

'...to tirelessly touch with my gaze the distance from me at which the other begins':

Marine Hugonnier's Journeys

Michael Newman

The three films of Marine Hugonnier's 'trilogy' all involve journeys: to Afghanistan in *Ariana* (2003), to the Swiss Alps in *The Last Tour* (2004) and to Brazil in *Traveling Amazonia* (2006). Each journey establishes a fiction to refer to a different genre of travel: reportage or documentary, tourism and anthropological film respectively. And each raises a set of questions around the relation of the site—a landscape, a place—to a different topic crucial to our time: war, ecology and the relation to the other. While each of the films is distinct, there is a certain formal commonality: a preference for static shots held fairly long, the screen going to black, and white text on a black screen, sometimes related to something spoken, sometimes not. These formal traits bespeak an intense focus on the visual image, at the same time as its interruption—by the black screen—and its critique. Indeed, all three films posit something that is or will be rendered inaccessible to vision: the panoramic overview in *Ariana*, the 'blank spaces' on the map in *The Last Tour* and the penetration of the visual field embodied in the traveling shot in *Traveling Amazonia*. This bespeaks not a rejection of the visual, but ambivalence towards it. Each of the films is about relation, and is itself a mode of relation. The same modality of vision splits into its possibilities: on the one side, domination, control and appropriation; on the other side, sympathy, celebration and respect. Rather than resolving the ambivalence on one side or the other, as if there were a simple solution, the necessity is to deconstruct each film's formal devices in order to tease out their ethical and political implications, which are not to be simply stated, but rather enacted as a problem or question in the very process of viewing.

Ariana

The first shot in Marine Hugonnier's film *Ariana* is a view from an airplane window of a dry mountain range. Later there is a shot that is an extended pan of a location in the lush Panjshir Valley in Northern Afghanistan. We are told in the voice-over, as translated by the subtitles,

*Neither of the two revolutionary utopias which had ruined the country had ever entered this place.*ⁱ

It is suggested that this is because the place is "protected by its mountains." What we are shown—the fertile valley, and later on boys swimming in the river—appears idyllic, as if in

reference to traditional depictions of paradise, which doesn't exclude the possibility that this is an outsider's idealisation. The pan transforms this idyll into a strategic terrain. The voice-over says:

In the light of coming battles, the landscape took on a strategic aspect. Every contour of land, pass and gorge, every shadow of a rock, lookout and footpath, was seen as a potential shelter, a hiding place, or a line of approach to be hidden from enemy eyes. Each specific feature, hollow, mound and viewpoint was thought of as a zone to control, a forward position to hold, a place to fall back to.

And then the question is posed:

And if the best point of view was not accessible to us, was it because it was also a strategic point?

The mountains provide a potential vantage point for the pan, the name for a rotating shot (from the Greek *pan* meaning 'all'), which translates to *panoramique* in French, making the connection with the panorama explicit (adding *horāma*, sight, from *horān*, to see, hence 'sight of all', implying that everything is available to vision). The mountains are also a site of resistance. It is this dual role that will be explored in *Ariana*, where there is both a struggle for the panorama, and a resistance to the panoramic as such.

After the first failure to get the panoramic shot, in the Panjshir Valley, 'for a couple of days we became nothing more than tourists.' Of course, their panoramic desire, as well as being connected with their drive to knowledge, had already, as a spectatorial relationship to the landscape, turned them into tourists (an anticipation of Hugonnier's subsequent film, *The Last Tour*). The crew goes then to the urban environment of Kabul where, by contrast with the countryside and the mountains which are shot in 16mm, an 8mm camera is used, intensifying the sense of fragility and fragmentation. Apart from battles, two favourite subjects for panoramas were exotic, far-away places—anticipations of the tourist gaze rooted in imperialism—and, from the start, the local cityscape. In *Ariana*, the city is an 'assembly' of the traces of utopian ideologies, 'all of them scattered in fragments.'

The continuity of this shot, this panorama, seemed to erase those fragments. It made the cityscape homogenous as opposed to this urban reality, as if the idea of discontinuity, or of a revolution, was impossible.

If, in the panorama, history becomes a second nature, then a counter-panoramic mode would present nature as intervening in history — 'This landscape is never to be seen simply as décor or background.'

Cinema has the possibility of varying the relation of distance and nearness through the focal length of the lenses used. A long lens will create the effect of nearness with that which is far away, while a short lens will position the viewer close to the subject. Just this contrast is explored in a montage in *Ariana* which cuts from a group of men sitting drinking tea and talking, shot with a long lens (which implies both surveillance and tourism) to a tracking shot that moves across from a curtained window to a woman's head-scarf and cheek. It is as if we move from being far yet near, to near yet far; while the first sequence offers a false closeness, the second sequence, which puts us beside the woman, nevertheless reminds us of the difference between nearness and proximity — however close we are to the woman, she remains other (the question of distance in the relation to the other in film will be developed in *Travelling Amazonia*).

'Ariana' is the name of the national airline of Afghanistan. It was also the name for the eastern provinces of the ancient Persian Empire, the regions south of the Oxus River — so the modern airline is named after an ancient province that no longer exists, as if the no-longer could connect with the not-yet. The film begins with an airplane sound over black leader, followed by a rather bleak and apparently barren mountain range. The voice-over tells us that

In this country mountains have no name. You cannot tell them apart unless you group them together.

Then later, over black leader again, the voice says:

During the war, battles were fought to secure vantage points offering panoramas. This was the way to control the country.

Then we see a hand covering the lens of the camera, obscuring our view (anticipating all those frustrations in the search for the image), followed by a plane of the Afghan airline on the ground — as if the one from which the film crew had embarked. We hear the words: 'This was the way to control the country. Planes had to be destroyed.' Finally: 'ARIANA'. The name, as well as being that of the airline, itself homophonous for us with 'air', is the name of a woman; it also resonates with the privative 'a' of the a-topia (non-place) that is one side of u-topia. It is spoken

as if it were the addressee of the voice, the beloved—maybe the beloved of a woman, since the voice is a woman's.ⁱⁱ The voice we hear on the film may or may not be the artist, or the fictional film director who remains unnamed among the crew ('The ones remaining are the anthropologist, the geographer, the cameraman, the sound engineer and the local guide'), or perhaps someone else entirely. The introduction of the possibility of fiction unsettles the objectification implicit in the documentary mode. The danger of documentary is the same as that of historicism (which was the discursive frame for panorama in the 19th century): namely an identification of the signified with the referent in a way that fixes 'reality' as that which is somehow inevitable. The insinuation of fiction separates reality from itself, introducing a distance, drawing attention to the partiality of representation, and opening up a space of possibility for the non-place of utopia.

'Ariana', then, might name the impossible non-object of utopian desire; but it is also, mundanely, the name of the rather run-down Afghan airline, and is therefore inscribed in a specific history of statehood, and the possibility for Afghans to attain their own access to power and recognition in the international world. The film works on an edge between the actual politics of the everyday world and a kind of absolute claim—a utopia that cannot be reduced to any of the historical 'utopias', whether Communist, religious or consumerist. Over the image of a ruined, dried-up concrete swimming pool, with the diving boards filmed from below in heroic Constructivist fashion, the voice-over states:

All throughout our trip back to the city, our guide told us about his country, his hopes, while promises of past ideologies filled the landscape. We grew up insulated by liberalism. We have no political ideology anymore. No project. Utopias are only a legacy. We have nothing left to hope for from them.

The 'we' speaks for the despair of a generation in the West that watches the news from Afghanistan, or Iraq, on CNN or the BBC, without being able to connect it to a collective political project of resistance. Yet the film also works against this despair in its maintenance of utopic desire, the desire that goes under the name 'Ariana', that is willing to leave the mountains unnamed.

The frustration and interruption of the pan raises the question both of the status of what we are seeing, and of the objectifying implications of documentary, its reduction of otherness to image. This has been contested in the films of Jean Rouch, including fabulations created by the subject-participants themselves as well as foregrounding the position and involvement of the

anthropologist: truth is not objectively given in facts and data, but provoked through fiction and enactment. Jean-Luc Godard mentioned Rouch's 1957 film *Moi, un noir* in support of his dictum that 'all great fiction films tend towards documentary, just as all great documentaries tend towards fiction.'ⁱⁱⁱ Godard also contrasted Rouch to the 'classicist' film-makers Eisenstein and Hitchcock: 'The others, people like Rouch, don't know exactly what they are doing, and search for it. The film is the search.'^{iv} This idea of film as 'search' applies well to Hugonnier's approach. Given this relation to Rouch, it is no coincidence, then, that the film crew in *Ariana* includes not only a geographer (recalling the topographic origins of panorama), but also an anthropologist. In traditional terms – critiqued by Rouch and others – these are emblematic of those who set out to transform the land and those who inhabit it into objects of discursive knowledge, a project that, in the course of Hugonnier's film, remains frustrated with the inaccessibility of the panorama, a frustration which, I think, is intended to open up a space for otherness, at least negatively. The possibility of another kind of relation is suggested by the film show – a movie within the movie – to which the crew is invited: what is presented is a film of tropical fish swimming in their habitat (Afghanistan does not have a coastline, so this is another desired, inaccessible point of view). The camera moves underwater, 'with' the fish, yet at the same time the viewer is separated. The image is ambivalent. On the one hand, the 'medium' provides the possibility of a connection with the other and the alien – this sequence alludes to the nature documentaries of Jean Painlevé, whose film *The Sea Horse* (1934) was one of the first films to use underwater footage,^v and who was associated with the Surrealists. On the other hand, the immersive, which is now a pervasive mode of digital culture, is the form that is historically anticipated by the panorama. What the underwater sequence in the film-show presents is immersion without totality; tellingly it is followed by the city shots which use a hand-held camera.

At last permission is obtained to climb 'Television Hill'. We are shown a view from above the city to the mountains – although not a pan – and told that 'The entire landscape was like a still image, a painting. This spectacle made us euphoric and gave us a feeling of totality.' In the painted panoramas, it was both important that the view from the platform be uninterrupted, and that the visitors, as the subjects of a homogenous view, form a unity, a collective subject. The original ideology of the panorama was in effect to unify the publics of the 19th century nation-states of the West in the age of imperialism. Here, however, the summit is shared with the Afghan soldier who has accompanied the crew and 'stood proudly in front of the view'. It is as if his presence in the image reflects attention back onto the 'invisible' film crew, and interposes difference where there may have been a presupposition of unity. This provokes the question of who 'owns' the view: if the viewers are not one, who has the right (remembering the earlier legal transaction of

the 'permission') to this point of view, this panorama? The film crew must abjure the temptation of euphoria, the lure of totality. Whereupon, 'We gave up filming.' The screen goes black.

The final interruption of the panorama gathers together the interruptions at the level of the story, and another level of interruption, which is connected in formal terms with the interruption by the interstice, the black screen between the shots.^{vi} The 'between' becomes an interstice when its role exceeds that of joining two clips of film. The interstice ceases to relate to the 'whole' of the film—that implied, if ever-receding, totality of the shots—and refers rather to the Outside, as its very intervention as an interruption of continuity. The homogenous time of the panorama is related in a linear fashion to a past that is 'my' past, and a future that is essentially a projection of the present. Such a linear temporality based on the present is a foreclosure of the event that comes from the future as surprise and the new. As the voice-over says, against an image of the blue sky:

*After all, doesn't a high point of view allow the possibility of projecting a future into space?
Wasn't it also the sweet memory of the tourist attraction that wasn't to be missed on holidays
when we were children?*

Nostalgia here is related to the transformation of the landscape into an image to be consumed, a 'tourist attraction'. Hugonnier returns to this topic in *The Last Tour*.

Landscape is transformed into souvenir out of a denial of loss, which is also the denial of the possibility of fracture in the continuity of time, of a revolution. The homogeneity of the panorama implies the attempt to control the future by reference to that which was. The interruption of the panorama at the level of the interstice, as an intervention from the Outside, might imply the opening up of the future to the other and the unprecedented, the 'utopic' as distinct from the failed historical utopias, which are 'panoramic' in their attempts at the totalisation of past and future. We are left with the image of the crew's car, 'FILM' taped in large letters on its windscreen, abandoned with its doors open in the midst of an urban housing development. Around it people walk by and local boys play soccer. The shot is a fixed one, which emphasizes the non-visibility of the out-of-frame from which passersby emerge and into which they disappear. As opposed to the attempt of the pan to show all, in this shot we see the limits of the image.^{vii}

The Last Tour

Like *Ariana*, the next film, *The Last Tour* (2004), both posits and subverts a certain kind of gaze with its attendant visibility. The conceit of the film is that the last tour of the national park around the Matterhorn mountain in Switzerland is about to take place, before this area is closed. This 'closure' is an outcome of what Jeremy Millar, in an excellent discussion of the history of tourism with reference to this film, described as 'a contradiction one must find in any consideration of tourism: that it cannot help but destroy that which it sets out to celebrate.'^{viii} The outcome posited by the film is rather more drastic than just being closed to tourism, for it will create a 'blank space' on the map. This 'blank space' has implications that are both geographic—as a resistance to power, domination, utility—and temporal, having to do with both the presence of the past and the very possibility of a future.

The moving and still filmed sequences are interspersed with titles in white lettering on black screen. The film opens with one stating that:

This is about a time when national sites are so regulated by protective laws with limited visitor access and restricted view points, that they are almost invisible.

The implication is that we are in a situation where tourism has become global and limitless—there is now nowhere that is not a tourist site—to the extent that, in order not to destroy what it desires to see, it has had to be regulated. If in *Ariana* what conditioned the viewpoint was military strategy, here it is the tourist gaze through which seeing is equivalent to appropriation. The imposition of limits is required by the totalization of this gaze. But if the tourist gaze is totalized, the limit cannot be external to it: rather, an 'internal' limit becomes a necessity. The next statement—'The action of the film is set in the near future'—suggests that this limit will be a matter of time as much as of space, recalling as it does a caption from Chris Marker's film of stills, *La Jetée*. What will be at stake is the relation of a return to the possibility of a future.

The first shots are of a bridge across a valley at dawn, and a tunnel through a mountain, like the passage to another world. The tunnel effectively closes the field of vision, turns the next shot, of a forest, into a surprise. The forest implies something primaeva, a wilderness and an ur-time before human habitation—an implication that will be taken up later. Then, finally, we see a shot of the Matterhorn from below, framed by branches in a classic still view, like a photograph or a post-card, one that stresses the sublime enormity of the mountain, its peak in clouds. Next, the shadow of a balloon in the snow, which suggests the attempt to get an overview, while hinting both at the earlier origin of tourism, and the negative or blank space evoked by the shadow.

Following the words ‘You are wondering what the park will be like when it closes’, we are shown a sequence of views. These effectively return the ‘end’ of tourism to its ‘beginning’ in the static ‘views’ or ‘prospects’ contrived by 18th century landscape design and evoked in the poetry of the time. In the 19th century, the Swiss alps became no longer an obstacle on the route to Italy but a focus of tourism, an accessible sublime. Echoing Paul Klee, Claudia Bell and John Lyall, in their book *The Accelerated Sublime: Landscape, Tourism, and Identity*, write of a historical, spatio-temporal development in tourism ‘from the static to the dynamic, for the spectator’:

This continuum can be represented mathematically, as the transition from a point that if it moves traces out a line. That line, when activated, traces out a plane. That plane, if moved through space, traces out a volume.^{ix}

We move from the prospect, to the journey, to the surround of an active landscape—the immersive experience of extreme activities. These stages involve different kinds of visibility and invisibility. While the relation of visibility to invisibility is clear with the prospect, since it is mediated by the notional frame around the view and what is invisible is outside the frame, once tourism becomes totalized and immersive, it seems, deceptively, as if everything is available to the gaze, and invisibility is occluded. We seem to be in an epoch where everything is available. What is necessary, as Hugonnier shows in her real fiction, is a transformation in the sense of the non-visible, which requires a re-inscription of the limit.

By using static shots, the filmed scenes are made to recall both the history of the painting of the alpine sublime—Hugonnier mentions in an interview Caspar Wolf, Eugène Violet Le Duc, J.M.W. Turner, Gabriel Lophe and Caspar David Friedrich^x—and the kinds of views that tourists, influenced albeit subliminally by these representations, would shoot with their cameras or buy as postcards. The series of views is followed by the words: ‘What you foresee is what you know from the past.’ This states a closure of the future: the unknown will be determined by the known, the past governs the future in a linear fashion. What is foreclosed, once again, in this way is the event as the unexpected, as that which advenes, which ‘comes’ from an unpredictable and uncontrollable future. However, after a view of a fall of snow, we read on the screen the words: ‘but your approach is to follow the footprints of the near future without nostalgia’. The ‘footprint’ suggests a trace, that which comes from the future like a track that we are to follow; it also implies absence, as opposed, for example, to the full presence—the availability of the ‘site’ as a ‘sight’—demanded by the tourist gaze. The future is a ‘near’ one, which to me implies not utopian, not impossible. And the footprints are to be followed ‘without nostalgia’. The structure of nostalgia is that of a circle, the desire to return home, and perhaps even the fantasy of a home

that never existed in the first place. Nostalgia is a refusal of an active intervention in the present, which is thereby rendered static, and hence another foreclosure of the future. There is no future for nostalgia other than a return to a past that never was.

The next image we are confronted with is of a ruin: gondolas stacked in the snow, an out of work mountain station. We are reminded that tourism in modernity involves movement, the accelerating 'through-put' of numbers. The closure, the creation of blank spaces, involves a stop. We are then asked the question:

Can you relate to the closure of the park at all... when everything is accessible in the world you live in?

This suggests that for technological, tourist modernity, relation involves accessibility. In terms of the meaning it has taken on in modernity, to relate to something means to make it present for use, or for that matter simply for the gaze. What is at stake in the closure of the park, then, is another kind of relation, a relation with that which is not present and accessible, a relation that would be at the limit of visibility. The difficulty for this extremely delicate and poised film is how to access this limit, insofar as film is one of the technologies of visibility. In this, the use of black takes a positive role in Hugonnier's films. And in this one we shall see, towards the end, a transformation of the sense of light.

When there are no external limits any more, what is needed—or perhaps even what springs up of itself—is an internal limit. This could be understood as the difference between the frontier—pushing towards the limit of the unknown and the unconquered as an external limit with respect to an inside that is known and familiar—and the blank spaces on the map created inside the territory. The latter become an outside on the inside: *extimité*.^{xi}

At this point we are shown a picture of a slightly crumpled flyer in the snow. On it we read:

LAST CHANCE TO SEE TOURS.

A hot air balloon ride over the Matterhorn.

Thomas Cook.

The Thomas Cook travel agency pioneered organized holidays in the 19th century, and was the first to provide pre-paid vouchers. The end of tourism is joined to its beginnings.^{xii} The suggestion is that the closure of this alpine park is also the closure of an epoch. The balloon ride

has a double function: it is a 19th century tourist attraction; and it evokes a key moment in the history of visibility, when, by linking the balloon as a mode of flight to photography, the representation of an overview becomes an actuality. The balloon-view realized the panorama, as the apotheosis of the view to be obtained by climbing the mountains themselves. This was anticipated by Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, a scientist from Geneva who initiated a competition to climb Mont Blanc. Starting in 1768, he crossed the alps fourteen times making geological studies, the results of which he published in *Voyages dans les Alpes* (1779-1796). He devised a way in which a 360-degree view could be represented on the page—‘circular views’ of the mountain ranges, which referred, in Bernard Comment’s words, ‘to panoramic viewpoints from which the whole of a landscape could be recaptured at a glance’.^{xiii} These views function simultaneously as pictorial representations and as maps. Mapping is part of a project of knowledge that emerged in the Renaissance: the projective geometry involved in mapmaking is historically linked to the emergence of ‘artificial’ or constructed perspective, indicating the connection of seeing and knowing that was to become paradigmatic for the West.^{xiv} These developments in the early modern period coincided with the ‘discovery’ of America. This connection is made explicit in *The Last Tour*. The words ‘The closure of the part is putting a “blank space” back on the map’, are followed by a shot of the shadow of the balloon on the side of the mountain, and then the question:

*Could this be the return of
THE NEW WORLD*

The latter appears as a title, juxtaposed over the initial image of the Matterhorn, which indicates a crucial break in the narrative, or a shift of register—effectively a new beginning.

In a film practically without speech, with the exception of the radioed speech later of the pilot of the balloon and the overheard crew towards the end, sound becomes particularly telling. If the film opened with the sound of the car on the road, the sound of exotic birds is particularly striking, as if from the jungle of South America (anticipating the next film of the trilogy, *Travelling Amazonia*), we see deer and wolves, a carcass, a waterfall surrounded by ice. It is as if we had travelled to a world before, or after, human beings. Then the film enters a different formal mode with superimposed images: exotic plants and the sun shimmering on water; a red party balloon that imitates a deer’s head juxtaposed on an actual deer’s head; women skating in snowflake costumes; and people dancing in deer costumes, as if from a musical or Christmas festivity. Finally there is a parade of people in Asian costumes in front of an artificial Matterhorn. These juxtapositions transform the ‘reality’ filmed in quasi-documentary mode into the kitsch, mass-

cultural representations of the Fake Matterhorn from Disneyland and the Disney Parade—another aspect of 'the New World'. These representations question the relation of the blank spaces on the map to the unrepresentable, one definition of the Sublime.

After a shot of fir trees, we see and hear a striped balloon being inflated, ready for the tour. Once aboard and in flight, we are shown the mountains, which look pristine and deserted, in a slow pan. This is interrupted by a black screen with text:

As you gaze at the panorama and the Matterhorn...you cannot help but map postcard images that you remember onto what you see.

This retroactively affects the juxtapositions that we have just seen, turning them into memory images that predetermine experience. The pan provides the material for a supposedly 'sublime' encounter—the last one, perhaps—with the Matterhorn. But what is it exactly that we see, as the camera then zooms towards the mountain? The vast sublime or a diminished post-card?

You would like the experience to be even more synthetic...You feel like an explorer on a ready made expedition.

The last tour is linked by the balloon and the circular structure of the pan to the first expeditions, which implies the end of an era, a double closure. The subjective camera moves rapidly towards the snow-covered ground, as if the balloon is crashing. In the interview, Hugonnier evokes the idea of the Fall, as depicted in the paintings of Ferdinand Hodler and Gustave Doré. This sequence ends with the camera turning upwards towards the sun, which flares in the lens. Are we not reminded of the myth of Icarus, of how his waxen wings disintegrated because he flew too close to the sun?

But this is not the end: there is an epilogue. It is dated, and, like the ending of *Ariana*, focuses on the crew. Lights illuminate a banner that says 'Comité pour la survie des lucioles' [Committee for the survival of fireflies]. We are told that:

By the end of the 20th century fireflies had disappeared in Europe. Ideologies as a way of commitment, as well.

This connection of fireflies with ideology comes from an article that the filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini published on 1st February 1975 in the newspaper *Corriere della sera* under the title,

'The void of power in Italy', and reprinted under the title 'The Fireflies Article'.^{xv} He parallels the history of the firefly's disappearance in the 1960s due to atmospheric pollution, with situation of Italian politics: the continuities with Fascism, the blindness of critical intellectuals to transformations in Italian society and the destruction of particularist cultures. He compares the transition in fireflies from being alight to invisible to the development of a 'void of power' in Italy. For Hugonnier, the equivalent today is the disappearance of political ideologies to which we can commit ourselves as a basis for political action. But I think it would be too simplistic to see this void in purely negative terms: there is something more subtle going on in Hugonnier's film. What, we may ask ourselves, is the relation of this 'void' to the 'blank spaces' that are to appear on the map after the last tour? The blank spaces are clearly not to be filled in: the possibility of a future lies in leaving them blank. There is an echo here of the political philosopher Claude Lefort's idea that the achievement of the French Revolution is to open the modernity in which, as a condition for democracy, the place of power is left empty.^{xvi} Totalitarianism, including Fascism, is the attempt to fill this place with the body of the leader, source of an identification that constitutes the people as one, excluding difference and otherness. Could not the blank spaces on the map posited by Hugonnier's film be conceived as the geographic equivalent of the empty space of power?

Near the end of the film, Hugonnier herself is shown holding a white box tied with green ribbon, like a gift. As she opens it a fraction, a glow is emitted from inside, accompanied by a tone or hum, suggesting both insects and music from a sci-fi film. The firefly is not something illuminated by an external light—the condition for the assimilation of representation with a project of knowledge since the renaissance, culminating in photography and cinema—but rather emanates a light from within itself. A film about 'closure' ends with an act of opening, a moment of hope, the release of the fireflies. Before we leave along a snowy nighttime road, accompanied, by contrast with the drive at the beginning, by music, we are told: 'Lately fireflies have been seen around the park again.'

Travelling Amazonia

The third journey is to Brazil. Both *Ariana* and *The Last Tour* involved traveling along roads; *Traveling Amazonia* is about the road that is traveled. The making of the film itself is folded into the road. Among the results of this road-building project, initiated at the beginning of the 1970s to bisect the Amazon forest and join the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and left incomplete, was, apart from the destruction of parts of the rain forest burnt for cattle farming, the extraction of

wood and rubber. To service transport and these industries, light industrial workshops were created along the road. The film shows the construction of a dolly, using these extracted materials, with which to obtain a traveling shot. The film ends with the laying of the rails and the placing of the dolly along the alignment of the Transamazon highway. This implies a homology between the cinematic shot—specifically the one known as the ‘traveling’, a zoom created by means of the forward movement of the camera, resulting in the visual penetration of space—with the road, and its penetration of the rain forest. The title, *Traveling Amazonia*, succinctly states this relation.

What exactly is encountered on this journey? Hugonnier exposes herself to the risk of traveling to an ‘exotic’ location and returning with trophy souvenirs of the other, and handles it with tact. Along the journey we meet a number of local people; we see them and hear their speech, but these two modes of relation are not synchronized. These are not subjects being interviewed for a documentary. Hugonnier also eschews Rouch's solution of allowing the local subjects a role in constructing the narrative of the film. In *Traveling Amazonia* there is no narrative other than the making of the dolly. In fact, most of the shots are rather static. In part, this has the effect of avoiding the diagetic identifications created by shot/counter-shot switches, and mobile, subjectified points of view. The latter is precisely the kind of shot for which the dolly is used, so the ending of Hugonnier's film, while unexpected, is appropriate to its very understated critical stance.

The local people are filmed in broadly two ways, either involved in activities, such as a pilot cleaning his light airplane, or men in a workshop making the dolly; or standing still. We could take this as an opposition between their role as active subjects and as objects of the gaze. But it seems to me that what is going on is more subtle. There is an interplay between static and moving subject and the static or moving camera. This raises the question of the relation between the activity of the filmmaker, and the activities of her subjects. The construction of the dolly is a commission from an outsider to create the means for their own representation—a representation that will objectify them and their land. Should this be seen as the continuation of an imperialist project? Or are the Amazonians active subjects of representation, rather than passive objects? On the side of passivity, the immobile subject portrayed by the camera, these shots also evoke for the viewer the effect of a face-to-face encounter. While this aspect of the film could be conceived as a series of portraits, the encounters also throw into question some of the assumptions of portraiture as a mode of representation—in particular its ‘physiognomic’ presupposition that an individual's inner character is expressed in external signs. If these moments in Hugonnier's film have an affinity with the work of another Western artist, for me it

would be with Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*, the three-minute films in which subjects were asked to remain still in front of the camera. Perhaps as a result of the duration of the confrontation between subject and viewer, which takes place largely without expression, portrait representation is exceeded in the direction of an encounter with the face of the other, and the other as face. For the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, the face of the other person (*autrui*) makes an ethical demand on me, places me under obligation, in a way that has nothing to do with context: rather, out of the singular relation is generated a universal injunction. In this way, Hugonnier's film goes beyond the kind of contextualization typical of documentary cinema, and, indeed, of most political critiques. On the other hand, context does not cease to figure, and the people that we meet are by no means universalized as members of the 'family of man'. We meet them precisely because they live and work along the Transamazon highway, although it is true that we learn next to nothing about them. Hence there is an ambiguity in the filming of these people that generates a tension in the viewer, who is being asked to enact a double response: to the representation, and to the face; to the confrontation with a singular otherness, and to the historical and geographical specificities of the context. The process of identification and disidentification is further complicated by the disjunction between the subject as filmed, and the voiceover of their speech: is the viewer to identify with the position of the observer, or the one who is speaking? Refusing any easy resolution one way or the other, these questions and tensions are left unresolved—which, while avoiding didacticism, also mitigates the tendency of the film to become, at times, too beautiful. We are not allowed to forget that what we are seeing is a film, and are shown the local people responding to being filmed. This is particularly striking in the sequence with the young man and two young women and the motorbike, who each respond differently—make themselves available in different ways—to the camera.

According to the film critic Serge Daney, we film the other in order to replace them with ourselves, their otherness dissolved in the universal medium of sympathy. In global modernity, transport, travel and tourism abolish distance. The function of the traveling shot is also to traverse distance, to bring the far away closer. The question becomes: how to preserve distance in that very movement. The distance that prevents proximity from collapsing into identification, the distance that makes it possible to love the other as other and not 'thy neighbour as thyself'.

So it is absolutely necessary that *Traveling Amazonia*, like *Ariana* by confronting the limit of a mode of representation. In *Ariana* the pan from a high place is never achieved, since a local soldier accompanying the crew is in the way, and the attempt is abandoned. In *Traveling Amazonia*, there is, towards the end, a sudden cut, from a view of the completed dolly, to a view

from the dolly platform, with the rails visible towards the bottom of the frame. This cut involves the shift to a subjective shot, in which the viewer is identified with the perspective from the moving camera. This raises the question of whose subjectivity is involved here, the 'auteur' or the ones who made the dolly, and therefore made the shot possible? With whom is the viewer to identify? Moreover, the camera only moves to the very limited extent of the length of the dolly, despite the clicking fingers that appear in front of it. The shot is as incomplete as the road itself. Both are, in a sense, 'failed' projects of appropriation. Time passes. An 'empty' duration is created. The sun sets.

So what is the significance of this focus on the traveling shot, which governs both the narrative and the structure, of *Traveling Amazonia*, as does the pan in *Ariana* and its extension into the overview in *The Last Tour*? In a group discussion about Marguerite Duras' and Alain Resnais' film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) in the year that it appeared, Jean-Luc Godard stated that 'tracking shots are a question of morality'.^{xvii} The question of the ethical and political implications of a particular kind of shot was taken up two years later by Jacques Rivette, in a review of Guillo Pontecorvo's film *Kapo* entitled 'De l'abjection',^{xviii} where the question was that of a forward tracking shot when a character commits suicide:

Look at Kapo, the shot when Emmanuelle Riva commits suicide by throwing herself on the electrified wires: someone who decides at that moment to do a forward tracking shot to reframe the body from beneath, taking care to set the raised hand exactly in a corner of the final frame, deserves nothing more than the deepest contempt.^{xix}

Daney returned to the controversy around this claim in his essay 'Le traveling de Kapo',^{xx} where he adds:

Thus a simple camera movement was the one not to make. The movement you must – obviously – be abject to make. As soon as I read those lines I know the author was absolutely right.^{xxi}

That *Kapo* is, as he states at the outset 'among the movies I have never seen,' far from qualifying his statement, reinforces it, since there are things that should not be shown, or at least are not to be represented in an image that does not speak of its own limitations. But is Rivette still right today?

The moment of assent to this doctrine is situated by Daney in relation to his own birth as a cinephile at a time when, between Auschwitz and Hiroshima in the near past, and with the

looming threat of nuclear annihilation, the essential thing seemed to be an aesthetics and politics of *form*. Daney contrasts the tracking shot in *Kapo*, a camera-movement that aestheticizes a dead body in a way that obliterates singularity, with the distance maintained by Resnais' film on the Holocaust, *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955). Does the lesson of the immorality of the tracking shot in *Kapo* still apply?

In Kapo it was still possible to be upset at Pontecorvo for inconsiderately abolishing a distance he should have 'kept'. The tracking shot was immoral for the simple reason that it was putting us-him filmmaker and me spectator-in a place where we did not belong, where I anyway could not and did not want to be, because he 'deported' me from my real situation as a spectator-witness forcing me to be part of the picture. What was the meaning of Godard's formula if not that one should never put himself where one isn't nor should he speak for others?

We should be careful not to equate this distance with detachment. Cinema 'adopted' him, Daney writes:

So that it could teach me to tirelessly touch with my gaze the distance from me at which the other begins.^{xxii}

In this distance resides the distinction between identification, with the consolations of sympathy, and respect for the other. In *Ariana*, and perhaps even more in *Traveling Amazonia*, Marine Hugonnier shows herself to be concerned in an exemplary way with the 'distance from me at which the other begins.' Is not the problem with the pan, finally acknowledged on 'Television Hill', precisely that it would put us 'in a place where we did not belong'? Just over a decade after the moment when for Daney, who died of AIDS in 1992, the year the aforementioned essay was published, it seemed that 'tracking shots are no longer a moral issue' and 'cinema is too weak to entertain such a question,' Hugonnier returns, in the context of a new globalised imperialism, to the ethics and politics of form. The formal restraint of the films of the trilogy, linked to a gesture of self-limitation, opens up the possibility for the interruption of the present by another future.

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NOTES

I would like to thank Deirdre O'Dwyer for her very helpful comments on this essay, and for editing the English version.

ⁱ Quotations without a source being given are from the voice-over.

ⁱⁱ In this mode of address there is perhaps also a very muted hint at the 13th century love poems of Jalal al-Din Rumi, founder of the Mevlevi Sufi order of Whirling Dervishes, who was born in Balkh in what is now Afghanistan, and who offered a way to God through longing and ecstatic sexual passion.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cited in Peter Wollen, *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film* (London: Verso, 2002), p.99.

^{iv} 'B.B. of the Rhine' in Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, eds., *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings by Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), p.101, cited in the excellent obituary by Emilie Bickerton, 'The Camera Possessed: Jean Rouch, Ethnographic Cinéaste: 1917-2004', *New Left Review*, second series, no. 27, May-June 2004, pp.49-63.

^v Painlevé's wildlife films as a source for this sequence is mentioned in an email from Hugonnier to the author, April 16th, 2003.

^{vi} My discussion of the interstice is based on Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), pp. 179-88. For Deleuze, the Outside is time.

^{vii} The discussion here of *Ariana*, and some parts of the discussion below, have been adapted from my essay, 'Interrupting the Pan: Marine Hugonnier's *Ariana*,' in *Marine Hugonnier* (London: Film and Video Umbrella and Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts, 2004), pp.30-41.

^{viii} Jeremy Millar, 'The Beginning and the End' in *Marine Hugonnier*, op.cit., p.66.

^{ix} Claudia Bell, and John Lyall, *The Accelerated Sublime: Landscape, Tourism, and Identity* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002). P.54.

^x Lynne Cooke, 'Interview with Marine Hugonnier' in *Marine Hugonnier*, op.cit., p.75.

^{xi} For Jacques Lacan, the subject is constituted in relation to 'extimacy' (*extimité*), 'something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me.' See *The Seminar, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-60*, trans. Dennis Porter, London: Routledge, 1992, pp.71 and 139.

^{xii} For the idea of the 'last tour', see Bell and Lyall, *The Accelerated Sublime*, op.cit., p.198.

^{xiii} Bernard Comment, *The Panorama* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp.81-2.

^{xiv} See Samuel Y Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

^{xv} Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Écrits Corsaires*, trans. Philippe Guilhon (Paris: Flammarion, 1976), pp.180-89.

^{xvi} Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell, Oxford, UK, 1988), p.233; for a discussion, see Bernard Flynn, *The Philosophy of Claude Lefort: Interpreting the Political* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2005), pp.216-7.

^{xvii} Jean Domarchi, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre Kast, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, 'Hiroshima, notre amour', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 97, July 1959 (translated in Jim Hillier ed., *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p.62. Luc Moullet, in an article on Samuel Fuller, had already claimed that "morality is a question of tracking shots" (Luc Moullet, 'Sam Fuller – sur les brisées de Marlowe', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no.93, March 1959, translated as 'Sam Fuller: In Marlowe's Footsteps' in Hillier, ed., *Cahiers*, p.148).

^{xviii} *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 20, June 1961), reprinted in Alain Bergala et al., *Théories du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2001), pp.37-40.

^{xix} *Ibid*, p.38.

^{xx} *Traffic*, no. 4, autumn 1992, reprinted in Serge Daney and Serge Toubiana, *Persévérance* (Paris: P.o.l., 1994), pp., 15-39, citations from the English translation by Laurent Kretschmar, 'The Tracking Shot in *Kapo*' at www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/04/30/kapo_daney.html.

^{xxi} Daney, *Persévérance*, p.16.

^{xxii} *Ibid*, p.38: "Pour qu'il m'apprenne à toucher inlassablement du regard à quelle distance de moi commence l'autre."