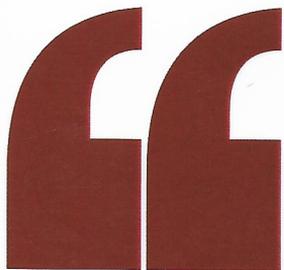


conversations with

MARCO BELLOCCHIO
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FRANCESCO CASETTI
JEAN-LOUIS COMOLLI
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DAVID FREEDBERG
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TONI SERVILLO
WALTER SITI
SHINYA TSUKAMOTO
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OLTRE IL CINEMA

Collana diretta da
Roberto De Gaetano

SERIE

No Man's Land

CINEMA, THOUGHT, LIFE

Conversations with *Fata Morgana*

Edited by

Roberto De Gaetano and Francesco Ceraolo

Frontiere. Oltre il cinema

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Revision by James Ingoldsby

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JACQUES RANCIÈRE

Reason for Disagreement

edited by

Roberto de Gatano

in collaboration with Paolo Godani and Andrea Inzerillo

How about starting with some of the issues that emerge from your book The Emancipated Spectator? In the classical concept of cinematographic and theatrical performance there is always a connection between the scene, or the screen, and the spectator. This connection is brought into question by what you call the aesthetic regime of the arts, which finds discordance and disagreement as characteristics of the composition. In cinema, disagreement can be seen between: the visible and the expressible, image and sound, sensible and intelligible; but also, if we think about what you wrote in Film Fables, between fables and vision; between mythos and ophis. In what way does the notion of the mimetic regime of the arts develop through disagreement, discordance, interval, remainder?

Let us start with the general issue. I think that the representative regime of the arts is a regime of *agreement* on more levels. For example, it can be agreement between a subject and the way it is represented, or between the way of treating a particular subject and the general information of sensibility which are organized according to a given preference. The mimetic regime is fundamentally based on the idea that there are ways of expressing oneself which correspond to the thoughts and feelings we want to express; that there is a sort of vocabulary, or grammar reference of expressions that can be immediately intelligible. I am thinking, for example, about the types of expressions provided by painters like Le Brun who have the possibility to immediately transcribe graphically every thought and every feeling through facial expressions. More

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generally, the representative regime is regulated by a sort of agreement between the transmission of thoughts, the presentation of sensible forms, the reception of these forms, and consequently, the reception of the ideas and the messages that are transmitted by the sensible forms. In relation to this, the aesthetical regime of the arts is by definition a regime of non-relationship. Most importantly, the aesthetic regime removes all the codes which define regimes of expression belonging to specific thoughts and which, more generally, also define a relationship of concordance between norms of production and forms of reception. I think that this is the nucleus of the idea behind Kant's aesthetic judgment. The judgment on beauty is a judgment without concept, so as to exclude the possibility of establishing *only one* way of transcribing or expressing ideas and feelings; a way to sensibilize ideas to be the cause for the feelings about beauty and the judgment on beauty. In my opinion, this is the initial point that defines a series of consequences. The first one is that we cannot think about the political effect of a poetic, pictorial or other, in terms of the transmission of an idea through a certain sensible form. This is very clear in Schiller's *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* where he bids farewell to all those people who think that art teaches because it transmits messages through suitable forms. Instead, the effect of art is that of interrupting the normal relationship where ideas are transformed in specific sensible forms.

Once the mimetic relationship is suspended, is it substituted by another type of relationship which gives way to a new form of agreement, or is it a non-relationship, a sort of de-liaison?

We could say that a relationship between artistic production and aesthetic sensibility is considered by the aesthetic regime; this relationship has to effectively recall an agreement. An agreement which cannot be enunciated in the form of a concept, or that it can be enunciated in the form of a separation of the concept. The idea that something is considered art because it was not art for the person who created it dominates Hegel's aesthetics. What is at the heart of such aesthetic reflection is the disassociation between the reason of production and the reasons of appreciation, of reception. This does not mean that there is no agreement, but the reasons of the agreement somehow explode, multiply. This entails a mutation of the statute of criticism starting from the aesthetic regime. Criticism is no longer capable of establishing art norms, for example, how they should be applied or not. Therefore, it is no longer capable of stating the reason why something should be

accepted or rejected, should be liked or hated. In the end, what will become of criticism? It becomes a way of re-describing what something is, in other words, a way of building a possible sensible world around a work of art. It is what Hegel does. He creates a possible sensible world which is a world of disagreement, of a duality immanent to a work of art. A possible sensible world where what touches us in a work of art, the effect of light, for example, does not coincide with its subject, with the way the subject is treated, and so forth. What changes is that there is at least one division, and at most a pluralization, of the artistic product.

What is brought into question in what you call the emancipation of the spectator is the opposition between watching and acting. In this difference, we understand that the evidence which structures the relationship between saying and doing belongs to the structure of domination and of subjugation. Emancipation starts when we understand that watching is an act which confirms or transforms the regulated distribution of roles. The spectator observes, compares, selects, interprets. The active participation of the spectator brings into question the principle of inequality and the hierarchy which is inscribed in the affirmation, and in the casual transmission, for example, from the text to the spectator and from the master to the apprentice. How should we contemplate the emancipation of the spectator who, by seeing, frees him/herself of the servitude to the text and from the imposition of meaning on the part of the artist?

I want to make it clear that I am not a theorist of art and what I am interested in are not so much the theories of art or of the relationship between the viewer and the work of art, but rather the theories of the sensible forms; the notion of the hierarchization of the sensible forms. The spectator as a passive subject is a figure which we could consider *classical*. This classical figure is somehow tied to the idea of the artist as a teacher and is extensively connected to the designation of active and passive roles. This designation is actually a flexible one, meaning that the person who is watching and the person who is acting can somehow switch roles without having to eliminate this hierarchy. Cinema is an exemplary case, because it was traditionally conceived as a form of imposition (the dark theatre, the projection on the screen), an immediate illustration of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. This idea made it possible for cinema to be considered as a new type of opium, the opium of the people-spectators, the *divertissement* of the idiots, and so forth. However, it would be possible to conceive cinema differently if it were not for

the fact that cinema is the art that, more than any other, depends on the spectator's attention. In its purely material condition, cinema is the art that has to be set up and linked to the spectator's view. Cinema has also been the subject of a series of *pedagogical theories*; the idea behind these theories was that editing could somehow define what the spectator saw (with regard to this, Eisenstein wrote about cinema as a tractor which tills the brain of the spectator). Now, since the very beginning, cinema presented itself as an art which depended on the attention or the distraction of the spectator and also on its ability of organizing the film as one unit. First and foremost, cinema belongs to the spectator, because it is an art of evanescence. It is a type of art that is not established until it recreates itself through a series of processes; processes of the immediate vision, of the memory and of the writing on cinema itself.

If the spectator can participate as the subject in a process of emancipation, the notion of the public, or even worse that of the audience, seems to bend and converge emancipation to a total subordination. What is the relationship between the spectator's possibility of emancipation and setting him/herself up as the public, or as the audience – notions that probably deal with the one of consensus?

The title I gave my book *The Emancipated Spectator* is a polemical one. It is neither a manual on the emancipation of the spectator nor is it an invitation to emancipation. Rather, it is a book which tries to bring into question or tension an idea of spectatorship. That is, the idea that the spectator is necessarily a passive, alienated, brutish figure. The first important point is that you will not find any advice on emancipation. The title indicates an issue and a tension, an alteration of the notion of spectator, rather than a collection of recipes to become emancipated. Secondly, I do not think that cinema is well defined by the notion of aggregation. In cinema there is no organic bond between being together and a certain type of viewing. That is the classic image of the theatre as a place where people come together, where a sort of collective bond is created. Cinema, however, is pure entertainment where many people sit together but, for example, do not applaud at the end of the movie; you go to the movies and at the end you go home. The fact that cinema has a structural set up as entertainment and consumerist object, does not allow for consensus or for collective approval. These notions, instead, belong to theatre; they lead to interpretations of theatres as popular assemblies and so on. Only at the cinema are people gathered unconventionally, in a group we could define aleatory. This is the reason why cinema is

opposed to the more or less consensual needs of the theatre (at least regarding the place), and at the same time it is opposed to the status of the solitary spectator of television, for example, faced with the news. There is a sort of free relationship between the single and the collective at the cinema, and regardless of what has been said, cinema has never been a place of propaganda. People always mention Leni Riefenstahl, but the consensual effect of her films has to be attributed to the ceremonies which they depict, and not to her work as a filmmaker as such. What is consensual, what creates aggregation is, actually, the Nazi ceremony created according to theatrical principles and so on, not the film itself. The two things need to be disassociated. It is a too easy conceptual association the one that says: 'They are images; images are food of the ignorant; ignorant people keep each other company', and consequently, 'Ignorant people are united by the vagueness of the images'. No, I believe it is about images placed on a two-dimensional surface, without depth. A show that is not performed by bodies in front of us is actually more liberating than what people believe. At the cinema, you do not have to physically take part, which means, once again, that the statute of a simple performance has a liberating dimension. The performance, then, can be liberating when there are no encounters with other bodies, with the community: between a community of bodies on the scene and bodies in the movie theatre. The condition of illusion is a condition which has to be accepted; which *is* indeed accepted and it functions as a condition for the possibility of a free relationship.

In The Future of the Image you say that, compared to the images, the viewing medium is not that important; a film by Bresson is not less by Bresson if seen on TV.

So far, I have talked about the movie theatre. The question you are asking is a little different. We can indeed say that images are not defined simply by technical equipment; an image is always a process but we have to distinguish two levels. On one level there is the construction of the sequence of the images, and on the other, a sort of phenomenology of the cinematographic experience. We should think about the relationship between these two levels, but surely it is not an adaptable relationship. Bresson creates a film in a way we could describe as authoritative but, at the same time, it does not define any precise or specific relationship with the way it should be seen; this is the paradox. There is in fact an authoritarianism in Hollywood movies created by the producers who come up with sequences in order to evoke specific effects on the

spectator. Bresson says something different. He says that a sequence, as long as it is art, has to be created rigorously in a certain way, without this evoking a predetermined feeling in the spectator. In this case, we are dealing with two associative links without a predetermined nor oriented relationship.

Does your interpretation of the cinematographic dispositif take into account the changing forms of representation? If we think about Hollywood movies, we realize we are dealing with dispositif that are built to influence the sensibility, the interpretation, the emotions of the spectator. Is it possible to find, inside different forms of the same dispositif, different spaces of freedom? With Bresson, freedom and the possibility of emancipation work a little differently. With regard to the issue of the cinema spectator, is there a difference between classical and modern cinema?

It is complicated to understand exactly what is meant by classical or modern cinema; on this topic, I do not agree with Bazin or Deleuze. Actually, there are always different types of associations; a Hollywood movie is always a sort of compromise. In general, traditional Hollywood cinema does not present strong forms of disagreement but there always are different ways of organizing the notion of the sensible. There is a first level of negotiation; it is very clear; it is the one between filmmakers and producers. Clearly, if we take an example of classical cinema such as John Ford's, we always find moments of *distraction*. Moments that escape the logic of the effectiveness of action and go towards a typology of characters or towards scenes of pure diversion. Just think of the character who thinks himself as a Shakespearean actor in *My Darling Clementine*. It does not have anything to do with the tragic plot, but it shows the freedom the filmmaker has as an artist. Consequently, these films are a sort of aleatory connection where there is always the possibility that our gaze may suddenly stop upon a detail of a picturesque figure, or that we may linger upon the face of a woman. They could be considered a sort of untold story within the movie. They are always there. Even Hollywood movies have deviations of this sort: things that are extra with regard to the logic of the narrative, and thus several ways for the spectator to be taken in by the sensible logic of the story. With Bresson, something different happens. We find ourselves in a situation where the director claims to be entirely responsible for every element of the film. In a way, then, the spectator should be a total prisoner, more so than a spectator of a Hollywood movie, who is always a bit messy.

Nevertheless, if we take a film by Bresson (for example *Au hasard Balthazar* or *Mouchette*), the very fact that every element is calculated in a way so as not to create its own meaning, except by the bond with all the other elements, assures that every element can be isolated by the spectator. The spectator can stop his gaze on Anne Wiazemsky's hand, and next to her, on a detail belonging to Balthazar, or on Nadine Nortier's black hair in *Mouchette*. The spectator can stop on all the small elements which have a role in the plot, but which can also be isolated and be considered valuable as such. In the end, different conditions of re-association are created starting from the links or from the disassociations that the filmmaker has brought into play. Think about the slowing down of time in Béla Tarr's films (a young woman who advances, advances, advances slowly). The fact that the timing is decided by the director, that it takes the young woman eight minutes to get to the place where she will find death, allows the spectator – who during this time is fixed on the young woman's face who is advancing in the rain, and whose steps we can hear – to rebuild a sort of interior tension of this walk, which is entirely calculated by the director.

I think it is very important to emphasize the difference of criteria, and not of nature, between Hollywood and auteur cinema. If we think about Plato's Allegory of the Cave, we find this exact ontological difference, which is also the basis for a type of politics, between two types of images: on the one hand, the projected images in the cave, on the other, the true images, the things that are outside. Perhaps, this is a dispositif – the distinction between two types of images, the real ones and the false ones – which is at the basis for the distinction between people who have access to reality and the others who are tied up in the dark theatre. I would like to ask you whether you think that, in politics, the idea of a difference between consensual and dissensual dispositif should be abolished. It seems to me that in your more recent works you focus mainly on the several partitions of the sensible and you have a tendency to tone down, for example, the opposition that appeared in Disagreement between police and politics.

Let us start from the distinction between police and politics. Like with all the distinctions I try to make, it is a way of thinking about complexity. I will try to establish some distinctions to identify useful tools to understand situations which in reality are situations of *mélange*. Already in *Disagreement* there is nothing that specifically belongs to politics or to the police; the objects are constantly divided, always on a line of tension.

Politics defines and creates itself as such through the use of a police *dispositif*, a certain way of building and redistributing public spaces (the space of power, the road, the place of work, the hospital and so forth). Politics tries to reconfigure something that has already been configured in a certain way by the police. The police is a type of organization of the sensible, an organization which lends itself to whole series of movements and reconstructions. Think about health problems. I am not a fan of the notion of biopower, but if we think about all the medical and pedagogical norms which have been constantly modified, distorted by the different political movements, I think that we can understand how power scenarios create spaces of sensibility which can always escape from power and can be reconfigured differently. There is not a real world and one of appearances, an imposed world and a suffered one. However, we do find ourselves in spaces of possible reappropriation. From this point of view, cinema has, once again, something to say, because the totally calculated projection is something completely authoritative, and, at the same time, completely in the hands of those who are supposed to be suffering this imposition.

I would like to return to the issue of the partitioning of the sensible which aesthetics shares with politics. Is every reconfiguration of the sensible – what you call the dissent of sensoriality – always a political operation or do police reconfigurations of the sensible exist? Are there any signs, if we can say it like this, that separate the work capable of reconfiguring sensibility from the one that goes towards consensus?

I do not think it is necessary to ask ourselves – with regard to every sensible creation – how police and politics are organized. We can say that every artistic creation constitutes, in its own way, a certain form of common sentiment. Every time common sentiment is transformed, we are operating in the field of politics in a broad meaning. Every artistic form constantly works in the configuration of common sense, but it is not the type of reconfigurations put into place by collective subjectivation, which is politics in the real sense of the word. Think about, for example, the work of reconfiguration of the world in modern novels. It breaks all the consensual forms which go towards a general depersonalization, a destruction of every sort of subjectivity which could create a *we*; a *we* which would show itself as such. This allows for the creation of a novel – from the middle of the 1800s to mid 1900s, the great period of the novel – where there constantly was a parallel between the forms of political collective subjectivation and the forms of destruction of a

common sentiment. These were, at the same time, similar to a denial of every possible form of reconfiguration of an *I* or of a *we*. Consequently, we can say that every artistic creation can be considered political in the way it creates a common sentiment, and, at the same time, in the way it creates forms of common sentiment which dissent or are in disagreement with other attempts to create a common sentiment, like that of a political subject who puts forward an idea for a possible world. There should not be a rigid view of the partition between consensus and dissent. In addition, what characterizes political dissent is always a way of building a world that can be shared. An artistic creation does not concern itself with the issue of creating a world that can be shared in the form of a collective declaration, or a collective plan. An artistic creation is, in a way, a type of destruction, of dissolution, of reconfiguration of the sensible elements of the world. In other words, the work of art does not have to satisfy the needs of politics. The political need is always to put forward a form of consensus because, from the moment a political *we* is defined, even if it is a dissentual collective voice, we define it as the possibility of consensus shared by individuals which constitute a collective subjectivity. The world described in a novel is like an idea of the world which can be shared by a multiplicity of individuals, but it does not constitute a collective subject(ivity). I think, for example, that Sartre's *impasse* in the problematic of commitment consists in thinking that literature constitutes a *we*. No, literature does not constitute a *we*; it does not constitute any kind of possible collective subject. Literature redistributes the experience in a unique way and constitutes a weave of a world common to many. A world where you can find the elements of reconfiguration of something which in fact resembles a collective subject, but in reality it constitutes the collective freedom which Sartre expected in *What is Literature?*.

Would it be misleading, then, to say that art is political when it is capable of imagining a world in the future, and is it police-like when it only describes or depicts the world just the way it is?

We could say that art is political in the way it modifies the positions constituted in a sensible universe. A film by Pedro Costa is political mainly because it modifies, at the same time, the visibility of the places of poverty and the position of the victim, of the worker, of the immigrant in the landscape created by consensus. Consensus constitutes something like a medium-landscape of designation of the sensible: designation of the center and the outskirts, of wealth and poverty, of the capacities and

incapacities and so forth. It is something that can be relatively shared. It is something that defines a system of information, of possible stereotypes, of representation, and so forth. Politics starts when things get messed up in this game. It starts when a filmmaker goes somewhere to find beauty in the world – even in a world which is normally seen as of misery and dissolution – in order to create a heroic, tragic, enigmatic figure instead of one who is entirely defined by its being a worker, immigrant, unemployed and so forth. What is after all a police order? We could say that a police order is a type of consensual constitution of the designation of places, of the characterization of groups, of individualities, of their potential possibilities and impossibilities. This deals, a little, with what I once said about the distinction between documentary and fiction starting from Godard's famous sentence '*La fiction c'est pour les Israéliens, le documentaire c'est pour les Palestiniens*'. It is like saying that the poor, the oppressed and the victims cannot afford the luxury of fiction. Together with them, we cannot have the luxury of making fiction because respect, deference and so forth compel us to document their situation. Art becomes political when it alters this designation of roles.

I Want to See is analogous to what Godard did. It brings into question the difference between fiction and documentary. It is a documentary which stars a famous actress, Catherine Deneuve, who wants to see the Lebanese people but manages to see them only as victims and nothing else. This is evident because when there is something nice to see (wheat and flower fields) she falls asleep. This is probably a good example of a political film.

Yes, absolutely. I think that Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's films, just like other expressions of a group of Lebanese artists, are a type of filmmaking which deliberately breaks the boundaries between fiction and documentary. At the same time, it tries to leave behind the identity of the life of the victims. It tries not to involve the issue of whether the war should be depicted or not and which could be good images, and so forth. There is a type of work in process, not only of these two directors but of various other artists who work in Lebanon. It is a conscious decision not to work with images of war and of the oppression but to focus mainly on two things. One of these is the landscape, the signs of the war on the landscape or how the signs of politics are evident upon a landscape; the other is the issue of disappearances. What characterizes these situations is not simply the fact of their being oppressive, where people are killed, massacred and so forth, but that they are all different

types of disappearances. For example, take the areas of transformation of the landscapes, of landmarks, of temporalities that happen in this type of situations. Hadjithomas and Joreige's previous film, *A Perfect Day*, can be considered fiction. It is the story of a woman who, after 15-20 years, has to report her husband's disappearance. She has to decide that someone who disappeared 15-20 years ago is dead. The whole film is based on a play on temporality; on what happens one fine day; on the day of *judgment* when it has to be decided whether a man can be taken away from the list of the living; the moment when it has to be decided to transform this long lack of visibility into something written, which confirms the leaving of the world of the living. Something much more powerful, then, more intense compared to simply taking pictures of the dead.

In *I Want to See*, which is also an important film, Hadjithomas and Joreige introduce distance from within the film. On the one hand, we cannot help but look at the places, and on the other, at the same time, they introduce a double level. On one level there is the person, Catherine Deneuve, who says '*Je veux voir*', 'I want to see', who wants to see the effect of war (which could signify the notion of the *good will* of Westerners who want to go and see on site those terrible things). The other element is the fact that there is another way of dealing with reality, which is that of the actor Rabih Mroue, who has played several films set in Lebanon and has created performances where he jokes about the Lebanese situation. He behaves like a comedian, playing with the ruins, with the destruction; confusing coordinates, and creating situations which could be defined funny. They are important films – I do not know whether to define them *good political cinema* – but surely they bring into play the tension of political cinema or of political art. Also, they are important because of the choice that was made of not working on the depiction of actions, of the bodies and so forth; they work on temporal effects (absence, disappearance) and on the re-composition of the landscape and of the visible.

Z32 is also based on the disappearance of the visual dimension. Everything is based on the telling of stories (plural) on war crimes.

It is true. Both in *Z32* and the film by Ari Folman, *Waltz with Bashir*, which talks about the massacre of Sabra and Shatila through the use of cartoons, what is brought into question is the disassociation between documentary reality, which is not documented except in form of animation, and reflection in hindsight, which is documented live. Also,

in *Z32* there is the relationship between what the character is saying, represented by a type of mask, which is something unreal, and the self portrayal, the *mise en scène* of the director himself – I have to say, that I do not like very much the way the director puts himself in the scene ostensibly to create political distance. However, whether I like it or not, there is a sort of *dispositif* which consists in turning into fiction that which is just too real – as well as saving the live recording for the reflection of the witness or of the filmmaker on what is being done.

We would like to refer to the notion of the pensive image you talk about in The Emancipated Spectator. The pensiveness of the image is tied, we might say so, to a distance, to a self-emancipation, to a vagueness inside the image, due to the presence of expressive heterogeneous regimes (for example, the streets in Kiarostami's film). You also say that the pensive image is not necessarily artistic but it is an image which is midway between art and a non-art.

Once again, my attempt is to re-work the status of the image which does not say anything. After the golden age of semiology, of the analysis of the image, and after the exposure of messages in images, the 1980s started a sort of re-iconization of images in different forms: the sublime, Godard's icon-image in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, the *punctum* of the image in Barthes and so forth. My attempt is to escape from the compulsory choice between a sort of over interpretation of the image on the one hand, and on the other the creation of an image as a shock to the body, a shock to the sublime, a shock to the Other and so forth. I try to destroy this type of relationship or tension between the image as information and the image as shock, as a completely unique and mute entity. This is why I decided to work on photographs again. Photography, more than any other thing, can easily oscillate between the status of an artistic and that of the nonartistic image. Lewis Hine's pictures, for example, are neither destined for, nor are they part of an artistic plan. We could say that even Walker Evans's pictures (*Let Us Now Pray Famous Man*) belong to a plan which is not artistic. What is amazing about these images is their inherent quality of creating or not creating a message to be interpreted. The same image of the same boy can simply be a picture about a boy. However, it can also be interpreted as the image of a small boy who is subjected to abominable slave labor. Another interpretation could be that of a boy who easily adapts to any kind of work, or yet, the image of a boy whose potential should not be absorbed by labor. There is a multiplicity of possible interpretations of an image. In a way, this has

been very important to me, the *pensivité* is the fact that an image can be left alone or it can be subjected to a multiplicity of looks. In other words, the image can be a passageway or it can be the final destination. After all, even the Barthesian distinction between *studium* and *punctum* implies that the image can be a place of transmission; it can be precept to understand something and possibly to act upon it once it has been understood, or it can be a sort of final destination, the pure transmission of a sensible shock. I am interested in the possibility of the image to escape this type of dilemma, to either be an instrument of transmission or a point of arrest. I would like it to be a platform which authorizes a multiplicity of ways of focusing, a possibility of tying, or not, a certain type of sensibility to a certain type of sense. In *The Pensive Image*, I tried to perform this process backwards using the status of Murillo's paintings. They were painted in a specific time as part of a group of picturesque images of the sons of the people; they were sold to art lovers who loved having something picturesque in their homes. At some point, these same images are taken out of their original context – the picturesque and the popular produced for those who have nothing to do with the people, that is to say, the aesthetic consumption of principles – by Hegel who rethinks them a little like the Greek statue was rethought by Winckelmann. These interpretations interest me because they do not stop on the picturesque or on the misery, but on the idleness of the image, that is, on the possibility that the image does nothing. I think that this possibility is very important, because it lies at the heart of the aesthetic regime of the arts; the possibility of no longer assigning a role or specific destination to words and images, but that they may be left to their own idleness. Exactly by leaving them to their own idleness they may become susceptible to a multiplicity of appropriations. By so doing they can destroy the hierarchy between the person who watches and the person who acts, the person who knows how to watch and the person who does not, and so forth.

Can we imagine a type of homology between the artistic acts and the political acts? You were saying that politics is always an issue of subjects, while art is something like a dissolution of every constituted partition. Can we imagine the existence of political acts which, like the artistic ones, dissolve the given partitions, without any subjectivity?

We can actually establish it as an area of indecision: politics can be a manifestation which suddenly opens an undefined space. If we think at what the student movement of 1968 has produced, even with regard to

thought, we can say that it was something political because all authorities crumbled. We can also say that it was something artistic because the removal of authority constitutes something like a common context that no subject can take possession of. The period of 1968 was responsible for the establishment of a space entirely devoid of any authority, but also for the reconstitution of forms of possible subjectivity (student-worker unions and the idea of them being a step in the revolutionary process). Once the period of established political subjects was over, we found ourselves in a sort of undecisiveness where suddenly a political action created a sort of *flo*; a *flo* within visibility; a space of reconfiguration of the common, and, at the same time, a political space which was difficult to be part of. I am particularly talking about what happened after the French movement of 1968, that is, the incapacity of the large collective subject to reappropriate of the ruptures. We are in a world of political ruptures without the strength of hegemonic appropriation, a world where we witness the establishment of landscapes which are a little destructive but at the same time they are landscapes of indecision. Just this morning [March 16, 2009] Emmaüs brought a pile of mattresses to Place de la République to symbolize the approaching spring season and consequently the possibility to evict people who do not pay rent – thus creating a situation of tension between police and political logic. Emmaüs is a charitable organization which tends to behave politically because it creates forms which give visibility to dissent; for example, by displaying that pile of mattresses in the square where great political demonstrations take place. Similarly, other organizations create forms or re-organization of spaces, for example, by using tents for homeless people. We find ourselves in a type of aesthetic *dispositif*, so much so that *political* artists often head in the same direction. They come up with new ways of transforming public spaces, in order to render dissent visible or to somehow create it, even though they remain an impossible subjectivation.

Do you mean to say, then, that you intend to maintain a dialectic between the singularity of the subjective or specific political acts and the affirmation of equality as a universal need? According to traditional dialectic, the working class, a very specific element, is destined to free people from the regime of social classes.

I still feel very strongly about the idea that a political subject is a collective which embodies the part of those who do not have a part, which embodies the exterior, that which is not included in the police

organization of the places of identity. I am loyal to the idea that a form of political subjectivation is a form of universalization which creates the universal capacity of those who do not have particular capacities. Thus, I am still convinced that that is the model of political action because it is a collective subjectivation. What also needs to be said is that, in the end, we are obligated to think about a type of excess of the sensible universe of politics with regard to the capacity of the forms of subjectivation which are specifically political. There is a series of transformations – that deal with unit counting, the nature of *singularity*, of individualities, of subjectivities, the distinction of perceptive units – which are actually a work of art that alters the designation of the sensible. So in a way it is like working at a political level. If we were to be strict about it, we could claim that we are not talking about politics but rather metapolitics. However, metapolitics is something that always intervenes at the same time and in the same space as politics, and also, politics always takes metapolitical transformations of sensible landscapes. Consequently, I think that we are obliged to maintain this tension in order for the political field to surpass the field of action of political subjects and that we are forced to sometimes restrict and sometimes broaden the political field. I am thinking about the areas of indecision today, among all the things done by *para-political* organizations who hold demonstrations in public spaces. Think about the tension between some forms of art and certain *para-political* groups, and then the type of action, of performance, invented by some artists. We can clearly see that a *continuum* is created. On the one hand, there are real political actions followed by the actions of subjectivation of *para-political* groups which reconfigure common spaces. Then, there are actions by artists who try to take over public spaces transforming in part the designation of roles, capacities, and so forth. Then, there are forms of actions that are strictly artistic which, however, still deal with forms of re-designation of roles, of the ways of occupying a position, of the capacities of the subjects, of the forms of the visible and lastly, of the universe of the possible.

In your essay on Rossellini in Film Fables, you deal with the disagreement between the island and Ingrid Bergman's character based on the notion of being a foreigner. The contrast is also identifiable at a meta-cinematographic level. Bergman, a Hollywood star, is stripped of her image; her normally idyllic image is put against the reality of the Sicilian island (for example in the scene of the tunny killing). Is there – in Rossellini's films – a contrast between action and will, and does he bring into question the intent for action as a form of disagreement

embodied by the characters? Like in Bresson's films, the characters act involuntarily. I wonder whether we could view Rossellini as a great example of disagreement, of discordance, of dissent between the character and its capacity to act.

I think that there are several things to note even in this dismissal of the character's capacity. First of all, there is a sort of remainder in relation to the hegemonic political logic of the time, so the relationship between Bergman and communist militants in *The Greatest Love* is significant. It is about building a relationship between situations and subjectivity that contradicts the logic of communist militant action of the period. The first aspect is the opposition of the madness of Bergman's character to the rational interpretation of situations based on the dominant political views. Another aspect is Rossellini's will to subjugate the character to the *mise en scène*. This is his authoritative side for which it is necessary that the character, at one point, is lost, disarmed, destroyed. It is what I call *the physics of the fall*, where the fall is the obedience to a higher will, in this case that of the director. On the one hand, there is a certain way of using the character and consequently of using the possibility of action against politically dominant rationalization; and on the other, the recovery of this sort of dissent only created for the *mise en scène*. I think that the character, actor or actress, who actually performs in the interval has some space to play in: an interval between the liberation from politically dominant logic and subduing to an artistic logic. What I try to do is to define the freedom of play between the imposition of the political action and the obligation imposed on the actor to end up on the ground.

Books mentioned in the conversation

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