearby Neepawa. This experience as a movie house operator likely acted as a catalyst for the scenarios he penned in 1912-13 that were adapted into a series of silent films by the Brooklyn-based Vitagraph Company of America, starring Maurice Costello as the eponymous sleuth Lambert Chase (see Lauder, "It's Alive!" 96, 104n93). Brooker's early participation in film culture likely contributed to his later exploration of time-based forms in his texts and visual art. In parallel with this activity as a screenwriter, Brooker undertook work as a journalist and commercial artist for a variety of prairie papers, eventually becoming Promotion Manager for the *Winnipeg Free Press*. He also wrote a regular humour and traffic column for the latter publication, "Gasograms by Honk," whose free-ranging musings on art and current events anticipated the studied scattershot quality of McLuhan's analyses.

In 1921, Brooker moved to Toronto to work as a regular contributor to the advertising trade paper *Marketing and Business Management*, which he later purchased. In 1923, *Marketing* published Brooker's first monograph, *Subconscious Selling*. This recently rediscovered title applied techniques of "autosuggestion" developed by the French pharmacist Émile Coué—progenitor of the popular mantra "Day by day, in every way, I'm getting better and better" (Brooks 28)—to practical problems in salesmanship (see Lauder, "Bertram Brooker's Practice-based Advertising Theory"). The text is significant, in part, for its adaptation of Bergsonian concepts and vocabulary to its presentation of Couéist psychology for a non-specialist audience. This Bergsonian inflection set the stage for Brooker's full-fledged writings on Bergson for *Marketing* and other journals later in the decade. As editor and publisher of *Marketing* from 1924 until the close of 1927,

This article examines a related but as of yet largely overlooked dimension of the Toronto artist-advertiser's writings and visual art: namely their harnessing of Bergsonian constructions of temporality to critique the institutions and instruments of modernity, particularly the media of communication. Clearing a path for the analyses of space subsequently articulated by Toronto School theorists including Innis and Marshall McLuhan, Brooker's post-1929 graphic designs, visual art, and writings revisit his earlier valorization of flux to explore the limits of media and modernization. Some of the strategies developed by the artist-advertiser to mount this critical project resonate with the earlier experiments of the Canadian-born British artist-author Wyndham Lewis. However, in stark contrast to the ultra-conservative political trajectory Lewis pursued during the same period, the 1930s saw Brooker increasingly seize upon the socialist potential of Bergsonian temporality as a meditation on the plight of those left behind by technological progress amidst the deprivations of the Great Depression. Subsequently, in the 1940s and 1950s, Brooker's writings revisited Bergson's theories, but in a speculative vein that reveals a deepening awareness of the dangers implied by unchecked spatial ambitions.

This article performs the first close reading of specific artifacts of material culture produced by Brooker during the 1930s, notably illustrations published in the socialist magazine *The Canadian Forum*, as well as the late unpublished manuscript, *The Brave Voices* (ca. 1953-55)—a magisterial *summa* of his Bergsonian insights on media and modernity. This assessment of Brooker's meditations on the shifting politics of time and material culture spanning the Depression years through the postwar period will also provide an opportunity to test Gregory Betts's recent characterization of Brooker as a "Canadian Vorticist" (see *Avant-garde* 215-16).

"Service Products" and the Ambivalent Politics of Time-Saving

Brooker explored a Bergsonian "metaphysics of media" (Crocker), experimenting with synesthetic alternatives to established print conventions that also responded to the radio craze that swept Canadian consumers beginning in 1922 (see Weir). Brooker's multimodal media investigations in the pages of *Marketing* identify him as a key precursor of the auditory paradigm enshrined in Toronto School communications theory. In 1927, Brooker was the subject of Canada's first solo exhibition of abstract art—likewise inspired by auditory concerns (see Williams)—sponsored by Group of Seven members Arthur Lismer and Lawren Harris at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto (see Reid).

Brooker's prolific writings for *Marketing* and the American business journal *Printers' Ink* were revised and compiled in two influential volumes issued by McGraw-Hill: *Layout Technique in Advertising* (1929) and *Copy Technique in Advertising* (1930) (see Cavell; Willmott). Following a period of freelance work, Brooker returned to the advertising world in 1930, accepting a position with the prestigious firm of J.J. Gibbons as head of the first media and research department in Canada (Johnston 210). Brooker then moved to MacLaren Advertising in 1934, where he retired as vice-president in the year of his death.

The resoundingly negative response to Brooker's pioneering 1927 exhibition likely encouraged his turn away from abstraction and generally lower public profile of later years. Nonetheless he continued to exhibit and publish throughout the 1930s and 1940s, being awarded with the first Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1937 (then named the Lord Tweedsmuir Award) for his novel *Think of the Earth*. Despite perceptions of diminished radicalism, unexhibited canvases and unpublished manuscripts from Brooker's archives and estate attest to a relentless spirit of experimentation and inquiry. Yet, though a respected member of Toronto's advertising, art, and literary communities, since his death in 1955 the overall trajectory of Brooker's multidisciplinary achievements and broader contributions to Canadian culture remained elusive until recent, revisionist studies.

Electric power, equally available in the farmhouse and the Executive Suite, permits any place to be a centre, and does not require large aggregations. This reverse pattern appeared quite early in electrical 'labour-saving' devices, whether toaster or washing machine or vacuum cleaner. Instead of saving work, these devices permit everybody to do his own work. What the nineteenth century had delegated to servants and housemaids we now do for ourselves. This principle applies in toto in the electric age.

In the above passage from *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan draws attention to the ambivalent legacy of technologies marketed as labour-saving devices; for example, an unintended consequence of products such as the vacuum cleaner is the transformation of leisure-seeking consumers into harried self-service providers (36). Despite embracing James Joyce's participatory dictum, "my consumers, are they not also my producers?" (*The Gutenberg Galaxy* 205), as a model for his own theorization of reader reception as a process of creative "making," McLuhan was markedly less optimistic in his comments on "service products"—technologies intended to replace human labour that, as Jonathan Gershuny observes, paradoxically contributed to a "self-service economy" (81; see also Webster 51). This contradiction instantiates an abiding paradox in Toronto School communication theory, which simultaneously valorizes time as a dialogical counter to the alleged spatial bias of the American culture industries (see Comor; Zhao), but criticizes the effects of time-saving technologies and time-binding media such as radio for contributing to everything from the Great Depression and World War II to the post-war rise of an oppressive service economy. In some ways, these tensions anticipate recent critiques of the creative economy (see Boltanski and Ève Chiapelo), thereby complicating representations of McLuhan in particular as a naïve proselytizer of an exploitive cognitive capitalism.

Brooker's marketing texts and graphic designs articulate a similarly ambivalent discourse on time-based media and time-saving technologies, as both potential instruments of social redemption and "destroyers" of established social patterns. This anticipatory quality of Brooker's *oeuvre* is partly explained by a shared encounter with Bergson (see Cavell; Marchessault, *Marshall McLuhan*; Darroch

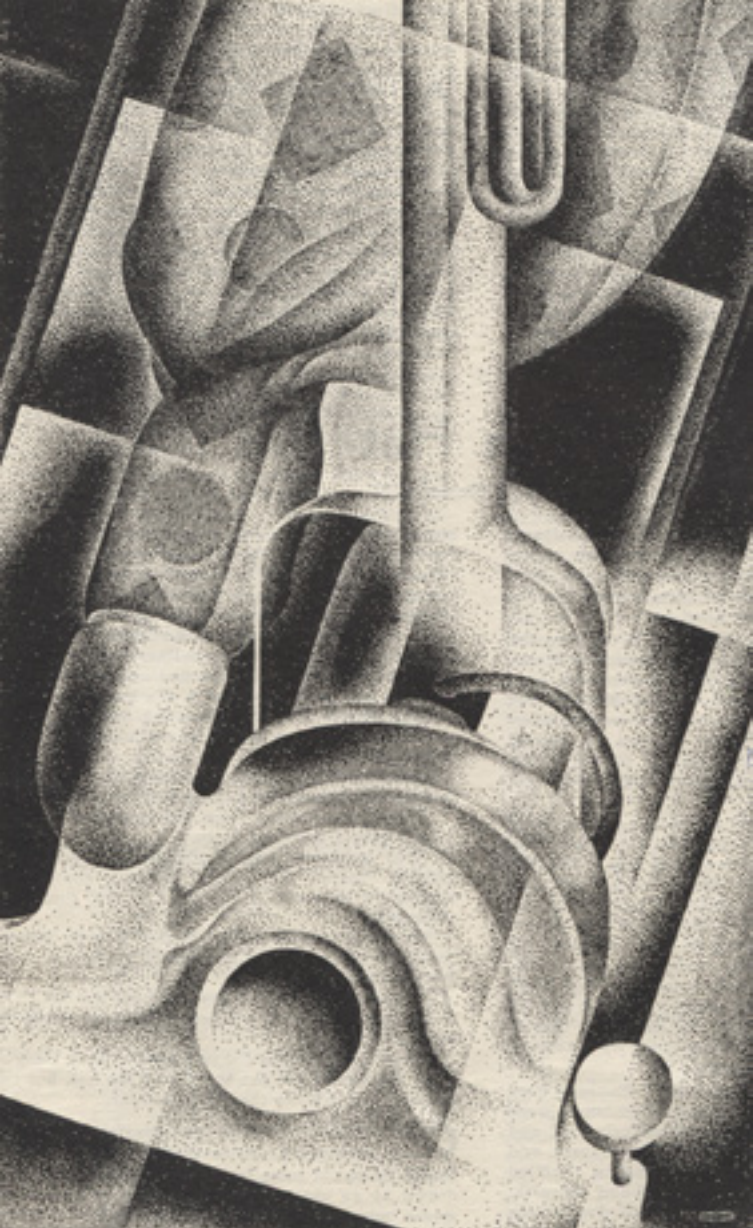
and Marchessault). Clearing a path for McLuhan's commentary on time-savers more than 30 years later, Brooker's analysis of an advertisement for Hoover vacuum cleaners (Fig. 1) in his 1929 McGraw-Hill textbook, *Layout Technique in Advertising*, singles out the iconic labour-saver as bringing into representation a Bergsonian "world made up of 'events,' rather than of objects" (174). Discussing the composition of the Hoover ad, in which a vacuum is encircled by its cord with numeric bullets distributed to suggest a clock face, Brooker comments: "[S]omething has happened to this circle. It is broken, and leads into a series of curves which are extremely active. They are going somewhere and doing something. In other words, these curves are 'events' rather than 'forms'" (176). This analysis follows on the heels of an unlikely commentary on Albert Einstein and Oswald Spengler as the heralds of a new conception of the "world-as-history" (174). Such seemingly tangential excursions into philosophy and physics are commonplace in Brooker's writings, whose astonishing transdisciplinarity anticipates the media experiments of McLuhan and Edward Carpenter's Explorations group of the 1950s (see Darroch and Marchessault).

The optimistic rhetoric of Brooker's Bergsonian reading of the Hoover ad parallels his comments in a March, 1929 piece for *Marketing*, "Visualize Events—Not Things in Advertising Copy." Similarly drawing on the physics of Einstein and employing a Bergsonian vocabulary of "flux," "stream" and "vortex," Brooker defines the successful advertisement as the projection of "the universe as a flux of energy" (161). Unsurprisingly, Brooker's own graphic designs and abstract paintings (the first to be shown in a solo exhibition in Canada) employ a geometric vocabulary that, in the words of Joyce Zemans, communicates qualities of "rhythmic biomorphic energy and flow" redolent of Bergson's *durée* (30). A representative series of ads designed by Brooker for the national daily *The Globe* ran in the fall of 1928. Echoing his gloss on the Hoover ad in *Layout Technique*, Brooker employs stylized clock faces in tandem with geometric motifs to represent the product as "a happening" (Spane, "Visualize Events" 162).

Brooker's exploration of Futurist principles of dynamism, energy, and flux in his writings, graphic designs, and visual art of the 1920s was abruptly cut short by the stock market crash of October, 1929. A meeting in the summer of that year with the Winnipeg artist Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald (1890-1956) is usually cited as the impetus for the subsequent sea change in Brooker's art practice, which saw him switch to a realist style reminiscent of the Precisionism of the American Charles Sheeler. However, it is likely that the pressures affecting Brooker's production were as much economic as aesthetic, the artist-advertiser having returned to full-time employment in 1930 after working for several years as a freelancer.



Fig. 1. The Hoover Company, "Positive Agitation," in *Layout Technique*, 1929.

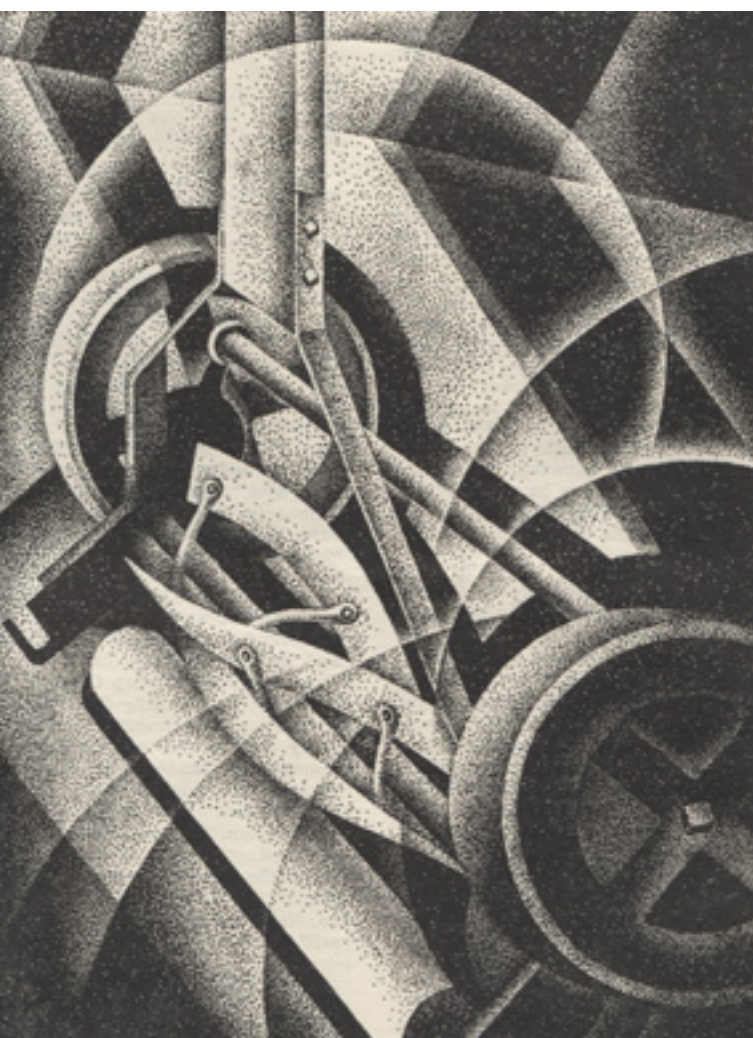


Dennis Reid notes that as the 1930s progressed, Brooker revisited abstraction, but in a more restrained, Cubist style. However, two drawings published in *The Canadian Forum* in July and November 1936 stand out from Brooker's relatively placid production of that turbulent decade: *Vacuum Cleaner* (1936) and *Lawn Mower* (1936) (Figs. 2 & 3)—though formally similar to the contemporaneous canvases *Blue Nude* (1937) and *Entombment* (1937)—are distinguished by their fusion of consumer products and geometric abstraction, a strategy recalling Brooker's advertisements for *The Globe* nearly a decade earlier. Yet these are not advertisements; in their use of unconventional perspective, they match Charles Hill's description of domestic still-life works by Brooker from the same years, such as *Ski Poles* (1936): "The arbitrary perspective projects the objects forward," states Hill, "creating a vertical as well as horizontal progression" (94). However, unlike *Ski Poles*, *Vacuum Cleaner* and *Lawn Mower* do not depict the "typically Canadian subject matter" of winter sport (94). The drawings' inclusion in the pages of the *The Canadian Forum*—which Hill characterizes as the "mouthpiece for the League for Social Reconstruction and the C.C.F. (Commonwealth Cooperative Federation, forerunner of the New Democratic Party)" and a forum for the discussion of Marxist topics—is, on a first reading, all the more puzzling. What are these drawings, seemingly glorifying the products of the very capitalist system habitually criticized by *Forum* contributors, doing rubbing shoulders with articles on Soviet Russia and the Spanish Civil War?

Despite the "surprise" with which Hill greets Brooker's socially committed stance of the 1930s—seeing it as an aberration in a career otherwise devoted to "individual aesthetic expression" (15, 16)—Anna Hudson's dissertation places Brooker squarely within a "socially-conscious modern movement of painting in Canada" ("Art and Social Progress" 33).

Fig. 2. (top) Bertram Brooker, "Vacuum Cleaner," in *The Canadian Forum*, July 1936.

Fig. 3. (bottom) Bertram Brooker, "Lawn Mower," in *The Canadian Forum*, November 1936.



Yet, while firmly locating Brooker within a milieu that included such known socialists as Paraskeva Clark, Hudson has more recently admitted that, "[m]y attempts to read social consciousness into Canadian painting of the 1930s and 1940s ended in frustration: what, after all, is political or propagandistic about works like Bertram Brooker's *Still Life with Bag No. 3* [...]?" ("Time and Image" 56). Where Hudson's recent scholarship proposes to wrest a progressive agenda from Brooker's work by situating his exploration of time and space within a discourse on "scientific humanism" (ibid. 58), I argue that the artist's social consciousness emerges, rather, from his Bergsonian critique of scientific progress and modernization.

If this anti-triumphalist stance is more opaque in visual works such as Brooker's illustrations for *The Canadian Forum*, Gregory Betts has lucidly demonstrated that the artist's coeval works of short fiction draw attention to the social consequences of rapid modernization: "his characters," writes Betts, "are distinctly ill-suited to handle the unique pressures of modernity" ("Introduction" xxx). "Mrs. Hungerford's Milk," published in a 1934 issue of *The Canadian Forum* between articles on Marxism and the state of the labour movement, narrates the plight of farmer Joe Snell, who refuses to bow to the pressures of "keeping up to date" by upgrading his farm equipment (138). This poignant allegory of technological dependency may have been an oblique response to an earlier *Forum* article by the Winnipeg Journalist Leonard Hungerford. In "The Consumer Listens In," Hungerford reported on a meeting of parliament early in the premiership of R.B. Bennett:

I was the consumer and I was listening in. For three hours I listened and watched. I became convinced that I'd pay more for good fruit and for first-class butter, suspicious that I'd pay more for good clothes and good shoes, and was made to entertain the surmise that perhaps I'd have more money with which to pay more. And as for the farmer... I decided to hurry home to ask Alice in Wonderland about the farmer. (93)

Hungerford's adoption of the consumer's perspective as a political lens undoubtedly would have been resonant for Brooker, whose writings on advertising topics were among the first in North America to articulate themes that would later cohere in the "Consumer's Movement" of the 1930s (see Bartels 52, 59). Brooker's advertising texts of the 1920s exhorted the copywriter to adopt a participatory tone that would recast the manipulative valence of the conventional sales pitch as participatory interaction. However, as Betts's gloss on Brooker's short fiction suggests, by the following decade the theme of consumption had assumed a more politically ambivalent cast in the artist's writings. The new truck that Joe Snell's brother urges him to purchase in "Mrs. Hungerford's Milk" is as much a symbol of the protagonist's failure to adapt to the pressures of modernity as a potential agent of "technological revolution" (Betts, "Introduction" xxix). A similarly conflicted picture of the legacies of modernization and of the Bergsonian politics of "creativity" promulgated by his advertising texts of the 1920s emerges from Brooker's poem "The Destroyer," penned on the eve of the Depression, an excerpt of which is reproduced below:

what have I to do with creating

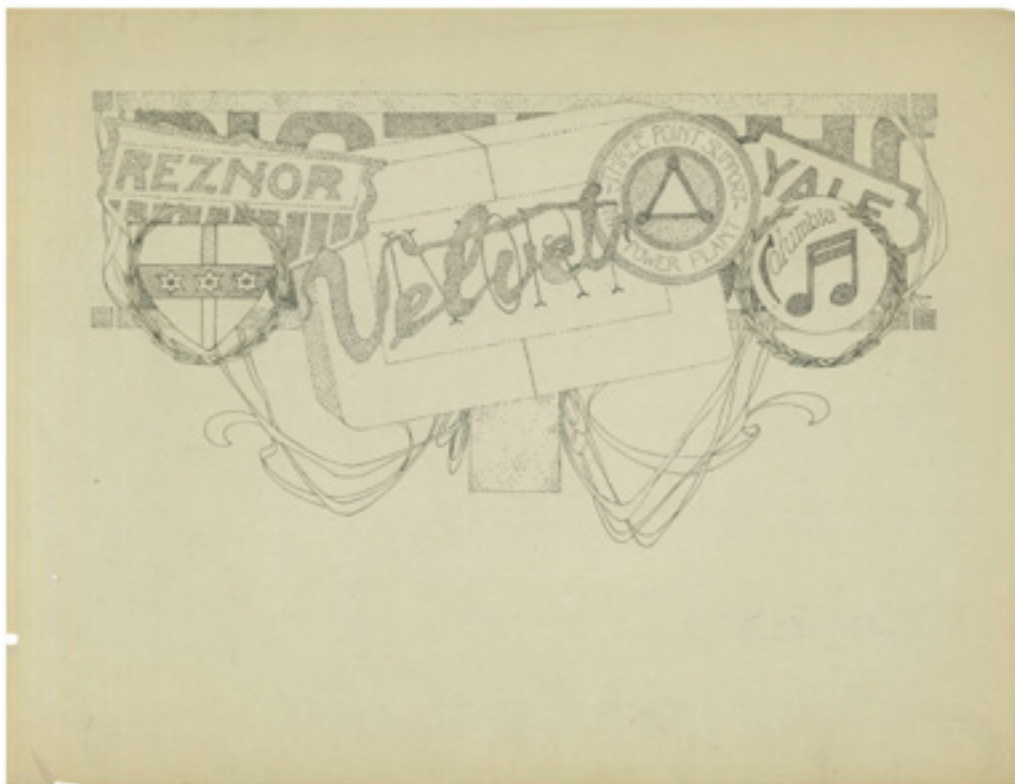
I am come back only to destroy
(qtd. in Betts, *Avant-garde* 120).

When viewed within the transformed perspective on the commodity that emerges from Betts's reading of Brooker's Depression-era short fiction, the artist's illustrations of consumer goods for *The Canadian Forum* assume radically new meanings as critical appropriations of material culture that comment on the unintended social effects of technological progress. I argue that this strategy suggests analogies with the tactics developed earlier by British Vorticist artists.



Fig. 4. (top) Bertram Brooker, *The Romance of Trade Marks*, ca. 1912-1915. Ink on paper, 21.5 x 27.8 cm. Courtesy The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Fig. 5. (bottom) Bertram Brooker, *Reznor*, ca. 1912-1915. Ink on paper, 21.5 x 27.7 cm. Courtesy The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



The bold typography and sensational language of the Vorticist little magazine *Blast* (1914-15) seized upon the potential of advertising to function as what Andrew Wernick (qtd. in Reynolds) terms “rhetorical form” (240). Building on the earlier promotional strategies of Italian Futurists such as F.T. Marinetti, but appropriating the products of British mass culture, *Blast* staged a “visual text” targeting the pretensions of the Royal Academy as well as the social disengagement of foreign avant-gardes (Tuma 403; see also Reynolds 244). Rather than critiquing the institution of advertising *per se*, the Vorticists positioned the artist as “a creature of the media” (Klein 137).

While Wyndham Lewis, the ringmaster of this media circus, would develop into a notorious critic of advertising and other ideological instruments of liberal democracy in the wake of the devastation wrought by World War I (see Rosenquist 61), Tuma underlines that, “*Blast* marks a moment—important to recover now that the situation has changed so—when it did not occur to avant-gardists to pit their work against popular culture” (403). An allied vision of a utopian merger of art and advertising emerges from early drawings by Brooker dating from the same period as *Blast*. Executed during his years in Neepawa, Manitoba (Zemans 18), ink drawings such as *The Romance of Trademarks* (ca. 1912-15) and *Reznor* (ca. 1912-15) (Figs. 4 & 5) harness the artist’s growing command of graphic design—acquired through his work as an illustrator for newspapers in Neepawa, Regina and Winnipeg—to collage commercial trademarks into intricate avant-garde compositions. While Betts dubs the related drawing, *Decadent* (ca. 1912-15), a “visual poem” (*Avant-garde* 132), Brooker’s explorations of advertising as an aesthetic medium are clearly linked to a contemporaneous body of drawings and watercolours likewise housed today in the archives of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, Ontario, including *The Cult of Ugliness*, which Zemans reads as responding to press coverage of the Chicago installation of the 1913 Armory Show (18).

Several writers, preeminently Betts, have suggested a Vorticist influence on Brooker’s multimedia production. Brooker’s direct references to Lewis confirm the Canadian artist’s familiarity with the movement’s chief spokesperson by the time that the latter’s anti-advertising polemic *Time and Western Man* appeared in 1927 (“Blake”; “Prophets Wanted”). An earlier point of contact is not out of the question; *Blast* had Canadian

distribution through Bell & Cockburn, the Toronto agent of publisher John Lane (see Lauder, “It’s Alive!” 102n35). Whether or not *The Romance of Trademarks* and *Reznor* reveal a direct Vorticist influence, they deploy strategies reminiscent of avant-garde little magazines to engage in a proto-Pop discourse on the rapprochement of high and low cultural forms paralleling Vorticist artists’ coeval valorization of material culture as “the real national art” (Tuma 405). Brooker’s *Blast*-like manifesto, “The Decay of Art” (ca. 1912-15), gives literary expression to the integration of material culture and avant-gardism visualized in these drawings in a fashion recalling Vorticism’s strategic inhabitation of popular culture:

Commercialism is developing the minds of thousands who were once serfs, and creating a new race, such as Mr. H.G. Wells anticipates will be the strength and stay of the New Republic. Commercialism is linking art with life, and giving every man an occupation worth living for. (n. pag.)

Brooker’s Vorticist-like embrace of commercial culture in this early text looks forward to McLuhan’s critique of the high-cultural pretensions of the 1951 Massey Report in *Counterblast*: his homage to Lewis’s irreverent fusion of popular and avant-garde forms in *Blast* (see also Stanners).

The optimistic embrace of advertising that characterizes Brooker’s Neepawa drawings has evaporated from his illustrations for *The Canadian Forum* of two decades later. Encountered within the context of the journal’s solemn tone of social criticism, the drawings’ residual qualities of Bergsonian dynamism now read as sarcasm. In a dialectical move recalling Lewis’s harnessing of Bergson’s dualism to stage oppositional dramas that Paul Edwards interprets as allegories of “dynamism [...] blocked by the sheer recalcitrance of matter” (43), Brooker’s *Canadian Forum* illustrations express a socially motivated comic turn. As early as February 1924, Brooker had explored Bergson’s theorization of the comic as the mechanistic complement to the *élan vital* in “Laughter” as a possible resource to advertisers (see Surrey, “Making Orders”). Yet the biting social critique of advertising and the limits of technological progress and its claims of time-saving to which Brooker yokes Bergsonian comedy in his *Canadian Forum* illustrations is completely foreign to the celebration of vitalist temporality that dominated his commercial designs and

marketing texts of the 1920s. If Brooker's appeals to Bergson during the boom years of the 1920s are representative of the "qualitative time" identified by Harry Harootunian as a widespread interwar reaction to the industrial schedules of modernity (479-80), his *Canadian Forum* illustrations explore the critical possibilities of the French philosopher's conceptualization of the comic as embodying the material limits of creative evolution.

The implosion of vitalist temporality visualized by the Bergsonian comedy of Brooker's *Canadian Forum* interventions resembles the winnowing horizon of expectation that confronts characters like Joe Snell in his short fiction of the same period. Much as the new truck that Snell refuses to purchase simultaneously symbolizes the advertising industry's hollow rhetoric of organic temporality and the rewards of modernization denied those unable to afford the price, Brooker's *Vacuum Cleaner* and *Lawn Mower* embody both the limits of progress and advertising's false aura of vitality.

Brooker's questioning of the modernist ideology of progress is even more overt in his 1939 painting *The Recluse* (Fig. 6), in which the defiant gaze of a vagabond confronts the viewer. The drab clothing of the gaunt figure contrasts sharply with the iconography of progress and electric palette of the background: a receding line of telephone poles, whose cruciform outlines conjure the salvational drama of Golgotha, that seems to represent all the benefits of modernity that have been denied the social outcast. It is significant that Brooker has chosen telephone wires—symbols of the same nexus of empire and communications of which his own work in advertising was an increasingly integral component in Canada—to visualize the limits of modernity, thereby implicating this late painting within the same discourse on advertising, modernity, and time as the artist's lesser-known, but no less poignant, illustrations for *The Canadian Forum*.



Fig. 6. Bertram Brooker, *The Recluse*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 61 x 45.7 cm. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Walter Klinkhoff, 1978.3. Photo courtesy MMFA.

The shift in Brooker's perspective on commerce and technology, from the optimism of his early Neepawa drawings to the relative pessimism of *Vacuum Cleaner*, *Lawn Mower*, and *The Recluse*, to some extent parallels the fluctuating trajectory of Lewis's relationship to advertising during the same period. Although Betts downplays the disparity, Rosenquist notes the contradictory character of the pre- and post-war Vorticist, observing that, "the two Lewises are difficult to reconcile" (34). If the early Lewis of *Blast* held out hope that the inspired leadership of the avant-garde artist could stimulate social transformation through a strategic redeployment of advertising and other popular forms, by 1919 the artist-author had begun to reverse this position (see Foshay). In *The Caliph's Design* Lewis chastised the post-war output of fellow modernists, including Picasso, for degenerating into a mere "reflection of fashion" (Rosenquist 43). This theme was subsequently taken up at greater length in *Time and Western Man*, in which the target of the British artist-author's critique of mass culture shifted from fashion to advertising.

Brooker's writings of the 1930s document the Canadian's reception of Lewis's contributions to the post-war debate on high and low culture as a conflict of "time versus space," in which advertising and fashion are identified as symptoms of a Bergsonian "time cult" threatening the classical foundations of Western culture (Rosenquist 54). The plot of Brooker's 1936 potboiler, *The Tangled Miracle*, reprises this Lewisian attitude of media skepticism. As Betts has noted, Brooker's foray into detective fiction explores newspapers' manipulation of a gullible public ("The Destroyer" 138, 159-62). The work of Brooker and Lewis thus traces a common path from what Rosenquist has dubbed a pre-war "high modernism involved in marketing itself" (7) to a more critical stance with respect to the effects of mass media on behaviours and perception.

Despite these affinities, Brooker's writings and visual art of the 1930s reflect an ongoing commitment to the very Bergsonian theory so vehemently repudiated by the later Lewis. Yet Brooker's deployment of Bergsonian tropes of temporality during the 1930s was tempered by a newfound attention to the deeper critical dimensions of the French philosopher's paradigm that was likely sharpened by the Canadian's reading of Lewis. Somewhat paradoxically, the artist's exposure to the hardships of the Depression years encouraged a commitment to social justice, reflected in his contributions to *The Canadian Forum*, that was antithetical to Lewis's growing elitism and flirtation with fascist politics during the same period.

The crypto-socialism of Brooker's art and writings of the 1930s was obscured by the delayed reception of his earlier celebration of flux by his chief critics, socialist politician Frank Underhill and painter Paraskeva Clark. "[T]here is not much sign," wrote Underhill in a scathing review of Brooker's 1936 *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada*, "that Canadian artists have been moved by the phenomenon of a civilization dissolving before their eyes" (27). Clark and Underhill's high-profile debate with Brooker's associate and apologist, sculptor Elizabeth Wyn Wood, in the pages of *The Canadian Forum* and *New Frontier* in 1936-37, looked back to the ideology of progress promoted by Brooker's work of the 1920s. If the pre-Crash glorification of financial boom criticized by Underhill is epitomized by a 1929 ad for *The Globe* designed by Brooker that celebrates the newspaper medium as a clear "dividing line between above-the-average and below-the-

average families" (19), subsequent works such as *Lawn Mower*, *The Recluse* and *Vacuum Cleaner* reveal a newfound social conscience to which both Clark and Underhill were oblivious.

Brooker's Spatial Critique

In counterpoint to the socialist turn communicated by Brooker's illustrations for *The Canadian Forum* and *The Recluse*, the artist-advertiser's writings of the 1930s mount a Bergsonian critique of the spatial "bias" of science and technology similarly directed at modernity's ideology of progress. Bergson's most comprehensive statement of this argument is found in *Creative Evolution*, in which he posits that Western philosophy and science alike substitute a "spatialized time" for the "radical becoming" of *durée* (363, 273). However, a critique of scientific systems of measure and the "homogeneous space" imposed by the Western metaphysical tradition on the qualitative multiplicity of non-rational duration is already central to the thesis of *Time and Free Will* (157, 335), Bergson's doctoral dissertation. For Bergson, clock time and the static "forms" of Platonism alike reduce the embodied experience of time as *durée* to rigid schematizations.

Brooker's personal library—preserved today with his papers at the University of Manitoba—document his close reading of Bergson (see Luff). The philosopher's conceptualization of "flux" and creative evolution as counters to the rationalist tradition fuelled the Canadian artist's experimentation with synesthetic and time-based techniques in his advertising and visual art of the 1920s. "Advertising is alive!" Brooker asserted in a 1926 *Marketing* article, "And being alive its development is in accord with those principles of 'creative evolution' which Bergson has postulated of all living things. It is in flux, it is in a constant state of becoming" ("Are Statistics" 115). Yet while Brooker's Bergsonian commitments prior to the Stock Market Crash of 1929 stemmed from a critique of the quantitative and "visual" character of American advertising, the Depression years stimulated a more sweeping reassessment of the spatializing effects of communications media and scientific method that cleared a path for the subsequent writings of his compatriot Harold Innis on the "monopolies of space" generated by print media and the emergent "information industries" (*The Bias* 128, 83).

Brooker first articulates these themes in the 1931 journal article, “Idolaters of Brevity.” That text attends, in proto-Innisian fashion, to the “physical urgency of space and time” as forces shaping what it presciently describes as a media “environment” (264). Brooker argues that, “with the popularization of the daily press the idolatry of brevity began in earnest” (265). Setting the stage for Innis’s arguments in “The Strategy of Culture” and other essays on newspapers of the 1940s (see Buxton), Brooker posits a direct relationship between the rise of modern journalism and a growing demand for cultural forms characterized by their compressed scale—including short stories, articles, and one-act plays. He concludes that, “[l]iterature in America, seems doomed to be brief” (266). Brooker’s thesis in this article echoes elements of Wyndham Lewis’s critique of popular culture in *Time and Western Man*. In an early chapter of that text, Lewis writes:

Advertisement also implies in a very definite sense a certain attitude to Time. And the attitude proper to it is closely related to the particular time-philosophy [...] that is at once ‘timeless’ in theory, and very much concerned with Time in practice. Both that conscious philosophy, and the instinctive attitude of the advertising mind towards Time, could be described as a Time-for-Time’s-sake belief. For both, Time is the permanent fact. Time for the bergsonian or relativist is fundamentally sensation; that is what Bergson’s durée always conceals beneath its pretensions to metaphysic. It is the glorification of the life-of-the-moment. (11)

The impact of Lewis’s arguments on the pre-McLuhan body of Canadian media theory (see Paul Tiessen) is legible in Innis’s paraphrasing in *The Bias of Communication* of the British artist-author’s assertion later in this same section of *Time and Western Man*: “The world in which Advertisement dwells is a one-day world” (Lewis 12; see also Innis, *The Bias* 79). Brooker makes a similar formulation in “Idolaters of Brevity”: “We, concerned more with the *moment* than any past people, deliberately ignore the past and pride ourselves on our ‘pure reactions’ to the immediate present. And since we live so fast, our reactions and their recording must be brief” (268, emphasis original). Lewis’s speculations on the effects of media on perceptions of space and time were clearly influential on the Canadian artist-advertiser’s

space-time discourse. Yet Brooker was quick to dismiss Lewis’s rejection of the organic philosophy of Bergson and Whitehead, characterizing Lewis as “cloistered and unadventurous” in an essay published in the British journal *The Adelphi*, edited by former Bergsonian and Rhythmist John Middleton Murry (“Prophets Wanted” 193; see also Antliff).

Given his prominence within the advertising profession, it is somewhat surprising to hear Brooker echoing the former Vorticist’s critique of publicity in “Prophets Wanted.” Sounding very much like the Lewis of *Time and Western Man*, Brooker bemoans the “behavioristic rationalization of experience” in “an age accustomed to advertising” (184, 185). Despite these affinities, Brooker ultimately rejects Lewis’s stance for its opposition to “the ‘organic’ philosophy of creative newness,” which he associates with the writings of Murry and Whitehead (192).

Brooker’s thesis in this text anticipates Innis’s subsequent argument in “The Strategy of Culture”—his harried response to the 1951 Massey Report on Canadian cultural policy—that, “[o]ur poets and painters are reduced to the status of sandwich men” by the influence of American advertising (*Changing Concepts* 11). Like Brooker, Lewis directly influenced Innis’s discourse on the space-time effects of media. Yet as Andrew Wernick has noted, Innis’s formulation actually reversed the terms of the Vorticist’s argument (see Wernick 275). While this transformation may have been a consequence of Innis’s notorious habit of composing his later texts through a juxtaposition of loosely re-written quotations (see Marchand 114-15; Marchessault, *Marshall McLuhan*, 95; Watson 352-53), it is more likely evidence of a deliberate practice of reading Lewis against the grain that hearkens to Brooker’s earlier non-conforming dialogue with the former Vorticist. Though echoing aspects of Lewis’s critique of advertising and mass media, Brooker does so in support of a Bergsonian cosmology of flux, whereas Lewis repudiates the anti-rationalist valence of the French philosopher. Innis’s later writings on media embody an allied strategy of appropriating the British artist-author’s observations on the formative impact of advertising on perceptions of space and time to advance a program for reviving “oral” and temporal forms to resist the spatial bias that he attributed to the specter of American cultural imperialism.

In retrospect, we can see Brooker’s writings and visual interventions of the 1930s—particularly those published in *The Canadian Forum*, which vied for space with articles on political economy by Innis and works of short fiction by his wife, Mary Quayle Innis—as anticipating, and possibly acting as an indirect influence on, the Toronto School theorist’s subsequent studies of newspapers and the sensory effects of media in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1920s, Brooker had acted as a member of *The Canadian Forum*’s editorial committee, which also included University of Toronto professor Barker Fairley—an acquaintance of Wyndham Lewis—as well as two of Innis’s colleagues in the Department of Political Economy (see *Canadian Forum*; Mastin 28). During the subsequent period when both Brooker and Innis were active contributors to the magazine, CBC radio pioneer Graham Spry served as editor; Irene Biss, a colleague and confidant of Innis’s at this time and another *Forum* contributor, would later marry Spry (see Watson 191-98). Yet the arguments of Brooker’s unpublished manuscript *The Brave Voices* (ca. 1953-1955) attest to his status as a true contemporary of both later Innis and his self-proclaimed heir, McLuhan. Brooker’s sprawling notes for this unfinished text explore sound- and time-based alternatives to the dominant techno-scientific paradigm of Cold War society in a fashion consistent with the “sound-based paradigm” that Judith Stamps observes in the work of the Toronto School theorists (*Unthinking Modernity* 11).

The Brave Voices

Conceived as a history of “nine words that shaped the world” (its original working title), *The Brave Voices* renewed and intensified the Bergsonian themes that had fuelled Brooker’s advertising writings of the 1920s. However, this engagement with the continental thinker’s philosophy of flux was tempered in the later text by a critical awareness of the limitations of progress forged by the bitter lessons of the Depression and World War II. Brooker’s Bergsonian critique of measure as a determinant of knowledge in a military-industrial complex resonates strongly with Innis and McLuhan’s contemporaneous riposte to what Stamps terms

the “identity-thinking” of Western metaphysics and commodity capitalism (*Unthinking Modernity* 13): the convention of treating objects in the world as one-to-one representations of abstract categories. A passage from a lengthy draft section of *The Brave Voices* titled “Bergson” gives Brooker’s perhaps most explicit formulation of this thematic:

If our race discovered and embraced the belief that while we have sought Truth elsewhere, the pursuit of Truth—scientific knowledge—has led us astray from the reality of energy and spirit, which we cannot measure—if we forsook the mistaken search for some sort of ‘stuff’ of which the world might be made, realizing that there is no ‘stuff,’ no solidity, no atoms or quanta—these being only measurements, not anything that is, but of something that passed—if we could discard all these measurements and limits and gaps and deficiencies and embrace the amazing fact that life is actually LOVE—we should take a new step in evolution. (n. pag.)

Brooker’s argument in this and similar passages from *The Brave Voices* echoes Bergson’s critique of scientific systems of measure as inadequate for describing the “qualitative multiplicity” of subjective experience in *Time and Free Will* (Brooker’s annotations to his personal copy of this text—a 1950s reprint preserved at the University of Manitoba—attest to his careful re-reading of Bergson during the composition of *The Brave Voices*). Like Bergson, Brooker avoids the trap of outright anti-positivism, seeing science instead as embodying a fundamentally practical view of matter, one powerless to grasp the essential flux of reality. “[K]nowledge of reality cannot be arrived at through science,” writes Brooker in a section of *The Brave Voices* titled “Courage”: “The scientific view of the world is not merely a wrong view, it is properly not a *view* at all—it is simply an elaborate collection of diagrams” (n. pag.). Employing a Bergsonian vocabulary of “cuts,” “diagrams,” and “moulds” to describe the rigidities of quantitative frameworks, *The Brave Voices* proposes a *musical* alternative to empirical knowledge that recalls the durational metaphor of “melody” in *Time and Free Will* (125). In contrast to the quantitative multiplicity furnished by the diagrams of geometry, Bergson opposes “the continuous or qualitative multiplicity” of music (105). Brooker deploys a similar alternative in his resurrection of

the classical Greek conception of nature as *Phusis*, which he describes as “the ever-striving upward ascent of everything in nature” (n. pag.). Brooker ascribes specifically musical qualities to *Phusis* in a section of *The Brave Voices* entitled “A Short Section from Chapter on LOVE”:

Music is man’s closest approach to creating something that moves and exalts our feelings as do the creations of Nature. Words cannot express our feelings when we listen to music. The best we can do is to say that it is sad or gay, frivolous or profound. The untranslatable flow of music, the reasons for its charm and its capacity to haunt our minds with melodies, these are as mysterious as the flow and beauty of life itself. [...] The Greeks, as we have seen, gave the name *Phusis* to the deep spring of action which rises continually throughout Nature and works from within upward in an ‘ever-striving ascent.’ (n. pag.)

Phusis serves as a material support for the critique of language that Gregory Betts has recently observed in Brooker’s writings (although Betts downplays the Bergsonian foundations of the artist-advertiser’s speculations in favour of a “mystical” exegesis that *The Brave Voices* explicitly disavows). Much as Bergson critiques language in *Creative Evolution* for substituting “an external thing” for the living reality of duration (159), Brooker outlines his “philosophy of the verb” in a section of *The Brave Voices* titled “Courage,” as promoting a rejuvenation of language: “The verb ‘doing’ is the very essence of our theme. The worn old nouns have deluded us too long. To regenerate mankind, to re-vitalize morals, to set a mark for conduct, we must think in verbs, in terms of action, of day to day doing” (n. pag.). The “oral” qualities of the reconstructed language envisioned by Brooker in this section are embodied in the structural logic of *The Brave Voices* as a whole, which the artist-advertiser explicitly conceived—as he stated in a “Postscript”—as a patchwork of quotations interacting dialogically:

When I was writing fiction I could never create a sense of reality in the characters if I tried to invent dialogue for them, I had to be in a mood of suspension—switching my own voice off, as it were, and simply listening to what the characters would say. With this book the process is the same. As I write I am listening to a thousand voices, ancient and modern, whose words have come to me from distant ages and lands through fifty years of reading. [...] In rewriting for the last time I have done my best to ignore heaps of notes—filed away, to keep my desk clear—and I sit in a sort of suspended state, making myself a receptacle, breathing in what comes uppermost in my ear from the voices of the past. (n. pag.)

The self-conscious dialogism of *The Brave Voices* parallels the “oral” turn of Innis’s later writings, which were penned almost simultaneously. The Toronto School theorist not only explored the non-linear properties of sound as a conceptual counter to the identity-thinking encouraged by conventional print media, but, through his method of composing his texts as a pastiche of quotations, Stamps claims that he “invent[ed] a quasi-oral mode of writing” (*Unthinking Modernity* 90). McLuhan would later observe that the compressed style of later Innis “saves time” (“Introduction” ix). As with Brooker’s critical riposte to the utopian claims of “time-saving” technologies in his illustrations for *The Canadian Forum*, the quasi-theological resonance of McLuhan’s rhetoric of redemption should not be overlooked (see Sterne). While rejecting the ideology of progress typically associated with “service products,” late-Brooker and late-Innis alike seized on the interactive potential of the labour-saving device as a basis for exploring dialogical alternatives to the dominant (quantitative and “spatial”) media paradigm.

The sonic themes Brooker explores in *The Brave Voices* are given visual expression in the contemporaneous canvas *Double Bass* (ca. 1953-54) (Fig. 7), in which volutes of string instruments set in motion a genetic spiral of surrounding abstract elements. The painting’s repeating scroll motif brings into representation Brooker’s Bergsonian description of *Phusis* as the “ever-striving ascent” of melody.

Echoing Bergson’s arguments in *Time and Free Will*, Brooker deploys the qualitative continuity of melody in *The Brave Voices* to critique the homogeneity and linearity of clock time. “Time, indeed,” writes Brooker in a draft chapter titled “Manhood,” “when conceived as duration in the Bergsonian sense, is eternity—not a ticked-off infinity of years ahead of us, but one huge expanded moment in which all that happens is actually *now*” (n. pag., emphasis original). Brooker’s *The Swing of Time* (1954) (Fig. 8), a canvas painted in tandem with his composition of the *The Brave Voices*, resonates with Bergson’s description in *Time and Free Will*, of the oscillations of a clock’s pendulum as “each permeating the other and organizing themselves like the notes of a tune” (105). With its superimposition of diverse instruments employed to measure the passage of time (clock, hourglass, pendulum, sundial), arranged in a spiral composition redolent of the scroll motif structuring *Double Bass* (or the clock face of the earlier Hoover ad), *The Swing of Time* brings into visibility Bergson’s musicalization of clock time in *Time and Free Will*.

Brooker’s appeal to organic temporality and music in *The Brave Voices* and late canvases such as *Double Bass* and *The Swing of Time* suggests analogies with Innis’s contemporaneous “plea for time” in the face of an expansionist American culture industry that he believed to be founded on the spatial bias and geographic ambitions inherent in newsprint. It is probable that Brooker’s Bergsonian critique of conventional print media served as an indirect influence on the Toronto School theorist through such channels as *The Canadian Forum* and the University of Toronto, where Brooker participated in cultural activities beginning in at least 1927, including retrospectives of his work at Hart House in 1931 and 1949. Given the Canadians’ shared commitment to orality and time-based forms, it is ironic that the ostensibly anti-Bergsonian writings of Wyndham Lewis served as a principal source for the later work of both Brooker and Innis.



Fig. 7. (top) Bertram Brooker, *Double Bass*, ca. 1953-54. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm. Courtesy Phillip Gevik.

Fig. 8. (bottom) Bertram Brooker, *Swing of Time*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm. Courtesy the Art Gallery of Windsor.

Conclusion

This largely unrecognized and misunderstood socialist turn in Brooker's production of the 1930s reflects the artist-advertiser's deepening social conscience in the aftermath of the Stock Market Crash of 1929. Brooker developed these themes in following decades, culminating in his drafts of the late, unpublished manuscript *The Brave Voices*. Brooker's critical exploration of space-time perception as an extension of media "bias" during the 1930s through mid-1950s developed in parallel with the later communications work of Innis, whose theories he likely influenced, albeit indirectly. The later thought of Brooker and Innis alike drew on the anti-Bergsonian writings of Lewis, while turning the British artist-author's arguments inside-out to propose a renovation of "oral" and musical forms as a quasi-socialist counter to American cultural hegemony and the "visual" bias of commercial print media.

Echoes of Brooker's Bergson-inspired, sound- and time-based alternative to dominant manifestations of modernism and modernity can be detected in Innis's influential representations of Canada as a polyvocal community located at the resistant "margin" of a monocultural American empire—a motif subsequently transformed by McLuhan into his portrait of Canada as a "counterenvironment" (c.f. "Defrosting Canadian Culture," "Canada: The Borderline Case"). For Brooker, Innis, and McLuhan alike, Bergsonian "multiplicity"—particularly in its sonic and temporal guises (as "melody" and "duration")—suggested strategies for attending to the socially stratifying effects of media and modernization as an ecological awareness of the constitutive role of difference. Brooker's socially conscious adaptation of Bergson's media ontology suggests one source for the non-Marxist, dialectical, and materialist strains that some commentators identify in Innis's writings (c.f. Stamps, "Innis in the Canadian Dialectical Tradition"). If, as Alexander John Watson has

observed, Innis increasingly distanced himself from socialist affiliations and theory as the 1930s progressed, Brooker's media interventions and commentary of the same period draw attention to enduring socialist threads in pre-McLuhan Canadian media theory.

The current inattention to Brooker's later output reflects the persistence of a late-modernist obsession with "innovation" in Canadian art historiography that has overemphasized the artist-advertiser's early (at least within the Canadian context) development of an abstract idiom (see Reid). Shifting focus onto Brooker's post-1929 reflections on the limitations of Bergsonian modernism as a media and social paradigm and parallel exploration of the deeper implications of the French philosopher's critique of "spatial" models as a constructivist thesis thus repositions the artist-advertiser as a forerunner of the Toronto School of Communication and its exploration of sensory bias. Furthermore, recovering Brooker's indirect contributions to the Toronto School contributes toward the ongoing project of documenting the broader cultural context of Canadian media theory, its sources, and legacies (c.f. Cavell; Lamberti). Like the pianist and composer Glenn Gould, Brooker emerges from this interdisciplinary reappraisal as a key participant in a network of discourses and practices focused on the co-shaping of media and sensory perception (see Cavell; Crocker; Théberge). With the notable exception of Wyndham Lewis, this network is distinguished by the particular auditory and temporal bias of its members. If Brooker and Gould come into view in this revisionist history as artists "performing" theory, Innis and McLuhan correlatively appear as "artists" whose medium is theory, or theorists appropriating the creative techniques of the artist, as McLuhan himself came to view Innis (see Marchessault, "McLuhan's Pedagogical Art"; McLuhan, "Introduction").

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Figure 1: The Hoover Company, "Positive Agitation," in *Layout Technique*, 1929.

Figure 2: Bertram Brooker, "Vacuum Cleaner," in *The Canadian Forum*, July 1936.

Figure 3: Bertram Brooker, "Lawn Mower," in *The Canadian Forum*, November 1936.

Figure 4: Bertram Brooker, *The Romance of Trade Marks*, ca. 1912-1915. Ink on paper, 21.5 x 27.8 cm. Courtesy The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Figure 5: Bertram Brooker, *Reznor*, ca. 1912-1915. Ink on paper, 21.5 x 27.7 cm. Courtesy The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Figure 6: Bertram Brooker, *The Recluse*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 61 x 45.7 cm. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Walter Klinkhoff, 1978.3. Photo courtesy MMFA.

Figure 7: Bertram Brooker, *Double Bass*, ca. 1953-54. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm. Courtesy Phillip Gevik.

Figure 8: Bertram Brooker, *Swing of Time*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm. Courtesy the Art Gallery of Windsor.

Notes

¹ Betts likens Brooker's analysis of the cultural effects of newspapers to McLuhan's writings; however, the work of Innis is closer to Brooker in both time and thesis (see "Introduction" xxxi-xxxii).

² Brooker is also known to have been an acquaintance of Helen and Northrop Frye (see Frye and Kemp *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*; Frye and Kemp *A Terrible and Glorious Life with You*).

³ "The book, in its totality, will be seen to coincide with some of the views of Shaftesbury, who wanted to banish the supernatural so that we could regard the universe as a living whole with reverence and affection. [...] Nature is enough!" (Brooker, *The Brave Voices* n. pag.).

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