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To Unsee the Sea: Modern Refugees on Screen

Paula Jurišić*
University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Abstract

This article provides a glimpse into the echo of the European refugee crisis in contemporary European cinema and the modes of narration deployed in representations of the phenomenon that is rapidly changing the European political and cultural landscape. The representation of the crisis seems to be bringing about a crisis of representation. Mainstream media refugee images are penetrating both the big screens and television production. Drama and victimhood are, consequently, inevitably becoming the dominant modes of narration (See Rosi's Fuocoammare), but a growing number of filmmakers address the issue in rather creative ways, bravely experimenting with the nature of the cinematic event as a whole.

Keywords: film, refugee crisis, spectator, narration of the crisis

> *Che fuoca a mare che c'è stasera*
> *(What fire at sea there is tonight)*
>
> —Sicilian swing song, 1950

This article focuses on different modes of the narration of the ongoing Mediterranean refugee crisis in contemporary European cinema and its underlying *imageme*, namely by focusing on three quite recent films: Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash* (2015), Michael Haneke's *Happy End* (2017), and Gianfranco Rosi's documentary[1] *Fuocoammare* (2016). The first film competed for the Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival, the second was selected to compete for the Palme d'Or in the main

* paulajurisic88@gmail.com

1 Rosi's *Fuocoammare* earned the director his first Oscar nomination for Best Documentary because the narrative departs from the global news story. The global media then labelled the film as a documentary. However, the Italian director is extremely impressionistic in style and the documentary narrative is complemented with staged parts. Rosi casted Lampedusa locals and most of the narration is performed through staged dialogues involving a 10-year-old inhabitant of Lampedusa. This is why *Fuocoammare* is not a documentary in a strict sense.

competition section at the Cannes Film Festival and was the Austrian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 90th Academy Awards, whereas the third film won the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature at the 89th Academy Awards. All of these awards gave these movies transnational acclaim, visibility, a vast audience, and a great deal of misinterpretation. Regardless of the fact of how different they might appear in narration and style, the movies listed here have one thing in common: observing obsession. It subtly pervades Rosi's documentary, Haneke makes it the main subject of his film, whereas Guadagnino violently blurs the boundaries between diegesis and non-diegesis, pushing obsession beyond the limits of the medium itself and turning the spectator into an object of observation as well. The viewer is, therefore, going to be brought into the discussion and analysis of the films; this calls for a clarification of the type of viewer this essay calls into question. The analysis of the three films addresses a viewer who approaches Haneke's *Happy End* believing that she is about to see a drama about dysfunctional family or the viewer of Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash* who believes herself to be watching an erotic thriller. The analysis also addresses the viewer who takes Rosi's *Fuocoammare* for just another documentary. This article is an exploration of forms and modes of narration which are (un)fit to narrate catastrophes as they happen, without historical distance, for an audience able to observe such catastrophes in real-time. Difficult times, according to Rancière, call for a redefinition of the relations between art, politics, and the social sciences, and instead of analysing works of art like plays, novels, or films as a response to social causes, it is perhaps more important to analyse the forms of narration those works deploy and modes of the presentation of facts (139). This is more or less the perspective adopted in the analysis of the films listed above. The language of cinema is 'more than a language of images, and the montage is not simply a way to bring distant images closer as Godard says in his *Histories of Cinema*. It is a way of bringing times closer, to put a multiplicity of temporalities into a unique temporal flow" (141).

Italian director Luca Guadagnino and Austrian Michael Haneke did not merely address the crisis, at least not in the 'straightforward' way that Rosi opted for, but have rather provided a glimpse into the European reality that, when decoded by the viewer, dissolves the Eurocentric, and at times even Hollywood-like plot it is wrapped into. In that way, different temporalities and different spatialities clash, exposing in the process the fiction that surrounds both. A brief overview of Rosi's *Fuocoammare* works as an argument in favour of a view that certain modes of narration of delicate matters are simply becoming outdated and, arguably, ineffective too. Guadagnino and Michael Haneke adopt a very similar approach to

representing crisis from both psychological and artistic points of view, which is why *A Bigger Splash* and *Happy End* will be discussed in the same section. New York Time journalist A.O. Scott described Rosi's straight-forward, semi-documentary project as an exceptional work of art that does not simply present the viewer with a 'tableau of human misery or global catastrophe that has been put together with the vague but unarguably noble intention of raising awareness,' as if such awareness were itself a kind of solution" (Scott). This article will try to argue that this is only partially true.

From the imagological perspective, the first two films operate elusively on the level of the so-called 'auto-image,' shedding the light on the collective dormant states of the modern West. *Fuocoammare* is, conversely, loaded with 'hetero-images,' frequently falling into stereotypical portrayals of refugees, which, however, does not rob it (entirely) of its artistic quality; mostly because the staged parts of the film function as a very lucid and even ironic commentary on the phenomenon. The choice of genre itself, in a way, limits the film's artistic expression and the choice of stylistic devices, but also determines how the audience experiences the movie. Hence, with the staged parts, Rosi is, arguably, trying to challenge not only our perception of the crisis portrayed in the movie but also certain genre conventions that can be very oppressing when it comes to the portrayal of such matters. However, I hold that the relations between the spectator and the image on the screen postulated by Rosi in his genre-mixing project are practically non-existent or at least less substantial than those Guadagnino and Haneke establish between their visual narration and their narratee by doing what I would term *genre haunting*.

According to *The Guardian* journalist Charlie Phillips, 'films about Europe's migrant crisis run the risk of being artful and exploitative. Now directors are seeking to redress the balance" (Phillips). However, redressing the balance sometimes requires redressing and questioning genre boundaries and turning to experimental modes of narration that do not aim at fulfilling the expectation of the audience but rather the creation and education of a new one. This article is also an exploration of new, innovative ways of doing so.

1. Observing the Observer

An article including advice from World Press Photo winner Kalpesh Lathigra for photographers in the field states that 'public perceptions of refugees are shaped by the narrow lens through which they are most often presented: drama and victimhood" (Howden). According to Lathigra, photographers, editors, and commissioning organizations all share a

degree of responsibility for the boats and camps' images that dominate visualizations of refugees. Rosi's *Fuocoammare*, despite its artistic dimension, falls into a category of film that is desperately drawing on the Aylan Kurdi effect"[2] which suggests how the effect of the crises tends to wash off, even in the case of a real-life toddler Aylan Kurdi because certain modes of narration can make different catastrophes that are being narrated seem interchangeable.

Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash*, as well as Haneke's *Happy End*, both work in the opposite direction, moving away from *effet de typique*, from stereotyping, refusing to subordinate their narratives to the spectator's prejudices and expectations, offering instead a pinch of sobering reality, and an intriguing auto-image: that of a white Westerner trying to enjoy himself not thinking about the harshness in his own vicinity. The question that arises here is how to depict a brutal reality for audiences who do not necessarily want to hear about it or are rather easily distracted from it. European cinema is rapidly offering answers to that question.

Both Haneke and Guadagnino have decided to feature our painful indifference in their films, turning it into a protagonist, if not the subject of their projects. Refugees or minorities (in Haneke's film it is quite hard to tell), on the other hand, are basically voiceless; they appear only for a brief moment and are reduced to sketches functioning merely as a backdrop for the unsettling portrait of a complete lack of interest on the other side. This is, naturally, intended to downplay the 'implied European default of normality against which the disturbance manifests itself" (Leerseen, 'Stranger/Europe" 22), and the refugee crisis that we are currently witnessing is frequently presented as such: a malign tissue on an otherwise perfectly healthy organism that is Europe. Having seen *A Bigger Splash* or *Happy End*, the spectator is basically 'raped into authenticity,"[3] to use Haneke's expression (Haneke). The implicit European auto-image, claims Leerssen, is

> one of a separation between an ordered interior world, ruled by laws and by domestic values, a household with a centre of gravity in traditional

2 A toddler whose body had been washed ashore on a Turkish beach in 2015, a body that came to symbolize the European refugee crisis. The image of Aylan Kurdi washed ashore managed, for a brief moment, to prompt a slight shift in the attitude towards the crisis.

3 'Why do I rape the viewer? I try to rape him into being reflective, and into being intellectually independent and seeing his role in the game of manipulation. I believe in his intelligence. At its best, film should be like a ski jump. It should give the viewer the option of taking flight, while the act of jumping is left up to him" (Haneke).

> authority, and cordoned off from an unordered outside where only the law of the jungle applies. That image is that of the house, with its roofs, walls, and thresholds separating outside from inside and with its central focus in the hearth and chimney giving warmth and shelter to its inhabitants. (Stranger/Europe" 22)

It is precisely this image that is satirized by Guadagnino and Haneke: Haneke tears his house down and Guadagnino turns his into a murder site. The tension that pervades both films is born from an auto-image and its unstable grounds. The otherness and the perception, or lack of perception, of otherness merely inserts itself between us and our narratives, not even to facilitate its assimilation but to point to the hidden, subconscious mechanisms standing in its way.

According to Prime, the refugee film as 'a form of transitional, transnational cinema," it is 'preoccupied with space, integrating into its structure the sense of displacement that is perhaps the fundamental experience of the refugee and asylum seeker" (58). Both Guadagnino and Haneke play with the familiarity of domestic spaces slowly letting the uncanny creep in and instil anxiety both in the filmic space and the viewer's mind. Space is stripped of all certainty and the posh *maisons* featured in both films offer no refuge even when they are basically *maisons des artistes*, as are Tilda Swinton/Marianne Lane's.[4] Haneke's *Happy End* opens with a scene of a construction site collapsing somewhere in northern France as if to show that the house' we call Europe is a shaky edifice itself, with unstable walls and roofs, and that the real danger lurks inside familiar walls. Philosophy and film studies have brought about a lot of reflection on the relation between architecture and film. According to Pallasmaa,

> through architecture we transform our experience of outsideness and estrangement into the positive feeling of domicile. The structuring of place, space, situation, scale, illumination, etc, characteristic to architecture - the framing of human existence - seeps unavoidably into every cinematic expression. (161)

Both film and architecture are, among other, an attempt to order and domesticate mental and physical space, to fight internal and external chaos.

4 In this case it could be also argued that these kind of spaces - all *maisons des artises, buen retiro, turris eburnea* kind of spaces – can actually offer a privileged point of view given their, usually, reclusive and isolated nature which is apt to induce meditation.

However, Haneke's opening scene presents chaos at its most destructive and the viewer is lost right at the start as he/she is intentionally deprived of a mental dwelling space and left waiting for a 'solid ground' to walk on through the filmic space. Pallasma continues:

> Presentation of a cinematic event is, thus, totally inseparable from the architecture of space, place and time, and a film director is bound to create architecture, although often unknowingly. It is exactly this innocence and independence from the professional discipline of architecture that makes the architecture of cinema so subtle and revealing. (162)

Knowingly or unknowingly, the destruction of a construction site and the death of a construction worker somewhere in France set the dominant tone for a basically non-existent plot and the cinematic event because the viewer is left with nothing to hold onto. He/she is intentionally displaced and, hence, confused and anxious throughout. Having no solid plot to follow or a safe mental space to move through gives the viewer a sense of nausea as if caught in the middle of a bad dream. According to Kracauer, when watching a film in a cinema, the viewer is surrounded with darkness, her contact with actuality reduced, and she is deprived of much of the environmental data needed for other mental activities (159). The same practically applies to dreams. One is put to sleep, in the dark and free of stimuli, left only with the brain-produced images that frequently ask for some sort of decoding while awake. Haneke's imagery is, by no means, pleasant, and, having seen *Happy End*, the viewer is forced to reflect on it long after the credits have rolled. The matricidal poisoning taking place the film is also very suggestive, as Europe is often perceived by Europeans as the good mother protecting its offspring, sticking to the *abundans cautela non nocet* rule. However, *Happy End* opens with collapse and matricide. The first wrapped in the silence of his European protagonists and the second framed by a smartphone camera in the hands of a mentally unstable child struggling with the consequences of a painful divorce.

Kracauer's viewer is attracted to a specific film not by a desire to 'look at a specific film or to be pleasantly entertained," but rather the viewer is desperate to be 'released from the grip of consciousness," to lose themselves in the dark, which makes the moviegoer 'much in the position of a hypnotized person" (160). It is particularly this feature that makes film an ideal vehicle for all kinds of propaganda. Film theory has, on several occasions, compared the spectator's condition with that

of Hitchcock's fictional photographer L.B. Jefferies[5] (played by Jimmy Stewart in *Rear Window*), confined to a wheelchair, with his leg in cast, observing through a rectangular window, using a pair of binoculars or his camera lenses, both of which allow him to switch between long and close shots, as a way to entertain himself. Both Haneke and Guadagnino put their viewers to sleep, release them from the grip of consciousness, immobilize them only to present them with mirror images of themselves asleep, unconscious or immobilized. Finally, the viewer is, just like Hitchcock's character, metaphorically exposed and thrown out of the window, as a form of the 'rape" that Haneke deems to be a necessary feature of the cinematic event.

Both directors are, as a matter of fact, questioning what it means to be an observer today. Haneke and Guadagnino are observing the observer of the silent catastrophes taking place in the personal, but also in the wider, political space, performing what could indeed be described as a 'useful traumatization,' directing the camera eye towards the observer who does not even want to be seen observing. Guadagnino and Haneke are all about the visibility of the observer and reducing the distance of the audience from the filmic events, subtly pointing fingers at an individual, not at an apparatus. In his *Inglorious Basterds*, Tarantino made a similar point with the famous scene of the brutal slaughter of a entire cinema audience comprised of Nazi soldiers and their families on a night out, people who were nothing but silent observers pretending not to hear or see a thing. The question he raised by doing so is the same question Guadagnino, Haneke, and, to a smaller extent, even Rosi put forward: what does it mean to be an observer of moral catastrophes? Directing the light towards the cinema audience was an extremely powerful statement. This type of useful traumatization of largely oblivious audiences living in a mediated reality fabricated to serve the capitalist interests of the highest bidder is becoming a common feature of the new wave of directors seeking new ways of social engagement, mostly through a critique of the plague of modern times: civilized indifference.

The directors mentioned above addressed the same issue that Gramsci voiced in his 1917 pamphlet *The Future City*. 'I hate the indifferent. I believe, as Frederich Hebbel did, that living means being partisan'(...), indifference is abulia, is parasitism, is cowardice. Indifference isn't life. This is why I hate the indifferent" explains Italian philosopher and politician, referring to indifference as the 'dead weight of history," 'the millstone around the innovator's neck," and 'the brute matter that rises up against intelligence and smothers it" (Gramsci).

5 See *Hitchcock's Moral Gaze*; Barton Palmer, Pettey and Sanders (eds.); *Stalker, Hacker, Voyeur, Spy*; Gediman.

Silence (frequently synonymous with indifference) is in fact a recurring motif in Guadagnino and Haneke's films. The Austrian director's film is set in Calais, a major ferry port in the northern France, and a refugee camp, but that is something the spectator does not learn from the director, as the movie is entirely deprived of didacticism. Moreover, in Haneke, the spectator is not allowed to hear what the conversation between the member of the Laurent family and the migrants is about, as their voices are drowned out in a traffic jam on a busy street, just like their bodies are drowned in the waters around Mother' Europe. The sound pollution reverberating in Haneke's film comes to symbolize, among other things, the impact of modern technology on human communication. The streets of Calais in *Happy End* are teeming with life and voices, but the Austrian director puts this polyphony to work just point out that, despite the visible display of interculturality, Haneke's Europe is still not a postcolonial one that would allow new voices to speak. It is rather one that is still imposing one and only one voice. However, this Eurocentric perspective is way too haunted for the viewer and, hence, not easily adopted. Haneke's viewers are, in a way, forced on a quest for a new perspective, but a ready-made one is by no means available. By not letting the viewer settle in a safe spot' and by denying him/her omniscience, Haneke disables his audience and haunts their dreams, taking full control of the viewer. Haneke's viewers are constantly looking for both mental and physical states to settle in and are perpetually being denied permission to do so, a condition that pretty much resembles the condition of a modern refugee. As Ince put it, in Haneke's films, 'private and public space, like interior, mental and exterior, real' space, refuse to remain in the clearly delimited, self-identical categories that would ensure the spectator's peace of mind" (88).

Guadagnino, on the other hand, takes the spectator a step further into the depths of the human psyche, silencing not just the refugees but his western protagonists as well, taking this whole interplay to the so-called meta-image[6] level, as an image that is neither an auto-image nor a hetero-image but something between the two, an image that leaves both western and eastern protagonists speechless, as during an encounter in a forest on the small island of Pantelleria, both of them face their naked selves in the gaze of the o/Other in a voice deprived scene.

6 Meta-images 'exist wholly by way of imputing to Others the way how we think that they look at Us" (Leerssen, 'Imagology" 24). It is precisely at the meta-image level where the most intense antagonism takes place because 'we believe the others guilty of ill-will, a refusal to be reasonable, a deep animus, without realizing that it is ourselves who display such ill-will and animus by imputing it to the Other. We suspect the other of being suspicious, without being aware that to do so is an act of suspicion on our part" (ibid.).

According to Mendelowitz,

> The filmmaker has much to teach us about the world we inhabit and share and the incompleteness we mostly embody and persistently long to surpass, about the sheer madness and mystery of being in a new millennial landscape and terrain. It is the artist's peek behind the proscenium arch; in other words, it is psychology. (187)

The Italian director, extremely psychological in his approach, attempts, in Felliniesque fashion, the deconstruction of the so-called meta-images, bringing his silent protagonist in the middle of nowhere where one stands naked' before the other, each wholly stripped of the fictitious,' which means being deprived of language as the main device helping us frame our prejudices and stereotypes. To make them really see' each other, the director relieves them of the burden of what Henri Pageaux would define as *'la confusion entre l'attribut et l'essentiel*'" (qtd. in Leerssen, 'Imagology" 25), leaving each side, including the spectator, slightly uncomfortable and ashamed. This quite short, but rather powerful, Dantesque scene suggest that maybe the crisis' that we are witnessing calls not for humanitarian help only but for the deconstruction of the discourse of the self, which necessarily implies the deconstruction of the discourse of the national as well, conforming to Arendt's political theories of the figure of a modern refugee[7] as a potential foundation for a new social and political philosophy.

Whereas Guadagnino dwells, among other things, on western indifference and self-centeredness, Haneke, it could be argued, provides some sort of an explanation, mostly by placing modern technology as the mirror of an indifferent French protagonist, but also as the cause of it, since technology plays a great role in the domestication of violence. The non-existence of an immediate reality is, as a matter of fact, one of the leitmotifs of the movie. Moreover, the most significant and highly disturbing frames are shot with the camera filming a smart phone screen while the movie's youngest protagonist is live streaming the poisoning of her own mother and later even the failed assisted suicide of her grandfather. In Haneke, technology provides both a window into the harshness of a globalized world as well as a wall that keeps us away from it, and in *Happy End*, the presence of modern technology is turned into a framing device. Both the framing of shots and the narrative framing

7 In We Refugees," originally published in January 1943 in the Jewish journal *Menorah*, Arendt dwells on what it means to be a refugee, an inhabitant of a state that exposes the so-called fiction of sovereignty and blindness of the bureaucratic apparatus to the existence of bare life in a bureaucratically unprocessed form.

are, therefore, entusted to a deranged girl struggling with her parents' divorce. This mentally unstable girl is an evolved echo of Hitchcock's immobilized photographer, whereas the role of the window is transposed into a smartphone and the protagonist is no longer able to think of the events from her surroundings as real once she places a screen between herself and the occurrences in her immediate vicinity. Haneke's frame-within-a-frame further destabilizes the viewer as well.

While the Austrian director is introducing an element of mediation and mediated reality that, when it comes to refugee crisis, is of vital importance and raises a set of questions on how this new reality should be represented in contemporary cinema, Guadagnino builds a strong intertext in *A Bigger Splash*, a film that, to start with, borrows its title from Hockney's famous pop art painting depicting a swimming pool and a modern house. The painting is extremely static; the only movement represented being the splash created by an unseen protagonist who has just jumped in from a diving board. Being familiar with Guadagnino's poetics, I assume he was particularly intrigued by the cause-effect interplay taking place on the canvass. The observer is seeing the effect of an action only, whereas the cause is hidden deep under the surface and one is left guessing who or what could it could be. Furthermore, we are faced with an effect of a human action, but the human element is nowhere to be seen in the painting, which is very reminiscent of the crisis that the Italian director is tackling. The West is, as a matter of fact, following and treating the refugee crisis as if it were indeed an effect without a cause, a dangerous self-induced tide approaching the Fortress. The dangerous water' metaphor is, as a matter of fact, frequently deployed in the media discourse when it comes to the portrayal of the refugee crisis, frequently resulting in the conceptualization of migrants as an uncontrollable, destructive force. Flow, tide, wave, and flood appear to be the terms most frequently deployed in American, British, and Balkan media as well (Mujagić). Guadagnino further develops Hockney's visual narrative' and depicts the cause instead, a naked Westerner drowned in the safety of a luxurious villa, in a posh swimming pool (a symbol of the human desire to dominate powerful forces such as water) on a Mediterranean island surrounded by those dangerous waters' frequently discussed in the media. The murder at the centre of Guadagnino's painting' is characterized as an accident, as the murderer happens to be married to a famous rock star played by Tilda Swinton and the Sicilian officer investigating the case is an easily charmed docile body. Guadagnino makes use of this well-known painting and penetrates its psychological depths with the film camera as an homage to both arts, but at the same time as an attempt to unveil the truth, only to cover it up and bring the viewer back to the pleasant and visually soothing surroundings resembling those in Hockney's famous painting.

Besides deriving its title from this modern art painting, *A Bigger Splash* is also a remake of Jacques Deray's *La Piscine* (1969) set in Côte d'Azur. Guadagnino borrows the plot and the motifs of sexual possessiveness, transposing it to Pantelleria, a small Italian island in the Strait of Sicily, an island hosting a refugee camp. The director is, therefore, juxtaposing images of prosperity with images of a struggle to survive, showing how a small geographical area can become the place of the clashing of two principles ruling our lives: the principle of pleasure and the principle of pain occasionally stare at each other silently. *A Bigger Splash* starts off as an erotic thriller, but its loose narrative line is disrupted by the unexpected intrusion of Otherness that dissolves the plot and melts down its erotic charge. The Other is suddenly penetrating both Western life and the genre the viewer believes himself/herself to be watching, and is silently seeking asylum in both. The pressure piles up and the movie ends in a murder disguised as an accident that, however, receives great deal of attention from the local authorities, as it is all taking place at a rock-star's villa. The refugee camp, as well as its inhabitants remain what they are, a part of the film setting aiming at verisimilitude. This is precisely the element that made it possible for the film to be labelled an erotic thriller. The silent encounter of the worlds in the Sicilian forest presents a breaking point in the narration and offers the viewer the possibility of choosing a different narrative line or rather the possibility to follow both lines simultaneously: a reading that turns out the be the most productive one as it encompasses the complexity of the phenomenon that is simultaneously penetrating geographical, political, cultural, and private spaces.

Therefore, both directors manage to paint the same picture of Europe Leerssen is referring to, and it is a picture of Europe as "a combination of civilized refinement and a fraught history, a combination of suave civility and long-lost innocence, that Machiavellian sense that behind every Michelangelo lurks a Borgia, behind every Sissi a Dracula, behind every Louvre a Dachau – and between the two a sense of complexity and mixed feelings" (Stranger/Europe" 23).

2. Rosi's Amblyopic Eye

> If an immigrant stood at my door and said: You have so much room. Can I live here? Would I let him in? No. I'm not a saint. I cultivate a certain scepticism in my films: toward other people and myself.
>
> — Michael Haneke, "Every Film"

Italian director Gianfranco Rosi portrays his Lampedusa through the eyes of Samuele Pucillo, a twelve-year-old boy dealing with amblyopia, his lazy eye functioning rather as a symbol than an actual medical issue, and through Pietro Bartolo, an island doctor anguished by images of the dying and suffering migrants. Samuele is only a child with no real understanding of the crisis, which is why he often points his slingshot towards the sea pretending to be fighting the 'enemy invasion' and is, therefore, not to be blamed for it. Samuele is the symbol of an average Westerner, a perfect picture of the collective 'lazy eye issue.' His condition, I would argue, functions as an embodiment of the collective dormant states that seem to be reawakening in the West as the refugee crisis is rapidly triggering both panic and fear, mostly due to a lack of knowledge or proper information on the subject.

Pietro, on the other hand, is in direct contact with the refugees, or the 'invaders,' but the spectator is, in a way, already familiar with his point of view: the haunting events he witnesses are the same haunting images that today's mass media is putting forward on a daily basis. However, constant exposure to an image carries in itself some sort of immunity or a tendency to think of its content as virtual, as seen in Haneke. Consequently, the spectator can no longer be 'raped into authenticity" by an image of anything else rather than herself, an image of one's own indifference, or, in this particular case, one's childish ignorance. The image of a refugee presented through the eyes of the island doctor is in fact no better than the image of an enemy/refugee presented through the eyes of Samuele Pucillo, as it is a very stereotyped one, belonging to the so-called 'boats and camps' images aimed at provoking pity or action and frequently failing to do so.

None of the movies analysed in this essay is plot-driven and viewers would most likely find it hard to sum up the (non)events taking place on the screen. The anxiety that pervades the works of these European directors forbids the viewer to settle in comfortably and the nonexistence of a solid, linear plot is nothing but a policing device preventing him/her to do so. Furthermore, when it comes to genre, the movies analysed here bravely defy classification. Rosi's *Fuocoammare* appears to be grounded in documentary practice, but the documentary footage is complemented with staged scenes in a neorealist fashion. The (in)flux of refugees and asylum-seekers into Western Europe, according to Prime, 'poses new challenges for genres, such as the documentary or the realist drama, that traditionally attempt to 'solve' these sorts of social problems" (59). Naficy goes even further stating that 'access to multiple channels and types of local and transnational media and the displacement of an unprecedented number of people have challenged our received notions of national culture and identity, national cinema and genre, authorial vision and style, and

film reception and ethnography" (8). Despite the fact that Rosi's film is a skilful exercise in genre-mixing, the mode of narration of the central theme is rather stereotyped and conforms to what Lathigra terms 'boats and camps" representations.

Modern refugees inhabit a limbo, an intermezzo, an in-between space and Guadagnino's and Haneke's spectators are consequently placed in the same limbo in terms of effective genre disruption and narration. The refugee camp and the boat, which come to be Rosi's in-between spaces, are the same spaces that take on the role of the dominant symbols of the displaced in Western visual culture. Guadagnino and Haneke's refugees/minorities do not inhabit the plot but rather dissolve it and suspend it, as they are constantly ignored by the Western protagonists, by the sound director, and by the movie camera. However, the very process of intentional, even trained unseeing fills the attempted plot' with anxiety, an anxiety greater than the one Rosi is trying to instil in his audience with his real-life walking and talking stereotypes. There is an elephant in the room, be it the gaze of a Moroccan cleaning lady, a refugee at a posh seaside party somewhere in France, or an unknown wanderer from Pantelleria's forest, and it is precisely this feeling that inhibits the viewer from enjoying the familiarity of the domestic spaces presented in Guadagnino, Haneke and to a certain degree even in Rosi. However, Rosi's viewer is not exactly forced to take a look and acknowledge the uncomfortable gaze of the Other, whereas Haneke's and Guadagnino's viewers are highly subjected to the gaze and forced to take a look at themselves and acknowledge their own inertia. Whereas Rosi is using the crisis as a subject of his project, Haneke and Guadagnino are turning it onto a medium to deliver and present the most accurate image of the West that we all deem true but we would rather not see, let alone acknowledge. The fact, however, remains that we are much more in need of that kind of image rather than the images of bodies washed away on Mediterranean shores, images pointing fingers at governments, laws, apparatuses, and other mechanisms serving, among other things, to relieve us of individual responsibility.

Nonetheless, there is a striking interplay put at work in Rosi's film that makes it worthy of attention and it is the constant juxtaposition of a familiar,' stereotyped and widely commercialized mediterraneity (scenes of a Sicilian *nonna* cooking a most delicious pasta), meaning a flat mediterraneity that can easily misguide the viewer into projecting personal positive emotions into it, images frequently deployed in advertising campaigns for the Mediterranean (perceived as a luring room with a view') are juxtaposed with images of the strange and unexpected' appearing in the form of a crowded old vessel blocking the view and instilling anxiety. This is the mechanism behind Samuele's imaginary war with the enemy.'

Rosi's *Fuocoammare* is a Mediterranean room with a view that is suddenly filled with terror and Otherness, and the locals are overwhelmed with fear and uncertainty. Unlike Haneke's and Guadagnino's spectatorships, Rosi's viewer does not have to fear being involved or being made a subject of the narrative through the director's psychological game. Rosi's viewer has the privilege of being cut off from events and is at times overwhelmed with pity, but is still not confronted with the moral obligation to intervene. Rosi's audience is granted a dwelling space and a delicious bowl of homemade Sicilian pasta. However, the projection of positive emotions into the familiar scenes in Rosi means holding onto stereotypes and becoming a stereotype oneself, since the cosy Mediterranean scenes are, in fact, flat and highly commercialized. In Rosi, the image of the arrival of the refugee boat on the Sicilian shore, which some locals perceive as an enemy invasion, is in itself a form of a celebration of transnational space, whereas the domestic Mediterranean scenes that easily become a form of a refuge for the viewer ironically come to symbolize the resurgence of micro-level hyper-nationalisms and micro-fascisms. This is where Haneke's scepticism' comes into question: Rosi is merely illustrating fear and scepticism at work, while the Austrian director parts from his own scepticism, raising a set of question on its nature and origin, forcing his characters and audience to question the nature and origin of theirs.

Unlike their treatment in Haneke and Guadagnino, Lampedusa refugees are actually given a voice in Rosi's movie. However, they are only allowed to express themselves by Western means: using English, which is not their first language, which again, forces them to hold onto stereotypes in order to provoke empathy, and this is precisely how an alternative reality is created and served, 'a mediated and manufactured reality, encouraging simulation and theatricality, instead of genuine information" (Ignat 79). However, Rosi's stereotyped refugee invades an even more stereotyped mediterraneity, resulting in an anguishing simulacra, a representation of the original the true likeness of which no one is exactly able to recall. Rosi's refugee is stripped of all familiarity and certainty and given only limited means to try to claim them back, which, arguably, turns him/her into a walking stereotype, but the Westerner on the safety of the Mediterranean shore is no less a stereotype. Still, one is to claim protection from the other, turning the whole interplay in a grotesque *absente reo* trial with the defendant present but only in the extent in which he or she is able to use the Western tools put at his or her disposal. *Fuocoammare,* meaning *Fire at the Sea*, bears the title of a famous Italian song from World War II and features some hellish scenes at open sea where the worst terrors of our age are taking place, and yet the people in the film remain as careless as the Sicilian swing piece from 1950 from which the director borrowed his title. The spectator is allowed to do the same, there is no imagined gaze of

the Other that is supposed to instil guilt or shame in the Western viewer, whereas the other films discussed leave it, in a neoformalist fashion, to the viewer to compile and assemble the experience and his/her own personal role in it. Rosi's disembodied eye' is omniscient and more impersonal in its nature, whereas Guadagnino and Haneke's filmic eyes become organic parts of the body of the spectator, and the latter is forced to take responsibility for his/her bodily presence or at least to acknowledge it.

3. *Le réfugié que donc je suis*

> I often ask myself, just to see, who I am-and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment. Whence this malaise? I have trouble repressing a reflex dictated by immodesty. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. Against the impropriety that comes of finding oneself naked, one's sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see. The impropriety [malseance] of a certain animal nude before the other animal, from that point on one might call it a kind of animalséance: the single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant. The gaze of a seer, visionary, or extra-lucid blind person. It is as if I were ashamed, therefore, naked in front of this cat, but also ashamed for being ashamed. (Derrida 3)

A form of nudity enforced on viewers that I have discussed in the previous sections appears to be the central concept of Derrida's famous 1997 seminar: nakedness as a metaphor for naked thoughts, naked words, and naked truth: the language of thought stripped of its discursive element, the kind of nudity to which Guadagnino exposes his spectators.

Even though we tend to look at the animal as the Other, and moreover, the subordinate Other, Derrida argues it may not necessarily be the case. The original title of the seminar, *L'animal que donc je suis*, is in fact a word play, as *je suis* does not only mean *I am*. This is because the French verbs *être - to be*, and *suivre - to follow*, happen to have the same singular form for the first person: *je suis*. Hence, the problem that Derrida poses is who is following whom? Is the human following the animal (and therefore, establishing themselves as superior) or is the human an animal, and therefore equal, if not inferior, caught in the gaze of another animal?

I am aware that Derrida was speaking in defence of animals and against generalization, instrumentalization, and the conceptual simplification of

animals, challenging the so-called philosophical logocentrism. However, one of his key points is 'othering' and the mechanism of othering performed mostly through language that has become instrumentalized and put to the service of dominant power structures. The cat's gaze from the philosopher's speech corresponds to an intrusive gaze from a stranger for instance, the gaze perceived as a dominant gesture. It is the same kind of gazing we witness in Guadagnino and Haneke in the scenes of silent clashes between worlds. Their Western protagonists, all of a sudden, are brought down from their Western thrones, from a position of seeing from a safe distance, that is seeing without being seen and placed in the spot of the observed subject from Derrida's speech, that of a naked person exposed to the unbearable gaze of the Other.

What Guadagnino and Haneke do is expose their posh, bourgeois protagonist to the gaze of the Other that they would prefer to unsee, let alone to be caught gazing at the Other's gaze. It is this strong psychological element that makes their approaches to the narration of a delicate issue quite unique and effective, as the spectator is left with the feeling that she did not actually see a movie, but was rather seen, in her nakedness, allowing for embarrassment to kick in afterwards.

The modern refugee crisis addressed in Haneke and Guadagnino, more than anything else, seems to be calling for a perforation of the spaces of the construction of the self, acknowledging 'the refugee that one therefore is,' and that a film's plot is frequently an obstacle to the reflective process as such. A loose narrative structure, further dissolved by numerous *temps mort* scenes, provides the viewer with both space and time for reflection. Unlike Rosi's *Fuocoammare*, emotional charges are practically non-existent in both Haneke and Guadagnino, but the filmic portrayal is by no means neutral. The construction of suggestive elements in the narrative spaces of the films is performed mostly through the location of characters in space. Haneke's only Western protagonist, troubled by the sufferings of the Other and at the peak of the depression he is struggling with, expresses his repressed feelings in a free-style dance at a night club, but the stage he is dancing on resembles a box that limits the freedom of movement and what would otherwise be perceived as a gesture of finding one's inner peace, a gesture of liberation, turns out to be a claustrophobic *mise-en-scène* that is actually imprisoning the character. In *A Bigger Splash*, the visual narrator[8] locates the characters in space so that their respective positions resemble those of a hide-and-seek game, with one peeking out from a safe place (usually from a tiny window or the window blinds in a

8 According to Verstraten, the 'visual narrator is a narrative agent responsible for choosing who or what can be seen, for locating the characters in a certain space, for positioning the characters with regard to each other, and for determining the kind of lighting in the shot" (8-9).

police station). The viewer gets to share the character's voyeuristic, protected view, but then, all of a sudden, the camera exposes his/her hidden shelter and the situation is immediately reversed. Guadagnino offers no safe space for his viewer to settle and puts him/her under the constant threat of being abruptly exposed both to the Other and to him/herself.

This crisis that is frequently presented as if literally being born out of water, out of the Mediterranean Sea, an immense natural space featured in all three films, has become a thing to unsee in both moral and political senses, or at least, a thing to watch from the safety of being a moviegoer. The representation of the crisis in contemporary European cinema is bringing on the crisis of cinema itself, as filmmakers are struggling to find fit modes of representation that would move away from a mere illustration of events; thus, *Fuocoammare*'s biggest flaw is the fact that it is way too illustrative to be effective. Rosi's viewer is too disembodied to be thinking with the director. However, a growing number of European filmmakers (Haneke, Guadagnino, Kaurismäki, Hristov) are addressing both the crisis and the crisis of representation in the most creative ways, clearing a path for the new, subtle and, in their expression, very avant-guard forms of social engagement aimed at showing the audience that, in times of moral catastrophes, being just an audience is synonymous with being compliant.

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