

Anachronism, Displacement, Trace: “Scarred Images” and the Postcolonial Time Lag

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In June of 2014, Danish sculptor and video artist Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen, after a month-long residency at the Rome-based contemporary art organization qwatz, submerged forty-eight figures evocative of human shapes, wrapped in concrete canvas resembling funerary sheets and body bags, into the Tyrrhenian Sea near the southern Italian port town of Pizzo (Calabria).¹ The human forms were meant to serve as markers for the thousands of unidentified dead refugees and asylum seekers washing up on Italy’s shores, making the Mediterranean into what some have ominously dubbed a vast “necroregion.” Larsen’s figures deliberately recalled the now ubiquitous images disseminated by the international press depicting rows of drowned people enshrouded by Italian authorities in anonymous sheets.² The figures were affixed to a wooden platform with ropes and chains, hanging vertically, like macabre pendulums. They occupied a liminal space between surface and depth, like specters at once present and absent, material and fleeting, visible and invisible, fixed and mobile, past and present. The plan for the work, titled *End of Dreams*, was to keep the forty-eight figures submerged in the sea for four months, incurring a degradation of their form and the growth of subaqueous forms of life—a filmy coating of algae, a host for other marine organisms (Fig. 1).

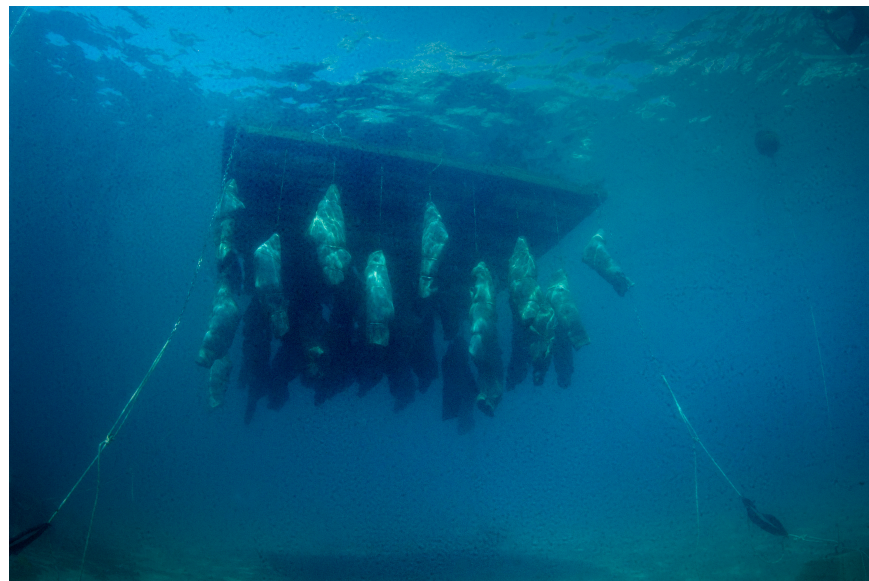


Fig. 1. *End of Dreams*—Raft. Courtesy of Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen.

¹ I’m grateful to Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo for introducing me to Larsen’s work, and to Larsen himself for his collaborative spirit and generous discussion of it. This essay develops ideas I first explored in a brief piece on Larsen’s work titled “Time Out of Joint: Larsen’s *End of Dreams* and Italy’s ‘Colonial Unconscious.’”

² Maurizio Cattelan’s nine-figure sculpture *All* (2007) deployed similar forms, made of Carrara marble, though his reference was to a more generalized, abstract death.

After several months, Larsen planned to remove the forms and exhibit them publicly, as he had done with an earlier work on trans-Aegean migration, *Ode to the Perished*, which premiered at the Thessaloniki Biennale in 2011 (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. *Ode to the Perished*. Courtesy of Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen.

An unexpected storm interrupted his plan. The platform was reduced to shards, and most of the forty-eight sculptures were detached and cast out to sea. The metaphorical implications of this chance meteorological event were, of course, not lost on Larsen; he engaged a local art student and diver, Giuseppe Politi, to search for and record the figures with the use of an underwater HD camera. The resulting video installation is haunting, indelibly inscribed with the perilous conditions it seeks to expose and denounce. Only about half of the original sculptures were recovered; the fragmented remains, like the human bodies they memorialize, lie in obscurity on the sea floor. For Larsen, cinema intervened to register these spectral vestiges of a commemorative project, like the afterlife of memory. That chance and contingency brought about this cinematic intervention adds yet another layer of spectrality to the work, materializing Derrida's description of the connection between the photographic media and the spectral as "time out of joint," at once present and absent, material and immaterial.³ Like Derrida's ghost, Larsen's figures demand to be listened to—signifying an ethical and political potential; they are figures that too easily escape full cognition. As haunting figures, they produce, for sociologist Avery Gordon, "a something-to-be-done."⁴ For Gordon, writing in a distinct yet related context, "Haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known [...]"

³ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* 75. Eduardo Cadava demonstrates how Walter Benjamin conceives of history as a "dialectical image" through a recurring photographic vocabulary (the flash, lightning, etc.). The spectrality of the image is crucial to Benjamin's notion of history.

⁴ For Gordon, this is what distinguishes haunting from trauma: "[H]aunting, unlike trauma by contrast, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done" (2). Gordon distances her theorization of haunting from that of Derrida by alleging that, although he frames his discussion in terms of ontology, his focus is instead ultimately epistemological. Gordon privileges ontology through her deployment of Foucault's notion of subjugated knowledge (7).

especially when they are supposedly over and done with [...] or when their oppressive nature is continuously denied” (2).

Larsen’s piece introduces a series of issues regarding the status of the ghostly trace in cinematic attempts to come to terms with Italy’s colonial past and pertinent to the effort to reestablish an ethics of the gaze in the wake of colonial violence and objectification. This essay will explore two films—one by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1969) and the other by Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi (1986)—which similarly attempt to define an ethical way of looking at colonial subjects and landscapes in the aftermath of empire. If the most urgent task of any purportedly anti-colonial film is to disempower or, at the very least, problematize the objectifying gaze of the camera—given the multiple and well-documented links between colonial desire, governmentality, and visual media—then these films address this representational problem by deliberately deploying the spectral.⁵ Decades before postcolonial studies utilized these terms, Pasolini and Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi formulated compelling calls to engage traces of colonialism by deploying the notion of haunting to describe Europe’s varied relationships to its colonial past.

Eclipse, Evaporation, Haunting: Italy’s “Belated” Postcolonial

It has become commonplace to refer to contemporary Italy, along with other ostensibly former imperial states, as “haunted” by its colonial past.⁶ The persistence of Italy’s particular brand of “colonial amnesia” is the result of another historiographical trope—that of Italy’s perennial belatedness.⁷ While other imperial nation-states, it is argued, have gone through more extended processes of postcolonial reckoning, public and academic discourse about colonialism and race in Italy began only in the 1970s and 1980s, with the publication of groundbreaking histories of Italian colonialism by Giorgio Rochat and Angelo Del Boca. These have been followed by an unprecedented immigration to Italy of racially marked migrants. The “Italian postcolonial” is a theoretical apparatus that has sought to associate Italy’s history as a colonizing, emigrant nation with its present status as a destination for large numbers of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from the Global South. It has been accused by skeptical critics as passé and derivative. Its detractors claim, in reference to the “birth” of postcolonial studies in India and Great Britain decades ago, that Italy has arrived too late.⁸ Larsen’s *End of Dreams* inspired an evocative footnote in response to such critiques by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo:

The choice of the artist to build the statues using organic material that will deteriorate in these four months—as do the bodies of the people who drowned—

⁵ For the Italian context, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “Preface” *Entering the Frame. Cinema and History in the Films of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi* and Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema*. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi’s later works directly address these questions. Their three screen installation at the 2011 Venice Biennale, titled *La marcia dell’uomo*, contains footage from three distinct stages of African colonial/neocolonial conquest: 1895, 1910, and the 1960s. Robert Lumley describes the installation as, “a container for the work carried out on archival footage that reveals the mechanisms of power whereby the technology serves as an instrument of the colonial gaze” (*Entering the Frame*, 114).

⁶ On the centrality of haunting to postcolonial theory, and some of its analytic limitations, see O’Riley, “Postcolonial Haunting.” On Italy, see Caterina Romeo, “Racial Evaporations.” On haunting with regard to Italian films about contemporary migration, see Derek Duncan, “Shooting the Colonial Past” and Áine O’Healy, “[Non] è una somala.”

⁷ See Miguel Mellino, “Deprovincializing Italy” and Alessandro Triulzi, “Hidden Faces, Hidden Histories.”

⁸ See Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, “The Italian Postcolonial,” 425–426.

underlines the materiality and the physicality of this daily tragedy. In ways similar to the project of this artist, and of many others, we believe that building a theoretical and scholarly framework around the concept of postcoloniality can contribute to keeping alive the memory of those who died and continue to die in the Mediterranean. (426)

Lombardi-Diop and Romeo thus align their theoretical and ethical project with that of Larsen by drawing a parallel between his commemorative sculptures and the intellectual task of tracking the reverberations of Italian colonial history in the present. Their argument coheres with a Benjaminian notion of history—not as a unidirectional, teleological “image of the past,” but rather as a dialectical relation between past and present, “an experience with history original to every new present” (352).

With few exceptions, Italy does not have a robust anti-colonial cinematic tradition—from Gillo Pontecorvo’s watershed *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) to lesser-known films such as Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi’s shockumentary *Africa Addio* (1966)—it may be safe to say that narrative Italian films produced during decolonization were most often about colonies other than Italy’s.⁹ In his analysis of how Italian narrative film engages the traces of Italian colonialism, Duncan notes that “postwar Italian cinema [showed] little interest in returning to the colonial past, at least in a direct, referential manner,” naming three films released only beginning in the 1980s--Giuliano Montaldo’s 1989 *Tempo di uccidere*, Carlo Mazzacurati’s 2004 *L’amore ritrovato* (both based upon novels published in 1947 and 1969, respectively), and Amelio’s *Lamerica* from 1994--among the only examples (116).



Fig. 3. *L'eclisse*, 1962; dir. Michelangelo Antonioni.

⁹ On *The Battle of Algiers* as an “end of [French] empire” film, see: Alan O’Leary, “End of Empire Cinema.”

In her essay on Antonioni's 1962 *L'eclisse* (Fig. 3), Karen Pinkus provocatively reads the film, despite its utter silence on the topic of Italian colonialism itself, as perhaps "the most eloquent film about Italian decolonization ever made."¹⁰ Pinkus argues that, unlike the trauma experienced by Britain and France that generated a process of colonial nostalgia, decolonization in Italy was more of an eclipse, a slinking away, followed by a long period of repression and amnesia. Caterina Romeo has referred to Italy's racial unconscious in similar terms as an "evaporation,"—temporarily invisible, though nevertheless pervasive and always bound to reappear.¹¹ Gianni Amelio's 1994 *Lamerica*, which proposes an analogy between post-World War II Italian emigration to "Lamerica" and contemporary Albanian immigration to Italy, has been cited by several scholars as Italy's first properly postcolonial film—yet another instance of Italian belatedness.¹² Yet I propose that two experimental films constitute notable exceptions to this cinematic lapse.

Disjunctive Present, Projected Past

Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi's mesmerizing film *Dal polo all'equatore* (From the North Pole to the Equator, 1986) is arguably as much a film about the material traces of Italy's colonial enterprise as it is about ideological and aesthetic specters. Their use of the degraded condition of the archived film shot between 1898 and the 1920s by documentarian Luca Comerio visually foregrounds what Ruth Ben-Ghiat has termed "scarred images." Scratches, rips, and chemical dissolution are not mended or restored but are left as they are, even enhanced, in order to serve as a powerful visual metaphor for the collective memory from which scenes of colonial violence, captured by Comerio's original camerawork, have been torn ("Preface," xix). Apt here is Gordon's claim that haunting is "[the] moment [...] when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed."¹³ The 1986 film—the product of these found fragments, re-photographed with an apparatus that Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi call their "analytical camera"—slows down Comerio's footage considerably, drawing it out to at least twice its original length. With the exception of the film's opening credits and dedication to Comerio, "words are notable for their absence," as Robert Lumley puts it.¹⁴ Images of unspecified landscapes, people, and animals from "the North Pole to the Equator," as the title announces, are reorganized, color-tinted, and at times repeated rhythmically. An eerie ambient score composed by Keith Ullrich and Charles Anderson enhances the meditative, trance-like pace of the movement onscreen. Neither narrative voiceover nor subtitles guide viewers with an authoritative commentary on the reworked images.¹⁵ Instead, by staging lengthy processes of decay, deterioration, and amnesia before our eyes, the work makes present a powerful absence.¹⁶

¹⁰ Pinkus, "Empty Spaces. Decolonization in Italy" 312.

¹¹ Caterina Romeo, "Racial Evaporations."

¹² Duncan writes, "[F]rom the outset, [*Lamerica*] is concerned with producing a coherent historical narrative from the purview of the nation's colonial past" (116). On Amelio's *Lamerica* as an ambivalent "postcolonial" film, see Rhiannon Noel Welch, "Contact, Contagion, Immunization."

¹³ Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity" 2.

¹⁴ Lumley, "Amnesia and Remembering" 139.

¹⁵ This lack has led some to critique, misguidedly in my estimation, the film's ultimate aestheticization and commodification of "the Other." For a cogent discussion and critique of this position, see Jeffrey Skoller, "Shards," 21–22.

¹⁶ Ara Merjian's reading of recent work by artist Francesco Arena—particularly his installation *Riduzione di mare* (2012), which commemorates the more than 16,000 migrants who have died attempting to enter Europe since the early 1990s—highlights a similar aesthetics of absence. Merjian describes how the work is made up of performers

Like Larsen, who seeks to expose the erasure of anonymous migrants from collective memory by deliberately engaging the spectral—that is, by staging the decay and ruin of their sculptural remains and the subsequent videographic search for their elusive traces, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi make haunting the film’s primary aesthetic and ideological mode. Temporality and repetition are key elements of this spectral presence. A dual or even tripartite temporality is inscribed in the film project itself:¹⁷ the historic footage of Comerio’s early twentieth-century filmic archive; Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi’s 1985 re-shooting with their analytical camera; and, presumably, the future of what they call “un senso etico della visione” (an ethical sense of vision).¹⁸ As Gianikian has remarked, “Memory interests us not as the past but as the discovery and reading of the present.”¹⁹ In addition, the filmmakers foreground temporality as a hermeneutic: the memorable opening sequence, drawn out from two or three to roughly eight minutes in duration, presents viewers with landscapes captured from a moving train, an icon, as Lumley has noted, of nineteenth-century modernity’s speed, forward movement, and progress, as well as an important symbol of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century film history to which Comerio’s original footage belongs.²⁰ Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi’s train moves through rocky Alpine landscapes in slow motion, lulling viewers into an altered relationship to both the image and to the passage of time (Fig. 4). Lumley suggests that “time is its subject, along with the act of looking.”²¹



Fig. 4. *Dal polo all'equatore*, 1986; Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi.

licking a salt block in Morse code, thereby “inscribing” the blocks with the names of the dead by ingesting the salt. “The inscription of names is simultaneously an erasure,” writes Merjian. “[T]he remembrance of those 16,136 bodies become wrought upon the salt slab through a subtractive action. Commemoration here takes the form not of an accretion,” Merjian concludes, “but of an absence.” (“History + Distance X Mass—Memory,” 147—148).

¹⁷ Here I’m thinking of Derrida’s figure of the specter as not simply a figure of the past, a revenant, but simultaneously an *arrivant*, a messianic figure of what’s to come, a figure to which the present *must* listen.

¹⁸ Lumley, “Amnesia and Remembering” 139.

¹⁹ Gianikian at London’s Tate Modern in 2011, cited in Chiara Bertola, “The Eye as the Instrument of Thought” (n.p.).

²⁰ Lumley, *Entering the Frame* 53–54.

²¹ Lumley is here paraphrased by Ben-Ghiat (“Preface,” xviii). For Ben-Ghiat, the filmmakers’ manipulation of time “might also be taken as exhortations for us to examine the timelines we draw, especially those which allow Italian imperial aggression to be confined only to the years of the Fascist dictatorship” (xviii).

This opening train sequence sets the stage for a number of subsequent scenes clustered around the theme of mobility pertaining to travel, war, colonial conquest, ritual, procession, and the motion picture itself.²² Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's deceleration articulates, joining what would otherwise seem geographically and temporally disparate fragments into thematic constellations that provoke ethical contemplation. For instance, one sequence binds the baptism of a presumably autochthonous infant by white European missionaries dressed in gleaming robes and sun hats, the march across a river of unclothed locals carrying the flag of the Kingdom of Italy along with what one presumes are the possessions of missionaries or colonists, and an outdoor classroom at a colonial Christian mission, where a clergywoman instructs a group of roughly thirty schoolchildren in the gestures of genuflection and prayer (Figs. 5–7). The delayed and disjunctive temporality of the moving images invites viewers to reflect on the links between mobility and the disciplining of colonial bodies past and present, or, in Gianikian's words, memory as a "reading of the present."



Fig. 5. *Dal polo all'equatore*. Baptism.

²² On the many inflections of mobility in Italian culture, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, *Italian Mobilities*.



Fig. 6. *Dal polo all'equatore*. River crossing with Kingdom of Italy flag.



Fig. 7. *Dal polo all'equatore*. Colonial missionary school.

We might therefore argue that the film's emphasis on deceleration anticipates by nearly a decade Homi Bhabha's theorization of postcolonial haunting as a "time lag."²³ A temporality that "fractures the time of modernity," the "[t]ime lag keeps alive the meaning of the past."²⁴ Bhabha explains:

The postcolonial passage through modernity produces that form of repetition – the past as projective. The time-lag of postcolonial modernity moves *forward*, erasing that compliant past tethered to the myth of progress, ordered in the binarisms of its cultural logic: past/present, inside/outside. This *forward* is neither teleological nor is it an endless slippage. It is the function of the *lag* to slow down the linear, progressive time of modernity to reveal its 'gesture,' its *tempi* [...] This can only be achieved [as Benjamin remarked of Brecht] by damming the stream of real life, by bringing the flow to a standstill in a reflux of astonishment. (253)

The result is a "disjunctive' present" that "*impels* the 'past,' projects it" (254). Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's film makes a similar claim about a modernity inhabited by colonial specters that disrupt any notion of history as a teleological progression or unfolding. Indeed, Lumley and Skoller have noted the indebtedness of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's entire oeuvre to a Benjaminian notion of history as a "seizing hold of memory as it flashes up," a "brushing history against the grain," while Ara Merjian has described their re-ordering of film fragments as "an unspoken protest against the previous century's inexorability, against a positivism gone wrong [...] Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's work underscores the vagaries of historical time," Merjian continues, as "anachronistic, atavistic, eternally recurrent."²⁵



Fig. 8. *Dal polo all'equatore*. Return gaze.

²³ Áine O'Healy ("[Non] è una somala") and Derek Duncan ("Shooting the Colonial Past") have recently employed to great effect Bhabha's "time lag" and Derridean spectrality to address contemporary narrative films about migration (Moshen Melliti's *Io, l'altro*, 2007 and Claudio Noce's *Good Morning, Aman*, 2009) that are haunted by colonial specters.

²⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 252-4.

²⁵ See: Lumley, *Entering the Frame* 128 and Merjian, "Bloody News from Friends" (n.p.).

If the film stages the time lag through a disruption or fracture of “the time of Western modernity,” then its decelerated, “scarred” images also serve to resignify the ethnographic spectacle that Comerio’s original camera sought to display (Fig. 8). Their “senso etico della visione” is thus instantiated in the slowing down of Comerio’s ethnographic impulse, and in so doing, it restores the humanity of what Comerio’s camera had reduced to objects.²⁶

The people who were objects of Comerio’s original gaze, with Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi’s temporal manipulation, become subjects of a return gaze that implicates the viewer in a voyeuristic act. In describing the tension between the spectral and the real, between fact and fiction, in their oeuvre, Merjian has suggested that the “ghostliness [of the imagery] is more unsettling because of the evident solidity and corpulence of real bodies, objects, [and] landscapes” (“Bloody News”). Furthermore, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi’s decelerated images draw repeated parallels between camera and rifle, between looking and violence—thereby underscoring the historical proximity of the height of European colonialism, the “birth” of the motion picture, and the looking relations that subtended both.

Contamination and Anachronism: Pasolini’s Universalist Time Lag

A similar tension is at work in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Appunti per un’Orestide africana* (Notes for an African *Orestes*), shot in 1969 and released in 1970. Ostensibly made up of location and character scouting “notes,” similar to those Pasolini shot in India and Palestine, the film is a montage of spectrally mythopoetic and documentary footage shot in and around Dar Es Salam (Tanzania) and Kampala (Uganda). The basic project, as Pasolini outlines it in the opening minutes of the film, is a production of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* staged in an African nation undergoing a transition from colonial rule to formal democracy.²⁷ Writing about Pasolini’s *Vangelo secondo Matteo* (Gospel According to Matthew, 1964), which was also preceded by a similar scouting film shot in Palestine in 1963, Noa Steimatsky argues that these are central tenets of Pasolini’s poetics of contamination, which privileges analogy, displacement, and anachronism over any faithful reconstruction of either mythic source text or contemporary reality. This is where she locates Pasolini’s interest in the archaic trace, which takes the form of “a jarring, heterogeneous textuality.”²⁸ Steimatsky’s description of Pasolini’s process in *Vangelo* and *Sopralluoghi in Palestina* could just as well describe that of *Appunti*:

Pasolini embraces both the material concreteness of [archaic] traces and the grand resonance of myth. Their mutual contamination forms the basis for an adaptation in which [...] the actual and the phantasmatic intersect but do not neutralize each other. It also [...] reflects the oscillation of the cinematic image as such between its photographic-realist claim and its amenability to myth. (126)

The film can also be situated in the context of what Luca Caminati has convincingly termed Pasolini’s “heretical Orientalist” works—from *La rabbia* (1963), *Oedipus Rex* (Morocco, 1967), *Medea* (Turkey, Syria, 1969), and *Arabian Nights* (Yemen, Ethiopia, Eritrea, 1974), to the screenplays and treatments *Il padre selvaggio* (1962), “Appunti per un poema sul Terzo Mondo”

²⁶ Skoller, “Shards” 17–18.

²⁷ As M. D. Usher puts it, “For Pasolini, Africa presented the ideal social conditions and political prospects to realize Aeschylus’ synthesis of the past, present, and future, of the mythic and historical” (“An African *Oresteia*” 122).

²⁸ Steimatsky, *Italian Locations* 126.

(1968), the appeal to UNESCO *Le mura di San'aa* (Yemen, 1971), and other location scouting films already mentioned. The *Appunti* constitutes a continuation of Pasolini's experience with the "Third World," which had officially begun with his trip to India in the company of Elsa Morante and Moravia in 1961, but which could arguably be traced back to his earliest poetry in Friulian dialect.²⁹ Caminati, along with Gian Maria Annovi ("Istanbul KM. 4,253") and Cesare Casarino ("The Southern Answer") have cautioned against reading Pasolini's *tiers-mondisme* as yet another classic neocolonial, orientaling gesture—one which ascribes primitivity to an abstract, anonymous "Africa" and relegates it to a kind of Hegelian "prehistory."³⁰ Instead, in Tanzania and Uganda, as he had elsewhere, Pasolini arguably went to Africa looking for ghosts—stubborn remnants of history that haunt modernity and cast the distinction between past, present, and future into doubt.

In the *Appunti*, he uses his camera to seek out traces of the magical, the archaic, and the irrational with the express purpose of placing these traces not into a narrative of inevitable progression, development, or unfolding, but instead to hold them together, in draft or note form—*appunto*, *appunti*, or "un film su un film da farsi" ("a film about a film-in-the-making")³¹—"drafts for future revision."³² The temporality of haunting—a holding together of past, present, and future—is underscored by the film's very heterogeneous form. In Gordon's words, "[T]o the extent that a something-to-be-done is characteristic of haunting, one can say that futurity is imbricated or interwoven into the very scene of haunting itself" (3). The jarring temporality or juxtaposition of contemporary African "reality" with Aeschylus's ancient text, indeed "the West's charter myth for the rule of law and the social contract," is inscribed in the fragmented nature of the film.³³ Like Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, Pasolini thus anticipates Bhabha's claim about the "time lag," which is characterized by:

[a] challenge to modernity [which] comes in redefining the signifying relation to the disjunctive 'present': staging the past as *symbol*, myth, memory, the ancestral—but a past whose iterative *value as sign* reinscribes the 'lessons of the past' into the very textuality of the present that determines both the identification with, and the interrogation of, modernity. (247)

Pasolini's refrain, repeated time and again throughout the film, "This could be...[Orestes, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra]," distills this condensation of a staged mythic past and present with a future promise. Likewise, his "notes for a conclusion" resist any summation and opt instead for

²⁹ Luca Caminati argues that for Moravia, a strict Marxist, the "underdeveloped" world had to be first developed through capitalism. Caminati points out that Pasolini eschewed the term "developing world," precisely because of his rejection of the standard Marxist revolutionary progression from pre-capitalism *through* capitalism to socialism. He cites the author's two books on India as evidence of this split in their thinking of revolutionary Marxism. See *Orientalismo eretico* 5.

³⁰ For an alternative take, see Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories*. For Bongie, "The revolutionary concept of the Third World subproletariat turns out to be inextricably linked for Pasolini with the category of the 'prehistoric,'—of a natural, indeed animal way of life whose vitality has yet to be undone by the sort of historical complications that characterize 'civil' society" (206).

³¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Appunti per un poema sul Terzo Mondo" 2681.

³² Alessia Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning* 139.

³³ Usher, "An African *Oresteia*" 121.

suspension, between past, present, and a “patient, anxious” march toward the future.³⁴ As Ricciardi aptly describes it, “[I]n his poetic encounters with the specters of history, Pasolini encounters not only the *revenants* of the past, but also the *arrivants* of the future” (*The Ends of Mourning*, 127).

We are again, as we were in *Dal polo all’equatore*, dealing with a spectrality that is fundamentally a question of temporality—Bhabha’s “time lag” or Derrida’s “time out of joint.” Unlike Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, who disrupt colonial modernity’s narrative of progress, speed, and conquest through the reassembly of found fragments and the decelerated image, Pasolini proposes instead a disorienting juxtaposition of text, image, and sound (the erratic, wailing jazz score by Gato Barbieri, Soviet work songs, and a profoundly grating and atonal song by Yvonne Murray and Archie Savage that constitute the film’s score). At times, Pasolini’s narrative voiceover summarizes and, at other times, reads verbatim from Aeschylus’s play, as possible characters pass before his camera. He repeatedly digresses, from a dramatic reading of the text to an almost ethnographic description of the profilmic figures seemingly lapsing distractedly from one register to another.³⁵ For instance, Pasolini comments on the difficulty of finding an Electra figure, because, in his words, “African women don’t seem to have the same rage that animated Electra; they laugh, they wear joyful, colorful clothing.”

Pasolini was acutely aware of the implications that Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi’s film so eloquently illustrates—the violence that inheres when a white, Western man turns his authoritative camera to unnamed, silent African people (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana*, 1970; dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini.

³⁴ For Ricciardi, describing Pasolini in terms of the “spectropoetics” that runs throughout his earlier poetry and film theory and practice, Pasolini favors a “phenomenology of posteriority that keeps alive a sense of ethical and political commitment” (126).

³⁵ On Pasolini as ethnographer, see Luca Caminati, *Orientalismo eretico* and Donatella Maraschin, *Pasolini: Cinema e antropologia*.

The film, in fact, opens with a self-reflexive gesture, “Here I am with the camera reflected in a plate glass window of a shop in an African city,” Pasolini explains. The film’s second section turns to a classroom full of African students at the University of Rome, for whom he screens his footage and explains his project. Their responses are overwhelmingly skeptical, “Africa is not a nation, it’s a continent,” one student feels compelled to clarify: “I don’t see the connection.” These students, armed with both language and an unequivocally dubious return gaze, use both to cast the project into crisis (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana*. “African students” at the University of Rome.

If Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi use the decelerated image to disrupt colonial looking relations—objects of Comerio’s original camerawork become subjects, looking back at spectators and illustrating our complicity in the violence of the gaze—Pasolini stages such a disruption, quite characteristically, as a pedagogical moment.³⁶ The abrupt cut from the colonial classroom, where

³⁶ In their respective readings of *Il padre selvaggio* (1975), Luca Caminati (*Orientalismo eretico*), Pasquale Verdicchio (“Colonialism as a Structure”), and Alessia Ricciardi (“Umanesimo e Ideologia”) focus on how the screenplay illustrates Pasolini’s enduring concern with pedagogy, first experimented with during his tenure as a teacher in Friuli and then in Rome, later projected onto an African backdrop in *Il padre selvaggio* and *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana* (1970), and culminating in the pedagogical treatise *Genariello* (1975), aimed at an imaginary Neapolitan schoolboy who represented for Pasolini the subaltern subject par excellence. Drawing from the

students labor in the fields before silently contemplating textbooks imported from Europe, to a classroom at the University of Rome, where students vocally contest the filmmaker's project, might be read as symptomatic of Pasolini's attempt to break with a colonial politics of knowledge through the spectro-cinematic mode of contamination, disjunction, and anachronism. Italian colonialism haunts this sequence; Pasolini's most vocal critic is an Ethiopian student who challenges the project saying, "Non sono pratico dei film, però non vedo la connessione ("I'm no film expert, but I don't see the connection") (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. *Appunti per un'Orestide africana*. Ethiopian student.



Fig. 12. *Appunti per un'Orestide Africana*.

Gramscian notions of the national-popular and the organic intellectual, Pasolini's reflections on pedagogy attempted to instruct subcultures in how to resist assimilation by the hegemonic forces of Western consumer capitalism.



Fig. 13. *Appunti per un'Orestide africana*. Casting in the countryside.



Fig. 14. *Appunti per un'Orestide africana*. Schoolboy in “Western” clothing.

To illustrate the distinction between Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi’s and Pasolini’s respective spectro-temporalities, and the disjunction or juxtaposition that I suggest characterizes Pasolini’s formulation of the “time lag,” we might consider the sequence, drawn from the opening minutes of the film, in which Pasolini’s disembodied voice recites a summary of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus over a series of close-ups of people in the countryside (Figs. 12, 13) and in a village cluttered with cars, where residents wear crisp white “Western” clothing (Fig. 14).

The mythic voiceover only fleetingly corresponds with the tightly framed images on screen, suggesting that Pasolini is seeing, not the people in front of his camera, but his characters: Cassandra the slave girl, Orestes as a child, 20-year-old Orestes, and so on. At other times, there is a radically disorienting assemblage of narrated text and image. Further enhancing the

disorientation is the desperately seeking mobile camera, whose objects peer back at it, playfully evading capture by its lens (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15. *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana*. Return gaze.

After several shots on location in Tanzania and Uganda, a cut to the “African students at the University of Rome” (the only “Africans” to receive acknowledgment in the film’s opening credits) creates a further disjunction.



Fig. 16. *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana*. Skeptical student at University of Rome.

A series of close ups of the students seems to reveal reactions ranging from indifference to skepticism and derision, as Pasolini continues his narration (Fig. 16). This unannounced, decontextualized cut to the University of Rome anticipates, without comment, the film's second, explicitly self-reflexive sequence.

Though by radically divergent aesthetic and technical means, both *Dal polo* and the *Appunti* embrace cultural belatedness as a critical tool.³⁷ Rather than a melancholic nostalgia, a sense of having arrived “too late” to an African continent already spoiled by its contact with colonial modernity (a disposition that might inadvertently reproduce that of imperial European travel writing³⁸), these films use belatedness to reconstruct temporal coordinates. By inhabiting belatedness, they refuse imperial teleology, introducing a “time lag” into the flow of Western modernity. Indicative of this stance by Pasolini is Caminati's claim that the poet-filmmaker deliberately eschews the nomenclature of the “developing world,” preferring to cling, “heretically,” to the term “Third World,” illustrating his rejection of teleological time, be it imperialist or Marxist (according to which pre-capitalist countries necessarily had to pass through a phase of capitalism before turning to socialism).

Interestingly, and perhaps critically, neither of these films is explicitly or exclusively about the Italian postcolonial. They point to a more wide-reaching model of postcolonial critique that refuses to respect the geopolitical boundaries imposed by imperial nationalism.³⁹ The respective films' very titles speak to this refusal: Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's resignifying Comerio's original title—“From the North Pole to the Equator”—does not deliver an all-encompassing tour of imperial spoils; instead, turned on its head, it maps Western imperialism's slow, corrosive, peripatetic march around the globe, illustrating, rather than mastery, its inherent and widespread violence.⁴⁰ Pasolini's title, like the project it describes, deracinates and resituates the origins of Western democracy in modern Africa, at once defamiliarizing the Western canon and overturning the topos of African primitivity into a topos of future possibility, which contains, without neutralizing, the archaic trace.

Scholars eager to refute the fruitlessness of the “belated” arrival of Italianists to the field of postcolonial studies (declared “dead,” particularly in light of the “decolonial” thought of Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo) might take a cue from Pasolini and Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi. Their films, like Larsen's project, compel us instead to heed the specter.

³⁷ Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning* 141.

³⁸ On the belatedness of late-nineteenth-century Europeans traveling the Middle East and their nostalgic desire for “authenticity,” see Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers*.

³⁹ Cesare Casarino highlights what he calls Pasolini's *transnational universalism*, arguing provocatively that it is precisely because of Pasolini's Orientalism and Eurocentrism that his works should, rather paradoxically, be placed alongside other literatures of decolonization by C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire, and Frantz Fanon. He writes: “Pasolini's admittedly problematic disregard for national and cultural specificities, geopolitical particularities, as well as historical accuracy—namely his indifference with respect to both diachronic temporality and identitarian deployments of difference—ought to be understood as an attempt to produce a genuinely transnational universalism based on common potentials and common projects as opposed to those (either Kantian or Hegelian) universalisms that find their stable ground in shared and essential identities” (“The Southern Answer,” 682). For an alternative account, which, instead of transnational universalism, focuses on the specificity Pasolini's Eritrean writings, see Giovanna Trento, who writes: “Pasolini formulated descriptions of Eritreans and Eritrea that are unquestionably disturbing and have been, so far, mostly ignored” (“PPP in Eritrea,” 144).

⁴⁰ Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's 2013 *Paese barbaro* addresses Italian fascism's empire more directly.

Montage and the “Stumbling Temporalities” of Migration

Returning to the scene of contemporary migration in order to trace the persistence of the spectral in its cinematic responses, I turn to the Ethiopian-born filmmaker Dagmawi Yimer’s 2015 *Asmat—Nomi* (Names in Memory of the Victims of the Shipwreck at Lampedusa). In his short film commemorating the more than 350 people from the Horn of Africa who drowned on October 3, 2013 less than a mile off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa, Yimer foregoes documentary realism and linear narrative for the painterly, fragmentary, and poetic.⁴¹ The film opens on a black screen with a woman’s voiceover humming a melancholy melody.



Fig. 17. *Asmat—Nomi*, 2015; dir. Dagmawi Yimer.

The first image—a watercolor painting of a tiny strip of land seen across a vast stretch of sea (Fig. 17)—is overlain with a moving image of turbulent waters. A montage of watercolors follows, depicting scenes both ubiquitous and uncommon in the contemporary media coverage of the ongoing Mediterranean migration scenario—a sunken boat with the abandoned possessions of absent migrants draped haphazardly, an arm clutching a sleeping infant (Figs. 18, 19).

⁴¹ On the October shipwreck as a turning point in media representations and public discourse about migration in Italy, see Evelyne Ritaine, “Lampedusa, 3 ottobre 2013.” On recent aesthetic representations of Lampedusa and Linosa—including Emanuele Crialesi’s 2011 narrative film *Terraferma* and Dagmawi Yimer’s earlier documentaries *Come un uomo sulla terra* (2008) and *Soltanto il mare* (2011)—see O’Healy, “Imagining Lampedusa.”



Fig. 18. *Asmat—Nomi*. Submerged ship hold, watercolor still.



Fig. 19. *Asmat—Nomi*. Infant in arms, watercolor still.

A full ten of the film's seventeen minutes is dedicated to the same woman's voice reciting the names of the victims and their English translations—"my hope," "we wanted her," "Joy," "God's treasure," "she is chosen," "no one is like him," etc. The names are recited over slow-motion images of numerous upright bodies standing in the nighttime sea, draped in funerary sheets that explicitly evoke the countless photographs of the drowned circulated in the international press (Fig. 20).



Fig. 20. *Asmat—Nomi*. Figures draped in funerary sheets standing in water.



Fig. 21. *End of Dreams*. Seabed. Courtesy of Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen.

Critically, Yimer’s figures—unlike those memorialized by Larsen using concrete canvas (Fig. 21)—are reenacted by enshrouded living bodies positioned upright, gracefully bobbing up and down at the sea’s surface (Fig. 22). A fisheye lens positioned on the same plane as the floating figures captures their forms both above and beneath the water line.



Fig. 22. *Asmat—Nomi*. Fisheye of floating figures.

The uncanny forms—at once alive and simulating death—give way to an underwater camera recording the sea floor, overlain (in post-production) with the names being recited (Fig. 23).

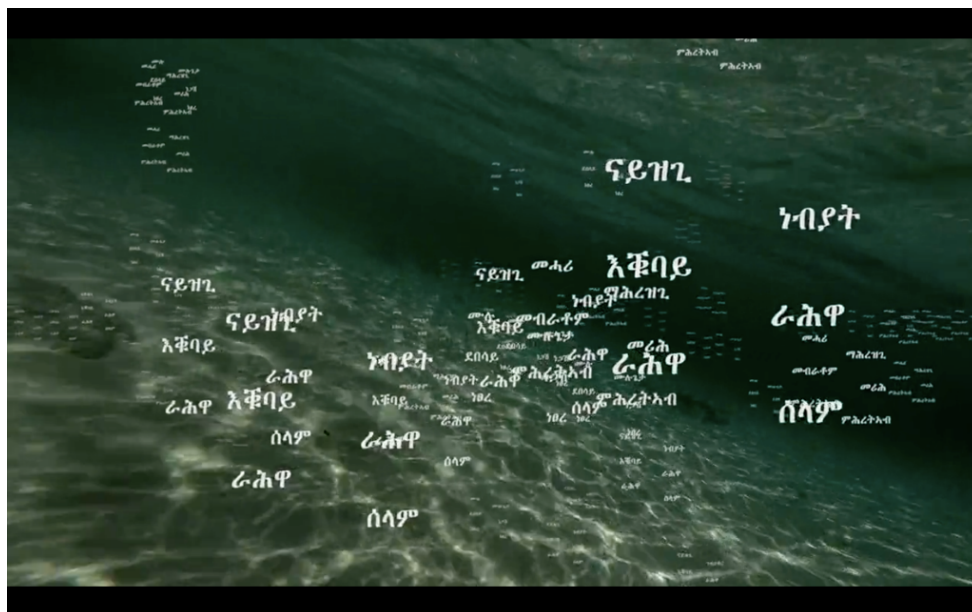


Fig. 23. *Asmat—Nomi*. Names of the victims “projected” on the sea floor.

From the outset, Yimer's project sets up a number of oppositions—between motion and fixity, past and present, presence and absence, and life and death—also appearing in the spectropoetic works of Larsen, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, and Pasolini. In Yimer's film, the effect of such oppositions is a disruption of the temporalities of migration and its representations. His choice of the static watercolor and the anonymous reenactment, as opposed to the temporal immediacy of photo-journalism, underscores the filmmaker's aim to, in his words, "give space to these names without bodies." Despite the film's explicit memorialization of a mass drowning—or perhaps because of it—*Asmat* refuses to reproduce the embodied spectacle of migration as "crisis" so prevalent in the global media—a spectacle in which, in 2006, the filmmaker had himself unwittingly, and, we may presume, nonconsensually, participated (Fig. 24).



Fig. 24. *Come un uomo sulla terra*, 2008; dir. Dagmawi Yimer.

Asmat therefore picks up on Yimer's earlier work, including his 2008 feature-length documentary *Come un uomo sulla terra* (co-directed with Andrea Segre and Riccardo Biadene). This earlier film combines footage from a newscast depicting Yimer's own rescue at sea with numerous scenes depicting his daily 'afterlife' in Italy—whether watching television, riding a train, or situated behind the camera as a filmmaker. Like *Asmat*, *Come un uomo sulla terra* thus explicitly rejects the negative biopolitical logic that defines the so-called "crisis," according to which migrants are only recognizable as anonymous bodies in distress, as dead or dying bodies, or as teeming, contagious bodies who risk imperiling the implicitly and explicitly racialized projects of European nationalism.

Migration anthropologist Cristiana Giordano has recently critiqued depictions of migration, which rely on categories such as “crisis” or “catastrophe,” and which are deployed by sovereign power to justify a perpetual state of emergency. Images of migration as “crisis” or “emergency,” Giordano writes, “prevent us from perceiving the *longue durée* of [certain forms] of violence,” such as the mass exploitation across the Italian South of seasonal agricultural workers coming primarily from sub-Saharan Africa.⁴² Visually, categories of crisis, catastrophe, and emergency tend to produce images of migrating people as swarms, or the only slightly more ambiguous “migrant flows,” overwhelmingly focusing on the spectacular moments of departure, shipwreck, or arrival. Emblematic of this tendency is Massimo Sestini’s 2015 World Press Photo Award-winning “Rescue Operation” (2014), which captured a boat full of migrants in aerial perspective from an Italian Navy helicopter as they awaited intervention by *Operation Mare Nostrum*.⁴³ Photojournalist Paolo Pellegrin’s 2015 essay for the *New York Times Magazine*, “Desperate Crossing,” deploys similar techniques, aimed at highlighting the mass phenomenon-as-crisis.⁴⁴ Speaking reductively, the global media narrative appears less interested in what Giordano has called the “stumbling temporalities” of migration. For Giordano, the trauma of border crossing does not sufficiently account for experiences of migration that register more subtle and enduring traumas—for instance, indefinite waiting in camps or detention centers; nor does privileging the trauma of border crossing accommodate experiences of extended periods of “exploitation, repetition, or the unfolding of fragmented memories.”⁴⁵

Rather than swarms or flows, Yimer’s *Asmat* focuses on plural singularities by deploying a technique of fragmentary, juxtapositional montage, underscoring, as mentioned above, the stark contrasts between motion and fixity, presence and absence, and life and death. As in Larsen’s *End of Dreams*, the film is void of realist images of migrant bodies. Their presence is established instead by figures of absence: the static watercolor, the haunting traces of the objects they left behind, the “ghosts” of the drowned, simultaneously alive and dead, and the disembodied voice of the narrator speaking their names. Montage, as theorized by Eisenstein and Vertov, which emphasizes fragmentation and juxtaposition rather than continuity, functions in this film as a refusal of narrative continuity. Through the cut, such montage can powerfully disrupt rather than replicate temporal continuity and with it the rationalities of teleological “progress” and “productivity” that have underwritten biopolitical regimes from the imperial to the neoliberal. In such a conception, meaning is produced *through* difference, not in spite of it. That Yimer’s film so suggestively deploys montage returns us to Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi’s reworking of found footage: a constellation of fragments that produces meaning through juxtaposition.

The voiceover narration of individual names and the reanimation of bodies by living stand-ins imbue Yimer’s static watercolors and enshrouded figures with an uncanny life. Yimer’s focus for well over half the film on what might be interpreted as a symbolic maternal voice which reads unique names laden with hope for singular lives thus resists the thanatopolitical logic that equates migration exclusively with distress, catastrophe, and death. Like Larsen’s *End of*

⁴² Giordano’s online essay “Catastrophes” does not contain page numbers.

⁴³ For the photo, see <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2015/general-news/massimo-sestini> (Accessed April 30, 2017). Sestini has recently launched a campaign titled “Where Are You?,” which offers web viewers a high resolution version of the image with powerful zoom capabilities so that anyone may identify individuals aboard the ship. The site prompts visitors, “If you recognize yourself or somebody you know on this boat, please contact us.” <http://www.massimosestini.it/wru.html> (Accessed April 30, 2017). I’m grateful to Valeria Dani for bringing this photo and the related project to my attention.

⁴⁴ See <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/09/03/magazine/migrants.html> (Accessed April 30, 2017).

⁴⁵ Giordano, “Catastrophes” (n.p.)

Dreams, Yimer's film dwells in the depths of the Mediterranean. Yet if for Larsen (and, arguably, scholars of the Italian postcolonial), the past is a figure that tugs on the present, like a tragic fate or a burdensome weight, Yimer's formulation of the postcolonial "time lag" simultaneously "projects [the past]" and "gives its 'dead' symbols the circulatory life of the 'sign' of the present."⁴⁶ Asmat invokes the drowned people by recalling the moment of their birth and naming. The past thus impels the present to "stumble" by holding together an end alongside a potentially ever-recurring beginning.⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 254.

⁴⁷ Yimer's *Asmat* also evokes what feminist political philosophers following Hannah Arendt refer to as *natalità*—the moment of birth, and not death or mortality, as constitutive of the human or political community. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*; Chiara Bottici, "Rethinking the Biopolitical Turn"; Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone*.

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