

## CHAPTER 1

# Houses in Motion

## The Reimagining of Time and Space as Anomalous in Representations of Mobility

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On 29 March 2020, five days after India had closed its own state and district borders, migrant workers defied lockdown and took to the road, gathering at the Paipad town centre to demand the right to leave their labour camps and return home. The migrants, who work in construction, plywood making, hospitality, fishing, laterite mining, apparel manufacturing, and farming, had been, at the time, contributing to two-thirds of India's state domestic product.

'We cannot allow them to travel', a district collector told the media on the same day. 'We have already promised them free food and accommodation during the lockdown period' (Onmanorama 2020). Without work, without any means of transport, evicted from temporary shelters, migrant workers began to travel on foot, walking hundreds of miles in sweltering heat. They carried their small children and their spare belongings. Some were beaten by civilians; others were hosed down with disinfectants and forcefully sterilized.

The migrant in this case, as elsewhere, can be read as anomalous, as bearer of anomaly: the migrant body as that which unsettles the body politic by revealing the logistical assembly of raw materials that in turn assemble the vast swath of free citizens' lives. As indispensable labour to the organization of the global supply chain for retail conglomerates and as silenced phantom in the social-economic-political organization of life, the migrant worker relates our moment's unsustainable (and paradoxical) tenets of 'transnational flow' and 'national borders'. To return the migrant worker to visibility thus converges not only the inside/outside (and, more specifically, the inclusion/exclusion of national or supranational memberships) but also the East and West, colonialism and imperialism, global capitalist processes (accumulation, extraction) and governmentality (sovereignty, law).

A related question that arises is: what happens when the anomaly becomes standardized as the norm? Mieke Bal, in her theorization of the ‘double movement’ of migratory aesthetics, refers to the phenomenon of heterochrony – ‘the variation of temporal density between moments in a time frame’ (Bal 2008: 61) – an experience that is re-routed by memory, an unsettling present and an unpredictable future; tempos of movement whose durations, as unsustainable, can only be gleaned in flashes. Returning to the multiple and heterogeneous to parse the actuality of movement and its fluid reception – the hospitality of the viewer-reader, which enacts another double movement – I want to insist that the central feature shared by diverse representations of mobility is their staging of time and space as non-linear and plural, manipulated and amorphous; in short, as anomalous. This chapter is an attempt to theorize a common aesthetic manoeuvre across different generational fabrics, to understand mobility as a remaking of space, and, in doing so, to suggest that such creative strategies can serve, also, as a paradigm for broader structural shifts within digital discourse, informing what I have elsewhere called Post Internet culture: the mode of self-publication and circulation, the ways in which media is exchanged and capital is produced.

In bringing together these specific texts – *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (Cuba, 1968), *Transit* (Germany, 2018), *Beforeigners* (Norway, 2019), and *Years and Years* (United Kingdom, 2019) – I am interested in converging narratives of exile, escape, passage, and asylum from seemingly disparate moments (times, spaces) to limn the interconnections between the interwar era, the Cold War, and our contemporary ‘migration crisis’ brought about by global neoliberalism and disaster capitalism, the rise of floating labour populations and special economic zones, alongside increasing temperatures and ecological insecurity: in sum, brought about by the geopolitical strategies of the last century. In approaching the representation of mobilities on screen by jointly tracing a trajectory of today’s displacement, my aim, also, is to show how these texts, produced for different mediums, in different contexts, and in response to different political and social situations, all apply anomalous or incongruous juxtapositions to provoke the viewer-reader towards a radical empathy rooted in imagination, interaction, and displacement (for further discussion on empathy, see Evans in this volume). Each film, in fact, proposes a reinterpretation of narrative framework, and they do so by moving beyond recognition and the terms of representation, beyond the desire to see and to grasp. At a moment in which knowledge and information too often disconnect and discredit, when visibility reveals only debasement and

celebrification, these texts thus serve as necessary counter-documents of mobility, works that have forecast but also reshaped new media practices and digital norms.

### **Exile as Episodic and Unreliable: *Memories of Underdevelopment* as an ‘Imperfect Cinema’**

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*Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*), a 1968 film adaptation of Edmundo Desnoes’s 1965 novel, *Inconsolable Memories*, presents exile as nothing if not repetitive and history as nothing more, and nothing less, than a collage of highly-mediated renderings of the past – shown here to be still ongoing and, as such, highly susceptible to trespass. Director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s episodic narrative advances through flashbacks, fantasies, and hallucinations, employing a scrapbook aesthetic that merges the amateur and the official, ‘subjective’ memory and the ‘objective’ reality of found footage and news reports. In holding up, and harnessing, the inherent fictions of documentary, *Memories* also becomes an expression of Cuban syncretism, the advancement of Cuban modernism to the realm of the screen, where both the individual experimentalism of the West and the social realism of the East could be simultaneously employed and subverted.

After its credit-laden, mambo-inflected introductory sequence – a frenetic account of a carnival: dancing, drumming, gunshots, a political assassination; the beat goes on – the first scene of *Memories*’ exposition occurs in the airport, as passports are checked and exit visas stamped. The film’s plot, organized episodically, begins here, as a white-lettered caption confirms: ‘La Habana 1961, Numeros Personas Abandonaron El Pais.’ The camera pans across several dozen women – mothers, daughters – crying or holding back tears, faces and palms pressed up against the glass wall separating those leaving – abandoning the country – from those who have decided to remain. Among them is *Memories of Underdevelopment*’s protagonist, Sergio Carmona: a thirty-eight-year-old unpublished writer, whose first observation as a bachelor – ‘For years I’ve said that if I had the time, I’d write a book of stories or keep a diary. Now I’ll find out if I have anything to say’ – as he bids farewell to his parents and his wife, Laura, provides an early indication of Sergio’s moral turpitude and existential angst, alongside the film’s use of juxtaposition as thematic motif and organizing principle.

On the way home from Rancho-Boyeros Airport, as Sergio rides the jitney back into the city, the camera continues to cut back, intermittently, to the moment of

departure and of spousal parting. We, too, re-encounter his last (inaudible) words to his wife, but this time from his perspective, as if to show viewers how Sergio himself repeats, and thereby attempts to restage, the immediate past with his arrested present, displacing the objective logic of the camera for the subjectivity of memory. As Sergio retrieves the recently-presented past, we no longer see him but see what he sees. In his memorial re-vision, audiences are finally granted a glimpse of his wife's face, her distress a marked departure from his cool detachment. This moment, one of four 'double-takes' in the film, produces a critical image' that can only be achieved through collaging imagination, observation, and memory, a manoeuvre in which viewers are forced to negotiate a range of mobile (and movable) subjectivities with an ostensibly objective and 'fixed' reality. This early disturbance, which occurs, revealingly, in the liminal moment of pre-departure, pre-passage, will serve as a model for the rest of the film's hybrid, multimodal, metatextual structure, and its function for empathic engagement.

Upon returning home, Sergio realizes that the texture of the city, not in spite but because of its relentless stagnancy, has changed. Havana had become, in the interval between morning and afternoon, artificial, plastic. 'Nothing has changed. Everything's just the same. All of a sudden', he says, abruptly contradicting himself, 'it looks like a set, a cardboard city.' Returning from his balcony, from the telescope he will wield throughout the film as aspiring author and incessant voyeur, Sergio confronts the past once again, this time in a reproduced conversation between himself and his absent wife, which he mechanically rewinds and plays back. As the frivolous discussion grows tumultuous, Sergio, by contrast, studies his wife's wardrobe methodically, each object he touches disrupting the temporal frame as Laura, in various choreographed situations – back turned to the viewer, stepping into the shower; legs crossed and reading atop her bed, looking up from her book to meet her observer's gaze – flashes into view. Sergio's fascination for form concludes in his own ornamentation. As their voices echo across the bedroom, he begins to put on her fur scarves, and pearl necklaces, and tights, and finally, her lipstick, which he uses to sketch a face in the vanity mirror: a copy to cover his own reflection.

'You realize everything you said is on tape? . . . Every single word', Sergio hears himself saying, after she calls him a monster while he stretches his wife's tights over his head, as if suffocating on the present, or presence, of the mediated past, while confirming the truth of her statement, the truth of his own psychological

condition: an inability – an impossibility – to forget. ‘It’ll be funny’, he tells Laura, ‘when you listen later.’ (Here he pauses the tape.) And yet the occasion for listening, in this early scene, is not humorous at all but horrific: Sergio attempting to drape himself with the luxuries of the past – material residues of Batista’s Cuba – to merge with his estranged wife, to redact himself from the capital city, where everyone – and he too – feels like a cardboard mannequin, an actor doomed to recite only the lines and gestures already written for them.

Sergio’s inner workings – the discontinuous rhythms of his internal exile – are repeated, reflected, by the structure and arrangement of the film itself. Gutiérrez Alea’s direction, alongside Nelson Rodríguez’s editing and Ramon F. Saurez’s camerawork, depict the ‘present’ – an interval stretching from the Bay of Pigs Invasion in April of 1961 to the fraught days leading up to the Crisis de Octubre in 1962 – as an improvised<sup>2</sup> criss-crossing between court testimonies, archival footage, handheld filming on the streets, fictional footage shot on location, without extras and without preliminary preparations, and Free Cinema-style footage: fictional footage meant to appear, in a narrative set five years before its production, as archival. This constellation of media mimics how we, too, as viewer-readers, process experience – our ability to remember, which is to say our ability to defer and displace – while heightening the specific alienation experienced by Sergio, for whom history, as either cultural revolution or state resistance, is always occurring elsewhere, in the background and on the literal stage of reportage, or else ventriloquized in the regular and regulated narration of others: a history that is not his own and which he cannot join.

As archival footage continues to penetrate the frame of Sergio’s day-to-day activities, aspects of subjectivity also intensify. With his characteristic self-awareness, Sergio redirects his gaze from the women walking along Calle 23 to meet the gaze of the audience, inviting our attention to his early observation – ‘most people are exhibitionists’ – so that we can locate ourselves, too, among the many subjects of his voyeurism. *Memories of Underdevelopment’s* explicit mobilization of documentary – the art par excellence of social realism, of the statement of record, of reproduction by (and of) the state<sup>3</sup> – should be treated in the film, not as nationalist gesture nor as counterrevolutionary praxis, but as a structural critique about representation and power, the politics of visibility, the ways in which people and subjects and the events they contain or are contained by become invisible or, alternatively, only visible *as such*: a critique on representation as false consciousness.

The roving camera meanwhile follows Sergio along the city streets, mimicking his own wandering eye (the camera's eyes serving as his own, and then ours, as he comes into view as character, as we shift from seeing what he sees to seeing him looking), diegesis informed in flashes of documentary footage – the 1961 arson attack on El Encanto, Cuba's largest department store, for instance; first-hand experience and incidental observations inextricable and unravelable from the time of memory and imagination, the time of consciousness or the continuous present, as Sergio narrates: 'Havana's like a provincial town ever since El Encanto burned down. People used to call it the Paris of the Caribbean.' And yet, nostalgia for Western decadence and a pre-Castro mob-run oasis is juxtaposed with the very next scene, when Sergio is in the passenger seat, discussing politics with longtime (and off and on) friend Pablo, as Pablo steers them toward a mechanic in the hopes of repairing his car. Sergio's internal narration, as he leans on the car's hood and yawns – 'He says the only thing Cubans can't endure is hunger. With all the hunger here since the Spaniards came. In Latin America, four children die every minute from diseases caused by malnutrition. Over ten years, that's 20 million children . . . the same number of deaths as in World War II' – is overlaid with a series of photographs depicting starving children, men with protruding ribs, forlorn mothers on the street, on their knees, surrounded by possible sons and daughters. Why does Sergio stay? Like the viewer, he stays so he can keep watching. Yet *Memories of Underdevelopment*, in its frequent intertextual commentary and double takes, in the ways in which Gutiérrez Alea counterpoints narration with a critique of representation that undermines the narrative frame, activates an experience of looking that resembles the spectator consciousness<sup>4</sup> so integral to any critical examination of the material of the past and its manipulation in the present.

Sergio's role as hyper-vigilant observer emulates the film's appreciation for trembling close-ups and hidden shooting positions, borrowed segments from other narrative films and other documentaries and other news reports, a transparent *découpage* which asks viewers to make meaning from relationships and counterpoints, as when Sergio, as spectator, becomes spectacle and subject of observation, interrogated first by state housing officials and later, by court judges, or ultimately, in the film's final scene, when Sergio's restlessness and inaction – a montage of the protagonist alone, fruitlessly pacing his apartment, flicking a lighter, rotating the tap on and off, without wetting his palms – is cross-cut with footage displaying the militarization occurring just outside: tanks being

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unrolled onto the Malecón. To be both in the aftermath of ruin and also on the edge of (another) annihilation: what is exile except for this enduring absence, which is unforgettable?

Indeed, Sergio's central dilemma is not that he has forgotten the past or the people within it but that he remembers too much. Internally exiled, neither a revolutionary nor a counterrevolutionary – 'Nothing', his young lover Elena will later tell him, 'you're nothing' – Sergio's memories enter through autonomic and automated intrusion, literally imported by (US) technology. The 'Yanqui Invasion' may have been subdued or conquered, as a state-produced commercial that blares across the screen will attest to, but the spectre of capitalism and its influence endures, even and especially for those Cubans who remain on the island. If the past is malleable, its relation as epiphany is also momentary, legible only in the spare moments when reproductions (technological, organic) are played against each other. Much later, in the form of flashback, we too return to the moment we'd previously only heard. Instead of listening to disembodied voices, we witness the aggressive physicality accompanying Sergio's criticisms, a tirade that continues past the point where Sergio previously turned off the tape: Laura thrashing about, falling to the floor, and finally, sobbing atop the bed. It is not funny the second time we encounter it, not for Laura, nor Sergio, nor us. Déjà vu, and a style of editing akin to a reprise, in which the same moment, whenever it repeats, is never shown as identical, immerses the audience in the impassable experience of exile, in which both 'home' and the 'origin,' or original, can neither be recovered nor forgotten.

'Everything comes too early', Sergio narrates in the next scene, 'or too late for me.' And yet, moments after, Sergio will ask Elena, upon her first visit to his lavish apartment, to try on his wife's dresses, and he will linger there, standing behind her, the two looking at one another in the mirror, as if to testify to the futility of attempting to disguise the present as the past. The film, too, can only represent mobility – or its absence within exile – by confusing past and present, fiction and history, revolving, as memory does, without warning. When we return to these scenes-already-seen, audiences are given back their own critical gaze. Neither version cancels out or replaces the other but, in contradistinction, each – held together – create the unresolvable indeterminacy so necessary to the labour of empathy.

The work *Memories* does to inform a genre that mediates between documentary and narrative fiction, a corpus of media I've earlier called a 'migratory text' (Campanioni 2021, 2022), should be examined in context with Cuba's other foreign

interventions – not, this time, by its northern neighbour but through the postwar Western influence of the French La Nouvelle Vague and Cinema Verité, Italian Neorealismo and British Free Cinema, a range of political aesthetics that had been circulating within Havana’s numerous filmmaking workshops prior to Castro’s rise to power, and which would coalesce, a year after this film’s release, to inaugurate Cuba’s own ‘imperfect cinema.’ In his 1969 essay, Julio García Espinosa hypothesized an art form that would marry advances of science with the cultivation of politics, in which the evolution of film technology would eventually create the conditions for the democratization of art – ‘the possibility for everyone to make films’ – while calling into question the notion of ‘taste’ and the nature of ‘specialization,’ a response that is also a recovery: ‘the true meaning of artistic activity’ (García Espinosa 1979: 24–26). In contradistinction to the dramatization and glamorization of Hollywood cinema, which concealed, within its illusions, the means of its production while relegating the viewer to passive consumption, the imperfect cinema, in García Espinosa’s theorization, depended on its audience and our ability to critically evaluate the several registers of ‘truth’ within a specific environment (relations between Cuba and the United States in 1962, for instance) and among a broader global culture (consumer capitalism, the mainstreaming of television and personal cameras), in which everything that exists exists to be recorded and, moreover, transmediated – redacted or resignified. Elsewhere (Campanioni 2023), I’ve suggested that the links of connectivity formed through today’s transmedial production – as seen in the simultaneous resignification of a work in alternate formats across the Internet – could both reveal the faulty lens of a narrative-historical timeline and create an alternative system of order and representation based on aesthetic performativity: copy, paste, combine, find all, record, screenshot, transfer, *transmit* (Campanioni 2023: 89). For Gutiérrez Alea, cinema’s function for ‘social realism’ is a vehicle from which to carry or convey a new reality: the choreographed trance or trace that can only arise through the documentation of performance and the performance of documentary.

Pertinent to this analysis of transmedia production is the afterlife of Desnoes’s novel, which he revised during the release of Gutiérrez Alea’s film, integrating bits from his book’s own adaptation, and republished as *Memories of Underdevelopment*. Which comes first? As the book adopts its own adaptation’s title, the doubling subverts the trajectory of original and translation while producing a third text, one marked by coincidence and collaboration. Within this true-to-life *mise en abyme*, both Desnoes and Gutiérrez Alea appear in the film as themselves, and no

exchange of dialogue is as hyper-aware as Sergio's brief encounter with his director in the hallway of the Cuban Film Institute, after the pair screen a series of semi-pornographic film cuts. 'What are you going to do with them?', Sergio asks. 'It'll be a collage', Gutiérrez Alea responds, 'that'll have a little bit of everything.'

Womanizing, condescending, egotistical, judgmental, complacent, politically impotent – on the surface, viewers are naturally inclined to feel disdain for Sergio. Yet Gutiérrez Alea's film, its insistence in showing the plurality of (im)mobility (passage, internment) – a little bit of everything, time and space as multiple, as multiply displacing, and moreover, to expose itself as a form of labour, revelling in the processes of its own mediation, relates its protagonist's alienation in a way that diegesis or mimesis alone cannot achieve. Exile is not presented in *Memories of Underdevelopment* so much as it is performed, conveying an experience of repetition only so that it, too, might be reproduced, in our emotive response, in the film's requirements for our interaction and identification. No longer do we serve as observers but as participants: to sift through, as Sergio does, the various and conflicting strands of reality – remnants of a revolution, of a life that is no longer and yet lingers.

### **Escape as Adaptation: The Alternate Dimensions of Transit**

Christian Petzold's 2018 film adaptation of Anna Seghers's autobiographical novel, published in 1944 and set during the waning days of 1939 – as persons across Nazi-occupied northern France, Seghers among them, desperately fled south – is not quite a modern update of its source material, nor does it conform to the World War II setting of its original's composition and plot. As if Petzold were working through superimposition and not adaptation, *Transit* presents Vichy France as a hallucination of the present in the past. Viewers are asked to consider the slippage on screen with(in) our larger cultural narrative of historical silences: this world resembles our own – the world of World War II, or the atrocities it endured and oversaw, are still happening. In the film, twenty-first-century clothing, cars, and cops serve as props for a vaguely historical plot involving the sealing off of Paris and the city's escalating occupation by German forces. The first sounds we hear, in fact, are police sirens. Our protagonist, Georg, encounters another man at a bar who mentions his danger visa: 'a visa', he describes, 'for people in great jeopardy. They're building camps in Aix and Cassis', he explains, as more sirens blare in the

background. ‘The cleaning will begin.’ ‘Your papers’, a French-speaking, heavily-uniformed, automatic rifle-clad officer demands in the next scene, grabbing Georg from behind. There are discussions of the requirement of registering all aliens. The ‘occupation’ is suggested; people are shown informing on their neighbours. ‘They’ve set up camp at the Vélodrome’, a friend tells Georg as he returns to the Paris apartment that he shares with another family, having narrowly escaped the police. ‘They’re scouring the district. They call it spring cleaning.’

Such pedestrian conversations remind viewers that we may be out of place, or out of time, but that the alternative dimension of *Transit* is not unlike the experience of *déjà vu*: unrecognizable and yet entirely familiar. Was it that long ago when France was rounding up its own citizens in football stadiums? Two years after the conversion of the first of fifteen occupation camps across the Occupied Zone, the French police conducted a mass arrest of Parisian Jews in an operation called *Opération Vent Printanier* (Operation Spring Breeze). After being taken to the Vélodrome d’Hiver, an indoor cycle racing track and stadium located near the Eiffel Tower, almost 14,000 persons were deported on 16 July 1942 to Auschwitz. Or less than two decades later, when Algerians were sent to detention centres throughout Paris, while others were beaten by French police on the streets of the City of Lights before being thrown to their deaths in the Seine. When Georg arrives safely in Marseilles, stowed in the shipping compartment of a freight train, it is not coincidental, I think, that he befriends another pair of illegals: a mother and son who had emigrated to France, we learn, from the Maghreb. History is revealed to be a nightmare, linearity its great catastrophe. How to relate generational trauma, cultural amnesia, and the bigotry of both institutional classifications of migrancy and liberal humanist ideas about ‘refugees worthy of our protection,’ except through bringing viewers closer to our present moment by manufacturing distance? Whereas the original novel relies on the trope of impersonation – a survival tactic premised on misidentification – the film adds the conceit of mistaking the historical past as static and immutable. The anomalous setting’s ‘shock value’ relies on the audience’s ability to identify, if not the film’s source material, then the genocides of the twentieth century; to connect the events leading up to and extending past World War II with today’s conditions of drift and dispersal, the largest human displacement since the interwar era.

In situating his film in an indeterminate temporal space, overlapping the present with the past, or vice versa, Petzold achieves the ‘double exposure’ so common in early cinema, an effect used to frame the sleeping body and waking

body, to contain both or conflate them, to commingle, to contradict or coincide. In an interview, Petzold described the experience of adapting the book to the screen as a procedure of memory, or forgetting.<sup>5</sup> '[W]ith *Transit* I wrote down what I could remember from the book, what was important to me, without reading Anna Seghers's work again' (Weston 2018). Indeed, the film moves with the muted stillness and gauzy vision of a dream, an impression heightened by Petzold's use of long takes, his absence of establishing shots, both of which magnify Georg's drift, his wandering and idleness, the vastness, and waste, of bureaucratic paperwork, our protagonist literally retracing another's steps, or only walking in circles: a rehearsal for a transit that never comes. Years ago, Polish exile Zygmunt Bauman suggested that 'the meaning of the "underclass identity" speaking about the class of people – the stateless, 'the non-territorials' – who are denied the right to claim an identity different from the one they have been ascribed, 'is an *absence of identity*; the effacement or denial of individuality, of "face"' (Bauman 2004: 39; emphasis in the original). Such persons, Bauman wrote, are denied the right to a physical presence, 'except in specially designed "non-places"' (Bauman 2004: 40). How else might we characterize the sets of *Transit* except as a series of 'specially designed "non-places"' – modernity's liminal zones: the space of the traveller, of haste and waiting, cafés, trains, freight cars, hotels, consulates (the waiting rooms of conditional hospitality), 'spaces', as Marc Augé has theorized, 'in which neither identity, nor relations, nor history really make sense' (Augé 1995: 70).

When he first paces in Marseilles' le Panier, Georg is shown to viewers via surveillance footage. We are reminded of his status as illegal and of the state's securitizing gaze, but also of the film's intermixing of technologies from vastly different periods. No mobile phones, laptops, or even digital cameras are shown throughout the film's 102 minutes. Halfway through, Georg, a self-taught technician, repairs his young friend's transistor radio through a complicated procedure involving a spoon, a lit candle, a screwdriver, and a pair of scissors. When, travelling under the identity of the dead writer Weidel, he is interviewed during his many meetings with various consuls, he is accused of writing an article for a communist newspaper. In another critical revision of the novel, Petzold updates the original scene's reference to the Spanish Civil War's Badajoz massacre to redirect our attention to the CIA-backed shooting of unionists in Almería, the Spanish district dubbed 'El mar de plástico' (the sea of plastic), today responsible for Europe's largest production of fruits and vegetables, a site of transnational and temporary low-paid and dangerous labour by Moroccan migrant workers.

The ‘migrant crisis,’ so often magnified – brought closer, dramatized – and, alternately, truncated – distanced, distorted – on our touchscreens, is shown here to be the product of various and mutually constitutive processes involving national and international politics, technical system and software designers, manufacturers, distributors, retail conglomerates, local markets, and consumers. Borders have expanded and also vanished, receding into digital infrastructures of arrest and detainment, the invisible and algorithmic violence of biometrics. Georg, too, who performs in Petzold’s adaptation as both character and storyteller, frequently melts the divisions between the event of narration and the narrative event. When he arrives at a hotel in Paris at the film’s opening, tasked with delivering a letter to Weidel, he sees the days-old blood of the dead writer sprayed across the bathtub. Before he exits with Weidel’s passport, his gaze catches a manuscript on the table. ‘Die Entronnenen’ (The Escaped), announces the underlined title. Yet as the camera lingers on Georg’s fingers, as he gradually flips the pages, viewers familiar with Anna Seghers’s novel notice that ‘Die Entronnenen’ is in fact the film’s source material, *Transit*, transmediated here and typeset in her native German: ‘Die ‘Montréal’ soll untergegangen sein zwischen Dakar und Martinique’, reads the first line. (They’re saying that the *Montréal* went down between Dakar and Martinique.) The *Montréal*, of course, is the same ship that Georg, in the film’s finale, will intend to board, before abandoning all plans for escape. He is reading his own story – a what-if future – a present found and then forged, or vice versa.

Recall Elena, in *Memories of Underdevelopment*, and her assessment, upon being asked, that Sergio is ‘nothing.’ It is exactly because of this voided identity – to be made illegal, the fact of one’s inability to be anything (other than who they are) – that invites viewers to empathize with each character, an empathy premised on identification and resemblance: to be nothing is also to be *like anyone*. Georg, who speaks French with a German accent, is coded as an outsider from the film’s opening scene. Such is the plight of the foreigner, or *l’étranger*, signalling both stranger and foreigner in the French that Georg has adopted or had imposed on him, the plight of the foreigner who, as Jacques Derrida knew well, always ‘has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own’ (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 15). Because he understood that hospitality is not individual so much as ancestral – given on the conditions of one’s proper name, the basis of family or filial fidelity – Derrida knew that unconditional hospitality required moving beyond identification, toward the non-legible or non-linguistic, toward murmur, toward a silence: the right to a consensual opacity.

Georg's failure to both integrate into the local community and actualize his own self-identity is contrasted, in the end, by his ascension to the role of anonymous storyteller, who tells his story to the bartender – another person unnamed – from whose mouth we hear the story (of the story) unfold. In passing on his story, which isn't his, to a community of listeners within the diegetic space – the bartender's café, the hearth of the kitchen's pizza oven (a commonplace, if not classical site from which to kindle a chronicle) – we, too, become implicated in the events from which these intertextual stories derive, each of us a witness and an accomplice to the knitted rhythm of history, from which 'destiny' is no longer or never solitary but collective.

In the film's closing moments, Georg leaves the bartender the manuscript he'd retrieved back in Paris – the movie's source material – as Walter Benjamin once did, passing off his seminal 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' to Hannah Arendt, who brought it in her baggage when she herself passed through Provence and into Portbou, months after Benjamin died. As if to punctuate the film's leitmotif of immobility, 'Road to Nowhere' by Talking Heads heralds the closing credits, consummating a mostly-muted movie with the strident croon of David Byrne, but not before Georg looks up one last time from his seat at the bar, at someone unseen, someone unshown: us.

In placing *Transit* alongside *Memories of Underdevelopment*, I can't help but linger exactly here: the moment of apprehension, a look briefly held before vanishing, the way a sight asks to be forgotten in the memory of its gaze. This up-close encounter with the viewer, which opens *Memories'* diegetic space, is used here to close *Transit's* alternate dimensions. Instead of the abrupt confrontation of an unknown woman's face, struck with panic and agitation, paused in a freeze frame to which we will and won't return, we are assailed, in this finale, by *Transit's* own protagonist, by Georg's imploring eyes. And whereas Sergio confidently remarks, while strolling through the streets of Vedado, 'here women look at your eyes, as if your gaze could touch them. This happens nowhere else in the world', Georg's first impression of Marseilles underscores the dehumanizing flipside of every viewer-voyeur's scopic pastime, as if to corroborate Sergio's value judgment, the entitlement or undesirability of certain bodies: 'He was tired, no one looked at him. That's the terrible thing. Not that they stare at you, your dirty, tired face, your torn clothing. The terrible thing is: they don't see you. You don't exist in their world.' The migrant, the displaced, the stateless, the exiled, the absolute other is the body subject to omnipresent surveillance and utterly ignored. In beginning,

and ending, on the gaze, we, too, take up the experience of each film's protagonist – arrested, unsettled – we are forced, not only to look but to look back, to become aware of our own complicity, and complacency, of watching.

'The people in *Transit*', Petzold has said, 'long to be taken by the stream, the breeze, put into motion. They long for a story of their own and to discover the fragment of a novel left behind by an author, the fragment of a narrative about flight, love, guilt, and loyalty' (Petzold 2019). Of course, these people – suddenly mobilized by a found and fragmentary narrative in which they've inserted themselves – include us, who take in, and pass on, the story as an act of experience and memory.

### **Passage and Asylum in the Leap (of) Years**

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Set in contemporary Oslo, HBO's *Beforeigners* opens on the bright lights of a posh waterfront district at night. Teenaged friends dare one another to jump into the harbour as the camera continues to cut to a view underwater, bubbles rising to the surface. Blue flashes shriek somewhere else, in the distance. 'There's something in the water', one teen says. 'But what?' A man bursts from the depths, shouting in a dialect that remains untranslated. A woman's face emerges into focus soon after. Then three others. Meanwhile, Lars – the series' police officer protagonist – and his wife are shown walking onto a balcony, admiring the view from their soon-to-be apartment, as a broker strolls behind them, readying the contract. 'Oh my god', Lars sighs, putting his arm around his wife. 'Yeah, it's nice', she returns, laughing, 'It's incredible.' The camera swerves back to the frenzied action below, as bare bodies jostle for breath, while the curious crowd of teenagers debate whether to continue swimming toward the strangers – to come to their aid, to rescue them – or, fearful, to swim away. The borders between the lavish lifestyle of urban elites and the panic of arriving refugees – their unrecognizable plea for hospitality – have melted, at a real estate viewing no less.

'They're definitely not Icelandic', a translator says, moments later, turning to Lars, who has been called in to assess the situation. 'They speak some sort of Old Norse. I don't understand all of it. But they appear to think that they're from the past.' As Lars laughs, placing a call to the psychiatric emergency unit, we see the footage blaring on the news breaking before him: a video revealing the 'largest marine operation in history.' 'People', as one newscaster announces in English, 'are

appearing in the ocean. Reports seem to confirm that this is happening all over the world.’

Fast-forward nearly two decades: Lars is divorced; his wife is living, complete with a new nineteenth-century husband, as a neo-Victorian. The flashes accompanying time migration are routine, not extraordinary. We learn, through a montage of news reports, that 13,000 ‘temporal refugees’ have arrived in Norway each year. (Compare this fictional figure to Norway’s current annual quota of UNHCR resettlement: 1,200 refugees.) These ‘beforeigners’ all seem to have originally belonged to three periods: the Stone Age, the Norse era, and the nineteenth century. Although time migrants don’t have any memory of actual passage, viewers gradually discover the reason why migration across disparate periods is becoming increasingly more common: time, as it is reorganized in our current moment, moves too fast. ‘The sense of coming both after and before history’, I’ve written elsewhere. ‘We have become so fully integrated into the machine as to become its greatest development: a living snapshot, through which memories are made before they become experienced’ (Campanioni 2019: 220–72).

The jointly-produced (HBO and BBC) limited series *Years and Years*, whose story coincides with the premiere’s original air date (14 May 2019), before jumping, as its title suggests, years and years into the future at the outset of every episode, concretizes this sensorial paradox brought about by technology. Creator and writer Russell T Davies’s serial time-leaps are revealed, telecast-style, through the detachment and rapidity of scrolling news sidebars and soundbites, including a brief series of press conferences announcing domestic (British, nationalistic) public policy and the broader world’s geopolitical strategies of the day. And yet the series’ plot points are grounded in migration. When Viktor, the Ukrainian refugee fleeing homophobic torture,<sup>6</sup> moves, so does the story. And Viktor, after a brief detainment in Manchester – where he falls in love with Daniel, the youngest sibling of the show’s central family who works in government housing – will move often: deportation to Ukraine; escape from Kiev, via container truck, through Poland, Germany, and France; political asylum in Spain; and, ultimately, a last-ditch effort to return to Britain, this time with his lover, across the English Channel. ‘How many times have police knocked on the door?’ Daniel responds, to a sibling who has questioned the rescue-mission logistics, while also considering the status of Viktor as officially illegal in an increasingly xenophobic and hyper-securitized Britain. ‘They don’t come here. Not to people like us.’

This conversation, which occurs just before Daniel travels to Spain to retrieve Viktor, to smuggle him across France, foregrounds the show's nuanced exploration of the privileges of citizenship, and moreover, the inequality that citizenship obscures: equal rights for all, administered unequally. When, by the end of the episode, surrounded by so many other bodies in an overcrowded dinghy, Daniel drowns and Viktor washes ashore, back in England, the culturally-specific Western construct of 'migrant' and the mass-produced perception of the multitudes of anonymous bodies – dead upon arrival, or disappeared off the face of the earth – is inverted; the show's unexpected climax, in which the protagonist/Western citizen dies trying to return to his own home while the deuteragonist/foreigner survives, turns migration into an Anglicized act. Western viewers are forced to confront our own ideas about 'deserving refugees' – Viktor, white, classically attractive, perseveres, while several dozen of the black and brown passengers perish – and moreover, given the shock and anger expressed by fans throughout the United Kingdom when *Years and Years* first aired (McHenry, 2019), we are forced to examine our rationale about who deserves to survive in fictional-visual representations of migration and passage.

In his series of seminars conducted in Paris in 1996 that would become *Of Hospitality*, Derrida wanted to show the reversibility between host and guest, guest and host. Indeed, the host becomes the hostage, the guest becomes the host, a mutability revealed by the word's roots from Late Latin *hospes*, from Old Church Slavic *gospodī*, from Indo-European *gost-i*: outsider, guest. Such is the inversion performed by *Beforeigners*' cast of characters; can one be construed as 'illegal' – or even as an arriving guest – if one has never actually left one's land? 'So the question returns', Derrida asks. 'What is a foreigner?' 'Usually', he responds, pages later, 'the foreigner, the foreign citizen, the foreigner to the family or the nation, is defined on the basis of birth: whether citizenship is given or refused on the basis of territorial law or the law of blood relationship, the foreigner is a foreigner by birth, is a born foreigner' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 73–87). And yet, these time migrants undo the dialectic of self and absolute other, belonging and exclusion, which the performance of citizenship and the reproduction of state sovereignty equally rely upon. As the migrants are torn between assimilating to their new time and preserving their original era's way of life, so are Norway's modern subjects divided between those who advocate for 'temporal diversity' and those who, as in the world outside *Beforeigners* (a time and space like and unlike this one), incite xenophobic and anti-migrant rhetoric and practices.

After all, one cannot watch the series' six episodes without returning to the current discourse of immigration in Norway and its neighbouring countries. Despite their tradition of social welfare, and the emergence of organizations like the RFSL (Sweden) and the LGBT Asylum group (Denmark), once-hospitable Scandinavian governments are becoming increasingly more and more right-wing, less and less welcoming to migrants. When *Beforeigners* was still in production, Denmark had already resolved, in the final days of 2018, to move 'unwanted' migrants to a remote uninhabited island used, in the past, for holding contagious animals (Selsoe Sorensen 2018). It is not just that the repressed spectre of colonialism haunts our neoliberal present – as unprotected guest worker, as undocumented migrant – but that sites of violence and industrial capital – Berlin's Tempelhof camp; Paris's Centre Humanitaire – have ghosted the twenty-first century as municipal spaces of mobility and detainment. In *Beforeigners*, the contradictions of liberal democracies and democratic capitalism are literally held up for the audience to witness and recognize. 'Norway for Nowadays People!' one sign reads, in a later episode, as Oslo's modern residents stage another rally. 'We were here before you!' another one announces. Incongruity and paradox return here as satire. Such resident vitriol is countered by the fostering of corporatized 'trans-temporal communities', where people are urged to look deeply within themselves, to consider the question, or slogan: 'Born in the Wrong Millennium?'

I can't watch *Beforeigners*, or any of this study's texts, without thinking of Édouard Glissant, who links the experience of exile to an awareness that is contrapuntal, 'an awareness of simultaneous dimensions' (Glissant 1997: 148). Pages earlier, in his *Poetics of Relation*, he surmises that 'the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened . . . an outcast in the place he has newly set an anchor . . . forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging' (Glissant 1997: 143). Back on screen, we soon learn that Lars is addicted to 'temproxat', an eye-drop medication used to wean migrants from their old sense of time – in effect, to slow time down, temporarily – so as not to be overwhelmed by the sensations of the present. And Lars' new partner, Alfhidr, a former shield-maiden from the Viking era, hailed as the precinct's first employee with a multi-temporal background – the plot's rendition of a diversity hire – is revealed to be, by the first season's finale, not a time migrant but on the contrary, a person born in the twenty-first century who'd abruptly disappeared into the past, as an infant, before returning via time flash, as an adult, to the present. The accumulation of plot reveals and periodic reversals

are framed by the show's conceit: series creators Eilif Skodvin and Anne Bjørnstad, in cross-dressing contemporary Norway with an array of historical details from diverse periods – distinct dialects; fragments of national history and legend sitting, side-by-side at the bar – provoke viewers into reconsidering our own internal beliefs and inherent biases, not just about moral reasoning – what is right or ethical – but about foundational mythologies of the individual and the collective to which we belong. We know that the continuity of filiation, genetic or pre-Biblical, anoints a kind of ownership: possession on the basis of birth. Such is the legacy of every self-sanctioned colonization: the ordinary extension of one's ordained land, when foundational mythologies flow into 'the consciousness of History' (Glissant 2020: 121), a slippage that is not spatial-temporal so much as epistemic.<sup>7</sup>

We know that national origin stories are premised on migration (in Norway's case – not unlike today's impetus for migration – the narrative thread includes climate change and rising temperatures), yet in the speculative fiction of *Beforeigners*, citizen-subjects are faced with their origins in the flesh and they can no longer assimilate its narrative stream nor its material residue; the transmission of creation myth or its site of nativity is repelled, rejected. Nostalgia for the past – a common call of today's far right movement in Europe as across the Americas – meets a critique of the present. This collision, this moment of impact, requires viewers to not look away. In that refusal, which is an opening up, we identify the plight of the migrant – the internal exile, the refugee, the displaced and stateless – harboured in the show's title: to 'be' a foreigner in our culture is neither to assume the experience nor impose the terms of the absolute other, but on the contrary, to unlearn strangeness as a form of incarceration – detainment, control – to take strangeness as one's guiding principle, to be guided by an appreciation for one's own unfamiliarity – to be unfamiliar, unknown, indeterminate, even to one's self – while embracing another's. It is, above all, to be 'for' another: a response-ability toward the exigencies of our current moment, which is not timeless so much as recurrent, not linear so much as elastic, a time and space that is no longer the rule but an anomaly. Rather than objectify the migrant – with a reliance on long close-ups and images of impoverishment, trauma, and suffering – or pity the migrant – with a narrative rooted in sentimentalism and the heroism or altruism of Western aid and intervention – these representations of migration, dislocation, and movement on screen respond to the all-too-common gaze of the culture industry by reminding viewers

that the only difference between the ones watching and the ones being looked at is very often as arbitrary as a time and a place, each of which becomes, for these media, tenuous, reversible, and reimagined.

**Chris Campanioni's** research on regimes of surveillance, queer migration, and the auto-archival practices of people moving across transnational spaces has been published in *Diacritics*, *Social Identities*, *Life Writing*, and the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*. His essays, poetry, and fiction have been translated into Spanish and Portuguese and have been awarded the International Latino Book Award, the Academy of American Poets College Prize, and the Pushcart Prize. His multimedia work has been exhibited at the New York Academy of Art, and the film adaptation of his poem 'This body's long (& I'm still loading)' was in the official selection of the Canadian International Film Festival in 2017. His recent books include *A and B and Also Nothing* (Unbound Edition, 2023), a re-writing of Henry James's *The American* and Gertrude Stein's 'Americans' that merges theory, fiction, and autobiography, and *VHS* (CLASH Books, 2025), a novel about a child's attempts to recast his parents' exiles onto interconnected videocassettes.

## Notes

1. For a more elaborate discussion of the 'critical image' that both enacts and interrogates the terms of its own representation, see Butler (2004).
2. Notes from the original continuity script reveal that many sequences in the film's final cut were in fact unscripted.
3. As I write this line, I think of Achille Mbembe's discussion of the state's inherent chronophagy, or its insistent (and paradoxical) act of eating time: 'On the one hand, there is no state without archives – without its archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state.' See Mbembe 2002.
4. For a more elaborate discussion of the 'spectator consciousness' activated by audience members, see Freedman 1991.
5. Compare Christian Petzold's strategy for adaptation to the one used by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, in *Memories of Underdevelopment*: 'We did not attempt to "translate" the novel into cinema. For me it turned out to be much easier, but for [Edmundo] Desnoes it perhaps demanded a much higher level of violence against his own work and against himself, because at a certain point his novel was to be betrayed, negated, transformed into something else. He was fully conscious of this and worked over his novel as if it were raw material, not like something already fully achieved which was going to be "translated" into cinema.' See Burton 1990.
6. At the time of writing, same-sex relationships are currently criminalized in seventy-one

- countries, eight of which punish offenders with death. Additionally, fifteen jurisdictions criminalize the gender identity and expression of transgender persons.
7. Netflix's *Messiah* (USA, 2020) counts border-crossings, environmental instability and disaster, extraordinary rendition, and numberless refugees stranded and starving between the disputed territories of Israel, Syria, and Palestine among its story's various backdrops; the crux of the plot – Isa's (Jesus, in Arabic) return in the form of an illusionist and/or Russian-backed psyops social disruptor – guides viewers' attentions to the farce of filial consecration for geopolitical conquest.

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## Filmography

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