

Aesthetic(s) Moves

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Abstract

Baz Luhrmann's 2001 Moulin Rouge saw the advent of theatricality in cinema, a performative event reconsidered by a number of films between 2011 and 2012. The controversial 2011 Anonymous, *Roland Emmerich's directorial endeavour* on the authenticity of the Shakespearean plays, is followed by *Tom Hooper's Les Miserable* and *Joe Wright's 2012 Anna Karenina* that literally stages *Leo Tolstoy's canonical literary text*. This paper critically examines what agency and affect mean in performative terms and how those relate to an ethics of the image, which the above films arguably indicate. This gesture in itself is an action that can be asserted as an indication of how formative an event can be in collective or communal senses just as it is for individual, creative autonomy, *akin to George Steiner's grammars of creation*. While this is pertinent to the consciousness of the politics of identity and cultural constitutions, this paper investigates how this consciousness arises and the manner in which it translates to action, an investigation that entails an ethical reading of performativity and its significance in contemporaneity. In view of the communal and individual conscious or unconscious, a principle is ushered in to speak of the relational and participatory nature of the authorial text, the performative event and the audience that will have political and ethical implications in social interactions. The theatrical films can be argued as instances of such a principle that, according to Jacques Rancière in *Mute Speech*, is a principle dialectically conceived. And a dialectical conception of theatre and film indirectly attests to the interactive nature of the dramatic event, the audience and the authorial text that is critically commented in terms of affect and the viability of cultural agency in modernity. Multimodality informs this rethinking of theatre and cinema that also entails a re-conceptualisation of the other arts.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Culture, Freudian Psychoanalysis, Film, Representation/Presentation

One is always tempted by this faith in the idiom: it supposedly says only one thing, properly speaking, and says it only in linking form and meaning too strictly to lend itself to translation. But if the idiom were this, were it what it is thought it must be, it would not be that, but it would lose all strength and would not make a language. It would be deprived of that which in it plays with truth-effects. If the phrase “the truth in painting” has the force of “truth” and in its play opens onto the abyss, then perhaps what is at stake in painting is truth, and in truth what is at stake (that idiom) is the abyss.

Jacques Derrida

The Truth in Painting (Passe-Partout)

My painting does not come from the easel. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting.

Jackson Pollock

Introduction

Artistic “authenticity”, a preoccupation of owners, curators and auctioneers of artworks, prompts the question as to what is meant by the word when it is used to describe art and its performativity, performativity in the social arena and psychic performativity. In short, do we merely attribute cultural value to artworks in utilitarian, aesthetic or creative terms? What about their critical and political potentialities? Can something new emerge from the ingrained cultural conventions and codes that structure aesthetic hermeneutics from time immemorial? Would uncovering the psychological configurations that are profoundly embedded in the cultural unconscious be sufficient even with the intent to add to the critical corpus of aesthetics? Conventionally, an authentic performance means a successful execution of the scripted play in theatre just as any inscriptive performance with the production of a text, visual or verbal, is an authorial accomplishment. This essay addresses what authentic art denotes in the subject of performativity and its ethical and political implications with regard to the shaping of cultural identities. Roland Emmerich’s 2012 *Anonymous*, a testimony to theatricality whereby rhetorical weaponry is demonstrated as equally effective in engaging the politics of that time, can be thought in line with Jacques Rancière’s words on the work of art as a representative of a specific cultural milieu, a premise supported by his comment on a dimension of aesthetic production that requires a certain anonymity, one that focuses not merely on skilful execution but the communality of craftsmanship. Inversely, the film too draws attention to the politics of recognition and the fact that the act of entitling the work of art is itself a celebratory and constitutive gesture to the writer as cultural translator, with the

signature as an authenticating event. Therefore the worth of a name manifests via this performative gesture. The etymology of the word “authenticity” shows its link to verbs such as “authenticate” and “authorise” that not only attests to genesis and creation but also that which is derivative, thus the material processes of production, proof and the structure that would give this evidence. This paper, in turn, gives attention to creators of verbal or visual arts, Immanuel Kant’s creative geniuses, and brings to the fore the creators as subjects arising in and through the created objects, the works of art. These “subjects” are cultural witnesses of specific communities and the objects are cultural testimonials to artistic genius, although such a distinction is qualified here as necessary for clarity. Since cinema is the seventh art that encapsulates the other arts, it is by way of responding to the question of how a photographic image can be objective and invested, natural and cultural, that the ontological and ethical premises of aesthetics can be conceived. And I shall argue that value should be given to any piece of art, visual or otherwise, in terms of its critical and cultural contribution with regard to how it evokes if not provokes.

Instead of examining aesthetics as fields of artistry, this paper investigates what artistry means in visual or verbal communicative terms, reconsidering and responding to what is meant by authentic dramatisations and arguing that an artistic production, rethought as an exceptional aesthetic event, can be rendered as immanence in transcendence not only because we, as *ecce homos*, think of the infinite in finite terms but also works of art as social productions are finite emblems of the infinite, an interactivity that can be psychoanalytically illustrated. And yet I shall have to qualify that it is the infinite that provokes critical thought on cultural productions, a “subjective” consciousness that, if annihilated, may render the object ordinary. In other words, the object can be reaffirmed and reincarnated by the authenticating “subjective” consciousness of criticality. The following films mentioned and their analyses can be argued as instances of a principle that, according to Jacques Rancière in *Mute Speech*, is dialectically conceived. And a dialectical conception of theatre and film attests to the interactive nature of the dramatic event, the audience and the authorial text that is allegorically represented and critically commented in terms of affect, its connection to action and the viability of cultural agency in modernity.

The fact that performativity in narratological study branches off sociologically to another academic area calls socio-narratology, Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Materialism* can indicate something about aesthetics and its value in social interactivity. The first pages of “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory” qualifies that the perception of art as cultural processes has yet to account for social practices that are not defined by positivist notions of reflection and reproduction. These activities, supposedly more complicated than mere reproduction or reflection, are considered contemporarily as mediations and he advises that we ought to examine the significant concept of the base so as to comprehend the actuality of culture and its manifestations. Oddly enough, the economic base, a fundamental presumably giving rise to ideological manifestations, has its structures already founded psychologically, transmitted from generation to generation. And this is historically traceable in how we think and react (mostly in similar ways), the sensory perceptions of the “things”

around us that we call “common sense”. But it is also this very common sense, though important for our everyday living, which makes us common, a secularised commonality that apparently gives even our neighbours the possibility of a fifteen-minute fame. It is a kind of ideological control to keep the ordinary thinking that they rule while the dominant class rules invisibly.

Williams’s notion of the base, when aligned to the title of his book, evidently refers to the materiality of cultural artefacts. The artefact itself then can be culturally conceived as holding and manifesting an aesthetic unconscious that parallels a social unconscious in its affective interaction with viewers. While critical attention has been given to the concepts of aesthetic and artistic values with defining focus on artistic value, I shall draw attention to how Gianni Vattimo’s “The Structure of Artistic Revolution” attests to aesthetic instead of artistic value. He discusses the possibility of a crisis of value in contemporary art in his essay on the centrality of the aesthetic (aesthetic experience, art and other related phenomena) and responds to the impact modern artistic productions has on culture and society by elaborating what this impact implies in social modernity, that one can infer from the analogous relation between art and global technological organisation that they are both predicated on Nietzsche’s will to power as art. Art then becomes another manifestation of *technē* such that any theorisation of the artistic genius, contrary to Kant’s notion of the artistic genius as one tied to nature, ought to acknowledge first the *technē* of contemporary artistic reproduction. Cultural development and progressive technological change are acknowledged as significant to societal improvement but Vattimo’s view that this crisis of value, a consequence of bureaucratic corporatisation and ideological control underpinned by the exchange economy of liberal capitalism and transnationalism devalues cultural artefacts. Technological progress has quickened the circulation of not only goods but also information, media circulations of images, which arguably leads to epistemological and aesthetic commercialisation. His introductory paragraph indicates the function of art: the responsibility of art rests upon his definition of art as life and life as felt experiences. However, sensorial incitation, though vital to artistic creations, can be traumatic. Despite the progressive inferences one can draw from the emphasis the secularised world places on the “avant-garde”, Vattimo reminds us that that which is termed progressive has within it the dissolution of the progressive and one has to rethink the concept of a development that implies faith only in the new. The distinction between the artistic value and aesthetic value is related to what Vattimo calls the subjective functions of the genitive that he opposes to the objective, instrumental ones of science and technology.

Although not disagreeing with Vattimo’s philosophical premise, this writing here gestures to the import of both the subjective and the objective in how the realisation of one is made possible by the other, notwithstanding the fact that technological advancement has its advantages that the Latin root of “apparatus” indicates: the aptly mechanistic dimension of the aesthetic apparatus is also the “preparatory” condition that facilitates any attempt at materialising the ideals. His assertion about the dissolution of the progressive is not unlike Nancy’s concern about an implicit ruin of an ontological opening. And yet how then can we

think of cultural development without a dissolution? I mentioned Jean Luc Nancy's take on Hölderlin's "open" in another essay but I shall reiterate this idea so as to connect his philosophical consideration to Vattimo's concept of the progressive, affirmed because it gives release to critical thought on art and life so that one can re-contextualise the Greek horizo. The following inquiries may reveal something about this opening that pertains to thoughts on artistic authenticity and the difference between the artistic and aesthetics. It is the concreteness of the signifier, as an aural or a visual mark, having and holding the gravitas of hermeneutic polysemy that can fasten the weight of truth. This weight of interpretative palimpsest may have ontological implications when read in line with psychoanalytic thought. But the concern here is whether one can do without the genitivus subjectivus in any thought, especially when it is a creative idea that leads to an aesthetic materialisation. Should we only focus on the objective genitive even if the aim is to achieve an unspoilt opening, i.e. without the violence of appropriations? Derrida's words in the epigraph suggest something about a strict link of form and content with a fixed frame. This propriety can mean only that translation itself is impossible since its possibility depends on a certain semantic flexibility. What about the creativity that underpins the very conception of subjectivity? Examining Vattimo's discussion of the structure of artistic revolutions suggests that the answer may lie with the a-temporal dimension attributed to this structure, an a-historicity as the historical fundamental that encourages the receiving and transmitting of an aesthetic legacy, a faith in another old that has yet be.

Theoretically considered as movement-in-writing, film language is arguably the semiotics that evidently uses both the subjective and objective functions in its multimodal presentation, whether in ornamental settings, temporal shifts, character interactions, narrative perspectives and cinematic angles as well as the film technologies that helped to materialise these aspects, aspects borrowed from the other arts. Film as a work of art is a kind of doing akin to that of an utterance in speech act theory, not only inscribing the constative inherent to the performative and vice versa but also the mimetic (showing) and diegetic (telling) modes of narrative. And, since the image can be considered the zenith of imaginary immediacy, the attraction of which is not just its intractability but its capacity to galvanise thought, I shall work with films to negotiate the opposition between showing and telling, describing or performing, as narrative modes. A reading of the filmic details of Joe Wright's 2013 *Anna Karenina* and Baz Luhrmann's 2013 *The Great Gatsby*, one predominantly mimetic and the other considerably diegetic, will demonstrate an affinity between these narrative modes in an attempt to re-inscribe Vattimo's revolutionary aesthetic structure the basis of which is "aesthetic as a domain of experience and as a dimension of existence that assumes exemplary value as a model for thinking about historicity in general" (c1993, 110). Aesthetics can inform the functions of truth and value in social reality with a critical thinking through this domain of experience. Derrida's writing of the artwork and its truth value suggests something about the process of inception within the aesthetic conception of an image, the ethics of which is making the invisible visible, aptly represented by Wright's *tableau vivants* (an ironic use because of its indication to the contrary) leading to the backstage scenes. This can be said, in a way, to reflect a move not that dissimilar from Kant's reading of the subjective and

the objective, the genesis and derivative of which Victor Hugo's and Tom Hooper's filmic musical *Les Misérables* illustrate. The focus on narrative in this writing is due to the fact that form is essential to holding content whereas the latter's significance evinces as that which fills form. In addition, a critical approach to the "trans-historical" facet of narrative brings to the fore the necessary interplay of form and content, appearance and reality, transcendence and immanence.

Hooper's film, a gain in translation with the highest of the arts, is a testament to Hugo's success in literarily depicting the political upheavals and the sufferings of the underclasses prior to the French Revolution, revolutionary activities instigated by intellectuals from the upper classes. Thus the ethics of the image can be thought of as the making present of that which is absent and the giving to presence an existent. This reworking of the subjective and the objective predicates itself on the argument that the objective genitive is itself a signal to the subjective and suggests that a meta-fictional reading of performativity in narrative, is an intimation of the performativity of narrative, the subject as moved by the object. Kant's third critique is an endeavour to overcome the gap between the subjective and the objective and it testifies to the importance of imagination. One can already detect the process of artistic *technē* involved in imag(in)ing the object in question. His critical thought, according to Hegel, promises an aesthetic synthesis of the subjective and the objective, a resolution of an inherent contradiction with pure subjectivity whereas Hegel's Spirit can be described as a composite of opposed elements. More importantly, the criticality of Kantian philosophy is made obvious by this emphasis on human autonomy, which is somewhat lacking after the advent of post-structuralism, a critical thinking that has within it the potential to unsettle conventions and codes embedded within the cultural unconscious. This retrieval when tied to Kant's exposition of the transcendental ego, arguably metaphorised by Christian Metz's analysis of the all-seeing scope of the cinematic apparatus, renders clarity to human intelligence.

In order to describe this aforementioned identification between the subject and the object, this metanarrative account directs focus to Rancière's citing of Fichte's transcendental I (noting its homonymous relation to "eye") that unifies the subjective and the objective. Visually and narratively depicted by Carraway's remarks and Luhmann's image of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg's bespectacled eyes watching all that happen in New York's Valley of the Ashes, it points to how Luhmann plays with the concept of the spectacle the premise of which is arguably the psychoanalytic emphasis on the gaze. If we are to speak using psychoanalytic terms, then it could be the transcendental imaginary that gives place to this I, which, in turn, reflects the image that manifests Kant's "sensus communis", a communal agreement in terms of taste. Rancière's discussion of a contradictory poetics, one that bears witness to art as a reflection of a specific culture or society as well as a mirror to an autonomous individual creation, is then dependent on a certain identification with an Other, not unlike the Althusserian ideological appellation, because of the social emphasis on the communal. Althusser's ideological take can be considered satirical since this dependency is that of the social Symbolic and his psychoanalytic reading is evident in the sharing of conventions and

codes, the very psychic structures I mentioned earlier. Kant's third critique on its own may not be sufficient an avenue to merge the sensible and the intelligible with the creative genius using her or his imagination to mould something out of that he calls nature, referred to as objective reality in modernity, and leading to a material production of an idea. It has to be psychoanalytically avowed using the link between the Imaginary, a "subjective" psychological mirroring, and the Real, an "objective" immersion, in and through the Symbolic, whether evolutionarily or revolutionarily. It is this psychological subjective-objective relation that hones the creative genius in a *Darstellung* (presenting) that is also *Vorstellung* (representing), an original that presents what is "naturally given".

Despite Derrida's prodigious levelling of the source and its derivative, the artwork and its critical exegesis, issues pertaining to the originality of works of art and their rhetorical exegeses were settled by art critics with theoretical distinction between artistic value that places emphasis on the artist's effort in producing the artwork, her or his contribution as the artist, and aesthetic value that focuses on the sensibilities evoked by the artwork, critically rethought here as "to have" and "to be". Notwithstanding this theoretical settling of a cultural dispute on art and aesthetics, the focus of the essay is on another complex question underscoring this dialectic of genesis and derivative in creation, one pertinent to any agency in cultural translation and its viability as contemporary cinematic art and reflexively grammatical with the "from" of the subjective case and the "of" of the objective. The objective case gains generality in Rene Magritte's apparently non-descript *The Son of Man*, a portrait with onto-theological inferences: the son instrumentalised as the human representative of God, the son of man as the earthly support of heaven and man as that which connects the celestial and concrete realms.

The Stakes of Truth and the Abyss

Derrida's words in the epigraph speaks of the relation between the work of art and the historical, political, social and economic contexts in which it is placed when viewed, a transpontine that gives to the "artiness" of the works of art, the "literariness" of literature or the "theatre-ness" (theatricality) of a theatre production, nouns invariably tied to rhetoric and its criticality. And yet these generic categories gain their resonance and relevance only with the denotations of the verb "stake": "to mark with", "to possess, claim or reserve a share of", "to support", "to separate or close off" "to tether" or "to fasten". While it is crucial to examine the specificities of generic category and comprehend them, comparative endeavours add to the understanding of the genre's "literariness" or "artiness" or "theatre-ness". The aforementioned generic categories comply with Gerard Genette's narratological study of discursive conventions that have yet to significantly include what the cinematic can contribute to performativity in and of narrative, noting that, first and foremost, the story is made possible with the act of narrating. The films mentioned here are plurimedial operations that embody artistic, literary and theatrical narratological features such as communicative acts, tableaux (which have painterly qualities), detailed stage settings and embodied moments transposed from different eras and yet appealing to contemporary viewers; these performative

approaches also imply a social and communicative interactivity, the basis of the Kantian “sensus communis”.

This aspect of performativity makes obvious two levels of interactivity: first, the cinematic framing of the theatrical stage in *Anna Karenina* and its running shots that show the backstage are mise en scenes that both show character interactions on a stage or in a specific setting and indicate the theatrical production process. Second, the cinematic frame, where difference resides, is also the site where structural properties from within intermingles with the viewer’s perceptual ones, giving to the director’s presentation of the representation and the viewer’s perception of a certain presence. Derrida’s four possibilities on artistic production in *The Truth in Painting* signal the semantic potential of the phrase “the truth in painting”: the truth within painting and/or the truth as represented by the painting, again not unlike the Barthesian punctum that gives to the sensible and the studium that prompts the intelligible, grammatically translated as (re)presentation that is in itself “for itself” and “about itself”. Derrida’s discussion of representation, which connects with his notion of reading as writing and reception as production, doubles presentation as representation and representation as presentation: the truth in painting apparently makes itself obvious in a belated manner as the artist or writer becomes conscious of what imaginarily penetrates and what focal properties emerge with the production process after the event, a truth that, according to Rancière, “the Ancients called “grammars”, fundamentals oddly aligned with not living an unexamined life, and “it designates a knowledge of the works of taste, a smattering of history, poetry, eloquence and criticism” (2011, 32) and substantiated by George Steiner’s *Grammars of Creation*, a book recording approximately twenty years of debate on philosophical philosophy at Cambridge. And this consciousness arising from the unconscious of the genius (according to Rancière, the latter is said to be anonymous and I can only read that this is so due to the individual’s awareness of his own production process after the fact) eventually comes to critical fruition with the theorist’s or critic’s interpretation. What is the stake here is then the Lacanian “affect” drawn from the unconscious that drives a person to act. But it is has to be qualified that the critical act of writing, the only production process that works concomitantly, at every stage, with a mindfulness of the criticality involved, has to be pitched at a meta-level so that how Plato’s “visual fire” works can be made obvious.

The truth in painting, in itself an ambiguous phrase, is called into question by Derrida in his preface “Passe Partout” that speaks of Kant’s *parerga* as ornamentations and signals, respectively, what are meant by the objective and the subjective where truth is perceived as *aletheia* (the unveiling of the truth within the image) and *adaequatio* (the image as an adequate copy of reality) that are substitution and simulation. In other words, *aletheia* (presentation) and *adaequatio* (representation) can be explained with the instance of the critique being a substitution for a work of art and the work of art as a simulacrum of reality, allegorically figured by the film, *The Great Gatsby*. When both processes are occurring simultaneously, a displacing effect manifests making any representation a supplement: an unveiling as a depiction, a presentation made possible by a representative, as illustrated by Nick Carraway, the unreliable narrator of *Gatsby*’s tale. His narrative unreliability is due to

the fact that he misrecognises Gatsby by using the latter as a reflection of his own attributes. Thus his narrative positioning can be read as homoerotic with Daisy as the prosthesis to Gatsby.

Carraway, in his extradiegetic observations of the apparently enigmatic newcomer to New York's society, embodies Guy Debord's critique of the spectacular. Gatsby is brought into being by a community that privileges specularity, a mirror of a society where appearance is of the utmost importance. Despite this polarisation of silhouette and substance, a hierarchy of which is challenged with an adjacent manoeuvre, the significance of the former evinces only if it adds intellectually to the latter. The ontological ramification of specularity, which accompanies secularity, is made obvious by Carraway's final words on Gatsby, a lone figure on the deck of the small bay reaching out and attempting to grasp an evasive green light, a symbol of "an incorruptible dream". On one level, this dream is projected upon Daisy whose comment on her daughter reveals quite a bit about what she represents in that society. On another level, this incorruptible dream, "the purely imaginary" of Louis Althusser becomes somewhat adulterated by the genitivus objectivus that drives creation, the Jay Gatsby created by Carraway's nostalgic narrative.

And yet it is also the specularity that makes Carraway turn away from the Buchanans and their society, directly pointing to the vacuity that underpins life in modernity. Though initiated by his psychologist, making the psychoanalytic inference evident, Carraway's endeavour in writing Gatsby, enabled by the genitivus subjectivus, indirectly and symbolically dramatises the interpretative palimpsest at the filmic core. Rancière's comments on Flaubert's book on nothing can be used to describe Luhmann's 2013 directorial production: its spectacular extravagance, reflected by Gatsby's sensational self-fashioning, ironically brings to the fore the spiritual emptiness of the moneyed Buchanans, perceivable in their inflated gestures and their welcome of Carraway to their dazzling abode at the beginning of the film. Therefore it can be asserted that the truth of the image is both something revealed with a critical analysis of the image and something re-presented by the image, its ethics being the act of re-presenting.

Derrida describes the Greek *aletheia* as this revelation and *adaequatio* the transparency that occur only with the temporal rupture within the image, the "now" is also a "then" projected forward as a "soon-to-be", a disjuncture opening part of the cinematic frame so that the directed image psychically draws a response from the audience. Cinematographically made evident by filmic analepsis, this temporal disjuncture is rendered by an inserted frame of Gatsby's and Daisy's reunion culminating with a shot of their romantic consummation five years ago, a consummation that has a lasting effect on his psyche and foreshadows his imminent death. Beneath Carraway's diegetic voiceover is a multimodal artistic event that gives image, thought and critique a renewed impetus.

Retrieving the *Coup D'état* in the *Coup D'envoi* of Art

Using Kant's three critiques to kick start this discussion on aesthetics, what ties together Kant's definition of disinterested artistic enjoyment (universality without concept) and his description of logical judgement (universality with concept) is a structural analogy. Consequentially, that which grounds the analytic of the beautiful is a knot entangled by the coming together of the "with" and the "without" of concept in Kant's approach to universality, a universality arguably supported by the sensible but given a critical momentum by the intelligible, a process expediently encapsulated by the word "impulse" that has synonymous relations with 'thought', "motive", "instinct" and "passion". As long as perception is involved in an interplay between viewer and image, any judgement of taste presupposes cultural and historical specifics adhering to communicative practices and aesthetics. In its capacity to bring the image to its visual edge, art in itself intimates both a disinterested appreciation and an interpretative interest. Carraway, who is at once with and without the actions of the story, recounts the tale of his alter ego, Gatsby, considerably heightening the mediating nature of fictional sequencing. The psychoanalytic overtones, not pronounced in Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel, are made evident by Luhmann's framing and interjecting the filmic narrative with Carraway's psychiatric consultations. It is the Freudian double concepts of transference that indicates something about the aesthetic unconscious: a labyrinthine interiority that Carraway inadvertently gains entrée and emerges a "subject" with a narrative.

What is this aesthetic unconscious? We can only get a glimpse of it through the aesthetic consciousness of works of art that make evident the ways of thinking and living, communal even in their historical and social specifics. In order to understand the relations between society, the individual psyche and cinema, Freud's primary process of transference indicates a literal experience of the object and the secondary that sublimates the experience to the imaginary, psychic activities prompted by emotional stimulations, a psychological understanding analogously comparable to Barthes's semiological conception of the denotative and connotative levels of meaning-making. It is also not coincidental that Freud metaphorically uses a mystic writing pad to explain the psychic functioning of an individual, aptly represented by the word "imprint" here since it is etymologically derivative of the Latin word, *imprimere*, meaning "to impress". In other words, Freud's understanding of our mnemonic capacity is enabled by the analogical use of the Mystic Writing Pad.

This writing machine of two parts, one an inexhaustible receptive surface and the other the underlying mnemonic systems which capture impressions of the excitations, makes the psychic operation conceivable to us. Derrida's use of the adjective "pellicular" in his response to Freud's essay which means "like a thin skin, membrane or a film", highlights the ephemeral quality of essence and also the permeability of our psychic apparatus. The impressions we receive from the perceptual apparatus can be described as grooves known as dark writing appearing on the whitish-grey surface of the waxed slab. The celluloid layer which protects the vulnerable waxed sheet from being damaged or torn by the stylus is also that which shields the waxed area from excitation provoked by external stimuli. Writing

vanishes every time close contact is broken between the layer that receives the written traces and the waxed slab that preserves the permanent traces (legible, we are told, only under a certain light). Although the lifting of the double-layer protection, the celluloid layer and the waxed layer, erases the imprint on the perceptual surface, the excitation experienced is retained as a permanent impression in the underlying mnemonic systems. What is noteworthy is the use of the word “systems” to describe the wax slab that signifies the unconscious. This imprint or impression as a certain psychic impact causes the performativity of narrative, evident in Carraway’s recount of Gatsby’s death the indirect cause of which is the Buchanans, embodiments of superficial New York, reflecting the temporal dimension of cinema as one of the recording arts.

Derrida alludes to Freud’s “A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad” in order to explain why the use of a symbol such as the mystic writing pad does not increase our understanding of writing but in fact makes it more enigmatic. This “script which is never subject to, never exterior and posterior to, the spoken word” is indispensable to clarifying “the meaning of a trace in general” and how conventional writing gains its required sense. Derrida, in his engagement with Freud, gestures to the surplus inherent in writing, a remainder unaccounted by any signifying matrix. That which is repressed so that metaphysics, Western or otherwise, can come into being is something that can be generalised only as “to each its own” just as the very stuff that makes an individual what she or he is hers or his little quirk. Freud intuitively feels this excess and his life’s work was an attempt to situate this intuition in the psychoanalytic realm – this repression whose force is that which propels the image as thought into being, an analysis based on how writing as speech arose as presence. Perhaps this explains why Freud believes that phonetic writing predicated on speech as presence does not have the capacity to recuperate this unknown trait. Read in relation to *The Great Gatsby*, Carraway is not just an observer because he not only serves as the author’s mouthpiece; he presents Gatsby in his representation, a telling that is also a showing. Derrida’s words on the social unconscious can be of use to a psychoanalytic understanding of an individual mental make-up in that when we speak of a trauma. Correlating this to Carraway’s psychological crisis, a problem that has to do with his traumatic experience in New York, one can infer that the film makes an analogous link to what Jacques Lacan calls the infant’s entry into the Symbolic with linguistic acquisition via Carraway, whose trauma incites a re-visit, and the psychiatric treatment can be termed “art after trauma”. That which threatens the individual psyche, the cause of which is the possibility of castration in the Name of the Father, the Symbolic law, has a perlocutionary effect and inversely incites the revolutionary possibility of the oedipal aspect to which Freud bases his four fundamental concepts of unconscious, repetition, transference and drive, the pathbreaking elaborated later. And it is from this knot of reticence within our psychic depths that writing in the conventional sense emerges with the focal use of a frame.

Barbara Johnson’s analysis of Lacan’s and Derrida’s debate on the “destination” of the purloined letter’s circulation is crucial to the psychoanalysis of subject constitution: “Everyone who has held the letter – or even beheld it – including the narrator, has ended up

having the letter addressed to him as its destination. The reader is comprehended by the letter: there is no place from which he can stand back and observe it. Not that the letter's meaning is subjective rather than objective, but that the letter is precisely that which subverts the polarity subjective/objective, that which makes subjectivity into something whose position in a structure is situated by the passage through it of an object" (1996, 98-99). The semantic significance of the letter changes as it attaches itself to the different characters in Poe's story. And the same can be said about Daisy Buchanan's role in Fitzgerald's tale. Johnson's analysis performs this linguistic knot that underpins the law of the frame when she states: "the letter's destination is not its literal addressee, nor even whoever possesses it, but whoever is possessed by it" (1996, 99), both endowing Daisy a different significance in the lives of each film character as well as enabling the film director's narrative manipulation.

Luhmann's film exemplifies a type of adaptive translating that opens semantics to interpretative transformation, materialised by cinematographic technicality, and an extensive branching out enabled by communicative dissemination that analogously corresponds to Freud's cathectic breaching as pathbreaking, a consequence of external stimulation. Johnson recites Lacan's cryptic words at the conclusion of his Seminar on the Purloined Letter in support of her analysis: "The sender," writes Lacan 'receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form. Thus it is that what the "purloined letter", nay, the "letter in sufferance" means is that a letter always arrives at its destination' (SPL, p. 72) ... When Derrida says that a letter can miss its destination and be disseminated, he reads 'destination' as a place that preexists the letter's movement". Derrida's "differentiation of his own point of view from Lacan's enacts the law of the frame" (1996, 98). Derrida's claim "a letter can always not arrive at its destination" refers to the precondition of the sending of the letter that says something about the possibility of a subject reaching her or his projected destiny whereas Lacan focuses on the signifying protection the letter provides the subject: the subjectivity of the cultural actor or social agent is destined by the way she or he is bound to the object. This is made evident in Gatsby's endeavour to court Daisy again, his object of desire, and Carraway's memorious inscription of Gatsby, a mirror support in the former's emotive entanglement with the filmic couple. This involvement also explains his psychological collapse when Gatsby dies and Daisy disappoints.

Cinematically, the hermeneutic palimpsest within the aesthetic unconscious offers new levels of performative interactivity that expands the inclusiveness of conventional written discourse. Film intertextuality undermines the traditional ideas of authorial control and the interpretative processes promoted by systematic encoding. This process is akin to the secondary task of the Kantian parergon that serves to limit the traumatic impact of Gatsby's death. It is the act of narration that stimulates Carraway's memories of this enigmatic figure and aids his psychological recovery. These processes of transference that displace psychic intensity relate to *darstellung* and *vorstellung* in a manner comparable to the metaphorical function of a material sign: the first level of signification is synchronic (context-based) and the second is diachronic (a level that exceeds context). Artistic value in an original work of

art or a reconstruction and its attendant criticisms can be resolved by the fact that they are considered aesthetic translations of the cultural unconscious.

Genieästhetik and its Performativity

Joe Wright's directorial adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* with Tom Stoppard's screenplay, perhaps celebrating Russian Formalism or satirising the author's aversion to the theatre-going Russian elite, foregrounds the performative facet underscoring any conceptual construction. Tolstoy's plot with its provocative conflicts is made to unfold in a dramatic *mise en scene* with the Shakespearean caption: "all the world's a stage", a diegetic mode of simulating the inessential nature of the Russian aristocracy at its decline. Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* depicts a nineteenth-century society where frivolous liaisons are tolerated only if the protagonists abide by its social conventions, another thematic treatment of the spectacular. Anna's fateful trajectory from a dutiful wife of an important, middle-aged reformer to a scorned mistress of a dashing and carefree cavalry man is a theme that Tolstoy used to examine a society governed by social and gender hierarchies. Anna is punished socially not because she has a lover and bears an illegitimate child; she is ostracised because she refuses to play by the rules of the dominant class, Marx's "ruling ideas". In modernity, the "ruling ideas" are that of the bourgeoisie and if Wright's version appears to be superficial, perhaps it is a subtle critique of the very insubstantiality of modern life.

Tolstoy's literary contribution is still relevant due to its themes of family, love and duty but what is surprising is the manner in which Wright translates the Russian literary classic that had film critics speaking of his "artistic hubris" and the insubstantiality of his version, evident in his focus on setting, movement and technicality. On the surface, Wright's film is a postmodern critique of a world that privileges appearance but this film presentation of Tolstoy's classic raises awareness of the tensions between pure formality and practical reality when referring to the activity of taste within a society; his film arguably indicates the contradiction found in idealised formalisation that underlines the illocutionary as well as the contingent and embodied interactive processes of aesthetic or social performance.

Aligned with its titular source whereby the art of foreshadowing intertwines the many thematic strands, Wright's *Anna Karenina* has a scene of a toy model that when held in tension with another of an actual train at the train station where Anna meets her brother, Oblonsky, not only indicates a disjunction between reality and appearance; it also signifies an impending disaster. A gruesome train accident occurs at that point that acts as a harbinger to the fate of the female protagonist. Wright inserts frames of a moving train at various points of the film, sometimes visually or aurally overlapping with the present frame, a leitmotif used to convey the depth of her attraction to Vronsky and his superficial reciprocation, which would lead to an existential crisis. It is as if Wright, like Tolstoy, wants to give an insight into how cruel society can be when the female protagonist flouts its rules and conventions. Both Tolstoy's and Wright's *Anna Karenina* demonstrate the tensions between internal and external lives, between private passions and public adherence of social conventions, depicted by Karenin's insistence that Anna maintains the status quo even after her adulterous

admission. One can accuse Karenin for preferring falsity but Wright's adaptation gives the emotionally austere Karenin a different reading. Jude Law as Karenin portrays convincingly a man who knows the society in which he lives, perhaps explaining Wright's use of the theatrical motif. In fact, Wright's version sets most of the film's conflictual relations on stage, the climactic scene being Vronsky's horse race accident and Anna's subsequent outburst.

Can Wright's version be a postmodern critique of Kant's pure subjectivity or a contemporary validation of critical reflection? Or is it proposing that an aesthetic arising via the subjective genitive, in view of the mirror motif, requires both an echo (an indication of the relationship between the signified and the signifier) and a comprehension of what is real in the "authentic"? Whereas Tolstoy's literary ingenuity lies with using the horses' obstacle course as a symbol of the romantic difficulties the lovers face, Wright, by setting the horse race on a stage, figures a tragic premonition. In light of these stylistic parallels, we can infer from Tolstoy's version that Anna is in love with an illusion and that comes across with Wright's use of the stage and the downward shot on Anna's lifted countenance when she proclaims her happiness, a *jouissance* that manifests as a choreographed dance of fleeting touches, ephemeral because it thrills. It is only by critical extension (one that does not thrill because it relies on internal invigoration) that Wright's use of intertwined arms and bodies is read as filmic embodiment of cinematography, a movement-in-writing that gives to film its capacity to make meaning in and through its aesthetic moves. Last but not least, a word on this conceptual understanding that impacts culture and aesthetics: it is this understanding that accentuates the "synergy" driving the transcendental ego, the material production of which is necessary for an authorial authentication, which is considered an emergence from a cultural unconscious with what the Ancients called "the grammars" of critical discourse.

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