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## CONTENTS

<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</i>	2
<i>ABSTRACT</i>	3
<i>PROLEGOMENON</i>	4
<i>ANIMATING THE IMAGE</i>	5
<i>CODA</i>	22
<i>NOTES</i>	24
<i>REFERENCES</i>	27

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

*I would like to especially thank my director of photography Chris Schutte – a true master of the art of filmmaking.*

## ABSTRACT

*In reflecting on the process of making the short film "The First and Last Loves of Leonardo Lopes" the author argues against interpretation as a method for working with character and its development. It is contended that the formative unconscious image(s) at the heart of a character requires a director to be more sensory in her/his response and to develop an intimate process of animating the image. The descriptive personal vocabularies of feeling, intuition and sensation are accordingly juxtaposed against prescriptive impersonal intellectual modalities that diminish immediacy as a by-product of its "latent content". Active imagination, poetry and music are seen as more appropriate models for the filmmaker than theories and theses. The author goes on to consider the dialectical reinforcement of interpretive strategies as a result of the economic pressures of the film industry and argues for a more process friendly conception of production. After reflecting on the role and insecurities of the director in a collaborative art form, a motivation is provided for the "natural voice" of the accompanying director's commentary.*

*The moment you've caught the snake in an interpretation, you've lost the snake. You've stopped its living movement. Then the person leaves the therapeutic hour with a concept about "my repressed sexuality" or "my cold black passions" or "my mother"- and is no longer with the snake. The interpretation settles the emotional quivering and mental uncertainty that came with the snake. In fact, the snake is no longer necessary; it has been successfully banished by interpretation...Meaning replaces image (Hillman, 1997: 26).*

*In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art. Even more. It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of 'meanings'. It is to turn **the** world into **this** world. ('This world'! As if there were any other) (Sontag, 1997: 251).*

## PROLEGOMENON

IT is hard to write about a feeling of absence as interminable as loneliness. Comparison and similitude are perhaps the only empathetic responses but one should never forget, in the temptation to close that uncomfortable distance with words, to just listen to what is unsheltered by even poetry as beautiful as Pablo Neruda's: *And...to hear the immense night<sup>i</sup>.*

In my seminar paper one of my concerns was to find a way of writing that was more immediately heartfelt than pointedly argumentative. The heart circumlocutes its obsessions and requires a certain patience as it passes over from opacity to clarity and then back gain.

I am in full agreement with the sculptor Rachel Lombard, a character from an André Brink novel, who says in a conversation about words:

*Isn't each one of them just put on the page in order to make the reader aware of what can not be said – all those blanks that surround them and curl right into them... (2004: 81)?*

Again...*to hear the immense night, still more immense without her.*

## ANIMATING THE IMAGE

At the start of this course I wrote, during the storytelling strategies component, the following: *need true raw/to ache the moon/to moan my blood/to whisper wax/to cook language/to shake shadow*. For me the focal points of images around which a narrative forms are archaic, compulsive and wild at heart. They come freely when the sentry of the ego is asleep at its post<sup>ii</sup>. They are strange and transgressive. They make you feel intensely. “They infect one’s perceptions”<sup>iii</sup>. They are erotic rather than hermeneutic<sup>iv</sup>.

Although, admittedly, the elegance of theory has always held a certain charm, it would be dishonest to pretend that I can account for the work that accompanies this explication by revealing the hidden hand of a coherent and consequential intellect in the choices that I have made. I certainly began the course with this linear expectation and intention. But in the processes of pre-production, production and post-production the unanticipated joy of discovery owed *more* to intuition and sensation borne of a fidelity to the energy of those inexhaustible, and still unfathomable, images.

For instance when I began writing the script, just one page at a time, not knowing what on earth would happen next, I dreamt of an old man whose metamorphic body emerged out of a drawing of a scrotum. *I followed him for some distance noticing along the way that he was carefully leading two horses on either side. When he turned back to look at me I saw that he had the face and mane of a lion*. I knew at once that horses had to be in the story. It felt right. And I immediately wrote the shadow play to that end.

Accordingly calling the puppeteer: Leonardo!

I have been asked, “*Why horses?*” And, as if  $a = z$  and  $b = y$ , “*Do they represent this?*” I have responded by saying, “*I don’t know! Perhaps?*”

I can only add that I recall as a young boy in my parents’ bed, equally impressed by the myopia of the dark night and my father’s low gravel voice, being told a story of a curious

gift in which boxes, enveloped in other boxes, are successively opened, to finally reveal a single toy: a white horse. I drank that story in so deeply. And it was possibly, for memory is the quintessence of montage<sup>v</sup>, there in the introversion of night, that I also felt amplified in that infinity my own loneliness and thirst: Where was its companion? And why was it packaged so enigmatically?

I must stress that I am not suggesting that creativity is inherently neurotic thereby making neurosis the first cause of art<sup>vi</sup>. What I do assume, though, is that in the nucleus of creative work there is something approaching the notion of the ineffable – that which, although it exceeds our conscious understanding, moves us so very deeply:

“Bango, it’s there and you know it instantly and it thrills your soul”, says David Lynch describing his intuitive openness, “I don’t know why it occurred when it occurred, but it occurred” (2002:133).

I must say that I also struggled with spontaneity. While I allowed the horses their galvanic mystery I wanted the human characters, especially the women, and in particular the older, to quote T. S. Eliot’s description of the workings of the modern mind, “pinned and wriggling on the wall” (1985: 15).

After a few drafts of the script, a phase that had been relatively free flowing I began to become increasingly categorical in the subsequent process of revision and translation. During the weekly open-ended sessions that I had with the initial leading cast<sup>vii</sup> I never sufficiently overcame my dominant intellectual inclinations. I was too often deductively building castles in the sky instead of remaining with the visceral experiences that we shared through the non-dominant hand drawing and the stream-of-consciousness writing of their characters. Characters whom *in the final analysis*, I might add, I even denied proper names opting instead for their description in the script as S. and B., shorthand for *Slut – Bitch* that was, for a while, the diagnostic-labelled title of the film.

When I look back at the journal that I kept I realise that I didn’t heed my own advice:

*Summarising last week: Our meeting was very interesting for there was a lot of latent emotion in our discussion...So much so, in fact, that I dreamt that night of being told that I would have a heart-attack on the tarmac of an Italian airport while attempting to board a plane. The imagery suggests that feeling would keep one on the ground, would literally keep one in the heartland of Italy, and that for me, primarily, but I suspect this might be true for all of us in this process of realising the flesh and blood of our characters one should avoid becoming too abstract and too flighty about matters of the heart. Our task as we begin to now explore S. and B. is to stay as close to the ground of their being as possible.*

Having come from a theoretical social science background, I knew hardly anything about the praxis of performance. What strikes me now forcibly after the completion of my first film is how bodily and cardiovascular it all is! While there is place for the nous of clarity, the life of a character has infinitely more elbow room than an analytical interpretation of its being allows.

In his preface to the screenplay of *Scenes from a Marriage*, Ingmar Bergman writes so intimately about his protagonists revealing that they are not primarily *concepts* of bourgeois men and women but *characters* called Johan and Marianne. And how well he knows them. But yet how animated and open he remains! One always gets the sense that his imagination is greater than any interpretation that he might harbour:

*They have grown rather contradictory, sometimes anxiously childish, sometimes pretty grown-up. They talk quite a lot of rubbish, now and then saying something sensible. They are nervous, happy, selfish, stupid, kind, wise, self-sacrificing, affectionate, angry, gentle, sentimental, insufferable, and lovable. All jumbled up. Now let's see **what happens** [my emphasis] (1972: vii).*

Performance, if it is to be believable, is an act of embodiment in which an initially literary character eventually becomes a central nervous system. A director if s/he is to assist in birthing this life needs to recover her/his senses. S/he needs to *feel* more, *hear* more and *see* more. S/he needs to be primarily responsive to the world of the character and not to our theories and theses that would reduce the latter to an epiphenomenon of

some abstracted 'reality'. Filmmakers, especially, need to heed Oscar Wilde's observation that, "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible" (in Sontag, 1997: 249).

The best lesson in this regard came from the considerably experienced director of photography, Chris Schutte, who deliberately ignored my instruction to cut at the end of our shooting of the tango scene and instead kept the camera rolling. He had sensed that Victoria (B.) who was sitting at the table was deeply present. I sat back and watched, maybe for the first time in the production, and felt the character's deep unhappiness. I was engrossed and riveted! And later the editor and I would again be hypnotised in the edit by what we sensed lay on the edge of her consciousness. I think if I had been equally present at that point and responsive, more of the character could have been discovered.

A couple of days earlier I had a not too dissimilar experience with Sian (S.) who while having her make up applied before her strip routine told me firmly, "*Look Chris. Don't tell me what to think now. This is in the body!*" She was asking me to be less didactic and more *aware* of her *character*.

Oliver Stone puts it like this:

*I think that directing actors is a very humbling experience...you have to listen to everybody's gripes and everybody's fears...it's pretty exhausting, but through the medium, through the director, I think something happens, **something grows**... [my emphasis] (in Hauke, 2005: 111).*

We will return again later to reflect on what "through the director" might mean?

Carl Jung, interestingly enough, makes an analogous observation in relation to dreams:

*A dream never says "you ought" or "this is the truth". It presents an image in much the same way nature allows a plant to grow... (1978: 104).*

If I were to shoot the film again I think I would try to not judge my characters so definitively and severely with “eyes”, as T.S. Eliot might have put it, “that fix [one] in a formulated phrase” (1985: 15). This especially applies to B.

Why her? Like André Brink’s Chris Minnaar, remembering the women in his life in *Before I Forget*, I too could say:

*Women who say no have always held a special attraction for me. Not just to sex: to anything. To the world. To what everybody expects of them (2004: 138).*

But I have also been frustrated by an often-accompanying hardness and by a devaluation of the affirmative. It is as if the capacity to say *yes* cannot emerge from beneath a historical and personal frozen rage. Negative control is, after all, not commensurable with freedom.

In a paper on *The Controlling Bitch* the depth psychologist Barbara Friedman writes:

*The controlling bitch is an **image** of perverted and misguided power. She is a product of the deep and lethal dysfunction within our culture, a result of the one-sided patriarchal paradigm of power under which we have lived for so many years. Her energy compensates for the repression and limitation of feminine power within this rigidly defined system. This image and this woman embody and give voice to a serious problem... [She] has teleology, a meaning and a purpose [My emphasis] (2003: 2).*

In a review that I wrote some years ago on the film *Charlie’s Angels* I tried to point out the paradox of this androcentric bias, which obstructs a more radical and thorough transformation:

*If Charlie’s Angels are supposedly advocates of a spunky equality then it’s a feminism that traces its genealogy back through Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill to the Greek philosopher Plato where possibly for the first time in written record, the question was asked: ‘Can women do what men do?’ All three of these thinkers assumed, however, that what reasonable men do in public – commerce, philosophy, warfare etc – constituted the true, good and beautiful. They also assumed, conversely, that what women do – emotionally- in*

*private- care, clean and cook – is both of an inferior status and quality. While it may appear progressive to suggest that women ought to gain access to such public activities – the premise of the movie remains: Men, in the final analysis, are the ones who set the public standards, which they must measure up to! (Rodrigues, 2000:8).*

But a character, like a real person, is not an intellectual concept and a well-thought-out *final analysis*<sup>viii</sup>. B. became too dense and head-heavy in my interpretation of her that stretched as far a field as Euripides's monomaniacal Pentheus: The king in *The Bacchae* who wanted to defend his fifth century BCE fortress of reason from his own heart. I needed to humbly stay closer to her image (and my experience thereof), as both Oliver Stone and Carl Jung suggest, and then, maybe, I would have seen, heard and felt more in her than what I already presumed to know to begin with.

What I have discovered is that too much theory makes for poorer characters!

What then are the alternatives?

“I think the most privileged moments in movie-making”, says Wim Wenders, “are when the work feels as close as possible to making music or poetry” (2002: 129). Both are mediums of considerable animation, the latter, in particular, the animation of images. And there is a care and vulnerability with which a lot of poetry weighs *the word and the world* that is an intimate acoustic for character enabling us: *To live close to every tree you had ever planted* (Cronin, 1990: 98).

Take for instance the following poem by Eileen Daly Moeller, which evokes so much of what I feel, and would have wanted to reflect, about B.:

*Joan of Arc  
Images of Defense and Sacrifice:*

*The best thing  
was when the voices told  
her to dress like a boy,*

*and stepping out of*

*the homespun skirts, her long  
hair in heaps upon the floor,  
she put on the armor and knew  
it would protect her*

*from rough hands,  
from then on becoming her  
skin: silvery scales  
hardened over her tenderest*

*places, and she would never have to  
be tender again,  
not even when the fire,  
trying to consume her, curled*

*every cell black, sent them flying  
up through the air, so many  
butterflies she watched  
circle away and come back*

*to enclose her again.  
So be it, she said, for eternity  
encrusted with angels darkly whispering: yes (in Friedman, 2003: 10).*

Poetry and music were actually, albeit unwittingly, part of my own process. While writing the script I had been arrested by a few lines of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and imagined them set to music - to a tango, as its mournful nature seemed ideal to "remembering love [and] lamenting loss" (Guillermoprieto, 2003: 35). I was fortunate that the *Cape Town Tango Ensemble* were able to realise the musical score and played it on a portable speaker as we set up Leonardo's space. What I was seeking was a way of giving expression to a core feeling that I hoped we would be *further* incorporating into the very *mise en scène* that we were constructing. It is of course sung at the tango club:

*You have conjured up prehistoric time in your lover!  
What feelings whelmed up from beings gone by/  
What women hated you in him!  
What sinister men you roused in his youthful veins.  
Dead children were trying to reach you... (Rilke, 1981: 47).*

Poetry and music seem to extend the imagination in a manner that emphasises and evokes creativity in the reader or the listener. They are both more (phenomenologically) descriptive than (ontologically) prescriptive vocabularies. Or as Luce Irigaray suggests in her discussion of “poetic dwelling” they do not reduce the world to “some familiar evaluation at our disposal”<sup>xix</sup> (2002: 152).

James Hillman, in the same spirit as Susan Sontag, maintains that animating the image is our contemporary task as we seek to recover our senses from the excesses of hermeneutics, Marxism, psychoanalysis and all other intellectual exegesis that destroys the visible at the same time as it claims to reveal its *latent content*:

*This is the psychological and imaginative work of animating the image, giving a life-soul back to the snake that may have been removed from it by your desire to understand it... There are various ways of keeping the snake around. It can be imagined as a felt presence and talked with, it may need to be fed and housed, painted and modelled. It can be honoured by attentions, like recalling it several times during the day: by “doing something for it” - a physical gesture, lighting a candle, buying an amulet, discovering its name. It can be brought closer by visualizing it, sensing its skin, its strength. Now imagination replaces meaning, and the human mind gives itself over to the animal presence (1997: 28).*

*Animal presence* indeed! What biofeedback researchers call “skin talk” (Mindell, 1984: 6) is what we intuitively sense in the minutiae of a good performance: *the body of the character*. To realise this we have to remain close to the image – whatever is the *daimon* or *genius*<sup>x</sup> at the heart of a character - so that it can become animated: *full of breath and alive*.

James Hillman suggests that interpretation denies this *life-soul* and that, instead, we need an active imagination to nurture it. We need, in other words, to be responsive in two senses: firstly, to what can be termed the unconscious, what I described above as being archaic, compulsive and wild at heart, and secondly, to consciousness itself, here conceived as an act of imagination, so that it can be assimilated and not merely expended in moments of reaction.

The philosopher John Armstrong in his discussion of imagination describes it as a “fecundity of options” for putting, oftentimes, ordinary things together:

*It's not necessarily the case that the imaginative person can see elements other people are unaware of, it's that they think up less expected – and perhaps more revealing – ways of putting together the elements which anyone can observe (2003: 96).*

In other words imagination can be “allied to an acuteness of perception” (2003: 96).

To *feel* more, *hear* more and *see* more. Poetry, music and active imagination bring us closer to an immediacy of experience that is surely one of the key objectives of any filmmaker’s image work.

One of the points that I make in my audio commentary on the film is that it suffers from a surfeit of images with the result that the story is obscured by a series of non-sequiturs. This may seem at first paradoxical with the emphasis that I have been placing on images here but it isn’t really.

The problem results I believe from the consequence of an improperly developed relationship to the two aforementioned aspects of responsiveness: In the first instance, I didn’t remain sufficiently close to any of the images; in the second, my reflection tended to be more interpretive, taking me even further away from the necessary imaginative work.

Accordingly the images kept increasing in number as I went along quite assuredly saying what each *meant*. I was in a sense cutting them off at their roots only to discover yet another unconscious outcrop<sup>xi</sup> but instead of cultivating it I simply repeated my *modus operandi*. Eventually the images ran riot. Instead of a couple or a few they were now everywhere and yet nowhere. Differently put my engagement was more or less superficial.

Active imagination, all those ways of “keeping the snake around”, requires an attention to detail and not just generalisation and on-going free-association. It doesn’t matter for example whether I think the character in question is, say for argument’s sake, a sado-masochist. It matters even less whether a sado-masochist can be cross-referenced with the iconography of martyrs! What does matter is how that character tries to express its *particular* experience of love. *What happens when he reaches out to someone? What does he do? What does he endure? And what happens, blow by blow, when he possibly thinks about one course of action and then acts out another?*

Nicolas Proferes in *Film Directing Fundamentals* maintains that one should speak to the character and not the actor:

*Do not use abstract or intellectual terms – use the everyday vernacular of your character. ‘What do you think you would do, if...?’ ‘How many times have you gone to bed with her? ...’ ‘Are you going to let her walk all over you like that? No? Then stand up to her, damn it! Let her know who the hell you are!’ (2005: 145).*

One has to speak directly *snake to snake* and not about the history of the representation of cold-blooded vertebrates in Western philology. Or to mix my metaphors (yet again) all roads can lead eventually to the proverbial *Rome*, that metropolis of all known things in the universe, but Rome (and semiotics) is too dense a story for a short let alone a long format film.

My film is stuffed full of concepts and ideas, some of which are interesting, but a good film, more often than not, has a clear and simple story. A good film has complex

*characters* and not complex *ideas*. That is to say the hard work, the finding of the *daimon* or *genius*, resides in the specific details of that arrangement.

But there is another more mundane pressure that all filmmakers face and which significantly circumscribes this discussion, namely, the practical economy of production. I'm sure that any sociologist studying film would find it, out of all the arts, the most industrial. Whether it is *Fordist* or *lean manufacturing*, it is driven by budgetary constraints that measure all of its many inputs against that metaphysically monstrous platitude: time is money.

What this means is that the *film industry* isn't particularly process friendly. Its urgency puts great pressure on the director to know just exactly what s/he is going to be doing on set. Definite designs and expert plans have to be in place (or so it seems) so that the whole thing runs as efficiently as possible. Generally this means that a script is broken down into unrelated units that are then rearranged in relation to an economy of scale and termed a shooting script. The director is expected to be able to understand how all the parts ultimately relate to the gestalt of the whole.

What we have been discussing above, namely, *character*, *consciousness*, *imagination*, *openness*, *patience* and *perception* are explorative qualities essential to the outcome of the story and have to somehow, despite all these external demands, be given their primacy. And where else? But where it all comes together: on set!

But how?

My immediate response to the complexities of production was to be very precise in my pre-production design drawing up a shot list that read, for instance, like the following deleted staff-room scene:

Scene # 29. Shot #'s:

1. MS. Begin with door through window frame. Pan following B's movement, reveal: studio space (student), offices (other female lecturer with back turned), to staff room.
2. MCU O/S B. picking up various papers from stacks arranged in semi-circle. Examines one more closely. Tilt up to reveal male colleague greeting.
3. MS of B. smiles while looking at door...cell-phone rings.
4. MCU O/S B. of cell-phone. Tilt up to reveal two other female lecturers.
5. MCU of B. She turns around.
6. CU of B. Pan as she walks towards window.
7. MS (exterior) of B. looking out of window

I must have spent more time looking at my clipboard than at the performances. Or better put I was placing all my emphasis on aesthetics, framing and style.

Wim Wenders describes how, as a result of directing a stage play, he learnt to reprioritise what was ultimately central to a story. He took that experience and extended into his next film, *Paris, Texas*:

*In the beginning I was totally obsessed with 'framing'...I would design all shots in advance, and I would have my layout ready in the morning, when I would come on set... That very exact notion of framing was my security blanket...On Paris, Texas, I took the story and its emotions and the actors more seriously than the look of the film. The theatre experience had opened me up to a less formalistic approach...My cinematographer Robby Müller would come onto the set in the morning and wouldn't know what the first set-up would be, and we wouldn't know how many set-ups we had to do that day. I would just come and talk with the actors about what the scene was all about and what the emotions of the scene were, and then we'd walk around and see how and where we could do it... **The whole process was much more from the guts than from the brain.** It felt pretty risky at first, but so much more connected [my emphasis] (2002: 125).*

In other words characters are the principal *experts* and vehicles of a story. They have a natural instinctive movement that must connect with and lead the camera through the story and not vice-versa. The camera, thus understood, is a galvanometer of their electrical current<sup>xii</sup>.

When I describe my film as *static* in the audio commentary it is precisely the absence of having allowed my actors their freedom of movement that I am referring to. Their bodies appear largely awkward and unnatural and so, rarely, do I truly believe their performance<sup>xiii</sup>.

“If you’re just animating drawings that are fixed, the thing is already dead”, says Ken Loach explaining why he doesn’t storyboard scenes (2002: 113). The same certainly applies to shot lists *a-priori*.

I note that Alfred Hitchcock is reputed to have said that if he ran a film school he wouldn’t let students near a camera for at least two years (in Proferes, 2005: 139)! Nicolas Proferes’s goes on to describe it as an “incumbent technology” that initially gets in the way of working with actors. And makes a valid point when he observes that far more actors go on to be directors than, indeed, do directors of photography (2005: 139)!

Again...if I were to shoot my film today, I would try to shoot less and rehearse more on set. If one blocks the action properly, that is, according to the internal logic of the characters’ movements, one would hopefully require fewer takes. The temptation is always to start shooting as soon as possible. Invariably there is always some or other urgency but what the Greeks called *kairos*, the capacity to discern the opportune moment when everything is aligned and well disposed, might well be, from the perspective of the vehicles of the story, the ultimate efficiency.

This also has a more radical implication, which if not always possible should always be striven for. That is - it makes sense to shoot as many scenes in their internal and sequential order! Admittedly this doesn’t always make for a rational production schedule but we need to consider that it is the story and not the net efficiency by which it was made that is the real indicator of value.

If characters are the *experts* then we have to fall in behind them as they walk from *A* to *B* to *C*. Milos Forman argues that this allows us to “grow” the story as it is shot (2002: 169). Mike Leigh, his approach based on the principle that the actors shouldn’t know anything more than their characters at the “organic” stage that they’re at, similarly develops his films sequentially (2002: 50).

Ken Loach states the case for this position particularly well:

*When you shoot a scene out of order, and a critical thing has happened in-between that you haven't filmed yet, you haven't explored it yet, so they actors don't know how they've emerged from it. You can't learn anything new emotionally in shooting the scene if you've already shot what comes after it. Control of the shooting schedule is definitely one of the most important things for the director [my emphasis] (2002: 144).*

My shooting schedule, conversely, read like a series of lottery numbers. And it is another reason why it was well nigh impossible to have a strong character driven narrative<sup>xiv</sup>. Even if, say, I had been responsive that night at the tango club and allowed B. the freedom to express her emotional *motion* it would have put unbearable stress on the design and plan that was the dialectical reinforcement of my interpretation of the story.

Which takes us back to my initial departing point: Interpretation isn’t a satisfactory methodology - neither for character or process. One has to kick that ivory tower habit. It is too effete and, almost always, detrimental in its irrelevancy<sup>xv</sup>.

I love the following observation by Friedrich Nietzsche and as much as I quote it here as an institutional criticism it is, foremostly, self-critical. *I imagine that somewhere deep in my unconscious stands an unlit image of a malnourished animal that resonates with these visceral words:*

*For this is the truth: I have left the house of scholars and slammed the door behind me. Too long did my soul sit hungry at their table; I have not been schooled, as they have, to crack knowledge as one cracks nuts. I love freedom and the air over fresh soil; I would sleep on ox-skins rather than on their dignities and respectabilities (1969: 147).*

Werner Herzog makes much the same unrefined point<sup>xvi</sup>, “Film should be looked at straight on, it is not the art of scholars but of illiterates” (in Ogilvie, 2005: 65).

In my seminar paper, which was largely an attempt at a critique of the high-culture of academic writing, I was engaged, I now realise, in a paper fight with myself. This passage is instructive:

*As the likes of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva have argued, with particular reference to gender, language isn't neutral (in Sarup, 1993: 103).*

*Nicolas Visser's Handbook for Writers of Essays and Theses, a standard text in South African tertiary institutions, for instance claims that:*

*“readers of an essay must be confident that the writer is in control of the material... knows where the discussion is going and how the points made relate to each other” [my emphasis] (1989: 15).*

*Visser stresses that he doesn't wish to devalue “conversational English” and is primarily writing about the formal academic essay which, as do other forms of writing, has its own particular “convention” (1989: 2).*

*The above mentioned troika would no doubt highlight such an expression of mastery<sup>xvii</sup> as part of the register of an androcentric/ male-stream/ patriarchal/ phallogocentric/ Symbolic discourse which, by insisting on non-contradictory identities (A is A, A is not B, or in this instance, an academic essay is not “personal” (1989: 2) writing), seeks to repress more fluid and fragmented ways of being (in Sarup, 1993: 103).*

Ironically, in the process of making the film, I went on to do just what I was strongly objecting to in Nicolas Visser's categorical guide: I wasn't open to the real experience of what was individual and particular in my characters and I was always trying to control them by locating them in their appropriate conceptually conventional boxes<sup>xviii</sup>.

You will recall that earlier I referred to Wim Wenders talking about the “security blanket” of framing. Mine primarily resided in the sort of intellectual attitude described

above. It compensated for a deep fear of inadequacy. Because what Samuel Butler, the Victorian Satirist, said about life is a particularly apt description for filmmaking: "Life is like playing a violin in public and learning the instrument as one plays" (in Solomon, 1982: 273).

Bernardo Bertolucci doesn't beat about the bush, and his honesty is refreshing:

*When I started, I was so nervous that I had to be in control of everything. In secret you think you are shit... (2002: 160).*

The consequence of my intellectually managed fear resulted in an unproductive stubbornness: For instance I thought it was rather *clever* that Leonardo, a puppeteer, would imagine himself as having been, in his own life, effectively a puppet of his complexes. It seemed to me to be a sort of Pinnocchio-like *intertext*. And I kid you not when I say that I was seriously considering finding a place for including, what would have been, yet another interpretive symbolic twist!

Now I received a lot of criticism of that initial idea. Nobody related to it. And I was most definitely in a minority of one as far as it was concerned but I was completely convinced by my grey-matter's capacity for extensive reference - even though by now it was being referred to on set as "the Muppet".

It would have been better to engage with the image of Leonardo. To throw my hands up and say for instance - *I don't really feel that I have spent enough time getting to see this story through his eyes. I'm not sure that I've understood his core emotional need in remembering this story the way he does. What does he want to do? I don't know?* It amazes me, in retrospect that the film was made without having the clarity of what Kristin Linklater, in her theatrical work, terms the "natural voice":

*...revealing...inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously [so that] the person is heard (in Gilligan, 2003: 132).*

I couldn't admit that I sometimes didn't know why I was making the choices that I was. If I could have - I would have discovered the "negative capability"<sup>xix</sup> of *not being in control of the material*. Something, perhaps, more appropriate could have emerged from this consciously expressed ignorance (or *illiteracy* as Werner Herzog describes it) in contradistinction to an unconsciously constellated knowledge<sup>xx</sup>.

In Ben Okri's aphorisms on storytelling he makes two points which are worth restating and which I will be sure to remind myself of again:

Firstly, "the greater the will, the greater the secret failure" (2002: 124)

And secondly, "the higher the artist, the fewer the gestures" (2002: 124)

Bernardo Bertolucci goes on to contrast his initial attitude with a later confidence that he equates with emotional discovery and openness. He conceives of the director as a *libidinal* spark that triggers a process of creative excitement in the people that come together and collaborate in the making of a production (2002: 157). It is a description far preferable to the inflation inherent in the popular projection of the *know-it-all* mastery of the *auteur*:

Firstly, it suggests a yearning for something that has its origins in the desire of the body and in the obscure unconscious. The director is merely an initial medium for this greater creative libidinal force.

I think this applies equally to a story that one has written from the inside-out, as much as those stories that one *finds*, and that speaks to one, from the outside-in. Or as Ben Okri puts it:

*Stories...are living things...There are ways in which they create themselves, bring themselves into being, for their own inscrutable reasons...We do not choose them. Stories may well be some hidden divinity's dialogue with the human soul (2002: 44).*

Secondly, it transports the notion of a journey of expression that reinforces the spirit of animating the image. It also reminds us that a good story retains that chthonic energy and does not merely describe it.

And finally, it underscores the fact that unlike the author of a novel or a fine artist, no actor, cinematographer, director, editor or scriptwriter can claim sole creative agency in the production of his/her work. Filmmaking is a collaborative process in which the director is also a container for that, once again, greater creative force of human relations.

This is what I think Oliver Stone could mean by saying that *through the director* something, if one has the right attitude, can take root and grow.

We have not discussed the processes of post-production but it should be obvious that the work done at this stage proceeds in an organic manner. The famous film editor Walter Murch describes this process thus,

*Not so much a putting together as it is the discovery of a path...The editor is actually making twenty-four decisions a second: No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. Yes (in Hauke, 2005: 114).*

And that decision to say *yes*, he suggests, is one that is best made with the following weighting in mind: first emotion - then story - and finally rhythm (in Hauke, 2005: 102). Significantly he doesn't refer to conceptual interpretations but to an immediately felt and intuitive response to the sensory image. It is in the edit where one discovers what can be *further* animated and what is ultimately unexpressive.

## CODA

Accordingly, if one doesn't follow the rules of interpretation, the next step - be it for the character or for the process - isn't always predictable. We shouldn't forget that even a script is little more than a touristic map of a place that is only discovered once one has actually *lived* there and felt, heard and seen the images that embody its *genius loci*.

In the first of the open-ended sessions that I referred to at the beginning of this explication I read the following passage from Ben Okri's *A Way of Being Free*. I include it here again with renewed appreciation:

*There are two essential joys in storytelling. The joy of the telling, which is to say of the artistic discovery. And the joy of the listening, which is to say of the imaginative identification. Both joys are magical and important. The first involves exploration and suffering and love. The second involves silence and openness and thought (2002: 48).*

The emergence of character and the resultant process that eventually culminates in an audience are, as I see it<sup>xxi</sup>, the respective first and second joys. I have argued against interpretation<sup>xxii</sup> because I have found it to be destructive of these essential intimacies. Simply stated - "artistic discovery" and "imaginative identification" are nurtured by *awareness* and not by the excavation of knowledge.

As an extension of the varying threads of that argument I have included along with this written explication the *natural voice* of a director's commentary. Motivated by a desire to reconnect with the inexperienced and passionate voice that was closest to my practice - it is deliberately unscripted. It's a *vernacular* more conversant with the primary material and, as such, an integrated way of continuing *animating the image*.

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> The verse which appears at the beginning of the film is taken from his poem *Puedo escribir los verso...* (1995: 33).

<sup>ii</sup> In other words they are the raw material of dreams. The image of the ego during sleep as a somnolent sentry is of course a Freudian one (Conrad 2001).

<sup>iii</sup> Ben Okri, from whom this phrase is taken, frequently refers to the somatic nature of the story (2002: 44).

<sup>iv</sup> Or as Susan Sontag puts it: **How it is what is, even that is what it is - is more critically important than what it means** (1997: 255)!

<sup>v</sup> Umberto Eco's amnesia stricken character Yambo describes the process in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*:

"I put disparate pieces of evidence together, cutting and joining, sometimes according to a natural progression of ideas and emotions, sometimes to create contrast" (2005: 178).

<sup>vi</sup> Creativity seems to me to be an organic and self-sufficient cause. Art Brut theorist Michel Thévoz, describing our innate creative impulse, puts it like this: "Every child draws, sings, dances, mimes and so forth" (1992: 34).

<sup>vii</sup> A disagreement resulted in the loss of my first choice for the older woman just a few weeks before shooting.

<sup>viii</sup> My old sociology professor once objected to my repeated use of this phrase correctly suggesting that it had Stalinist-like implications!

<sup>ix</sup> "This does not cover each one and each thing with a same, with something supposedly proper to everything and everyone. Rather it advances step by step toward an un-covering, of oneself and of the other, which reopens the place where each one takes shelter to prepare the moment of an encounter" (2002: 152).

<sup>x</sup> I am assuming that within a character there is a soul-image of its uniqueness. It is an old idea that has been expressed in many forms as these two words, one Greek and the other Roman, suggest. Other related concepts include calling, destiny and fate. Hillman himself refers to the "acorn theory" in which we come into the world with certain image(s) a-priori as it were:

"These many words and names do not tell us **what** "it" is, but they do confirm **that** it is. They also point to its mysteriousness. We cannot know what exactly we are referring to because its nature remains shadowy, revealing itself mainly in hints, intuitions, whispers..." (1997: 10).

<sup>xi</sup> I assume that this is because the psyche is a closed system. What is denied or repressed returns symptomatically.

<sup>xii</sup> Interestingly Mike Leigh eschews looking at scenes through the on-set monitor. Preferring to stand next to the camera and, at closer reach to the performance, empathise with what is going on (2002: 53).

<sup>xiii</sup> Sian's strip scene and Victoria's sex and swimming scenes being significant exceptions.

<sup>xiv</sup> To digress somewhat: It's for similar reasons that certain American independent filmmakers are increasingly looking to adapt theatrical productions into films. The former has the advantage of consequential developmental periods and intense readings that refine the nuances and textures of characters (Kaufman, 2004: 26).

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<sup>xv</sup> Susan Sontag is right to suggest that it's even reactionary:

*"Interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted...This cannot be taken for granted now...Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life – its material plentitude, its sheer crowdedness – conjoin to dull our sensory faculties. And it is in the light of the condition of our senses, our capacities (rather than those of another age), that the task of the critic must be assessed" (1997: 255).*

<sup>xvi</sup> As does the recent *Caméra d'Or* prize-winner Vimukthi Jayasundara: "Perhaps the only form of art that you can do without education is cinema" (in Wubin, 2005: 44).

<sup>xvii</sup> Indeed the *raison d'être* of the handbook is the "incomplete mastery of the means of communication" (1989: 1).

<sup>xviii</sup> I had in that same paper made use of the arguments of the depth psychologist Aldo Carotenuto to problematise what I had termed **total interpretation**. It bears repeating - as his insights into otherness and love can just as well apply to the attitude of a director to the *prima materia* of character:

*For Aldo Carotenuto, the creative person, who has the desire to live rather than survive, is the "natural enemy of power" and views the act of domination as a creative incapacity that requires the subjugation of the other for merely reminding the narrowly defined self of its more ample possibilities (1989:111).*

Carotenuto's alternative to the bifurcation of subject and object is to find in love a potential to develop an ongoing transformative relationship with otherness. Using the theological language of Martin Buber he suggests that when one loves one relates to a **Thou** and not an **It**:

*"I remove the other from the inanimate world of things, from the condition of being an object for me – as happens in every power relationship – and I restore to my beloved his or her dignity, integrity and power" (1989: 65).*

*But this, as those of us who try to love know well, is not to merely walk hand-in-hand into some antediluvian Eden or Elysian Hollywood. Relinquishing control and removing the bricks and mortar of the Berlin Wall of the heart is terrifying.*

*Love and fear are closely intertwined because they both evoke that which is interminably unknown, or as Carotenuto describes it, they constellate compelling elemental experiences "that resist passing through the sieve of reason" (1989: 31).*

*Conversely, total interpretation, or a kind of know-it-all distillate in relation to the beloved, would extinguish "the exuberant force" that propelled me towards the other in the first place (1989: 31). Love would be gone if we could quantify everything about a person or the world. For then the other would be denied their very quality.*

<sup>xix</sup> The phrase comes from John Keats (in Tacey, 1997: 106).

<sup>xx</sup> Cecil Castelluci, a film festival organiser, expresses this practically: "There's this idea that if you are going to blow your wad on making a movie, you ought to make it count. I think that's the wrong attitude. As a storyteller...you have to practice. If you don't have a place to fail or even try, you're not doing your work as an artist" (in Ducker, 2004: 62).

<sup>xxi</sup> I have not discussed the specificities of genre but have assumed a melodramatic strongly character driven reference.

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<sup>xxii</sup> *I note that the director of the Oxford Stage Company, Dominic Dromgoole is loath to read stage plays written by "philosophers" as the people in it are seldom people but concepts that "drive actors running and screaming from the rehearsal room" (2003: 102).*

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