

Violence and Laughter: Paradoxes of Nomadic Thought in Postcolonial Cinema

Patricia Pisters

Art is never an end in itself. It is only an instrument for tracing lines of lives, that is to say, all these real becomings that are not simply produced *in* art, all these active flights that do not consist in fleeing *into* art . . . but rather sweep it away with them towards the realms of the asignifying, the asubjective.
(Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 187)¹

In *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996) and *Divine Intervention* (2002), director Elia Suleiman features as one of the main characters. He did not cast himself; rather he was casted by the script that drew him into the film, as he points out in a DVD-interview (A-Film 2003). Although both films are set in his native village, Nazareth, they are not autobiographical in a classic way, representing events in the life of the director when he returns to Palestine. Rather, the films depict an invented self-portrait that is carefully constructed by the director's selection of images, actions and situations and simultaneously completely undetermined by his personal subjectivity. Suleiman's approach can be characterised as a 'politics of the impersonal' that is of central importance in Deleuzian philosophy. In this chapter I will address the objections raised against Deleuze by postcolonial and political theory, by focusing on this 'politics of the impersonal' and other Deleuzian concepts, such as the nomad, that have stirred many discussions. Through a concrete reading of Suleiman's films I will argue that in order to understand the political accountability of Deleuzian philosophy it is necessary to grasp the paradoxical implications of nomadic thought and immanent philosophy.

Postcolonial Charges against Deleuze

Since Gayatri Spivak's rigorous dismissal of Deleuze in her seminal article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' the significance of Deleuzian philosophy for postcolonial studies has been heavily contested.² Postcolonial

critics have argued that Deleuzian philosophy cannot take account of the political. In general terms, two basic charges are held against Deleuze (and Guattari). First, Deleuze's critique of representation and his emphasis on desire, lines of flight and the virtual are seen to prohibit any contact with concrete postcolonial and political reality. Secondly, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy arguably leaves no room for the specific voices of (third world) others. The political concepts they provide, such as the nomad and becoming-minoritarian, are problematic from a postcolonial point of view.

Spivak formulates her critique with respect to Deleuze's rejection of representation. For Spivak, both political representation (speaking for, *Vertretung*) and re-presentation as in art and philosophy (*Darstellung*), make representation the most important concept for understanding the ideological nature of reality, and hence for speaking about reality itself (Spivak 1994: 74). Accordingly, Deleuze's critique of representation is seen by Spivak as a refusal to deal with the ideological nature of 'reality'. Also Deleuze's claim that 'we never desire against our interests, because interest always follows and finds itself where desire has placed it' is unacceptable to Spivak because it downplays ideology (Spivak 1994: 68). In a similar critique, Christopher Miller reproaches Deleuzian thought as a mystification of the virtual which leaves reality in a 'now-you-see-it-now-you-don't limbo'. According to Miller this imprecise 'limbo' means that only 'certified Deleuzians' would be able to say whether reality and representation is left behind or whether there is still contact with (represented) reality (Miller 2003: 5).

According to Spivak, Deleuze also ignores the epistemic violence of colonial and imperial conceptions of the other. The real (local) voice of experience of the colonial or postcolonial subject remains absent, in favour of a so-called universal, but in the final analysis Eurocentric, theory. Miller also argues against the 'postidentitarian' predicaments faced by Deleuze and Guattari, and points to the problematic abstraction of 'the other' in nomadic thinking: 'Colonial and postcolonial studies have taught us, perhaps above all else, that "the other" cannot be so quickly and permanently dissolved in abstraction' (Miller 2003: 5). In this respect, Deleuzian concepts such as the nomad and becoming-minoritarian are considered to be particularly problematic. These concepts are often considered as part of a 'politics of disappearance of local or indigenous knowledge systems' (Wuthnow 2002: 184). The general fear is that 'becoming-minoritarian' might lead to a literal becoming-imperceptible, a condition too familiar for minorities of all sorts, and something they would like overcome rather than strive for. The nomad

is often seen to romanticise mobility and fragmentation at the margins. This coincidentally perpetuates the terms of colonial discourse by holding on to a universalised and unmarked Western norm (Wuthnow 2002: 189).

Most recently, Peter Hallward goes even further, arguing that Deleuze's ultimate aim is to reach escape velocity and disappear into an impersonal cosmic vitalism. According to Hallward, Deleuze's philosophy 'inhibits any consequential engagement with the constraints of our actual world' (Hallward 2006: 161). He, too, argues that Deleuze has no concept of the other: 'Deleuze writes a philosophy of (virtual) difference without (actual) others'. Concrete historical time or actuality cannot, according to Hallward, be taken into account, and Deleuze's emphasis on the loss of the subject is considered here as a 'politicide'.³ In the conclusion of his book, Hallward explicitly advises those who 'still seek to change the world and to empower its inhabitants' to look elsewhere. A more devastating 'philicide' is hard to imagine. Many have already commented elaborately on the one-sidedness of Hallward's reading of Deleuze (Shaviro 2007; Seigworth 2007). But Hallward's reading of Deleuzian philosophy of creation does bring together the main postcolonial critiques concerning the lack of political accountability of Deleuzian philosophy, and clearly indicates that abstract notions such as 'the virtual' and 'the impersonal' are problematically situated 'out of this world'.

Politics in Schizoanalysis and the Virtual

It is striking how consistently all the references to the complexity and the multiple layers of social and political reality in Deleuze and Guattari's work are downplayed in these various charges against Deleuze. In fact, it is quite obvious that politics is present on almost every page of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, especially in their work on capitalism and schizophrenia. The very notion of schizoanalysis describes a socio-political investment. As Deleuze points out in his essay 'Schizophrenia and Society', the delirium of the schizo is 'overflowing with history' and it is 'composed of politics and economics' (Deleuze 2007: 26). And in answer to the criticism that schizoanalysis entails escape from concrete socio-political reality, Deleuze and Guattari state: 'To those who say escaping is not courageous, we answer: what is not escape *and social investment at the same time?*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 341; original emphasis). Furthermore, there are several instances in which Deleuze and Guattari have expressed themselves explicitly about political issues,

such as the public debates around the Palestinian situation (Deleuze 2007).⁴ I will return to this connection to concrete politics in reference to the films of Suleiman.

Another problem that immediately should be cleared in response to the postcolonial critiques is the conception of the virtual as something 'out of this world' and as 'not related to actual reality'. This is simply a classic misunderstanding of virtuality, in which the virtual is considered to be opposed to the actual. In fact, the virtual is always connected to the actual, but in a far more intimate way than by opposition. In a posthumously published text, 'The Virtual and the Actual', Deleuze argues that 'every actual is surrounded by a mist of virtual images', just like every 'virtual reacts on the actual' (Deleuze 1996: 179–180; my translation). The Bergsonian movements of the present that passes (actual) and the past that preserves itself (virtual) are tightly interwoven (in 'actualisations' and 'crystallisations'); this is particularly relevant in contemporary image culture where all images (actual and virtual) refer to other images (actual and virtual). In a Deleuzian system of thought it is wrong to see the virtual as 'out of this world' – the virtual is an immanent force that has to be taken into account in *this* world. The consequence of this circulation between the virtual and the actual is that the virtual is also real (albeit on a more invisible level – in our minds, in memories, in fantasy/ imagination, in the invisible layers of images and culture). The important and political point in Deleuze's philosophy is precisely that he proposes a different conception of the relationship between 'reality' (actual) and 'imagination' (virtual) than has previously been posited through the concepts of representation and ideology. How to conceive this relation between the virtual, actual and reality in a politically accountable way is a critical question that postcolonialism asks, and which I will concretely engage with by referring to Suleiman's *Divine Intervention*.

Violence of the Burlesque: The Laughter-Emotion Circuit

In both *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996) and *Divine Intervention* (2002), Elia Suleiman returns to his native village, Nazareth in Palestine, which he presents in fragmented, sometimes *tableaux vivants*-like scenes. In both films he is the speechless protagonist who acts as a silent mediator looking at the world, receiving images from the world and giving them back to us filtered through his consciousness.⁵

Both films have been described in relation to the passive energy of the protagonist/director, which he appears incapable of extending into action. *Chronicle of a Disappearance* 'measures the gradual

disappearance, following the Oslo Agreement, of Palestinian identity and agency in Israel . . . the main sense of the film is of passivity, in-fighting (reflecting the corruption of the newly established Palestinian Authority), and paralysis' (Marks 2000: 60). In *Divine Intervention* there is also 'no progression, development or resolution . . . Progression has no currency here, there is only action and reversal, an endless dialectic of aggression and response . . . there is no narrative structure to perform a revelation of "truth" that suggest an appeal to justice. There is simply repetition, accumulation of acts and no "greater" meaning' (Harbord 2007: 157–8).

This dimension of inertia and passivity in the performance of the director/protagonist can alternatively be seen more actively, as a performative style that creates a distance from his own subjectivity, which turns his 'absent' and silent acting into a 'politics of the impersonal' that is also at the heart of Deleuzian philosophy (see also Schérer 1998). In his last text, 'Immanence: A Life', Deleuze pays homage to the impersonal qualities of a life:

The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: a 'Homo Tantum' with whom everyone empathizes and who attains a sort of beatitude (Deleuze 2001: 28).

Now, this impersonal dimension of the immanence of life could indeed be taken for an 'abstraction from reality' or 'cosmic vitalism out of this world' that postcolonial critics find problematic in Deleuze. So let's have a closer and more concrete look at *Divine Intervention* to see how Suleiman addresses concrete political reality while going beyond representation and beyond any notion of the subject and signification.

Suleiman's style could be described as a 'small form' (ASA) of the action-image as described by Deleuze in *The Movement-Image* (Deleuze 1986: 160–77).⁶ His unspeaking face resembles Buster Keaton, but in the way he performs and films, Suleiman is an heir of Charlie Chaplin. As Deleuze argues, the genius of Chaplin is that

because he knows how to invent the minimum difference between two well-chosen actions, he is also able to create the maximum distance between the corresponding situations, the one achieving emotion, the other reaching pure comedy. It is a laughter-emotion circuit, in which the one refers to the slight difference, the other to great distance, without the one obliterating or diminishing the other, but both interchanging with one another, triggering each other off again. (Deleuze 1986: 171)

Likewise every scene in *Divine Intervention* is set up to play with several associations or double meanings of the visual scene that creates, with a minimum of difference, a maximum of effect. The first time we see the protagonist in *Divine Intervention* (at the beginning of the second part of the film) he is driving in his car, eating an apricot. We see him in profile, filmed close from the interior of the car. When he has finished the apricot, he throws the stone out of the window. It's a very simple and ordinary gesture. The image then cuts to a position outside the car. From a distance we see the car driving and we hear the stone of the apricot hitting something hard. A giant tanker on the side of the road is briefly visible. At the sound of the apricot stone hitting it, it suddenly explodes. The image becomes a giant sea of fire. The protagonist does not notice the effect of his small gesture. He only chucked out the stone of his fruit. He continues to drive. The contradiction between the small gesture and the enormous effect it has creates a Chaplinesque effect. We enter a laughter-emotion circuit, or more precisely a laughter-violence circuit, that is as comic as it is shocking.

Here we have an 'impersonal performance'; the director embodying his character as a man eating an apricot has nothing to do with his own subjective self, while at the same time he traces lines of life and lines of resistance that have everything to do with a life in Palestine. In this burlesque political style, the question of the film's reference to reality is not irrelevant. But it is delegated to the spectator to decide how many layers of reality she wants to see. Of course, the sudden appearance of a tanker on a deserted road is significant, and its explosion is as well. Paradoxically the blowing up of a tanker can be seen as a pacifist gesture. The scene can be read as a figure of thought as well (the stone of the apricot symbolises stones of the intifada; the tanker can be read as a symbol for Israeli occupying forces). In itself, the whole scene is hilariously absurd, which could be read allegorically as the absurdity of the whole political situation. These readings are not necessary for the viewer to enjoy the scene, but the possible layers of significance add to the 'pleasure and pains' of watching the film. It is not a matter of reality being in a limbo, but a matter of the virtuality surrounding the actual images that make them ever more powerful and infuse the images with socio-political and historical layers. This is the immanence of the virtual at work. And it is very political.

Many other instances can be identified to show the various ways in which Suleiman plays with ambiguities and multiple meanings in the images that make the film work in the mind of the spectator. Just before the apricot scene, we have seen three men in a garden violently hitting

something on the ground with sticks. The camera is at a distance and the garden is fenced, so we don't know exactly what they are beating. 'Knock out the vermin,' we hear one of them say. Watching this scene, infamous video-images of Israeli soldiers hitting Palestinians start resonating in our brains. Then a fourth man arrives with a gun and shoots at the 'vermin' on the ground. More images of beating and killings that circulate on YouTube pop up from our virtual/mental storage rooms. Then we see how one of the men takes two sticks and picks up the poisonous snake they just killed . . . The difference of the actual image from all the virtual images that had crossed our minds is small, but the difference in the actual situation is enormous. Again Suleiman has played with the 'mist of virtual images' that surrounds the actual images he is showing.

A final example from *Divine Intervention* occurs at the end of the film, where the protagonist stops at a traffic light. On one side of the road he looks at a giant billboard that invites Israelis (over the image of a woman covered in a Palestinian Arafat shawl) to 'come and shoot when they are ready'. On the other side, next to him, a man wearing a kippah stops in his car, the Israeli flag waving on the roof top. Our protagonist opens the window, puts on a music cassette, and looks (dark sunglasses shading his eyes) at the man in the car next to him. While Natasha Atlas sings her Arabic trance version of 'I put a spell on you', they keep on staring at each other, traffic lights turning green and then red again, until the cars behind them start to hoot. It's a fight without words, without violence, a fight of pure image and sound, an exchange of blank looks and music. The scene immediately following this one shows two forcefully gripping hands in extreme close-up. This is easily taken as a metaphoric commentary on the fight between the two men we just saw, or even the two countries. But just when we allow that reading of the image sequence, the frame shifts and it now appears to be the protagonist helping his sick father get out of bed in the hospital where he is being treated after a heart attack. And then this image of the 'wrestling/helping hands' starts to resonate with a scene from *Chronicle of a Disappearance* where we see Suleiman's (real and still healthy) father's hand wrestling with his friend's, and (almost) always winning. Whereas in other scenes, the images that seem to be private or ordinary turn out to be (virtually) political, here an image that seems to be very political turns out to be a very private affair. The actual image of the father's hand as he is being helped out of bed is reminiscent of the strong hands he used to have. At the end of the film the father dies. The virtual brings in the notion of generational time.

All these scenes indicate the ways in which Suleiman reaches the impersonal dimension of immanent life by stepping back from both himself and from the political situation, as he constantly shifts between events in his personal life and observations that have collective and political resonances. He creates images that enter into circuits of the virtual and the actual and therefore are 'swept towards the asubjective' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 187). He does this on the one hand by employing a burlesque composition of the image typical for the small form of the action-image. Suleiman's inert performance and the images that open up to so many virtual dimensions could perhaps be considered as the 'burlesque of the time-image'. On the other hand his films can also be considered as a modern political cinema of the time-image.

Political Cinema: Fabulation and Double-Becoming

In *The Time-Image* Deleuze refers to modern political cinema, especially films that address contemporary political issues such as decolonisation, migration and globalisation (Deleuze 1989: 215–24). Consistent with Deleuze's conception of cinema as movement-images and time-images that have an immanent power independent of representation, this modern political cinema does not represent reality, but instead operates as a performative speech act that plays a part in constructing reality (Pisters 2006: 175–93). In a postcolonial world that is characterised by fragmentation, migration, transnational movements and intercultural encounters, some postcolonial scholars including Stuart Hall have suggested that representation in the classic sense is no longer possible or even desirable, instead commonly constituting a 'burden of representation' (Hall 1996: 441–9). The political accountability of these images is necessarily situated on the level of their power to do something (if only to affect us and cause debate) *to* reality, rather than on the level of accurate representation *in or as* reality. For the filmmaker, this implies that he should not try to *represent* a people, but his 'fabulating' films can contribute to the *creation* of a people. Fabulations are forms of story-telling that are 'neither impersonal myth but neither personal fiction' (Deleuze 1989: 222). The relation between the filmmaker and his characters is one of becoming: '[T]he author takes one step towards his characters, but the characters take one step towards the author: double-becoming' (Deleuze 1989: 222).

In his films, Elia Suleiman is both director and character, and in that sense this double-becoming takes place in his own performance where he becomes his character. *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine*

Intervention are modern political films that create fabulations between the personal and the collective, between the objective and subjective, between fiction and reality, expressing and addressing *both* the actual *and* the virtual as part of reality. In an interview, Suleiman discusses his way of working and the way in which he wants to renew the story of Palestine with his films. He explicitly addresses the question of fiction and reality, arguing that a film is real (it exists), and also that dreaming and the imagination is part of reality:

What I'm trying to do is bring the imagination down and put the supposed reality up so that they are moving on the same, let's say, strata. There is no rupture between one and the other, but they are blurred territory. The spectator imagines and decides him or herself what's real and what is not real. This is always an open question, we can never know for sure. (A-Film 2003)

Suleiman's reference to the 'strata' and (at another moment in the interview) the layers (that is, the virtual, memories, associations) in his images, corresponds to Deleuze's argument that time-images can link up in an infinite number of ways and therefore become 'stratigraphic':

In this sense, the archaeological, or stratigraphic, image is *read* at the same time as it is seen . . . Not in the sense that it used to be said; to perceive *is* to know, is to imagine, is to recall, but in the sense that reading is a function of the eye, a perception of perception, a perception which does not grasp perception without also grasping its reverse, imagination, memory, or knowledge. (Deleuze 1989: 243)

Deleuze here calls for a new analytic of the image, reading the stratigraphic condition of the image in all its richness and virtuality. This implies a different relation to the political than has traditionally been sought through representation.

As Deleuze has argued, the modern political film is based on the condition that 'the people are what is missing' (Deleuze 1989: 215). Nowhere is this political fact of a 'missing people' more explicitly acknowledged in Deleuze's work than in the case of the Palestinian people. In a short article titled 'Stones', Deleuze writes:

Europe owes its Jews an infinite debt that Europe has not even begun to pay. Instead, an innocent people is being made to pay – the Palestinians . . . We are to believe that the State of Israel has been established in an empty land which has been awaiting the return of ancient Hebrews for centuries. The ghosts of a few Arabs that are around, keeping watch over the sleepy stones, came from somewhere else. The Palestinians – tossed aside, forgotten – have been called on to recognize the right of Israel to exist, while

the Israelis have continued to deny the fact of the existence of a Palestine people. (Deleuze 2007: 338)

Suleiman's films are modern political films in that they contribute to the 'invention' of a missing people, by 'renewing its story' in a non-representational and impersonal, stratigraphic way that allows a free play between reality and imagination, memory and knowledge, with often humorous and empowering effects. A most powerful symbol of that empowerment through imagination is a pink balloon that the protagonist in *Divine Intervention* inflates in his car at a checkpoint in Ramallah where he meets his female (Israeli) lover from across the checkpoint. As the balloon grows bigger, the face of Arafat becomes visible and grows bigger.⁷ Then the rooftop of the car opens and the balloon escapes, crossing the checkpoint. Leaving the Israeli soldiers baffled and waiting for orders to act on a balloon crossing the border unauthorised, the balloon travels over Jerusalem to land softly on top of the golden mosque.

Besides the burlesque strategy that puts us in a politically engaged circuit of laughter-emotions, the stratigraphic conflation of imagination and reality is another way in which the political is taken into account in a virtual/actual circuit. One does not need to be a Deleuzian to 'disentangle' these layers. It's precisely that they cannot be disentangled and that they are always mixed that makes the film so powerful, both aesthetically and politically. It's just that Deleuze provides useful concepts, such as the paradoxical combination of the laughter-emotion circuit, the impersonal fabulating powers of political cinema and the stratigraphic layering of (political) images, that makes his work very useful for understanding the complex interweaving of the virtual and the actual in contemporary media culture.

Nomadic Thinking: Mixing Codes, Outside/Intensity, Humour

Arguably, it is Deleuze's concept of the nomad that has most stirred postcolonial debates about the politics of his philosophy. The idea of nomadic thought and nomadic subjectivity 'have led to a plethora of work within poststructuralist theorizing that strongly privileges notions of mobility, movement and becoming over conceptions of being, essence or stable subjectivity' (Wuthnow 2002: 184). As previously indicated, a general concern with this poststructuralist conception of the 'nomad' is that it becomes yet another unmarked universalised Western subject that does not acknowledge the voice and experience of the (indigenous

or minoritarian) other: it marginalises local knowledges and experiences and poses another abstract binary opposition between state and nomadic 'war machines'.⁸ Taking these objections seriously, let's look again at Deleuze's essay 'Nomadic Thought', in which he describes the basic principles of this concept, in order to discern whether and how these principles are translated in *Divine Intervention*.⁹ Here, I think it is important to emphasise that I am not 'applying' a theory to a work of art. Rather, what I'm trying to do is to see how philosophy and non-philosophy, art and non-art, understand each other, as was called for in *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 218).

'Nomadic Thought' was published in 1973 and is developed around the question of the importance of Nietzsche for the contemporary world. Deleuze points out that Nietzsche's first concern is to address cultural codes (family codes, state codes) in a new way, for the purpose of 'getting something through in every past, present, and future code, something which does not and will not let itself be recoded. Getting it through on a new body, inventing a body on which it can pass and flow' (Deleuze 2004: 253). This process can be developed by 'mixing up all the codes', an activity which is especially noticeable in an artistic style (a style of writing, a style of filming). Deleuze argues that this mixing up of codes into something new and uncodeable, is 'what style as politics means' (Deleuze 2004: 254). This is what he calls 'the beginning of the nomadic adventure' (2004: 260). Accordingly, it is important to see how Deleuze defines nomadic thought as an artistic experimentation in style that nevertheless has political relevance, precisely because of its escaping of codes.

In this sense, *Divine Intervention* is a nomadic adventure, not because it represents a 'nomadic' ('fragmented, multiplied, in flux') people, but because it mixes several codes. If the dominant code in cinema is Hollywood, this film plays with the cinematographic codes and escapes them by seeking to 'Breson-ianise *The Matrix*. I wanted to break away from the ghettoisation between the *auteur* film and commercial cinema . . . You can entertain aesthetically, politically, authorially. Entertainment is not necessarily superficial or ephemeral' (A-film 2003). The scenes previously discussed demonstrate the ways in which Suleiman mixes expected codes to create something new by bringing the actual and the virtual, private and public, and violence and laughter together in challenging mixed circuits.

The scene that most clearly mixes the stylistic codes of the *auteur* film, the political film and Hollywood, and also the codes of religion, politics and pop culture, is the much discussed scene at the end of the film

where Israeli soldiers are training to shoot, firing at targets which depict the image of a Palestinian woman – previously seen on the billboard – dressed in a long black ‘Matrix’ coat and covered in a Palestinian shawl. This image on the billboard observed by Suleiman when driving in Israel is described as a ‘sparkle from reality’, which he took ‘up’ into the realm of the imagination by making the movements of the soldiers more like choreographed dances and the image of the woman come alive and enter into a martial arts combat scene. As Janet Harbord describes:

[T]he action sequence of a human figure rising magically into aerial combat recalls the martial arts set pieces of recent transnational films, the potency of the body matched with special effects, a particular configuration of technology and the body from popular film. This is mixed with the symbols of a Palestinian national state, and the Christian reference as a reminder of the history of this space as a ‘Holy land’. In the moment of magical breakthrough, the thick effects of space-time are in condensed form, as though the past and present appear together, hovering over this site as a visionary, out-of-time apprehension. (Harbord 2007: 159)

A second principle of nomadism that Deleuze distinguishes in ‘Nomadic Thought’ is its relation to ‘the outside’. This principle does not refer to a state of being or of thinking that is ‘out of this world’. On the contrary, it refers to the ways in which a work of art shares something with experiences ‘outside’ of its apparent frame of reference: the principle of the outside is therefore related to the opening up of a philosophical text, a work of art or a film to the forces of life outside the text. Deleuze evokes the psychoanalyst Winnicott who realises at a certain point that he is no longer translating, interpreting fantasies into signifiers and signified, but he has put himself in the patient’s shoes. In the same way philosopher and artist do not simply represent reality, but share in the experiences they present:

We are in the same boat: a sort of lifeboat, bombs falling on every side, the lifeboat drifts toward subterranean rivers of ice, or toward rivers of fire, the Orinoco, the Amazon, everyone is pulling an oar, and we’re not even supposed to like one another, we fight, we eat each other. Everyone pulling an oar is sharing, sharing something, beyond any law, any contract, any institution. Drifting, a drifting movement or ‘deterritorialization’. (Deleuze 2004: 255)

As Deleuze points out, we find something beautiful when it relates to something beyond ‘its frame’:

What is this: a beautiful painting or a beautiful drawing? There is a frame. An aphorism has a frame, too. But whatever is in the frame, at what point

does it become beautiful? At the moment one knows and feels that the movement, that the line which is framed comes from elsewhere, that it does not begin within the limits of the frame. It began above, or next to the frame . . . Far from being the limitation of the pictorial surface, the frame is almost the opposite, putting it into immediate relation with the outside. (Deleuze 2004: 255)

The outside opens up the interiority of the text or the image, relating it to the invisible because virtual, but very real, forces in the world. At other instances in Deleuze’s thought these virtual forces are related to a universal consciousness of becoming-minoritarian, and also to the external forces of the body without organs (BwO), that can however only be experienced as forces of intensity acting upon a body. Intensity is thus a third principle of nomadism, closely related to the outside:

The lived experience is not subjective, or not necessarily. It is not of the individual. It is flow and the interruption of flow, since each intensity is necessarily in relation to another intensity. In such a way that something gets through. This is what is underneath the codes, what escapes them, and what the codes want to translate, convert, cash in. But what Nietzsche is trying to tell us by this writing of intensities is: don’t exchange the intensity for representation. (Deleuze 2004: 257)

In this nomadic way, the images and the performing body of the filmmaker in *Divine Intervention* open up to the intensive forces of love and pain outside the frame of the film. Love for the land, love for the father, love for a woman, pain for the land, pain for the violence and frustrations in the Israeli–Palestine conflict, pain for a lost love. Asked about the meaning of the title of his film, Suleiman’s answer in the DVD interview is nomadic, in that it indicates a poetic licence to mix codes. ‘Divine intervention’ does not so much refer to something holy, ‘but to something close to that’, namely imagination, that allows one to cross borders and checkpoints. When the protagonist loses both his father and his lover, the lover returns as an imaginary heroine. Whereas earlier in the film she has crossed the checkpoint just by walking past the soldiers in a sexy pink dress and high heels (which makes the watchtower collapse), in the ‘ninja’ scene at the end of the film she returns as comic and aestheticised violence that carves out a new story, a fabulated story, for the Palestinian people.

The subtitle of the film relates to Suleiman’s previous film. Where *Chronicle of a Disappearance* clearly addresses the disappearance of Palestine (the final image of Suleiman’s old parents having fallen asleep in front of the television set where the Israeli flag marks the end of a broadcasting day was the subject of much political comment), the subtitle of

Divine Intervention is *Chronicle of Love and Pain*. 'It grounds the film's imagination,' as Suleiman says, precisely by addressing lived experiences outside the frames of the image. Once more we see how the Divine and the Outside do not refer to an abstract virtual realm out of this world, but on the contrary, to an interpenetration of the world, the outside and intensity, within the text, the work of art and cinema.

In his seminal essay on nomadic thought, Deleuze indicates that humour is another characteristic of nomadism:

Call it the 'comedy of the superhuman' or the 'clowning of God'. There is always an indescribable joy that springs from great books, even when they speak of ugly, desperate, or terrifying things . . . You cannot help but laugh when you mix up the codes. If you put thought in relation to the outside, Dionysian moments of laughter will erupt, and this is thinking in the clear air . . . Laughter in Nietzsche always harks back to the external movement of humours and ironies, and this is the movement of intensities. (Deleuze 2004: 258)

This playing with the codes and with spectators' coded expectations is clearly part of the joy of *Divine Intervention*, making it such a wonderful nomadic experience. Clearly, this experience does not literally take us on a journey, nor is it about a diasporic moving around of people. Even if the journey goes nowhere and takes place in a single space (the 'Holy land'), *Divine Intervention* infuses our perceptions and thoughts with its visionary nomadic and impersonal wanderings/wonderings. Its laughter is laughter in the midst of the intolerable, in the midst of violence, and hence is laughter that is necessarily and vitally related to the world.

The Splendour of the Impersonal: Violence and Laughter

I hope to have demonstrated that much of the postcolonial criticism of Deleuze is based on a misunderstanding of the Deleuzian concepts of the virtual and the impersonal as abstract notions that are opposed to concrete reality and figuratively expressed in terms of a conception of the nomad as a romanticised wanderer in constant flux without any roots. Granted, many of the concepts that Deleuze proposes are indeed slippery and multilayered, and their definitions and meanings change and develop in the course of his work, so such misinterpretations are likely to happen. Deleuze's concepts are indeed hard to accommodate within the usual postcolonial framework of political representation and the critique of ideology, since they operate within a wholly different philosophical framework of virtual becoming and actual being, rather than that of reality and ideology. But that does not mean that his work

is apolitical. As I hope to have made clear by referring to a concrete 'nomadic' work of art, Deleuze's concepts have nothing to do with abstractions or escape from the world, but are related to fundamentally mixed states of the world and the mixed state of our perception and consciousness that is always layered with multiplicities, visions, memories, knowledge: in short, with virtualities. To clarify the difference between a representational framework and a nomadic framework of thinking and artistic practice, I would like to conclude by looking once more at the 'politics of the impersonal', by comparing the violence in *Divine Intervention* to the violence in a recent French television film, *Pour l'Amour de dieu* (Bouchaala and Tari 2006), that in a very different way, calls for some 'divine intervention'.

In an essay on Deleuze's impersonal politics, René Schérer explains that the impersonal power of Deleuze's philosophy of immanence implies a paradoxical logic. First of all the impersonal of 'a life' reveals itself most explicitly in a confrontation with death (Schérer 1998: 33).¹⁰ Think here of the Dickens example, given by Deleuze in 'Immanence, A Life', of doctors trying to save the life of a rogue: 'Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of a life playing with death' (Deleuze 2001: 28). A second paradox lies in the implication that the most original and authentic expression of 'self' can only be expressed by the impersonal, where 'I' has no longer a subjective significance. To illustrate such 'splendour of the impersonal', Schérer refers to the use of the impersonal pronoun '*on*' ('one') in a poem by Arthur Rimbaud: 'On n'est pas sérieux quand on a dix-sept ans' ('One is not serious at seventeen'). This 'One' is not an 'I' nor a 'We', but the impersonal of 'anyone' that Rimbaud speaks of; it addresses anyone young and in love, an 'anyone' that is nobody in particular, and yet exists as any body (Schérer 1999: 36). This paradox of the impersonal sets the stage for many other paradoxes implied in nomadic thought, and is not easy to grasp from within a representational image of thought (Deleuze 1994).

The telefilm *Pour l'Amour de dieu* takes this poem by Rimbaud as its framing device. At the beginning of the film the poem is read in a classroom, and the teacher explains that when one is young one doesn't yet understand all the dimensions of love, life and the future. *Pour l'Amour de dieu* is a film that fits easily into a representational logic. It is the story of seventeen-year-olds Kevin and Meriem, both born in France of Algerian parents, thus representing second generation migrant youngsters. Kevin is attracted to Meriem because she practises the religion from which he is completely alienated. He feels lost in post-colonial French society and looks for certitude, pureness and pride, which he finds with his Islamist brothers

who give him strict rules to which to adhere. He cannot see counter-messages from the Koran, instructing values such as tolerance, simplicity and freedom of religious choice. When Meriem returns from a visit to Algeria where she has seen her grandmother for the first time, Kevin, who now calls himself Mohammed, asks her to marry him. Referring to Rimbaud's poem again, she reminds him that they are too young, not only to marry but also to be able to decide upon more political issues such as whether or not to wear the headscarf (Meriem in fact decides to stop wearing a headscarf until she has developed a full understanding of all the dimensions entailed by such an act). Pushed by his friends, Kevin/Mohammed then kills Meriem, whom they consider unfaithful. In desperation, Kevin/Mohammed turns on the gas in the kitchen of the Islamist meeting point. When he reconsiders this act of violence and wants to call his friends to warn them, his eye catches a passage from the Koran that he could never see when Meriem quoted it: 'If God had wanted it, everybody would believe.' Kevin/Mohammed breaks down, imprisoned in a phone box that frames him in his failed attempt to create a stable self.

Pour l'Amour de dieu relates in a much more identifiable way to contemporary political reality, where terrorist fundamentalism is a serious challenge to society.¹¹ The film addresses these problems, and oppositional religious and political positions register a simple representation of contemporary postcolonial problems. Not understanding the impersonal 'one' of Rimbaud's poem, and replacing it with a destructive identity quest, he can only find a 'way out' when he breaks down, leaving a trail of violence without any laughter.

In his essay on violence, Fanon showed that violence was necessarily part of national decolonisation processes, as 'the naked truth of decolonization that evoked the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it' (Fanon 1963: 3). In an ideological representational framework, this violence has turned into a postcolonial religious violence, where God is called upon as a higher authority to justify human judgemental and avenging violence. Here we have a call for some divine power 'out of this world', which does not seem to bring anything good, or any change of perception, or a restoration of a positive belief in this world. In his essay on violence, Fanon acknowledges that in the end violence makes life, any life, impossible, and that it is necessary to reintroduce mankind into the world. Fanon explicitly addresses European peoples to help in this project: 'To achieve this, the European people must first decide to wake up and shake themselves, use their brains, and stop playing the stupid game of Sleeping Beauty' (Fanon 1963: 106). It is for that reason that nomadic thought and nomadic political art is of

extreme importance. By affecting us on an impersonal level, the universal level of 'one', anyone can be reached by the paradoxical pleasures and pains of violence and laughter, and as such, change established visions of the actual world, restoring our belief in a 'divine intervention' that belongs to this world, though is not the property of any one in particular, and yet, paradoxically, helps to create a people that are missing.

References

- Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (1998), *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. (1994), *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Bogue, R. (2004), 'Apology for Nomadology', *Interventions* 6 (2): 169–79.
- Braidotti, R. (1994), *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1986), *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam, London: Athlone.
- Deleuze, G. (1989), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta, London: Athlone.
- Deleuze, G. (1994), *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, London: Athlone.
- Deleuze, G. (1996), 'L'Actuel et le Virtuel', in G. Deleuze and C. Parnet, *Dialogues*, Paris: Flammarion, pp. 180–1.
- Deleuze, G. (1998), *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. D. Smith and M. Greco, London and New York: Verso.
- Deleuze, G. (2001), *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, trans. A. Boyman, New York: Zone Books.
- Deleuze, G. (2004), *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–1974*, trans. M. Taormina, New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G. (2007), *Two Regimes of Madness. Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, trans. M. Taormina, New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1984), *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem and H. R. Lane, London: Athlone.
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1988), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi, London: Athlone.
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1994), *What is Philosophy?*, trans. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson, London and New York: Verso.
- Fanon, F. (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington, New York: Grove Press.
- Hall, S. (1996), 'New Ethnicities', in D. Morley and K. Chen (eds), *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, pp. 441–9.
- Hallward, P. (2001), *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Hallward, P. (2006), *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, London and New York: Verso.
- Harbord, J. (2007), *The Evolution of Film: Rethinking Film Studies*, Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.
- Marks, L. (2000), *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Middelaar, L. van (1999), *Politicide: De Moord op de Politiek in de Franse Filosofie*, Amsterdam: Van Gennep.

- Miller, C. (1993), 'The Postidentitarian Predicament in the Footnotes of *A Thousand Plateaus: Nomadology, Anthropology, and Authority*', *Diacritics* 23 (3): 6–35.
- Miller, C. (2003), 'We shouldn't Judge Deleuze and Guattari: A Response to Eugene Holland', *Research in African Literature* 34 (3): 129–41.
- Patton, P. (2000), *Deleuze and the Political*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Pisters, P. (2006), 'Arresting the Flux of Images and Sounds: Free Indirect Discourse and the Dialectics of Political Cinema', in I. Buchanan and A. Parr (eds), *Deleuze and the Contemporary World*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 175–94.
- Said, E. (1978), *Orientalism*, New York and Toronto: Random House.
- Schérer, R. (1998), 'Homo tantum – L'impersonnel: une politique', in E. Alliez (ed.), *Gilles Deleuze, une vie philosophique*, Paris: Institut Synthélabo, pp. 25–42.
- Seigworth, G. (2007), 'Little Affect: Hallward's Deleuze'. Viewed at <http://time.tees.ac.uk/cmach/Reviews/rev65.htm>
- Shaviro, S. (2007), 'Hallward on Deleuze'. Viewed at <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=567>
- Spivak, G. (1983), 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman', in Mark Krupnik (ed.), *Displacement, Derrida and After*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press: pp. 169–95.
- Spivak, G. (1994), 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory. A Reader*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 66–112.
- Young, R. (1995), *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Wuthnow, J. (2002), 'Deleuze in the Postcolonial: On Nomads and Indigenous Politics', *Feminist Theory* 3: 183–99.

Filmography

- Chronicle of a Disappearance* (Palestine/Israel/Germany/France, 1996)
Dir./Writ. Elia Suleiman; Cam. Marc-Andre Batigne; Ed. Anna Ruiz; Prod. Asaf Amir/Elia Suleiman; Cast: Elia Suleiman, Nazira Suleiman, Fuad Suleiman, Jamel Daher a.o.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115895/>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronicle_of_a_Disappearance
DVD-distribution A-Film (www.A-Film.nl)
- Divine Intervention. Chronicle of Love and Pain* (France /Morocco/Germany/ Palestine, 2003)
Dir./Writ. Elia Suleiman; Cam. Marc-Andre Batigne; Ed. Veronique Lange; Prod. Humbert Balsan/Elia Suleiman; Cast: Elia Suleiman, Manal Kadher, a.o.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0274428/>
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Intervention_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Intervention_(film))
DVD-distribution A-Film (www.A-Film.nl)
- Pour l'amour de dieu* (France, 2006)
Dir./Writ. Ahmed Bouchaala and Zakia Thari; Cam. Laurent Brunet; Ed. Julien Leloup; Prod. David Kodsı ; Cast Rachid Hami, Leila Bekhti a.o.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0765838/>

Notes

1. Modified translation quoted from Daniel Smith's introduction to Deleuze's *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1998: iii).

2. While Foucault has been an important influence on Edward Said's seminal starting point of (post)colonial theory *Orientalism* (1978), postcolonial studies have been profoundly influenced by Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction (Spivak 1983, 1994; Bhabha 1994). Deleuze and Guattari have not consistently been taken up in a postcolonial context, with the exception of Peter Hallward's recent work (2001; 2006); the concept of desire in the work of Robert Young on colonial desire (1995); and the concept of the rhizome in relation to the organisation of imperial power (Ashcroft et al. 1998). In most cases whenever Deleuze is referred to within the context of postcolonial studies, it is in a very negative way.
3. Dutch philosopher Luuk van Middelaar argues in his book *Politicide* that Deleuze's desiring machines would create 5 billion Crusoes, each tyrant on his own sand plate (van Middelaar 1999). According to Van Middelaar all twentieth-century philosophy is politically useless.
4. 'The Indians of Palestine' was published in *Libération* (1982); 'The Importance of Being Arafat' in *Revue d'Études Palestiniennes* (1984); and 'Stones' in *Al-Karmel* (1988). See Deleuze 2007: 194–200; 241–5; 338–9.
5. In the episode *Homage by Assassination* (1992) from *The Gulf War . . . What's Next?* Suleiman is also the silent protagonist. He is currently working on his film *The Time that Remains*.
6. Deleuze distinguishes two forms of the action-image in *The Movement-Image*:
The large form – SAS' – moved from the situation to the action which modified the situation. But there is another form, which, on the contrary, moves from the action to the situation, towards a new action: ASA'. This time it is the action which discloses the situation, a fragment of an aspect of the situation, which triggers a new action. The action advances blindly and the situation is disclosed in darkness, or in ambiguity. From action to action, the situation gradually emerges, varies, and finally either becomes clear or retains its mystery. (1986: 160)
7. In 'The Importance of Being Arafat' Deleuze discusses the importance of the PLO and the symbolic function of its leader. Here he emphasises the Palestinian desire to be 'a people like any other people, that's all we want to be' as opposed to the Israeli claim to be 'a people not like any other' (Deleuze 2007: 244).
8. In her essay, Julie Wuthnow specifically takes issue with the conceptions of the nomad in the work of Rosi Braidotti (1994) and Paul Patton (2000).
9. Ronald Bogue has taken up this criticism by looking into the *de jure* and *de facto* principles and definitions of 'the nomad' (Bogue 2004).
10. 'Et ces deux puissances impliquent une logique paradoxale: la première est la révélation d'une vie par la mort; la seconde est que la plus originale et authentique expression de "soi", la plus singulière, ne se conquiert que par l'impersonnel' (Schérer 1998: 33)
11. In his article on Arafat and the PLO, Deleuze in the 1980s argued that the 'disappearance' of the Palestinians as a people will give in to a double terrorism, a state and a religious terrorism 'which will make any chance of a peaceful settlement with Israel impossible' (Deleuze 2007: 245). Seen the important symbolic function of the Palestinian people for the Arabic and Islamic world, the rise of religious terrorism in the twenty-first century can (at least partly) be connected to the missing of the Palestinian people.