

THE ASSIMILATION OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES BY AFRICAN FILMMAKERS. IN ORDER TO BE NOT ASSIMILATED?

A PLEA FOR ANTHROPOPHAGY

Abstract: Both Hollywood and colonial films made themselves susceptible to assimilation by African audiences, due to their semantic malleability and their susceptibility to local meanings and practices. Media-anthropologic research points towards the hypothesis that it is not the content (which is appropriated and reinvented by African audiences) but the medium itself, with its intrinsic elements such as time, space and narration, that constitutes the (colonizing) message. The question whether the assimilation of a media-text implies "being assimilated", to put it in Senghor's words, must be transposed to the level of the *production* of media-texts. Does the appropriation of the means of production and the cinematographic technique by African filmmakers – which is often considered as countering the alienation caused by the impossibility to make their own image in colonial times – paradoxically and unwillingly implies a "being alienated" as well? If so, how is deconstruction of Western imagery of Africa possible when African filmmakers rely on "shooting back"?

1. While working on the theme of African media audiences, and their reception of foreign films like Hollywood, Kung-Fu and B-movies, I explored media-anthropologic research (Ambler, De Boeck, Convents, Reynolds, Larkin, Gondola, Mulenda and Kaninda) which counters the idea of cultural imperialism by their observation that African audiences appropriate and reinvent the films that are imported from the West and re-imagine the represented into their own terms. Many scholars on reception studies in general as well as on research on spectatorship in Africa, counter the naïve claim that the import of foreign film would simply alienate African audiences because of a unidirectional ideological dominance arising from their exposure to the imperialist commercial text (Ambler 2004: 148; Maltby 2004: 7). Moreover, the reinvention of film texts by African audiences confirms the viewer's relative autonomy. To deny this would mean a paternalistic way of looking at Africa, which would consequently fit into the colonial imagery. The film *Aristotle's Plot* by the Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Bekolo gives a very interesting insight into this phenomenon. In his 1996 film, Bekolo shows the active appropriation and reinvention by a gang of African moviegoers of foreign film texts. Bekolo goes beyond the simple notion of a passive and mimetic audience, but attributes on the contrary a meaning-making capacity to audiences.

Concerning specifically the appropriation of *Hollywood* films by audiences abroad, Richard Maltby writes that those audiences 'create meanings through their negotiation of a set of cultural relations' (2004: vii). This is particularly relevant in the context of audiences negotiating the cultural relations between their origin and the dominant (western) culture, which however has not necessarily a polemic character (Barlet 2000: 117). This negotiation is possible because the 'cultural identity [of images] is not predetermined by what they were supposed to represent' (Maltby 2004: 4). When represented outside of the U.S., America becomes a recontextualised sign and Americanisation a signifying process. When exported and integrated into another culture, the semantic complexity of a cultural artefact is altered in different ways by the conventions through which the artefacts are perceived and reinterpreted within the cultural matrix of the host-culture (cf. Maltby, 2004: 2). The cognitive theory on spectatorship by Murray Smith (1995) also suggests that African spectators actively reformulate these [non-African] films within the terms of the "default values" of their own societies. Murray 'returns a sense of agency to the cinema spectator by underlying the importance of "imagination" as a key concept that has largely been ignored or dismissed by previous strands of film criticism: [as well as] for Smith, individual spectators, as agents, have the capacity – within certain limits – to imagine variations on, or changes to, the cultural "schemata" present within films' (Murphy & Williams 2007: 21; see also Smith 1995: 46-52). African audiences can thus identify with American icons in a self-willed way. Their recontextualisation allows them to appropriate films to their own meanings. In their eyes, the lens of Hollywood does not have to refer to Hollywood itself, neither to America or the

West. By these processes, Hollywood can become a part of the cultural identity and popular imagination of the moviegoers themselves.

But why would it be particularly Hollywood films that are more easily appropriated by audiences abroad, contrary to for instance European *auteur* film? Hollywood films put up a mechanism that allows for facile identification: textual indeterminacy and ambiguity – in other words: malleable semantics. Western export products, such as films, deliberately make themselves available for assimilation in a variety of cultural contexts, to put it in Maltby's words (2004: 4; Fowler 2002: 181). 'It was [...] pre-eminently in the Hollywood interests that the movies were designed for widespread smooth adaptability' (Maltby 2004: 10, 75).

Whereas Hollywood film aims at stimulating assimilation by its audiences by its indeterminacy of meaning, colonial film did so by indigenizing its message.¹ Colonial didactic and civilising movies used black actors and domestic settings so that the African viewer could identify, in order to show the native how to behave religiously, economically and hygienically and even how to live in families (cf. the critical works of Vieyra, Ukadike, Armes and Niang). 'Africans were to be the "stars" of the films, and would assist the touring circuits as they travelled from village to village' (Reynolds 2009: 60). 'Since the actors would be native, the speech native, the setting and motifs native, the lessons they are to derive from the films would come naturally and not from without as something imposed by the foreigner' (Davis 1933). But as Manthia Diawara brings in concerning the Bantu Educational Kinema Project and the British Colonial Film Unit, no African was allowed to manipulate the camera. However, the indigenisation was meant to enhance adaptability of the films or to make them available for assimilation by their audiences, and so to cloak the heavy hand of colonial development aspirations in African allegories, as Davis and Notcutt make explicit. Despite the "indigenous" inputs in the films like actors, speech, setting, motifs and even the remaking of the film based on audiences' feedback (Reynolds 2009: 67), African spectators made counter-readings. Criticisms by African audiences on colonial film were made. 'Africans were clearly not prepared to accept everything that was given them, and they made some unexpected criticisms', says Glenn Reynolds (2009: 70). He cites missionary Feinnes (1936) reporting a consciousness and criticism from African audiences towards the *Eurocentric underpinnings, cultural bias and white paternalism* of colonial cinema (2009: 70), resulting from the integration of the colonial film into "native" moral frameworks (Reynolds 2009: 67, 76n51, 70) and reinterpretation of the films through local stories (Reynolds 2009: 68) on the base of which meanings were given to films, depending on the cultural geography of the audience (Jancovich 2003). These observations of "active audiences" of colonial as well as Hollywood films, coincide very much with prescriptive statements by francophone African intellectuals and artists. Léopold Sédar Senghor made in his 1965 text called 'Vues sur l'Afrique noire, ou assimiler, non être assimilé' a distinction between *to assimilate* and *being assimilated*. In sum, he states that the oppressed African has to assimilate actively in order not to be assimilated (Senghor 1965, Latin 2007, Vaillant 2006: 291). In the case of film audiences, we can translate his device as: you better signify in order not to be signified.

This revaluation of the meaning-making capacity of the African spectator can further be transposed to the level of the usage of film as a medium. Not only meanings of foreign texts, but the medium of those texts itself can be actively appropriated. Criticism understood pioneering African cinema in Senghor's lineage of thought as an appropriation of cinematic means of productions by filmmakers so that their society and culture would not be totally appropriated and transformed by the imagery of the west which alienated Africans from their own identity, since the monopoly of image productions on Africans were (and are still now, at large) in the hands of the West, be it by exotic reportages, journalistic news coverage, documentary or films by development organisations.

¹ I understand "assimilation" here as 'to adapt', 'to conform', 'to bring into conformity', 'in accordance with' or 'to liken' (Oxford English Dictionary).

Means of production are appropriated, according to Marxist critics of African cinema (Férid Boughedir, Gabriel Teshome, Manthia Diawara, Frank Ukadike, Lizbeth Malkmus, Roy Armes), in order to counter the alienation and not to be assimilated. This appropriation of the means of film production always came along with the rhetoric of “shooting back”, *i.e.* making use of the camera to falsify racial and ethnocentric representations of Africans depicting them stereotypically and as the counterexample of western values. The federation of pan-African filmmakers (Fepaci, from 1963 to 1975) indeed made films about realities that colonial propaganda films kept silent. An alternative history was to be made to resist being absorbed by western historiography. One of the first African films, Ousmane Sembene's *BoromSarret* (1963), questions colonialist stances by use of a medium that was brought in for colonialist ends. African films were born in a situation of oppression and marginalization in which the African is understood as “the other than ...” This situation of *alienation* forced the African to make an attempt to think of the self by way of the image and stories which were imposed by the center, and in extension, by the technique which the colonizer possessed (Elungu 1984). In the Marxist reading of African cinema, the appropriation of the image, the mastering of the cinematographic technique is the neutralization of that situation of alienation. The discourse about African cinema as “shooting back” at the former colonizer insists ‘that the films respond to the false images generated by Hollywood, to the false history generated by the west’ (Harrow 2007: xii). African cinema is thus stated as a result of an active use of the medium as counter-strike, in order to rectify the injustice done by colonial and neo-colonial imagery on continental scale and to deconstruct this imagery.²

2. The extent to which the strategy of appropriation of the means of production is put forward can be seen in several African films claiming metaphorically that cinema is even an African invention.³ This metaphor seems implausible if we question “what” has been appropriated and “from whom”. What is the cultural matrix within which cinema came into being, and in which it operates? Moving picture is a medium which was born in the western world at the turn of the 19th into the 20th century, out of modern thinking at the junction of science and entertainment, for it is a complex mechanical process that results in offering ‘the most magical of consumer commodities, namely dreams’ (McLuhan 2008: 317). Despite the historicity of the apparatus that engenders a certain experience of time, duration, movement, assumption of continuous space, framing, distance, fourth wall (whether implicit or not), visuality, perspective ... it is said that the smooth adaptability of Hollywood films implies a ‘minimal cultural impact’ on foreign audiences (Maltby 2004: 10). Let us examine what such a minimal impact could be, considering media in general as importers of new forms of perception-behaviour (McLuhan 1971: 8) and consequently as having a social and cultural impact. From there, let us question whether the strategy of Hollywood and colonial film to make their media text ‘available for assimilation’, does not hide another assimilative force: that of the medium itself, and the conceptual frame that is carried out by the cinematographic language and its corresponding ontology.

² Talatu Carmen points towards similar uses of the rhetoric of shooting back: ‘Salman Rushdie riffed on the title of the George Lukas film *The Empire Strikes back* to coin the clever phrase, “the Empire writes back to the Centre” to refer to postcolonial writing, which was then adopted as the title of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s seminal collection of postcolonial literary criticism *The Empire Writes Back*. Since then, the phrase has been riffed on in other works, such as Melissa Thackway’s study of Francophone African film, *Africa Shoots Back*, (2004) which cleverly references Rushdie and Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, as well as playing with the metaphor of the camera as gun [cf. Latin America] and an instrument capable of violence. It is also likely an indirect reference to Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *The Barrel of the Pen*’ (2009).

³ Bekolo purports that cinema has been invented in Africa twenty-three centuries ago. He is not the only one defending the presence of cinema in Africa’s history. Mambety states that ‘Cinema was born in Africa, because the image itself was born in Africa. The instruments, yes, are European, but the creative necessity and rationale exist in our oral tradition. [...] Oral tradition is a tradition of images. [...] Imagination creates the image and the image creates cinema, so we are in direct lineage as cinema’s parents’ (Ukadike 1998). Kanyinda says: ‘I made a film called 10 000 Years of Cinema because I’m convinced that 10 000 years ago, here in Africa, a griot made cinema. The griot is the narrator, the storyteller. Even though there is no camera, when he tells stories, we can see images’ (Kotlarski 2001).

Our elaborations above (1) were akin to contemporary theories that counter the classic assertion that foreign content of films assimilates and alienates African film audiences, but that attribute to a certain extent a meaning-making capacity to the spectator who appropriates and reinvents the content – to a certain extent – autonomously. Other theories (2) pay attention to the structuring power of the formal qualities of the medium which is consumed (cf. Brecht, Baudry). If we put these two types of theories together, with the former on the level of the content and the latter on the level of the form, we could question whether the distinction between *to assimilate* (by appropriating the means of production to oneself) and *being assimilated* is a misleading one. This consequently brings the strategy at stake that is brought forward by criticism that understands African cinema as an appropriation necessarily to counter alienation.

What is the correlation between “to make itself available for assimilation” and “to assimilate”? Considering with McLuhan that ‘every culture and every age has its favourite model of perception and knowledge that it is inclined to prescribe for everybody and everything’ (2008: 5-6), we can understand the mechanism in which the more perception and knowledge generated by the model shows aptitude for integration in the existing prevailing *episteme*, the better the model will have its effects. It seems that products that are semantically malleable are more suitable for appropriation. Products that are susceptible to local meanings and practices, to put it in Rosen’s words (2002), are more apt for being assimilated by audiences or users. And this correlation is enhanced when the former eclipses the latter. The act of assimilating content makes one forget his being assimilated by the form. The focus on appropriating brings the aspect of being appropriated out of focus. McLuhan writes: ‘Indeed, it is only too typical that the “content” of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium’ (2008: 9) – it is the medium that has a social and cultural impact. The representation of semantic fluidity in a text teaches its audiences ‘the possibilities of pleasure in the democratisation of meaning and the power to interpret’ (Maltby 2004: 12), while this appropriation of content obscures the structuring power of the form. Putting content which is “available for assimilation” (*assimiler* in the active sense) makes assimilation by the media (*être assimilé* in the passive form) easier. Or, as McLuhan would say in *Understanding Media*, ‘the “content” of a medium as a juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind’ (2008:19). This is why Maltby’s adaption of Owen D. Young’s ‘economic integration of the world’ into the ‘cinematic integration of the world’ or his statement that ‘Hollywood integrates the World’ instead of the world integrating Hollywood, makes sense (2004: 11).

Assimilating actively to avoid being assimilated is thus problematic, since the medium that is appropriated might function as a Trojan horse which covertly brings in a whole *gnosis*, inherent to the medium itself. As explained above, if assimilation of a film *text* by film audiences abroad implies a “being assimilated”, criticism tend to look for a solution in Marxist appropriation of the means of *production* of those film texts. However, in this solution the problem only repeats itself because of the structuring power of the medium, not only in its consumption, but also in its use. At the level of the users of the medium, *i.e.* African filmmakers, the question is thus similar. Can they “shoot back”, if the means they use to shoot back are inscribed within a European system of knowledge? Can they fully state a proper identity which differs from the western imagery if the tools that are used manifest the very same imagery? Cinema cannot substitute the griot, for instance, since audiences have to pay for a film ticket. As mentioned above, the medium of cinema relies on underlying conceptions, its *gnosis* is inextricably related to a certain historical momentum in European modernity. Could these underlying conceptions of the medium cinema be compatible with the African *gnosis*? As Mudimbe argues, African *gnosis* is beyond western intellectual and political reach or representation (De Groof 2004: 65-6). ‘Mudimbe seriously challenges the possibility of adequate translations and places the [...] *gnosis* of African thought beyond Western intellectual grasp, and beyond representation, perhaps even existence’ (Apter 1992). Can we imagine an African identity ‘that is not haunted by the shadow of Western reason [...]’? (Gikandi 2002:136). Mudimbe’s question whether African

gnosis can be grasped by western conceptual frameworks without these first inventing the *gnosis*, does maybe also apply for the medium of cinema as a framework which does not only carry an *episteme*, but which carries this *episteme* also out. Then how could the African worldview be expressed by cinematic means? We tend to state that it can *not*. This would mean that in African cinema, the form chosen for the expression of a certain *gnosis* annihilates the very same *gnosis* it wants to express.

The assumption that the appropriation of the means of production by the oppressed can be brought in to guarantee authenticity and to resist alienation caused by the content which is produced by the oppressor, is thus fundamentally questioned. Firstly, because this content is not necessarily alienating, given the active reception; and secondly, because of the structuring power of formal qualities of the medium. "Appropriation of the means of production to fight alienation" might thus not be the most appropriate discourse for African cinema.

3.

The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception. (McLuhan 2008: 18)

We are thus confronted with a paradox between "appropriation" and "being appropriated": the first one can not go without the second one, it seems. All efforts to escape the "being appropriated" (by Western imagery) through acting as the one who is "appropriating" (the means of production of this imagery) himself, seem in vain. Or is there a way to transcend this paradox? At this point, the question *how we think African cinema* imposes itself. The paradox between "appropriation" and "being appropriated" can only be transcended if we adopt a thought on African cinema that puts at stake the notions of authenticity, alienation and even difference, that we have used and assumed so far. In a nutshell: we argue that it is not the appropriation itself which is problematic, but the thought that considers this appropriation as problematic.

Both thinking about African audiences in terms of "assimilation not to be assimilated" (1) and the criticism on this strategy (2) are thoughts that recuperate cultural manifestations of "difference" into our own – western – sphere. Our (hypothetical) analysis in which reception of imported media allows assimilation of content (1) and in which this reception is at the same time "assimilated" on the level of the form (2), describes how the west appropriates the other's gaze (2), while this appropriated gaze can produce content which is different than the one of the west (1). In other words: I, the west, tend to say that I look through the other's eyes, whereas I assimilated them, thinking I look differently to myself. Even so, the understanding of African film as shooting back (1), as well as the questioning of the possibility of shooting back (2), are inscribed in theories on the "game of the gaze" which refer to the West or which have the West in the centre. This understanding of African cinema could be translated as following: since the west assimilates the African gaze by cinematic techniques, the African film reproduces western imagery.

This understanding in (1) and (2) describes thus how the West looks through the eyes of the other which we already appropriated. Stating that African cinema reproduces western imagery because of its appropriation of the means of production which inevitably carries out the system of knowledge that constitutes the basis of the cinematic medium, describes how we force the other to take over our gaze so that we can place ourselves in the position of the other which is already ours in order to reinvent him with our means.

How can we transcend this Eurocentric gaze on African cinema? Let us go back to the claim by various African filmmakers that cinema is an African invention. Referring to cinema as an African invention metaphorically

advances the assertion that African filmic storytelling does not *inevitably* and *necessarily* have to be a reaction to the intervention of the other anymore. The other is not *indispensable* for the African to define himself. Our analysis of African cinema as a “reaction against western imagery” is reversed by African filmmakers who argue that cinema is part of an African essence and is intrinsic to their culture. How can Bekolo state – with Mambety, Kaboré and others – that cinema is born in Africa, while cinema – in its technical aspects, at least – is clearly a non-African invention but comes from abroad, as Med Hondo ironically states in *Les 'bicots-Nègres' vos voisins* (1974). When this allegation seems objectionable to Westerners, it is due to a false opposition between adaptation and authenticity. The un-authentic imitation, perceived as arrogance, is for western thinking a condemned value, because it is not original, authentic, creative. Still nowadays, this kind of appropriation is ‘rejected in a monstrous succursal of Occidentalism’, tells Baudrillard (1992: 57). Yet, cinema has not been borrowed and cannot be a derivation. African cinema is the result of hospitality towards a technique and its narrative potentialities, an absorption and transmutation-transformation of its use, which implies a total liberty of filmmaking. The “integration” of foreign technique or signs means a “recycling” by the filmmakers for their own motives and purposes. Hospitality is no arrogance: it preserves integrity and the integration results in something which is not reducible anymore. Technique is not a vehicle for/of unilateral universalism.

Let us examine this relation of appropriation in the light of the metaphor of “anthropophagy”. Anthropophagy, in opposition to cannibalism, implies a relation of appropriation of the other in which *firstly* the other is eaten without being totally annihilated or digested. *Secondly*, the other is eaten within a ritual context. *Thirdly*, only the esteemed other is eaten. *Fourthly*, anthropophagites accept to be eaten in return. Cannibalism, on the other hand digests an enemy, who is not appreciated, without ritual context and without accepting to be eaten in return.⁴

Anthropophagy thus functions as a metaphor for a specific manner of appropriation of the other. Anthropophagy as a metaphor occurred firstly in the *Manifesto Anthropofago* by the Brazilian writer Osvaldo de Andrade, written in 1928 and inspired by Montaigne’s 16th century essay on cannibals (1580). In this essay, Montaigne defended cultural relativism and defied Eurocentric imagery that made anthropophagy synonymous to savagery, thus functioning as the ‘diacritical index of Europe’s moral superiority (Stam 2008: 308). In Montaigne’s legacy, ‘Andrade’s evil anthropophagous eater of Whites and of their cultural products, was radically different from the Romantic’s good, submissive savage to be converted to civilization by the European colonizer’ (Sérgio Bellei in Budasz 2005: 2-3). Furthermore, Montaigne observed that anthropophagites chose to eat only those prisoners who insisted on resisting assimilation. To deserve to be eaten, they had to show their difference to the very end. Otherwise they were killed, but not “savoured” (de Hollanda 1998; Budasz 2005: 11). Andrade proclaimed anthropofagia as a process of absorption and blending of other cultures (Arthrob 1998). He argued for a critical ingestion of European culture and the ‘reworking of that tradition in Brazilian terms’ (de Campos 1986: 38-45 in Budasz 2005: 2).

The metaphor ‘has played an important role in Brazilian artistic and literary cultural movement during much of the twentieth century’ (Budasz 2005: 2). It was forged by the vanguards of the 1920s. After being recuperated by nationalist movements, it fell into disuse (de Hollanda 1998). Nevertheless, Heliosa de Hollanda qualifies it as a hyperpowerful cultural controversial paradigm that remains scarcely touched and as a *grand trouvaille* (de Hollanda 1998).⁵ The trope was used as trans-historical concept of art which challenges and goes

⁴ For further distinctions, see Lestringant 1997 and Goldman 1999

⁵ Anthropophagy is close to notions such as transculturation (Fernando Ortiz and Angel Rama) that is used instead of the old idea of acculturation; cultural rearticulation (José Joaquín Brunner); mediations of differential reception (Jesúsi Martín-Barbero) and cultural reconversion (Néstor García Canclini), that all deal – according to Heliosa de Hollanda – with the Latin American experience of cultural flows, especially from North to South, and regarding technology, science, information, intellectual and artistic trends and market relations (de Hollanda 1998).

beyond the Eurocentric conception of art history. It 'is understood to be a modernist process formulated in Brazil, in which artists and writers attempted to understand the configuration of Brazilian identity amongst its forming cultures (African, Indian and Portuguese) which cultivated a symbolic practice of incorporating the Other's value to construct its own' (Artthrob 1998). Not only values, but also techniques and information of the developed countries [such as the technique of film] are devoured (Stam 2008: 307) and negotiated and adjusted for the sake of survival (Budasz 2005: 14). Anthropophagy points at the learning from the oppressors and the mastering of their ways and weapons, which reflects the consciousness of the relation between knowledge and power (Budasz 2005: 14).

As a discourse, "Anthropophagic Reason" is defined by Andrade as 'the philosophy of technicised primitive' (Stam 2008: 309), and by Haroldo de Campos as 'mastication, digesting, and rewriting of the outsider' (1986: 44 in Budasz 2005: 14). Budasz describes it as 'recycling and incorporating otherness' (2005: 2) in which this absorption generates new meanings, while Robert Stam depicts it as swallowing, carnivalizing and recycling foreign presence from a position of cultural self-confidence (2008: 307). The chewing and processing the desired parts of the "Other" is very distinct from an identification (de Hollanda 1998). On the contrary, the need for absorbing the other is not mimicry, but a strategy to renovate and revitalize one's own society and to rework its cultural products (Budasz 2005: 12). 'Gods, enemies, Europeans were figures of potential affinity, modalities of an otherness that attracted and should be attracted; an otherness without which the world would sink into indifference and paralysis' (de Castro 2002: 207,268 in Budasz 2005: 13). This revitalizing force of learning, incorporating, and recycling is, paradoxically, a way to preserve cultural individuality (Budasz 2005: 14) that is only possible by self-transfiguration (de Castro in Budasz 2005: 14) or a 'transcendence of self through the [...] commingling of self and other' (Stam 2008: 308).⁶ The cultural practice of anthropophagy in which difference is swallowed (de Hollanda 1998) aimed at displacing frontiers (Bellei 1998; Budasz 2005: 2-3) and assumes 'the impossibility of any nostalgic return to an originary purity' (Stam 2008: 307).

We can now read Senghor's call as an expression of anthropophagy. 'Assimiler, non être assimilé' does not relate anymore to any *a priori*, original self but has to be understood as a modernist approach towards intercultural relations in which a culture assimilates the other in order to be assimilated and reciprocally, gets itself assimilated in order to assimilate. Senghor himself points towards this strategy when speaking about Malcolm de Chazal, a Mauritian writer and artist: assimilating allowed him his self-preservation and his self-preservation allowed him to assimilate (Senghor 1977). In a metaphor on making love in his book on Negritude and Humanism, Senghor elaborates further on the topic: « con-naître, c'est naître à l'Autre en mourant à soi: c'est faire l'amour avec l'Autre, c'est danser l'Autre » (1964: 141). This association between knowing and the rebirth in the other while dying oneself, renders account of the essential properties of anthropophagy, which are the acceptance of being devoured in return and the appreciation for the other. Emmanuel Katongole uses the counterexample of rape as a cannibalistic metaphor for (neo)colonialism on Africa.

An anthropophagic reading of African cinema abandons the idea of a privileged point of reference and does not claim a cultural monopoly on means of production. Without denying the historicity of the medium of film, thinking about *how* African filmmakers appropriated the means of production – rather than the question *where from* they did appropriate – attributes a possibility of mutation to otherness and does not pin it down to an

⁶ I don't use the metaphor in the sense how Claude Lévi-Strauss would describe anthropophagy as an unstable and extreme form of identification with the other (1964 in Budasz 2005: 12) or as the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro who says that the essential dimension of an anthropophagic society is the "identification with the enemy" (2002: 220,241,263). I neither use the metaphor as its reworked version by 'European avant-garde currents, namely Dada and the short-lived 1920 literary review *Cannibale* published by François Picabia' (Budasz 2005: 2), since the metaphor as I used it, is not concerned with an aesthetics of primitivism. I neither interpret the Andrade's metaphor in the way Budasz does, as a relation with otherness that – in devouring it – maintains a natural, "primitive" state (Budasz 2005: 2).

essence that would constitute a so-called authenticity. This “authenticity” (in an essentialist sense) then reveals itself as a notion that reflects our own difficulty and hesitation in being anthropophagic. If the notion of authenticity needs to be reconceptualised, we can find inspiration in the way the Belgian philosopher Rudi Visker understands Heidegger’s *Eigentlichkeit* in *Zein und Zeit*: not as the result of coinciding with oneself, but on the contrary as the result of a *distance* towards the self. ‘Authenticity for Heidegger does not mean that we try to fill up [the] shortage [of what constitutes the self but which we cannot see because we live too close to it] by gratefully hanging on to whatever is handed by the roots which we seemed to have lost. *Eigentlichkeit* has something to do with the insight that we do not need less but more loss of roots. In other words: that it is in the loss of our roots – and only there – that we properly feel at home. Put differently again: our roots lie in the loss of roots, which means, in something we never correspond with, in something that withdraws from us [...]’ (Visker 1998: 207).

An anthropophagic understanding of African cinema recognises that it is exactly the distance – or what I called above as incongruity – which allows looking at the self. The intercultural distance can be made intelligible by reformulating Husserl’s fifth Cartesian meditation on the *ego* in anthropophagic terms. In the appropriation of difference to express the self, otherness is not totally digested since the swallowing of difference does not neutralise the difference but reveals it. And since this difference is necessarily incorporated to reinvent the self, the distance is the constitutive element of the self.

This distance in the anthropophagic understanding of appropriation acknowledges the participation of African cinema in the global – universal – cinema, moreover because it assumes the inevitability of cultural interchange. Besides the appropriation of the cinematic means of production, the adoption by African cinematographers of different styles, narratives and aesthetics can be understood in anthropophagic terms as well. The Manichean opposition between “authentic African cinema” and “Hollywood alienation” (cf. Stam 2008: 310) is then transcended. In this opposition, films in the style of Bekolo, for instance, who makes use of an amalgam of (at first sight) non-African influences such as Kung-fu or S.F., would not have fitted. His adoption and adaptation of different film genres results in a deconstructing critique. The anthropophagic openness to intertextual influences, including those of Hollywood and the mass media, opens up our gaze on African cinema and urges for fundamental reconsiderations of understandings of African cinema.

“To assimilate” a text or a medium implies thus necessarily a “being assimilated” but – if understood anthropophagical – *firstly*, a volunteered one, *secondly*, one in which alienation is only understood antithetically and constitutive in the dialectics of identity and *thirdly*, one in which the structuring power of the assimilation does not determine the outcome. Consequently, the other cannot be imprisoned in his otherness. Our revised notion of assimilation⁷ prevents us from reducing the other to his alterity. Appropriation implies a “being appropriated” without being expropriated.

The contemptuous look of colonialism and eurocentrism expects to be answered with looking up without looking into, dominates the “inter”, reduces the act to a reaction and invents an alterity behind lowered eyes. The anthropophagical stance deals with this gaze by “looking straight into the eyes”. ‘Le blanc a joui trois mille ans du privilège de voir sans qu’on le voie. [...] Aujourd’hui ces hommes noirs nous regardent et notre regard rentre dans nos yeux; des torches noires, à leur tour, éclairent le monde’ (Sartre 1948: 577). Confronted with this self-affirmative act of looking by the African filmmaker, eurocentrism is no longer able to mirror itself in the other while thinking it looks through the other’s eyes. The world-vision of the African filmmaker that does not necessarily please the west or that is even opposed to the western worldview, is the result of an anthropophagic use of

⁷ Not anymore in the first sense of “conformity”, but in its less evident meaning of ‘to absorb and incorporate’ as well as ‘to become absorbed or incorporated’ (Oxford English Dictionary).

western means of productions that alters us at the same time - at least if we have esteem for the other and if we can bring up the courage to be eaten ourselves. The cinematic apparatus is itself an anthropophagical locus of *seeing* and *being seen* (camera and screen), where a worldview can differ as well as be recognised (with the "re" of recognised pointing at the "altering" in the way Senghor understood *con-naître*).

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