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Literature, Aesthetics and History:

Forum of Cultural Exchange between
China and the Netherlands

文学·美学·历史
中荷文化交流论坛文集

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Exoticism or the Translation of Cultural Difference

Ernst van Alphen

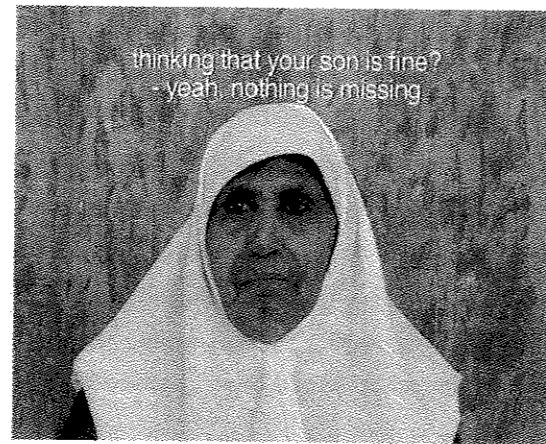
The "critical dimension of literature and art" is still the most common criteria of aesthetic judgment in Western contemporary aesthetic thought. With the rise of modernist aesthetics, in one way or another, a literary text or art work is supposed to embody a critical point of view. This critical dimension should, however, not be articulated explicitly, because than it becomes propaganda. It should be demonstrated in an indirect way; shown, acted out, but not said. The implied criticism is not necessarily political, social, or existential. It can also be self-referential by the embodiment of a critique on the literary or artistic tradition. But it is the critical position of a work which serves as a touchstone for critics to differentiate between good and bad works, important and insignificant works.

Although this critical dimension is still highly common as criteria of judgement, at the same time it has become impossible or contested as criteria of judgement in an era that is defined by cultural postcolonialism. According to French art critic Bourriaud, the comparatist ideology underlying postcolonialism, especially when it manifests itself as multiculturalism, is paving the way for a complete atomization of references and criteria of aesthetic judgment.^① For, present critical discourse on art and literature is based on the desire for recognition of cultural difference and of the other as other. This complicates critical judgment radically. In the words of Bourriaud:

^① Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, New York: Lukas & Steinberg, 2009.

Facing: the Local and the Global, or Intimacy Across Divisions

Mieke Bal



Nothing is Missing, video still, Massaouda

Introduction

One of the most tenacious instances of universalism — the belief in the universality of something — is motherhood, doubtlessly the most intimate, hence, local of relationships. The current state of the allegedly globalized world makes this universalism both urgently necessary and deeply problematic. This ambivalence is the topic of my contribution to this meeting. My proposal for a new perspective in literary and art studies is inspired by this ambivalence. I focus on the concept of facing in order to develop a vision of the arts that foregrounds both the global and the local, the universal and the intimate.

First of all, it is necessary to shed the problematic binary between

universalism and relativism that has so long dominated our thinking about intercultural issues. Thinking of motherhood as a universal usefully counters problematic relativizing. For example, relativizing the horror of losing a child by alleging that, in some severely underprivileged countries, losing a child to illness, hunger, or violence occurs so frequently that it is “normal,” would be a painful condescendence and a scandalous acceptance of the unacceptable. In the globalized world, the opposite move is necessary. Now that we are bound to those underprivileged situations by knowledge and economic complicity, assuming the universality of motherhood — through a “strategic universalism” — is a political necessity. Only through that assumption does the scandal of the inequities that globalization both promotes and lays bare become apparent.^①

At the same time and even for the same reasons, the opposite move is just as indispensable. One of the most severe challenges to the idea, or hope, of any universality is the division produced all over the world between people whose everyday life and its intimacy are safely assured and those who lead an existence of “infra-humanity.”^② Among other consequences, this division also produced an unsettling tension when the two parts of our supposedly unified world collided in Western countries as a result of migration. Migration causes the coexistence in one social environment of people who can afford to live permanently in a place and those who cannot — those who are driven to displacement.

This situation deeply impinges on (conceptions and practices of) motherhood. It interrupts that relationship and brutally destroys the relation of intimacy, since the proximity or distancing between mother and child is no longer a matter of choice. The combination of motherhood and migration, then, is a good place to reflect on the confrontation between globalization and intimacy

^① With “strategic universalism” I mean a universalist treatment, analysis, and understanding of issues, which does not necessarily entail a belief in the universality of these issues.

^② The term comes from Colombian artist Doris Salcedo. Salcedo’s Unilever Commission *Shibboleth* at the Tate Modern in London consisted of a long, deep, and elaborate crack in the floor of the Turbine Hall. The catalogue explains the artist’s attempt to put the global division between people down literally. The term “infra-humanity” must be understood in that context. See *Shibboleth, Exhibition catalogue* (London: Tate, 2007).

against the backdrop of a non-oppositional binary of singularity and universality. The relationship between the singular and the general — to use a more abstract binary that encompasses both universalism-singularity and globalization—intimacy—also holds for my own analyses. It has consequences for the relationship between my video-making (or, taking the word video graphy literally, video-writing) and my academic writing.

An additional introductory caution is called for here. Although one of my video installations is central to my argument, this is not a traditional case study but an exploration, through one particular “case” of the dynamic complementarity between media. One goal is to make the mothers staged in this installation, full participants in what can only be a multi-voiced discussion. Another goal is to develop a methodology suitable for the object of study. ①

In terms of the methodological innovation this panel is devoted to, rather than generalizing on the basis of a singular case, I am constantly going back and forth between one special view and another. This is nothing new. In terms of the logic of reasoning, this movement is neither deductive nor inductive but what the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, with an idiosyncratic term, called “abductive”. This method has been defined as follows: “In general abduction is considered as that type of inference which leads to hypothetical explanations for observed facts. In this sense it is the opposite of deduction.” Abduction goes from consequence to possible cause. As Van der Lubbe and Van Zoest write, this type of logic is “diagnostic.” ②

Deduction, in contrast, reasons from cause to consequence and is thus prognostic. Although abduction is itself not new at all, it makes innovation possible. According to Peirce, abduction is the way through which new ideas

① Making videos is an attempt to respond creatively to the constant actuality of the topics of the contemporary. By definition, the contemporary causes the belatedness of publications. This will always make it impossible to limit our research to libraries. In addition to this temporal argument, videos, while of course not full accounts either, preserve something of the voice of the subjects they stage.

② Jan van der Lubbe and Aart van Zoest, “Subtypes of Inference and Their Relevance for Artificial Intelligence,” in *Semiotics Around the World: Synthesis in Diversity*, eds. Irmengard Rauch and Gerald F. Carr (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997), p. 805; p. 806.

become possible. It has the singular as its starting point and makes creative leaps. It thrives on uncertainty and speculation, but its origin in observable fact remains primary. I consider abduction the most suitable form of reasoning in the face of globalization and the need to know what intimacy can mean for people at the other end of the economic division. ①

This abductive approach to what appear to be case studies has been an increasingly stimulating guideline in my recent work. Over the past six years I have explored this tension through several video works on migration. Most of these are based on the performativity of intimacy with migrants; they are concerned with situations of displacement (*Lost in Space*) and show migrants struggling to achieve some level of integration (*A Thousand and One Days*; *A Clean Job*) or suffering from the economic consequences of globalization (*Colony*). The tension between intimacy and the consequences of globalization is enacted most explicitly in a video installation made between 2006 and 2008, with a supplement in 2010. Through a discussion of this installation I seek to grasp intimacy on terms that allow for the strategic use of universalism (“motherhood”) as well as for the foregrounding of differences (“migration”). ②



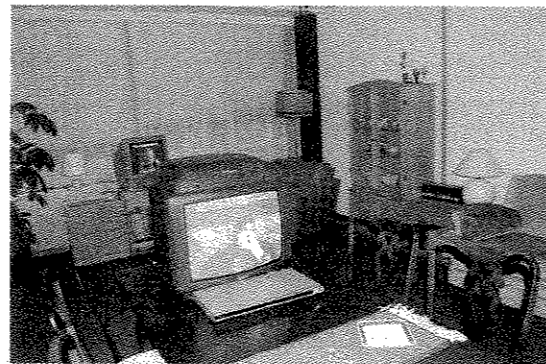
Installation Johannesburg, South Africa

① For an overview of the term “abduction” and the sources in Peirce’s oeuvre, see Frankfurt, *Peirce’s Notion of Abduction*.

② For a complete list or for stills and synopses of these works, see <http://www.miekebal.org>.

The Project

The installation titled *Nothing is Missing* consists of a variable number of audiovisual units that play DVDs of about thirty minutes in which a mother talks about a child who has left in migration. Imagine a gallery looking like a generic living room, where visiting is like a social call. The image is a portrait, a bust only, of a woman speaking to someone else. Apart from a short introductory sequence that sets up the situation, the videos consist of unedited single shots. Sometimes, we hear the voice of the interlocutor; in other cases, we hear no one other than the woman speaking. Every once in a while, one of them falls silent, as if she were listening to the others. The installation itself enacts the tension between global and intimate, since the domestic ambiance is created within a space that is public, although often not a space where such installations are expected. I have installed it in museums and galleries, academic settings, and office spaces — in a corner office at the Department of Justice in The Hague, for example. ^①



Installation The Hague, Ministry of Justice

^① *Nothing is Missing*, multiple-channel video installation. DVD, furniture, and mixed media, 4 to 15 units, 28 to 35 minutes, looped. Currently the installation is part of a large solo exhibition *Towards the Other* in the Peter and Paul Fortress, Saint Petersburg, Russia, planned for October 2011 and will be part of a group show, *Care Crisis*, in Prague, November 2011.

This installation probes the contradiction between usages of universalism as escapist exclusion and as a strategy to enhance differences. My provisional answer to the contradiction between these two elements is to replace any thematic universalism with a performative one, and an essential universalism with a strategic dynamic variant that is constantly challenged by singularities. Between aesthetic and academic work, a certain activism through the promotion of reflection insense-based experience is also present. The question that the video work raises, and that the present paper attempts to answer, is how it is possible to make intimate contact across the many divisions that separate people in different cultural, that is, linguistic, economic, and familial situations, and why it matters to do so. The goal is not to reach a universal ground for communication but instead to establish *the universal as the ground on which differences can performatively be brought into dialogue*.

The women are from various countries from which people have migrated since the onset of modern-day globalization. Still living in their home countries, they all saw a child leave to Western Europe or to the United States. My project is not an attempt to understand migration as such, nor to defend its necessity for the people engaging in it, which I take for granted. Rather, if we are to understand the possibility of a universal such as motherhood through insight into the intimate local relationships against the backdrop of a globalized world, we must first of all realize the enormity of the consequences involved and the changes in the souls of individuals taking this drastic step. We must wonder, that is, why people decide they must leave behind their affective ties, relatives, friends, and habits—in short, everything that constitutes their intimate everyday lives. These motivations, which are too complex to allow any generalizations, tend to include economic necessity but are rarely limited to that overarching issue. While my purpose is not to fully understand those complex motivations, I bring them to the fore here, considering that they are relevant in being among the ambivalences toward the migration of their child to which the mothers testify. My primary goal is to explore the possibility of an “aesthetic understanding” that, by means of its own intimacy across the gaps of globalization, can engage the political.

These terms refer to a simple understanding of the two domains. Foraesthetics I return to the 18th-century philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who developed the notion of binding through the senses, and, incidentally, also considered aesthetics a useful approach to the political. Since this conception presumes neither formal beauty nor a separate artistic sphere, it seems a useful starting point to develop the idea of an aesthetic understanding that straddles the distinction between academic and artistic exploration. Moreover, the proximity presupposed by the sense-based experience also establishes intimacy between the subject and the object of the aesthetic moment. Hence, this approach furthers my attempt to develop a methodology that approximates the "object".^①

For the political I rely on the distinctions between politics and the political currently advanced by, among others, Jacques Rancière^② and Chantal Mouffe. In a clear and concise book about this distinction, the latter defines the two terms as follows:

by "the political" I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by "politics" I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political.^③

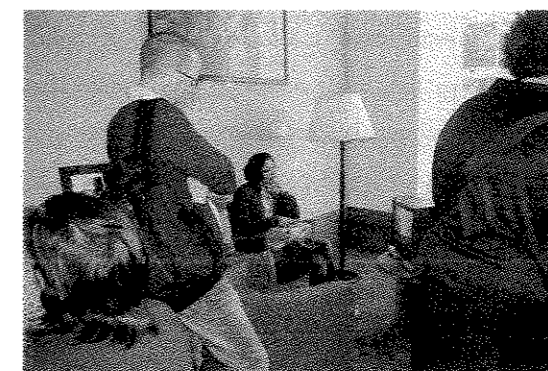
In this distinction, politics is the organization that settles conflict; the political is where conflict "happens." Thanks to the political, social life is possible. Politics, however, constantly attempts to dampen the political. Rancière uses different terms for the same distinction. In his work, Mouffe's "politics" corresponds to "the police," and her "political" is identical to his "politics." Since I find Mouffe's terms clearer, I will proceed to use those.

^① Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Aesthetica* (Hildesheim, Germany: Olms, 1970 [1750]).

^② Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

^③ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 9.

According to Mouffe's view, everyday life, including the intimacy that inhabits it, pertains to the political. It is there that intimacy must be grasped. In my view, a first step to contemplating these questions is a triple act of facing. Facing sums up the aesthetic and political principle of my video work *Nothing is Missing*, which is an attempt to reflect on severance and its consequences. Through this installation, I attempt to shift two common universal definitions of humanity: the notion of an individual autonomy of a vulgarized Cartesian cogito and that of a subjecting passivity derived from the principle of Bishop Berkeley's "to be is to be perceived". The former slogan has done damage in ruling out the participation of the body and the emotions in rational thought. The latter, recognizable in the Lacanian as well as in certain Bakhtinian traditions, has sometimes over-extended a sense of passivity and coerciveness into a denial of political agency and, hence, responsibility. Reflecting on facing helps me to rethink these notions. I try to shift these views in favor of an intercultural aesthetic based on a performance of contact. In order to elaborate such an alternative I have focused this installation on the bond between speech and face as the site of the performance of a universal. Here, I use speech not just in terms of "giving voice," but also and more importantly in terms of listening and answering, all in their multiple meanings; furthermore, I would like to turn the face, the classical "window of the soul", into an "interface."



Installation Aarhus, Danmark

Facing Philosophy

Facing constitutes three acts at once. Literally, facing is the act of looking someone else in the face. It is also coming to terms with something that is difficult to live down by looking it in the face rather than denying or repressing it. Thirdly, it is making contact, placing the emphasis on the second person, and acknowledging the necessity of that contact simply in order to sustain life. Instead of "to be is to be perceived" and "I think, therefore I am", facing proposes, "I face (you); hence, we are." For this reason, facing is my proposal for a performance of contact across divisions, one that avoids the traps of universalist exclusion and relativist condescendence.

For this purpose, I first make the move from the two universalist views of humanity — Descartes' and Berkeley's — to a merger that replaces both; from *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived) to *cogitote ergo sumus* (I know you therefore we are). There is no clearer — almost programmatic — demonstration of Berkeley's view than Samuel Beckett's only film, called *Film*. As Anthony Uhlmann has pointed out, Berkeley's formula, as elaborated to exhaustion by Beckett, is agony-inducing. As it happens, this identity without agency already shows linguistically in the mere fact that the formula defines being in non-personal forms. As a result, Uhlmann argues, Beckett's film explores the agonizing feelings that result from a consciousness of being through being perceived.^① *Film* explores the relationship of disharmony between the three types of images Deleuze distinguishes in *Cinema 1*. The perception-image is the result of the viewer's selection from the visible world of those images that might be useful for her. The action-image presents possibilities to act upon what is seen. In-between, the affection-image compels the viewer — who is affected by the perception — to consider action. Stuck in (negative) affect when he is the

^① Anthony Uhlmann, "Image and Intuition in Beckett's *Film*," *SubStance* 33, no. 2 (2004): 90–106.

object of someone else's perception, the protagonist of *Film*, played by the aging and decidedly not comical Buster Keaton, flees from the notion of perceivedness in the film's "action images."^①

The sets of eyes that watch this man and that he eliminates, show us the violence of the "perception image," whereas the ending, the close-up of the "affection image," translates affect into pure horror. This story can offer a useful counterpoint for the installation *Nothing is Missing*. There, these three types of images culminate in the mitigated close-up of the face that shuttles between perception image and affection image without the leap to action. Here, neither horror as a form of revolt, nor passive perceivedness as a handing over of human agency, but a rigorously affirmed second-personhood is the reply to this pessimistic view. The "perceivedness" that the predominance of the close-up foregrounds, does not lead to either rejection or agony, but instead to an empowering performativity. This, then, is my reply to Berkeley's pessimistic view of vision as violence.

Now, Descartes. The notion that Descartes is the bad guy of Enlightenment rationalism seems to reduce him in the same way as he was seen to be reducing human existence. According to French thinker Jean-Joseph Goux, the stake of the cogito is not primarily the link between thinking and being, nor even the exclusive emphasis on reason and the excision of the body, but the tautological grammatical use of the first person: I think, [therefore] I am. The point is the possibility to describe human existence outside of the need to use the second person.^②

The popularity of his formula has done more harm than good to Western thought, especially in its exclusions, its excising of not only emotions, but also the dependency of human life on others from human existence. I call it an autistic version of humanity, and deny it the universality it has come to claim. Yet, the dependency on others is so obvious and absolute that it may well have

^① Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1986).

^② Jean-Joseph Goux, *Oedipe philosophe* (Paris: Aubier, 1990).

been its very inevitability that informed the desire to erase it in the first place. From the baby's mother to social caretakers to linguistic second persons, this dependency has been articulated clearly in psychoanalysis, sociology, and linguistics, respectively: so much so, in fact, that being a second person seems more "natural" a definition of being human than anything else. Second-personhood, I contend, may well be the only and most important universal of human existence, while its repression underlies other universalist definitions. ①

This means that we cannot exist without others — in the eye of the other as in the eye of the storm (Berkeley, Beckett), as much as in sustenance of others (the ethical imperative to which Descartes, according to the vulgarized cogito, refuses to owe his existence). That is where I would start any attempt to confront universality as the ground where globalization meets — allows, enables, or precludes — intimacy. I do this not to pursue the beating of the Cartesian dead horse, but, on the contrary, to keep in mind the productivity of returning with "critical intimacy" to moments of the past, such as the dawn of rationalism in the seventeenth century. ②

In this I am joining a growing group of scholars exploring the history of thought and developing alternative ways of thinking humanity, many influenced by Deleuze, his Spinoza, his Leibniz, and his Bergson — to name the names that underlie my thoughts here. ③

An increasing number of scholars are studying the relevance of Descartes's

① I have been stimulated to think in terms of second-personhood by Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Epistemology and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1991) and *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Location* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995). Louise Anthony, "Human Nature" and its Role in Feminist Theory, develops a universalist definition of humanity from a feminist perspective in order to avoid the universal relativist trap.

② "Critical intimacy" is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's productive term in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

③ My argument here is based on the ideas put forth by Bergson in *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960 [1889]); *Creative Evolution*, trans. A. Mitchell (Landham, MD: University Press of America, 1983 [1907]); and *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1896]). Deleuze has devoted a book-length study to Bergson, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

contemporary Baruch Spinoza for an alternative stream of thought between early and late rationalism. The line Spinoza — Bergson — Deleuze has led to extremely important and productive revisionings of the image, perception, and feeling. Some of these new ideas lie at the heart of the "migratory aesthetics" of my installation — an aesthetics of geographical mobility beyond the nation-state and its linguistic uniformity. Philosophers Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd wrote a useful book that unpacks those ideas in Spinoza's writing that can be employed for contemporary social thought. ①

Gatens and Lloyd's book does three things at once that are relevant for my project, furthering the activity of "migratory aesthetics" and deploying the performative face in that context. Firstly, they develop an intercultural relational ethics. To this end, they invoke the relevance of Spinoza's work for a reasoned position in relation to aboriginal Australians' claim to the land that was taken from them by European settlers. These claimants are not migrants since they stayed put while their land was taken away from underneath them, but their claims are based on a culturally specific conception of subjecthood and ownership that makes an excellent case for the collective and historical responsibility the authors put forward with the help of Spinoza. This responsibility is key to any possible universality. It is a relation to the past that we have to face today.

That this intercultural ethics should be based on a 17th-century writer who never met such claimants — although he was definitely a migratory subject — makes, secondly, a case for a historiography that I have termed "preposterous." This conception of history is focused on the relevance of present issues for a revisioning of the past. In alignment with intercultural relationality, we could call it inter-temporal. ②

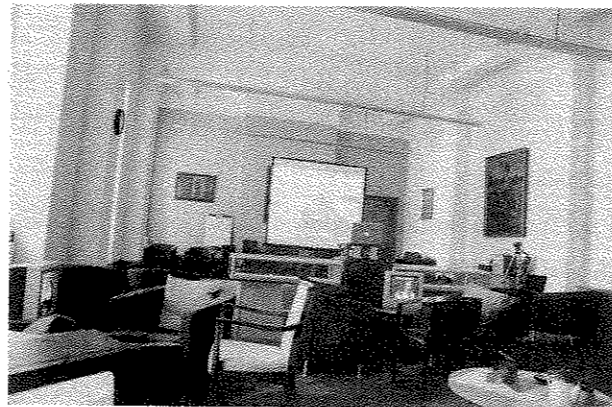
Thirdly, the authors make their case on the basis of the integration, an actual

① Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

② Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

merging, of Spinoza's ontological, ethical, and political writings — three philosophical disciplines traditionally considered separately. This, of course, exemplifies interdisciplinarity. In order to transform it from a fashionable buzzword into an intellectually responsible and specific notion, interdisciplinarity could be modeled on inter-facing in the sense I am developing here: as a universalist practice.

Against this background — my search for an alternative to masochistic passivity and autism as a ground for the possibility of a performative universal — the face, with all the potential this concept-image possesses, seemed an excellent place to start. But to deploy the face for this purpose requires one more negative act: the elimination of an oppressive sentimentalist humanism that has appropriated the face for universalist claims in a threefold way — as the window of the soul, as the key to identity translated into individuality, and as the site of policing. With this move I also seek to suspend any tendency to sentimentalizing interpretations of *Nothing is Missing*.



Installation University College, London

Ideologies of the Face

The abuses of the face that individualism underpins are, in turn, articulated by means of a form of thought that confuses origin with articulation,

and runs on a historicism as simplistically linear as it is obsessive. Common origin is a primary ideology of universalism. This involves motherhood: all human beings are born from a mother (even if this universal is no longer true). Creation stories from around the world tend to worry about the beginning of humanity in terms of the non-humanity that precedes it. Psychoanalysis primarily projects on the maternal face the beginning of the child's aesthetic relationality. Both discourses of psychoanalysis and, as I will demonstrate shortly, aesthetics show their hand in these searches for beginnings. Both searches for origins are predicated on individualism, anchored as they are in the mythical structure of evolution as ongoing separation, splitting, and specification.

Here, I take issue with an individualistic conception of beginnings through an alternative view that I will draw from literary theory. A few years after his pathbreaking book *Orientalism*, the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said wrote a book on the novels of the Western canon, entitled *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. In this book he demonstrated that the opening of a literary work programs the entire text that follows, from its content and its style to its poignancy and aesthetic. It is the thesis of *Nothing is Missing* that this is true for cultural-political reality as well. Origin is a forward-projecting illusion. Therefore, in this installation I wished to explore a different sense of beginning — not in motherhood, but in migration. The primary question is why people decide to leave behind their lives as they know them and project their lives forward into the unknown. With this focus, I aim to invert the latent evolutionism in the search for beginnings, and, in the same sweep, the focus on children and babies inherent to that strange contradiction of individualistic universalist theories of the subject.

Today, with authorities displaying high anxiety over the invisibility of the Islamic veiled face, we cannot overestimate the importance of the ideology of the face for the construction of contemporary socio-political divides. To briefly show the workings of this ideology I look to an art-historical publication that earned its stripes in its own field: a study on the portrait, the artistic genre par excellence where individualism is the *conditio sine qua non* of its very existence.

Confusing, like so many others do, origin with articulation in his study of the portrait — the genre of the face — art historian Richard Brilliant explains the genre with reference to babies:

The dynamic nature of portraits and the “occasionality” that anchors their imagery in life seem ultimately to depend on the primary experience of the infant in arms. The child, gazing up at its mother, imprints her vitally important image so firmly on its mind that soon enough she can be recognized almost instantaneously and without conscious thought.^①

Like psychoanalysis, art history here grounds one of its primary genres in a fantasmatic projection of what babies see, do, and desire. Both disciplines can and must be challenged for their universalism.^②

The shift operates through the self-evident importance attributed to documentary realism, a second unquestioned value in Western humanist culture that has been elevated to a universal status and that has also been inscribed in the face. Identity pictures as a form of policing demonstrate the bond between these two sides of the ideology of the face. The point of the portrait is the belief in the real existence of the person depicted, the “vital relationship between the portrait and its object of representation.”^③ The portraits that compose *Nothing is Missing* challenge these joint assumptions of individualism and realism and their claim to generalized validity.

The women in this work are, of course, “real,” as real as you and me, and individual — as different from you and me as the world’s divides have programmed. At first sight, they have also been documented as such. At the same time, however, the installation enables them to speak “together” from within acultural-political position that makes them absolutely distinct and

^① Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 9.

^② “Occasionality” refers to the reality depicted; in the case of the portrait, it refers to the sitter. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

^③ Brilliant 1991, 8.

absolutely connected at once. This is the meaning of the silences that suggests they are listening to one another, even if they never actually met.

As for the documentary nature of their images, again, this is both obvious and obviously false, since the situation of speech is framed as both hyper-personal and utterly staged. I filmed the migrants’ mothers talking about their motivation to support or try to withhold their children who wished to leave and about their own grief to see them go. The mothers talk about this crucial moment in their past to a person close to them, often someone whose absence in their life was caused by the child’s departure — a grandchild, a daughter-in-law, or the children themselves. This is a first take on the universal performance of contact I want to propose, against the more exclusionist universalities. In this performance, I contend, intimacy plays itself out against the odds of globalization-informed separation.

The act and mode of filming itself is implicated in this theoretical move. It is, in one sense, perfectly and perhaps excessively documentary. I staged the women, asked their interlocutors to take place behind the camera, set the shot, turned the camera on, and left the scene. This method is hyperbolically documentary. To underline this aspect I refrained from editing the shots. I will return to the resulting slow, unsmooth, and personal talk that results.

Aesthetically, the women are filmed in consistent close-up, as portraits — the other side of the face of Brilliant’s babies. The relentlessly permanent image of their faces is meant to force viewers to look these women in the face and listen to what they have to say, in a language that is foreign, using expressions that seem strange, but in a discourse to which we can relate *affectively*. This is a second form of the performance of contact. Another assumption of Brilliant’s argument concerns the nature of identity. In his view, identity is based on the baby and is enabled by seeing the mother’s face; in this way, the ontogenetic perspective is constantly mapped on the phylogenetic one, in which development is the matrix and old equals primitive. This baby-basis is challenged most explicitly by the simple fact that the figures speaking here are the mothers, the other side of that face gazing up at them; they now become the holders of the inter-face. The face as inter-face is an occasion

for an exchange that, affect-based as it may be, is fundamental in opening up the discourse of the face to the world.

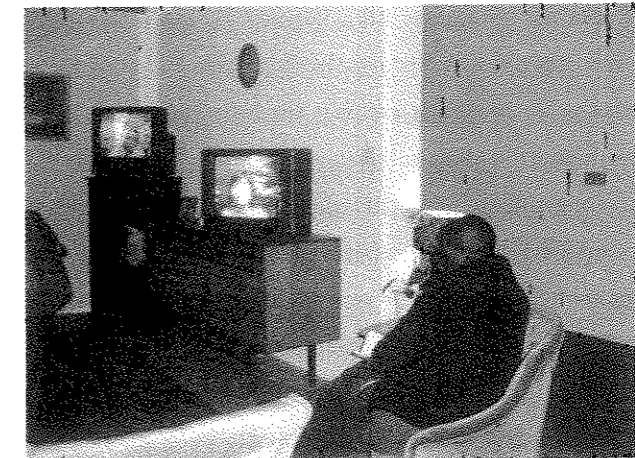
Crucially, for Brilliant, identity emerges not only out of appearance and naming but also out of distinction. Moreover, the recognition of appearance triggers interaction and expression. Typically for the cogito tradition, the two are practically the same:

Visual communication between mother and child is effected face-to-face and, when those faces are smiling, everybody is happy, or appears to be. For most of us, the human face is not only the most important key to identification based on appearance, it is also the primary field of expressive action. ①

The assumed link between these two sentences equates communication with identification and expression. This equation is grounded in the double sense of identification — as and with — that underlies the universalist paradox and to which my installation attempts to consider an alternative. I call that alternative “interfacing”.

The socio-cultural version of this political ambiguity is most clearly noticeable in the dilemma of “speaking for” and the patronizing it implies, versus “speaking with” as face-to-face interaction. The self-sufficient rationalism of the cogito tradition is thus in collusion not only with a philosophical denial of second personhood but also with a subsequent denial of what the face, rather than expression, can do. In order to move from an expressionism to a performativity of the face that, I contend, writes a program for a new, tenable universality, I deduce three uses of the preposition “inter-” from Gatens and Lloyd’s take on Spinozism that can be mobilized in a helpful way. But in order to prevent an over-hasty, overoptimistic mystification, each “inter-” works across a constitutive gap.

① Brilliant 1991, 10, emphasis added.



Installation Frankfurt University

Intercultural Ethics: Relationality across Gaps

Inter-cultural relationality, in its inscribed mobility of subjectivity, posits the face as an interlocutor whose discourse is not predictably similar to that of the viewer. These women speak to “us,” across a gap, as they speak to their own relatives, again across a gap. The first gap is that of culture, if we continue to view cultures as entities instead of processes. In such a conception, intercultural contact is possible on the basis of the acknowledgment of the gap that separates and distinguishes them. The sometimes over-extended emphasis on difference in postcolonial thought is a symptom of that gap. The second gap is caused by “the cultural” conceived as moments and processes of tension, conflict, and negotiation. ①

To highlight this dynamic, including the gap, I have chosen to invite the mothers to choose intimates as the interlocutors. The people to whom the women tell their stories are close to them, yet distanced by the gap that was caused by themigration of the loved one. Tunisian Massaouda’s daughter-in-law, for

① Johannes Fabian, *Anthropology with an Attitude: Critical Essays* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

example, who was not chosen by her, is reaching out to the mother across an unbridgeable gap produced by history. In Romanian Elena's case, even the son himself struggles to overcome the gap that sits between him and his mother, with whom he talks during the short summer period when he visits her.

There are yet other gaps in play. As I have suggested, the two simultaneous situations of speech—between the mothers and their relatives and between themothers and the viewer—doubly mark second-personhood, but across a gap. The strong sense of intimacy emanating from the direct address of the mother to her closely familiar interlocutor at first excludes the viewer. Only once one makes the effort and gives the time to enter the interaction can the viewer earn a sense of participation. When this happens — and, due to the recognizability of the discourse, it does — the experience is exhilarating and, I contend, unique in public events such as art exhibitions. ①

The third gap opens in the making, due to the theoretical and artistic alternative to artistic authority of a “willful abandon of mastery,” which underlies the filming in my own absence. There is necessarily a gap between intention and artwork. The gaps as entrances into sensations that are “borrowed” in a sense, grounded in someone else's body, open the door to the inter-face. Gaps, in other words, are the key to a universality that rejects a romantic utopianism in favor of a difficult, hard-won but indispensable inter-facing. Gaps, not links, are also the key to intermediality. As my installation attempts to suggest, the two go hand in hand.

There is another discourse to be addressed here, in the wake of the humanism à la Brilliant and the self-enclosure of vulgarized Cartesianism. I am referring to the discourse of intention, predominant in the humanities. I have frequently argued against the relevance and tenability of that discourse, most extensively in 2002. The theoretical and artistic alternative of a “willful abandon of mastery” I have discussed there underlies the filming in my own absence that

① The notion of “giving time” is a reference to Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

I practiced in the videos for this installation.

Uhlmann points this out through Beckett, and the latter uses that same noun, gap: there is necessarily, not coincidentally, a gap between intention and artwork. Beckett wrote this in a rare joyful passage, where he describes the sense of accomplishment he felt precisely because of his failure to do what he had intended:

I felt it really was something. Not quite in the way intended, but as a sheer beauty, power and strangeness of image ... In other words ... from having been troubled by a certain failure to communicate fully by purely visual means the basic intention, I now begin to feel that this is important and that the images obtained probably gain in force what they lose as ideograms. ①

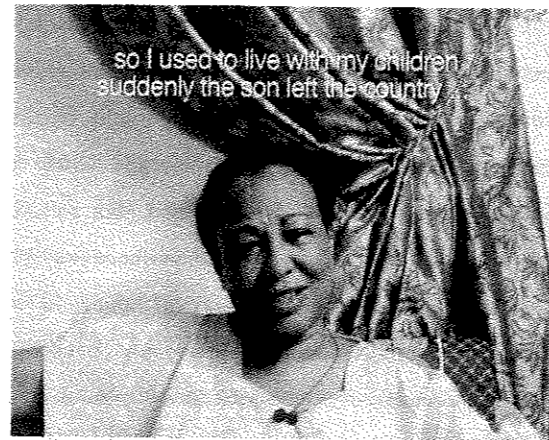
On a profound level of interdiscursivity, this statement engages the question of intention as medium-specific, binding it to images and, hence, bringing the discussion of intention within the domain of art history, where the relevance of intention is usually not discussed but taken for granted. For someone like Beckett, who was a writer before all, this serendipitous experience was crucial. Uhlmann concludes his essay with the following summary of what, in the wake of the affiliation he establishes between Berkeley, Bergson, and Beckett, the image does to intention. I quote this formulation because it succinctly sums up why the image is productively incompatible with intentionalism — an incompatibility that, I argue, is most useful for a migratory aesthetics of the face. He writes:

What Film in part offers is the exploration of a medium that draws its power — the power to produce sensations — through gaps. Yet, images

① Beckett writes to Alan Schneider here, in Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider, *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, ed. Maurice Harmon, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), as quoted in Anthony Uhlmann, “Image and Intuition in Beckett's Film,” *SubStance* 33, no. 2 (2004): 101–2. For more background on Beckett's Film, see Samuel Beckett, *Film: Complete Scenario, Illustrations, Production Shots* (New York: Grove, 1969).

provide sparks that leap from one side to the next, like messages across synapses, thereby allowing the formation of a unity among difference: intuition and sensation, intuition and the idea, intention and reception, philosophy and literature. ①

Significantly and paradoxically, Uhlmann uses the discourse of medium-specificity here to make a point about the merging of domains and the discourse of embodiment — sensations — to posit gaps. The gaps as entrance into sensations are grounded in someone else's body, opening the door to the interface. Gaps, in other words, are the key to a migratory aesthetics that binds globalization to a transformed intimacy.



Video Still, Alham; Khartoom, Sudan

Pre-posterous Time

This concept of the gap lays the ground, in turn, for the second partner in the exploration of “inter-”, namely inter-temporal thinking, which comes with

① Anthony Uhlmann, “Image and Intuition in Beckett’s “Film,” *SubStance* 33, no. 2 (2004): 103.

the preposterous foregrounding of the present as starting point. These women carry the history of the severance from their beloved child. They state their acceptance of that separation as a fact of the present. Moreover, the concept of video installation positions the co-presence of the mothers with the viewer visiting the installation. Here lies one function of the acoustic gaps, the silences in the films. When they do not speak, it seems as if it is the viewer's turn to speak back to the mothers, who are now just looking the viewer in the face.

The inter-temporality also plays out in the belatedness of the viewer's engagement. To understand the need for this engagement in its inevitable belatedness, two distinct steps need to be taken. The first makes the move from individual to social, the second from past to present. At the same time, the social nature of inter-subjectivity holds the performative promise of the improvement of the social fabric that the imaginary enactment of identification will help to build. The images themselves fulfill a function in this inter-temporality. They do this through the exclusive deployment of the close-up as affection-image. Here, Spinoza's writing on affect becomes relevant. As Gatens and Lloyd recall,

... the complex interactions of imagination and affect [yield] this common space of intersubjectivity, and the processes of imitation and identification between minds which make the fabric of social life. ①

Aesthetic work may be eminently suitable to double-bind the women to a social world whose fabric allows their experience to be voiced. Instead of being caught in a double-bind that forces them into silence, they can be relieved of carrying their burden too solitarily. This is where the affection-image, which Deleuze theorized as emblematically situated in the close-up, comes in with its typical temporality. Close-ups subvert linear time. They endure and thus

① Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 40.

inscribe the present into the image. Between narrative images and close-ups, then, a particular kind of intermediality emerges: one that stages a struggle between fast narrative and stillness. Here, the type of inter-temporality that is at stake takes the present of viewing as its starting point.

Italian philosopher Paola Marrati points to the crucial function of the affection-image as the closest to both the materiality of the image and that of subjectivity. She writes: "Between a perception that is in certain ways troubling, and an action still hesitant, affection emerges."

The affection-image binds a perception that has already taken place but leaves a trace to the future of possible action. This is why the affection-image remains closest to the present while providing it with the temporal density needed to make the inter-face possible. ^①

Gatens and Lloyd recall that Spinoza's conception of affect is explicit in its inter-temporality. They write:

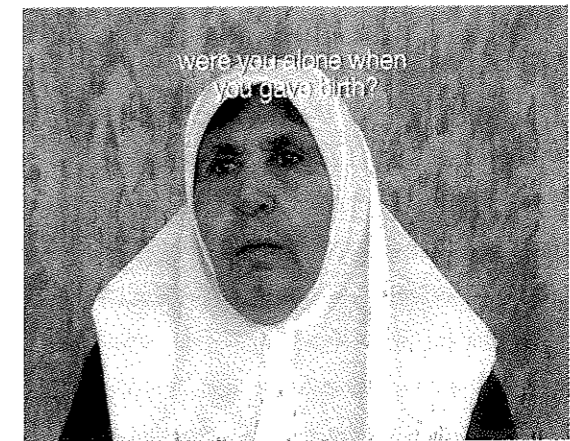
The awareness of actual bodily modification — the awareness of things as present — is fundamental to the affects; and this is what makes the definition of affect overlap with that of imagination. All this gives special priority to the present. ^②

The resulting images are far from the documentary realism so dear to Western culture. They possess a temporal density that is inhabited by the past and the future, while affect (and especially the affect produced by the close-up) remains an event in the present—an event of, to use a typical Spinozan-Deleuzian term, becoming. This is not an event in the punctual sense, but a slice of process during which external events slow down or even remain out of sight. Becoming concerns the presence of the past. If we take this presence to the realm of the social, we can no

^① Paola Marrati, *Gilles Deleuze: Cinéma et philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 2003), 48.

^② Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 52.

longer deny responsibility for the injustices of the past, even if we cannot be blamed for it. Without that responsibility, the use of the vexed pronoun "we" — "the full deceptiveness of the false cultural 'we'" — itself becomes disingenuous, even unethical. Gatens and Lloyd's "Spinozistic responsibility," then, is derived from the philosopher's concept of self as social, and consists of projecting presently felt responsibilities "back into a past which itself becomes determinate only from the perspective of what lies in the future of that past—in our present." Taking seriously the "temporal dimensions of human consciousness" includes endorsing the "multiple forming and reforming of identities over time and within the deliverances of memory and imagination at any one time." (81) This pre-posterous responsibility based on memory and imagination makes selfhood not only stable but also instable. (82) This instability is a form of empowerment, of agency within a collectivity-based individual consciousness. In Deleuze's work, this becomes the key concept of becoming.



Video Still, Massaouda, Remada, Tunisia

Facing Restraint

Becoming also defines our activities as scholars in the humanities. Hence, finally, inter-disciplinary thought is needed. This allows us to make the

connection, in the present and across the cultural divide, between a number of discourses and activities routinely either treated separately or unwarrantedly merged. It may be somewhat surprising that, in the course of this project, I became more cautious with the self-evident value of any form of inter-disciplinarity. I have been a fervent proponent of inter-disciplinarity for a long time (from 1988 to 2002). From the women in *Nothing is Missing* I have learned what I had only intuited earlier: sometimes, invoking a disciplinary framework can do more damage than good to the insights we try to develop through it.

There are many issues here, but I will focus on a single one. The most obvious case seems also the most problematic one: the place of psychoanalysis, the darling approach of some and a changeling for others. I was faced with the need to hold back in this respect. Obviously, I do not dismiss the theory. But, lest I universalize Western conceptions, in some cases it was necessary to give fullweight to the mothers' enacted desire to refrain from self-expression.

First, the situation of filming, in the intimacy-with-gaps and in the absence of the filmmaker, could easily become a trap to solicit more self-expression than the women would want to endorse. The intimacy of the speech situation has a globalized world of viewing as its backdrop, after all. But it is at moments of restraint, when they seem most reluctant to express themselves (in the Western sense of that phrase), that the performativity of their self-presentation is most acutely able to pierce through the conventional surface. These are the moments of the performative inter-face. I will describe one instance where the "performance of reticence," so to speak, in fact yielded the most beautiful insight into the way intimacy and globalization intersect.

The woman I filmed first, Tunisian Massaouda, offers a striking instance of a culturally specific reluctance that cautions us against psychologizing or psychoanalyzing her. Not coincidentally, this occurs at the most strongly performative moment of the video. This is the situation: as I have been able to see first-hand, Massaouda and her newly acquired daughter-in-law, Ilhem Ben-Ali Mehdi, get along famously. But in their relationship remains the stubborn

gap that immigration policies have dug. When Ilhem married Massaouda's youngest son, the mother was not allowed to attend the wedding: the authorities had denied her a visa. Not only had Massaouda not been granted the opportunity to witness who Ilhem was, but, even more obviously, she had not been able to fulfill her motherly role as her culture prescribes it, which is to help her son choose his bride. At some point, Ilhem ends up asking with some insistence what Massaouda had thought of her when she first saw her, after the fact and, hence, in a situation of powerlessness.

First, Massaouda does not answer, which makes Ilhem anxious enough to insist, and to ask: did you find me ugly, plain? The older woman looks away at this point. The young woman insists. We will never know what Massaouda "really" felt, but the power that the filming bestows on her, as if in compensation for her earlier disempowerment, is to either withhold or give her approval. She does the latter, but only after some teasing. When I saw the tape and understood the speech, I was convinced Ilhem would normally never have been allowed to ask this question and thus vent her anxiety — an intuition she later confirmed. As for the mother, she was given and then exercised the power she had been denied, and she used it to first mark the gap, then to help her somewhat insecure daughter-in-law.

"We" — global, mostly Western viewers of adult age — can easily relate to this moment. Such insecurity, for example, can easily be construed as universal. This interaction between Massaouda and Ilhem is thoroughly social, performative, but also bound to the medium of video — to the making of the film. Yet, it does not allow, say, a universalizing psychoanalytic interpretation. Neither did I as maker have any influence on this occurrence — it was not my "intention." Nor can we construe it as a realistic, documentary moment in the sense of Brilliant's Gadamerian analysis of portraiture, where an "occasion" was recorded — it would never have happened outside of the situation of video-making. Thus, it contradicts and suspends the universalizing myths of realism and documentary "truth." There would never have been an external reality the film could have documented. It is a moment, in other words, that was staged,

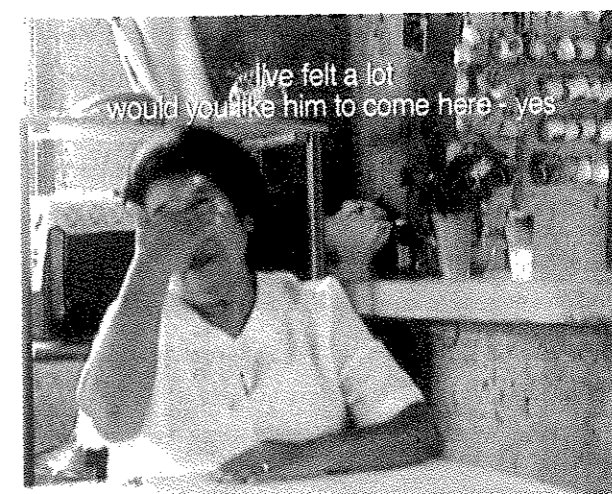
yet real, thus challenging that distinction. Nor can we pinpoint a psyche offering symptoms for interpretation. For this to happen there was, instead, a need for a culturally specific relationship between two women related by marriage and separated by the gaps of migration, and for a relationship to the medium that allowed the women to overstep cultural boundaries.

Thus, reflecting on what I have learned from this experimental filmmaking, I felt compelled to extend my willful abandonment of mastery from the filming to the critical discourse I am offering here. An installation of voices, intermingling and alone — of women facing other women none of them had ever seen: I did this, but I could not master how I did it. The art-making, in other words, is not an instance, an example to illustrate an academic point, nor an elevated form of cultural expression. Instead of these two things, equally problematic for a productive confrontation of universalities, I propose the universal validity of the performance in its non-universal singularity, including the moment of slight tension between Massaouda and Ilhem. The performative moment is the product of an act of filmmaking that required the absence of the filmmaker.

Moreover, it also required the surrender of the two women to the apparatus standing in-between them. This surrender entailed a cultural transgression — to insistently ask a question that in the culture of origin would be unspeakable. This, more than her linguistic pronunciation of Arabic as a second language, is Ilhem's "accent," in the sense in which Hamid Naficy famously uses that term. This "accent" emblemizes the productive, innovative, and enriching potential of intercultural life. In this case, it could occur thanks to the absence of the filmmaker—but also of the two husbands — and the situation of displacement for both women. This interaction — between the people performing and the critic reflecting on how to understand what they did—would be stifled if an overly familiar psychoanalytic apparatus were let loose on this event. ①

① Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

This is as useful a lesson for a scholar interested in interdisciplinarity as any. It takes us out of the somewhat despairing "anything goes" posture that the flag of interdisciplinarity seems to cover too often (and which the indifferent use of the term "multidisciplinarity" betrays). The insight is the result of the shift from an essentialist concept of a static culture to a performative, confrontational concept of what could be called "the cultural." In this adoption of Fabian's concept of culture as a process of contestation and in analogy to Mouffe's distinction between politics and the political, I see a possibility to articulate an intimate cultural dynamic in the globalized world: the intercultural, indeed.



Video Still Guilhermina, Mexico

Facing Speech

Massaouda's and Ilhem's performances of intercultural contact were done on the basis of a close collaboration of the face and the word. Indeed, the spoken word is central to a performance of contact across divisions as well as to the installation. The word is deployed in an attempt to turn a condescending act of "giving voice" into an affirmation of our need to be given that voice. More directly than film, video binds the image we see to the sound we hear. That

sound is, in this case, primarily and almost exclusively the human voice and the spoken words it utters. Speech, then, becomes the occasion for a positive deployment of interdisciplinarity, one that operates through intermediality.

Firstly, the centrality of the spoken word impinges on the visual form, the close-up. Film studies have been keen on including sound in their analysis,^① but the visual appearance of words in subtitles seems to solicit nothing but indifference, both in the film industry, where the ugliest outlining of words pollutes the most beautiful images, and in the work of scholars who tend to ignore that aspect. In *Nothing is Missing* I have attempted to experiment with the visualization of speech in order to make the most of the convergence of words and images. The surtitles, for example, make it easier to read the words and watch the faces at the same time.

In order to further privilege the voice of the mothers, the films consist of single unedited shots of their faces as they speak and listen. The personal situation presupposes sincerity. At the same time, they are keenly aware of the public nature of the speech they are producing in front of the camera. The nature of this performance is closer to theatricality, in the critical sense, than to traditional filmmaking. As theater, the situation is closer to minimally rehearsed, improvised, and inquiring forms of theater than to perfectly mastered public forms.^②

Secondly, the translations presented as surtitles also embody the close bond between the linguistic and the visual aspects of the images—the bond between face and speech. As I mentioned earlier, the viewer is confronted with different languages, foreign to most, audible in their foreignness and visible in an emphatically visualized translation. Placed above their faces, the language is both made important and presented as somewhat of a burden. English as the universal entrance port is exploited as well as de-naturalized, both by this visual

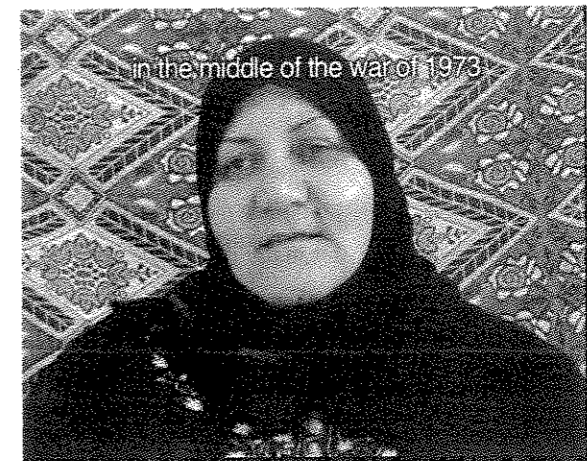
^① For example, Michel Chion *Un art sonore, le cinéma: Histoire, esthétique, poétique* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2003).

^② On the rhetoric of sincerity, see Ernst van Alphen, Mieke Bal and Carel Smith, eds., *The Rhetoric of Sincerity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

foregrounding and by the translations themselves.

Translations are as literal as possible, bringing out the poetry in the original languages without sacrificing to clarity. None of the translators are native speakers of English. Their assignment was to help me stay as close as possible to the phrasings the women used. This method results in this “accented” English that maintains the bi-cultural status of the communication.

Finally, the most acute intermediality occurs in the faces, which visibly produce the sound of the voices through their movement, thus yielding the movement of the image by means of sound. For this, with the language we do not understand, and the need to translate, all in one, the face is the actor. It is really difficult to separate sound from vision, since the mouths articulate with the rhythm of the sounds. This is not simply a case of the “moving image” of cinema. Instead, the moving quality becomes a poetic, a self-reflective statement about the medium that re-integrates what the predominance of English as universal language has shattered. This stands in contrast to the particular home-boundedness resulting from a lack of education, in turn aggravated by misogyny and colonialism. In this way, the face and its acts become the emblematic instance of video’s power to transgress boundaries of a variety of kinds.



Video Still Hamdiah, Gaza, Palestina

Conclusion

In *Nothing is Missing* I do address actual migration, but not as the thematic heart of the work. That heart, rather, is the encounter with the faces as negotiated universality, where globalization meets and inflects intimacy — and vice versa. The focus on the face embodies the act of facing in its three meanings, all three staged here as acts of mutuality facilitating contact. First, the emphasis on activity reflects back on the face itself. No longer the site of representation and expression, the face has become an agent of action: what this installation demonstrates is what faces can do rather than how to do things with faces. How, then, can the face be a universal, without presuming that facial expression is cross-culturally present or stable? The face faces, looking us in the face, which makes the viewer the interlocutor. It faces something that is hard to live down — here, the severance of the primary bond that humanism construes as defining for humanity: that between mother and child. In these videos of acting faces, that event is qualified as larger than the individual. All women speak in understated tones of the causes of the child's departure, and they do so in terms for which Western cultures can assume some measure of historical responsibility, if only "we" reason with Spinoza. The severances, all having different causes in the past and being experienced differently in the present, are lived as what for me is the ultimate tragedy: that all of the mothers say they are happy about the sore fact that their child left. These backgrounds are understated because they can neither be eliminated from the present nor be allowed to overrule the existence of the mothers in an everyday that is also rich and sometimes happy. Hence, the discourse intimated in the installation's title — the one on which Massaouda ends her eventual and hard-won openness about what matters most to her as a mother:

that her son finds bread to eat. Facing these present pasts, this kind of recognizable and perhaps, dare I say the word, universal motherhood

that results nevertheless fulfills the becoming of who we are in the present: facing these pasts together so that "we" can "be" is part of our own potential of becoming.^①

But how can we do that? Making contact, the third and most important act implied in facing, facilitates that becoming—becoming world citizens, building our existence on mobility without having to move. This making of contact is suggested as an effect of the insistent facing in *Nothing is Missing*. What faces can do is stage encounters. This is the point of the mothers' faces in *Nothing is Missing*—their empowerment. In the installation, the face is constantly present, in close-up but not as close as possible. As a visual form, the close-up itself is the face:

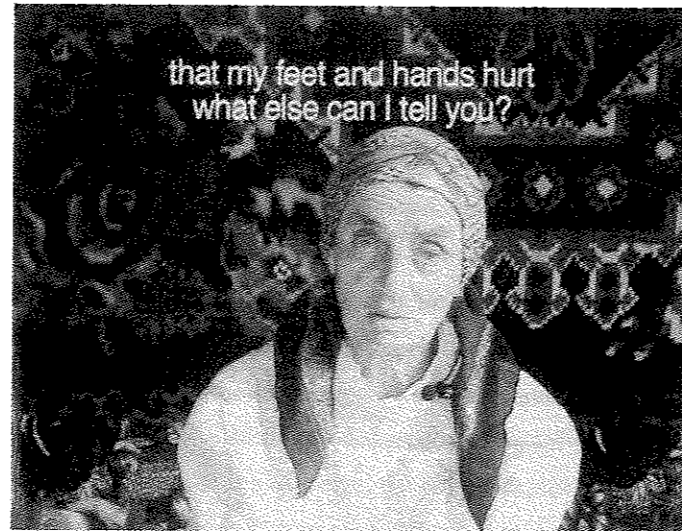
There is no close-up of the face. The close-up is the face, but the face precisely in so far as it has destroyed its triple function [individuation, socialization, communication] ... the close-up turns the face into a phantom... the face is the vampire.^②

If the close-up is the face, the face is also the close-up. Hence the slight distance nevertheless built into the image to avoid locking the viewer up and denying the women any space at all: to avoid facile conflation and appeals to sentimentality. To give the face a frame within which it can exercise its mobility and agency. To make the images also look a bit like the busts of Roman emperors and other dignitaries. That slight distance, then, provides the space for a certain kind of freedom. This would be a freedom à la Spinoza—a freedom that is "critical." Critical freedom, wrote James Tully, is the practice of seeing

^① The phrase "present pasts" alludes to the title of Andreas Huyssen's book, much of which is relevant to the present discussion. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

^② Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 99.

the specificity of one's own world as one among others. Inter-temporally, this freedom sees the present as fully engaged with a past that, insofar as it is part of the present, can be re-written a little more freely. The act of inter-facing can do that. The term, or illusion, of universality may not be the most felicitous one to characterize this act, but accompanied by the verb "confronting" it makes sense beyond a relativism that implies turning one's back on such faces.



Video Still Elena, Bucovina, Romania

Let the Allegory Fly: Beyond the Activity of Reference

Bian Yangfeng

The idea of applying the concept of allegory to Chinese film is anything but new, because "Chinese philosophers from the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B. C.) onward have often used extended metaphors" (of which fable is the logical result) to effectively express their ideas. This is assumed to reflect the fact that, as "realistic" thinkers, the Chinese usually do not favor abstract argumentation. Thus simple allegory helped to stimulate the interest of audiences and helped to "increase the force of an argument."^① "If an allegory 'says one thing in words and another in meaning' [...] it is an open question whether the verbal analyst can avoid giving a one-sided view of it. But the one-sided view may, in and through its incompleteness", lead us to "reimagine how much has been left out and [...] in comparison we can hardly ask for much more than that."^② In the 1980s, allegorical readings as perceived in western literary theory came to be the underlying mode of representation in most Chinese films, at the same time those films, heavily influenced by the West, became more technically sophisticated and complex. In this context it seems that the western notion of allegory could be an appropriate tool for dealing with the vague sense of some

^① Quoted from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1457283/fable-parable-and-allegory/50910/China?anchor=ref503555>

^② Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, 13.

Appendix - 1

About the Authors

Ernst van Alphen

Ernst van Alphen is Director of the Institute of the Cultural Disciplines and Professor of Literary Studies of University of Leiden. He holds a Ph. D. from University of Utrecht, and has published about one hundred papers. His main books, among others, include *Art in Mind: The Contribution of Contemporary Images to Thought* (2005), *Schaduw en Spel: Herbeleving, Historiseren en Verbeelding van de Holocaust* (2004) and *Armando: Vormen van Herinnering* (2000). His main academic interests are in Modernism, Postmodernism, The Historical Avantgardes, Relations between the Arts, Cultural History, Semiotics, Critical Theory, Theory of Ideology, and Genderstudies.

AN Deming

AN Deming is Professor and Fellow of folklore at Institute of Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His research interests are focused on popular religion (folk beliefs) among Han Chinese in Northwest China, Chinese proverbs, and intellectual history of Chinese Folklore Studies. Since 1992, he has conducted fieldworks on popular religion, proverbs, and folk narratives in his hometown Tianshui, Gansu Province, for many times. His main published works include *Exorcising Disaster: A Study of Agricultural Rituals from Farming Villages in Tianshui, Gansu Province* (Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2003), *Going Back to Hometown: A Folklorist's Field Experiences in Familiar Place* (Guangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2004), and *Handbook of Chinese*

Mythology (co-written with Yang Lihui, ABC-CLIO, 2005; Rpt. Oxford University Press, 2008).

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Murat Aydemir is Associate Professor in Comparative Literature and Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. He is the author of *Images of Bliss: Ejaculation, Masculinity, Meaning* (2007) and the editor of *Migratory Settings: Transnational Perspectives on Place* (2008) and *Indiscretions: At the Intersection between Queer and Postcolonial Theory* (2011).

Mieke Bal

Mieke Bal, a cultural theorist and critic, is based at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), University of Amsterdam. Her interests range from biblical and classical antiquity to 17th century and contemporary art and modern literature, feminism and migratory culture, and madness. Her many books include *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art* (2010), *Loving Yusuf* (2008), *A Mieke Bal Reader* (2006), *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002) and *Narratology* (3d edition 2009). She is also a video-artist, making experimental documentaries on migration. Occasionally she acts as an independent curator.

BIAN Yanfeng

BIAN Yanfeng, Ph. D. Candidate of Institute for Cultural Disciplines, Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. He received his M. A. degree in English Language and Literature at Nankai University. His interest is to do research not only on a wide range of literature but also on comparative study of literature and film- and, not least, text-to-film as well as straight film studies. He was ever Project Officer at China Scholarship Council (CSC, Beijing), Lecturer at Department of English Language and Literature and Program Coordinator at Office for International Academic Exchanges of Nankai University.

Maaïke Bleeker

Maaïke Bleeker is a professor and chair of Theatre Studies at Utrecht University. Since 1991, she has combined her academic work with a practice as dramaturge, collaborating with various theatre directors, choreographers and visual artists. She is President of Performance Studies international, the largest worldwide network organization in the field of performance studies. She has published extensively in international journals and edited volumes. She has edited several books including *Anatomy Live: Performance and the Operating Theatre* (Amsterdam University press 2008). Her book *Visuality in the Theatre* was published by Palgrave in 2008. Her research first focused on the mediations of theatre and performance as apparatuses of vision. This has resulted in the first book-length study in English on visuality in the theatre (*Visuality in the Theatre*, Palgrave, 2008), which examines the mediations of these apparatuses in relation to the context of western modernity. Her additional research interests are new dramaturgy, contemporary dance, the relation between theatre and philosophy, creation processes and the intersection of theatre, performance and visual arts.

Maria Boletsi

Maria Boletsi, Associate Professor in Comparative Literature, Leiden University. She is interested in cultural theory, literary theory, modern and contemporary literature (in English, Dutch, Greek, German), literature, art, and the political after 9/11, postcolonial literature and theory, poststructuralist theory. Her Ph. D. dissertation *Barbarism, Otherwise: Studies in Literature, Art, and Theory* is under final review by Stanford University Press. She is the co-editor of *Inside Knowledge: (Un)doing Ways of Knowing in the Humanities* (co-edited with C. Birdsall, I. Sapir and P. Verstraete. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009).

CHEN Dingjia

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CHEN Jun, Assistant Research Fellow of Institute of Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing. Born in Henan Province, Chen Jun received his B. A. in Chinese Literature at Peking University (1999), M. A. in Chinese Studies at National University of Singapore (2002), and Ph. D. in Chinese Literature at Peking University (2006). He was Visiting Scholar of University of Washington (2008-2009). His research focuses on Han and Six Dynasties Literature, with special interests in the Court literature and the Early Chinese Eremitic Tradition. He has published many articles in the journals such as *Literary Heritage*, *Literary Review*, and *Studies on Sinology*. His publications include " 'Rhapsody on the Two Capitals' and the Political Trend of the Later Han Dynasty", "Changes in the Geographic Distribution of Scholars in the Later Han Dynasty and the Shift of Literary Styles and Features", and "The Rise and Fall of Hongdumen School and Its Historical Revelation".

DING Guoqi

DING Guoqi, Associate Fellow of Institute of Literature of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Associate Professor of the Graduate School of CASS, and supervisor of the post-graduate student. He received his Ph. D. in Literature at Renmin University of China. His main academic interest lie in Marxism literary

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GAO Jianping

GAO Jianping is Professor of Literature and Aesthetics in CASS. He holds a Ph. D. in Aesthetics from Uppsala University, Sweden, and has published eight books and more than a hundred papers in Chinese and English, including *The Expressive Act of Chinese Art* (1996), *Globalism vs. Localism: Aesthetics and Art in a Comparative Perspective* (2008). He is also serving as the president of the International Association of Aesthetics (IAA) and the president of the Chinese Society for Literary Theory.

Isabel Hoving

Dr Isabel Hoving is senior lecturer at the Department of Film and Literary Studies of the University of Leiden. She teaches and publishes on postcoloniality, globalization, gender, sexuality, and ecocriticism. A study on Caribbean women's writing was published by Stanford University Press (*In Praise of New Travelers*), and she has edited books on the influence of migrants on Dutch everyday culture, the cultural interactions between Africa, Europe, and the America's, the innovative aspects of Caribbean and/or postcolonial writing, and the intertwining of gender and race. She is currently researching the

intersections of postcolonial theory and ecocriticism. She is associate editor of the book series *Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex, and Race*, and *Ecozon@: the European Journal on Literature, Culture, and the Environment*. In addition, she is an awarded creative writer.

JIN Huimin

JIN Huimin is Qujiang Chair Professor of Literary Theory at Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, 211 Chair Professor of Cultural Theory & Aesthetics at Shanghai International Studies University, and Professor of Literary Theory at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His publications in Chinese, among others, include *Post-Confucian Turn* (2008), *Consequences of New Media: a Critical Theory Concerning the End of Literature* (2005), *Postmodernity and Dialectical Hermeneutics* (2002), *Beyond the Will: A Study of Arthur Schopenhauer's Philosophy and Aesthetics* (1999 & 2007), and *Anti-Metaphysics and Contemporary Aesthetics* (1997). He has published 7 articles in English, German and other European languages, among which, the most recent one is "Simulacrum: An Aesthetization or An-esthetization" (*Theory, Culture & Society*, London: Sage, vol. 25, no. 6, 2008). His first English book *Active Audience* will be brought out by Transcript, a German publisher, in association with Transaction, a USA publisher, in the coming September. He is Associate Editor of *Theory, Culture & Society* (London: Sage).

Jeroen de Kloet

Jeroen de Kloet is Assistant Professor of Mediastudies at the University of Amsterdam and affiliated to the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ACSA). He works on the cultural implications of globalization in China. He co-edited with Edwin Jurriens the volume "Cosmopatriots—On Distant Belonging and Close Encounters" (Rodopi 2007), and published on popular music, cinema, art and new technologies in China. His current NWO funded research project is titled "Celebrations and Contestations of Chineseness—The Beijing 2008 Olympics and 21st Century Imaginations of Place, Culture and Identity."

His monograph titled "China with a Cut: Globalisation, Urban Youth and Popular Music" is published by Amsterdam UP in 2010.

LIU Fangxi

LIU Fangxi is Professor of Literary Theory at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His publications in Chinese include *The Theory of Shengqing (Feelings-expressed-by-voice)* (2008), *Consumer Society* (2011). He has published several essays on consumer culture and Marx's aesthetics, etc.

LIU Ning

LIU Ning, Associate Professor in Institute of Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, obtained Ph. D. of literature from Peking University in 1997. She was Fulbright scholar at Harvard in 2006-2007. Her academic interests lie in Poetry and Prose in Tang-Song China, and Confucian Classics. Her published works include books: *Poetic Transitions in Tang-Song China* (《唐宋之际诗歌演变研究》) (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press 2002), *Selected Poems of Wang Wei and Meng Haoran*, with innotation \ introduction and comments (《王维孟浩然诗选评》) (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House 2002), *A History of the Study on Chunqiu-Zuozhuan* (co-authored with Shen Yucheng) (《春秋左传学史稿》) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House 1992), *OuyanXiu and Song Elites* (co-ed. with Zhu Gang) (《欧阳修与宋代士大夫》) (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Press, 2007)

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bureaucrats and Yongming Literature. He has published more than 90 papers in Chinese academic journals. His main academic interests lie in the Literature of Qin and Han dynasties, Literature of northern and southern dynasties, and Classical Philology. He is also research leader of several research programs and the owner of several rewards.

LU Jiande

LU Jiande graduated from Fudan University, Shanghai, and received his doctoral degree at Cambridge, UK. His special field is Anglo-American Modernism and comparative literature. He is now Director of Institute of Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). His books include *"Dr. Zhivago" and other Essays* (1996), *Fragments of Broken Systems: Essays in Anglo-American Literature and History of Ideas* (2001), *Interests behind Ideas* (2005) and *Canvas over the Horizon* (2011). He is also the editor of *Studies in the English Novel since 1945: Essays by Various Hands* (1997) and *T. S. Eliot: Poems, Plays and Critical Essays*, in 5 volumes (2011).

Liesbeth Minnaard

Liesbeth Minnaard is Assistant Professor in Comparative Literature at Leiden University. Before obtaining this position she studied and worked at Utrecht University, University College Dublin, the University of Trier, and Cornell University. Her main fields of expertise are interculturality in literature and cultural effects of globalisation. She has published widely on literature of migration, as well as on exoticism in literature, representations of the national, and issues of gender and sexuality. Her publications include the monograph *New Germans, New Dutch. Literary Interventions* (Amsterdam University Press, 2008) and the edited volume *Ethnizität und Geschlecht. (Post-)Koloniale Verhandlungen in Geschichte, Kunst und Medien* (Cologne; Weimar; Vienna: Böhlau, 2005). Currently she is co-writing a book on multiculturalism in Dutch literature, preliminary titled *Beyond the multicultural drama* and co-editing a volume on *Literature and Multiculturalism in Scandinavia and the Low Countries* (forthcoming at Rodopi in 2011). Liesbeth

Minnaard is one of the organizers of the bi-annual Flemish-Dutch Platform for Postcolonial Readings and a member of the international Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies (CePoG) at Trier University.

Esther Peeren

Dr. Esther Peeren, Ph. D. in Literary Studies of University of Amsterdam, M. St. in Women's Studies of University of Oxford. She is now Assistant Professor in Literary Studies in Department of Literary Studies /Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis at University of Amsterdam. She was ever Research Leader of Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has published a book titled "*Intersubjectivities and Popular Culture: Bakhtin and Beyond.*" and nearly 20 papers. She is also the associate editor of the 4 books, including *Eighth-Eight: Mieke Bal PhDs 1983-2011*.

WANG Keping

WANG Keping, Ph. D., is a fellow of Institute of Philosophy of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, professor of Philosophy at The Graduate School of CASS. He was a visiting fellow at University of Oxford, and a visiting professor at University of Sydney. Currently he is Vice President of International Society for Universal Dialogue, and Vice Chairman of Chinese Society for Foreign literary Studies and Comparative Poetics. His main academic interests are in aesthetics and ancient philosophy. His major writings in Chinese include six books such as *Plato's Poetics in the Republic*, *Aesthetic Travelling* and *Towards a Transcultural Aesthetics*. His major publications in English include six books such as *Reading the Dao*, *Chinese Way of Thinking*, *Spirit of Chinese Poetics*, and *Ethos of Chinese Culture*. His is a contributor to 8 English books such as *Rediscovery of Happiness*, *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, *Mythos and Logos*, etc. He has published over 40 essays in more than 15 Chinese and English academic journals. His book was awarded Beijing Municipal Book Prize and Beijing Municipal Book Prize and All-China Universities Book Prize.

YE Shuxian

YE Shuxian (Ph. D), Chair Professor, Director of comparative literature, Institute of Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS); Vice Chairman of the Chinese Academy of Folklore Study; Editor in Chief of "The Series of Anthropological Explanation of Chinese Classics"; Editor in Chief of "The Series of Myth-History". He also was Visiting Professor of British Academy, Oxford University, Cambridge University, and Yale University. His major publications in Chinese include 30 books such as *Philosophy of Chinese Mythology*, *Chuang Tzu: A Cultural Hermeneutics*, *Lao Tzu: A Cultural Hermeneutics*, *Bear Totem: China's Ancestor Myth*, etc. Some of them are translated into English, French, Japanese. He edited an English book, *China's Creation and Origin Myths: Cross-cultural Explorations in Oral and Written Traditions* with his partner. Owing to his leading of Literary Anthropology and Chinese Mythology, he was awarded Outstanding Leading Researcher Award of China and other foreign awards.

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ZHAO Xifang is Fellow of Institute of Literature of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Professor of Philosophy at The Graduate School of CASS, and Deputy Director of Department of Chinese Modern Literature of CASS. He has been invited to give lectures at Cambridge University, London University, Harvard University, Yale University, Tufts University, Toronto University, Ninth University of Paris, etc. His eight writings and translations include *Stories of Hong Kong* (2003) and *Post-colonialism* (2009). His more than 90 academic papers have been published in America, Britain, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China.

ZHOU Min

ZHOU Min, Literature Ph. D., Associate Professor, Vice Dean of Institute of Literary Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, Research Fellow of the Institute of Foreign Literature, Henan University, Kaifeng. More than 20

academic papers have been published in key academic journals (*Literary Review*, *Foreign Literature and Contemporary Foreign Literature*) in the field of postcolonial literature, cultural studies and contemporary American and British literature. Her eight writings and translations include *Post-colonial Identit/ies: A Study of V. S. Naipaul's Fictions* (written in English). She has assumed simultaneous and consecutive interpretations at more than thirty international conferences and forums for some state leaders, the Nobel laureate in literature, and world famous scholars.

Appendix - 2:

Contributors' Information (Listed in alphabet order of surnames)

Chinese experts and scholars

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CHEN Jun	Institute of Literature, CASS
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GAO Jianping	Institute of Literature, CASS
JIN Huimin	Institute of Literature, CASS
LIU Fangxi	Institute of Literature, CASS
LIU Ning	Institute of Literature, CASS
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