

Writing on the screen

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I

Introduction

This essay is about the stories being told through and on the screen. It is also about the movement of those stories and the mobility of the screen upon which they are projected. No longer bound by the fire-side ritual or ancient open air auditorium, stories now migrate across vast terrains.

Aims and Objectives

I first ask whether the idea of ‘story’ – as it is constructed by conventional, mainstream, Hollywood narratives - is as important as it appears. In doing so, I contrast conventional ideas of what it means to write *for* the screen with an idea of writing on the screen. My aim is to consider and include the work of audiences, especially immigrant, and in particular illegal immigrant audiences, as producers of meaning along side the screenplay writer as producer. In re-thinking the screen in terms of immigrant culture, the screenplay breaks free of what Jameson describes as the story's arrival as an “always-already-read” text (Fredric Jameson cited in Chandler 2006: 198). Irrespective of the intrinsic qualities of a screenplay – its language, style, genre, and mode of storytelling – something happens when humans encounter texts and engage with them, even if they are not familiar with the language of the work. People produce meaning – a tendency some suggest is a basic human quality (Hawkes 1977: 125). However, as communication scientists have argued, people pay scant regard to the intentions of a text's author.

The independence of artistic and, indeed, of any representational object has gradually become clearer over time. Yet, as early as the 16th Century, Michel de Montaigne writes that “the work, by its own force and fortune, may second the workman, and sometimes outstrip him, beyond his invention and knowledge” (*Essays* 1580). A more comprehensive examination of the independence of a work was published by W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley in 1954. De Montaigne and Wimsatt and Beardsley all give too much credit to the formal existence of the text, however, while denying the role of the audience. The audience's role was first hinted at by Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) where he draws attention to the unreliability of authorial intent in negotiating the meaning of a particular work. Roland Barthes continues to develop this argument in “The Death of the Author”, where announces “the birth of the reader” (Chandler 2006: 196-199).

Globally mediated screenplays produce meanings that can neither be anticipated and yet neither can they be dismissed from the text. In a sense, the focus of this article is on the *meanings* that writing on the screen produces rather than the stories the writer wants to tell. This is not to say that the roles of the screen writer, the plot, or the story are reduced. Rather, I am interested in understanding what happens when screenplays move beyond the context of production and distribution. This is the mark of a society that has become so mediated by reproductive technology that access to a text can, in the end, no longer be guaranteed, controlled, or predicted, even though a range of intrinsic as well as extrinsic gate-keeping functions can limit the openness and availability of a particular text. Although techniques and technologies such as censorship, language, and the channel of communication can limit the interpretive possibilities of a text, I nevertheless disagree with Tony Bennett's approach in which he portrays audiences as passive receptors in order to emphasise the role of the institutional mechanisms in governing the meaning of artifacts (Bennett 2005). See also Dibley's (2005) critique of Bennett's approach.

I am keenly interested in the role of writing for the screen and the production of *meaning* such writing produces. However, I am also interested in understanding screenwriting in a broader set of cross-cultural co-ordinates as well as inter-subjective human relations. Every individual who encounters the screen remains an indeterminate actor who creatively ascribes meaning to objects irrespective of the limits imposed by social and cultural institutions within which the object is displayed.

The Context of the Essay

This article focuses on the production of meaning and the problems that arise when screenplays are projected on a global screen. Implicating both new and old screen media, this points not only to the nature of the textual practices producers use, but also to the reading strategies audiences employ in encountering and interpreting such work. I want to explore this inter-cultural terrain by examining what happens when texts are screened in locations far from the situations their producers imagined. The context is in watching foreign language films. My experience of living in continental Europe provides a quantity of empirical evidence of watching films from different parts of the world whilst living in a diasporic linguistic environment. That diaspora is defined by having principally lived in an English speaking environment (Australia) although my linguistic background (Maltese) also situates me at an intersection between European and non European languages. This is a context out of which migrant forms of reception arise, encounters with films exhibited either without subtitles or, if subtitled, the subtitles are in languages that the viewer doesn't fully understand.

Perhaps it might appear important to say that my experience in media production gave me an advantage in understanding how films work. Dismissing this discussion on the grounds of the privileged position I occupy would, however, ignore the experiences of many immigrants who, while lacking familiarity with media production and scholarship, nevertheless continue to encounter screen texts in a vast array of linguistic settings and who seem to understand the meaning of the texts that they encounter.

Having established the limits of this discussion, I now proceed to identify different types of screen narratives and their audiences before moving forward some ideas concerning the reception of screen objects in different language and migrant contexts.

II

Approaches to Storytelling

There is a broad consensus amongst authors of screenwriting books that good screenplays are structured along narrative lines long ago delineated by Aristotle, a simple structure comprising of a beginning, middle, and end. This is now the basis of mainstream screen productions. In addition, there are expectations that a good story contains identifiable characters who motivate the drama in the screenplay. Character motivation is sometimes articulated as “Somebody wants something badly and is having difficulty getting it” (Gulino 2004: 10). How the character goes about the task becomes the tale plotted on the screen. The motivation of the characters in such screenplays can be regarded in terms of objectives: the goals the character sets themselves or had set for them and what do they stand to gain and lose if they succeed or fail. Another feature of this type of storytelling is the ego of the central character in the screenplay. As a rule, the story depends on a strong and positive identification between the audience and that character. The development and resolution of the story then fulfils the desires established by that relation: the character gains or fails in their goal. The underlying assumption is that stories work best when audiences identify with that character and the way they have chosen to resolve their problem. Life, in such storytelling techniques, is about establishing goals or ambitions, and, in the case of a successful hero, attaining them.

The goal-oriented ego focused story leaves, however, little scope for dealing with or incorporating the actual experiences of the audience's daily lives. For most people go through life without a goal that they are aiming for, without definitive ambitions they want to realise. Just as people rarely construct their lives in terms of a beginning, middle, and end. Indeed,

many refuse to consider that their life will end. Arguably, what such stories do is teach audiences how to structure life dramatically according to rules established by Aristotle.

Yet there are other ways of telling stories. Some have been documented by mythographers such as Vladimir Propp. In *The Morphology of the Folklore*, Propp reports that “a hundred fairy tales [...] were all based on the same basic formula” (Chandler 2006: 92). Stories in this form can be considered in terms of the lessons that they seek to teach. Often aimed at the socialisation of children, such stories identify good and bad characters typically cast in binary roles. Wretched old witches intent on making mischief appear in a fixed symmetrical relations to their innocent unsuspecting victims, often young children. While such stories can follow the same structural progression of beginning, middle, and end, they can be more sophisticated in that the protagonists motives are not always so clearly defined. Nor might the character's personal motivation be the main driver of the story. Personal gain, ambition, or achievement are subsumed within such stories and remain incidental to the lesson being taught.

A feature of this second class of storytelling is that they are often specific to a cultural contexts and transmission into different cultural domains can be difficult. Some screenplays, such as Steven Spielberg's *ET* (1982) and Wolfgang Petersen's *The Never Ending Story* (1984), have successfully traversed a range of screen cultures by enlivening what they have apparently identified as 'universal' themes, structures, characteristics, or tendencies. Yet there is still an unanswerable question over the sort of narrativising function such screenplays perform. Do such films merely educate their audience into the reception of their characters' tales, or, is there something universal pertaining to the way they describe humanity? We have no way of saying either ‘Yes, there are universal qualities in the human condition that can be narrativised in a coherent form’ or ‘No, there are no universal qualities in the human condition that can be told under an overarching storytelling strategy.’ What we can say is that the success of films like *ET* and, to a lesser extent, *The Never Ending Story*, is linked to the modes of capitalist production that, as Walter Benjamin suggests in *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, “habituate” (Benjamin 1992: 233) individuals to relate to the world in particular ways, even though those relationships may be out of step with the actual relationships such individuals have within that world.

Against these categories, one comes across another form of storytelling on the screen. Usually subsumed under an all encompassing but inadequate family name called art, this is a class of screenplay in which notions of narrative structure, storytelling style, genre, didactic purpose, character motivation, thematic questions and theses may no longer apply. Each work in this family can be so unique that it becomes exemplary, a category and a genre unto itself. The fragmentary, unclassifiable class of classes of the work of art, and the subjects that each member of this family articulates, calls for specifically situated responses, specifically situated interpretations, and specifically situated analyses, to each work and sometimes even to each screening. This class of work can develop not only unique narratives but each work in itself can inaugurate and incorporate a way of telling that becomes unique and unrepeated (and even unrepeatable). We can understand why authors of *how to write a screenplay* books (see for example, Evans 2006, Smethhurst 2005, Henson 2005, Dethridge 2003, Thompson 2003, Bicat and Macnabb 2002, Dancyger 2001, Cooper and Dancyger 2000, McKee 1999, and Dancyger 1991) generally steer away from dealing with this group, for any example naturally and insistently calls for a unique and individual approach that makes generalities difficult to impose.

The classification of screen-art does not result in a category in which other works can be approached and treated with familiarity. What it does is indicate the difficulty in placing screen-works within a formalised and formulaic category that reproduces certain aspects of style, genre, storytelling techniques and approaches. Yet while art may accord more closely with actual experience in everyday life, the work it does – both on and off the screen – demands intense engagement. This engagement insists on acknowledging each unique aspect of the narrative in order to appreciate and understand what a story actually communicates.

The Work of the Audience

The three general classes indicated above create different reception positions for their audience. In the first category, the main goal is to entertain people, a goal often underpinned by a need to generate profit from the production. For the

individual, the effect of this kind of work on screen does not rely on their active participation but rather, such works try to gratify their expectation by demanding nothing from them. Screenplays can do this by providing novel situations in which the hero on the screen tries to solve a problem in new, entertaining, interesting, or unexpected ways. As Benjamin (1992: 222) suggests, audiences of this kind of work are generally passive judges who sit as critics over what they are presented with. In general, there is no lasting meaning or effect such works seek to establish. Rather they strike for transitory gratification – a gripping thriller, a good belly laugh, a sense of being entertained (Grodal 2000).

The second category, arguably one of the oldest forms of storytelling, is didactic and seeks to establish a framework of meaningful significance that stays with the viewer for a longer period of time. The audience of this kind of screen narrative are expected to be active receptors of what is communicated on the screen. Given a positive identification between the narrative and the individual being narrated to, such educational stories can have a lasting impact, producing outcomes that individuals can draw on, and find useful, during their entire life. However, a limitation of this kind of work is that it must enculturate the recipient so that the values the screen portrays are perceived as important and significant, and the solutions presented believable to that individual. This may sometimes mean that individuals abandon their own strategies in dealing with similar situations and adopt those presented by the screen. There are many *affective* techniques available to the screenwriter to achieve this, as many propaganda films demonstrate. However, as with all educational projects, there are problems with this kind of narrative in that screenplays of this kind can control and manipulate audiences as well as being paternalistic in nature, no matter how benign and beneficial they hope to be.

The third form of narrative, that of the house of art, is more difficult to generalise, because, as already noted, this class of screenwriting characteristically lacks uniformity. There is no overarching sign that give the members of this family a sense of belonging to each other. Even the production of meaning cannot be spoken of as generic here. What a successful interaction and reception of an artistic screen-work does, however, is to specifically draw upon the experience of the person who encounters it. Only some artworks succeed in doing this while many fail (although, of course, a film that fails for one person may succeed for another). The screenplays in this category that do work, however, create conditions under which meaning is sourced in the individual's reality. A work on the screen-art is a rich and fertile terrain – a text – upon which the individual in the audience finds significance, as well as self reflection, and, so too, the possibility of situating themselves and their experiences within those screen events. While this does not guarantee that work will have a lasting impact on the individual, there are reasonable prospects this can occur. Yet even if a lasting effect is not achieved, enabling the individual to gain a critical distance from their world by allowing them to project their reality on to the screen suggests that it should still be regarded as a highly effective (and *affective*) work of art. Here I disagree with Grodal's (2000) argument that an art film must achieve permanent meaning.

III

Screening Language

In discussions about the screen, language usually refers to the entire semiotic field surrounding screen culture. Although the codes of signification used in communicating on and through the screen are important in discussions around screen storytelling, I focus on the actual spoken and written languages people use when writing for the screen. In this discussion, then, I am limiting the idea of language to its conventional understanding – a tool that produces the oral/aural/written texts that facilitate communication through the medium.

I also distinguish two different types of encounter with the screen; the first in which audiences are both familiar with and respond to the depiction of events on the screen in ways that they are expected to. This is the mode of reception predicted by the producers who devised the languages and codes deployed by that particular screen production. The second is a mode of reception that was not expected nor could it have been predicted by those producers. This is a situation in which audiences interpret events on screen in ways that breaks them loose from the meanings the screenwriter sought to establish and transmit. In these reception situations, nearly all the languages and codes of a production can fail. Not only does the language of the dialogues and script, but also the languages of the screen itself, as well as the codes that govern its

reception, fail to inform the audience of the way the work should be approached. This can happen either when an audience is not sufficiently competent in the languages and codes employed by that work, or because they do not recognise the codes of that mode of communication, such as when someone does not distinguish between a mockumentary or a documentary. One famous example of code confusion was the 1938 broadcast of a radio drama called *War of the Worlds* (Wells 1938). Apparently this created a mass hysterical reaction in its audience who mistook the broadcast as earnestly announcing that America had been invaded by aliens.

In what follows, I concentrate on situations in which the breakdown of the language employed by a particular screen production is due to the audiences' lack of linguistic competence in understanding dialogues and the scripting of the screenplay. This is a situation commonly experienced by migrants. My object is to identify when and how individuals in the audience can overturn the communication system a screenplay seeks to establish, and when such audiences create entirely new, and hitherto unidentified reception positions.

I became aware of this phenomenon when I encountered productions screened in languages that either I did not speak, or, where I had only limited linguistic competence. During this time, the films I watched had either Dutch subtitles or were spoken in Dutch. As I became accustomed to watching films in foreign tongues, I found I could still interpret screenplays, and in those interpretations, I was able to give them meaning. As my confidence to interpret different films grew, I realised I could interpret films from a wide variety of languages, from Dutch to Russian, Swedish, German, Italian, and French, to Japanese, Chinese, Iranian, and Afghani. I remember feeling particularly satisfied when I saw Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (2001) and understood what the film was trying to do. Cuarón's film is a sophisticated work on screen that moves between both spoken and visual modes of communication to implicitly and explicitly set up metaphors that politically engage the class stratifications of Mexican society and the impact of mass tourism.

Although a growing competence in Dutch, accompanied by the inter-linguistic skills my other native tongue, Maltese, helped improve my receptivity to Dutch screen culture, I nonetheless found that my capacity to re-invent the stories being told on the screen did differ, depending on which families the languages of the films I was watching belonged to. (And I am talking now not only about the spoken and written scripts, but also the visual and other semiotic systems that each work deployed as well as my varied knowledge in understanding the cultural associations the signs deployed relied on.) I therefore qualify the analyses I am about to suggest, for it seems that the capacity to engage meaningfully with the screen still depends partially on a capacity to at least gain a toe-hold in the discursive domain of a particular screen production. Gaining such a toe-hold depends entirely on the relative proximity between the languages of the recipient and the languages deployed on the screen.

Re-inventing Screen Language in the Diaspora

In a keynote address, Kevin Robbins (2006) attempted to show how migrants watched and received film and television in the language of their host community. Robbins showed that it is possible to analyse what I too had experienced in the six years I was living and watching the screen in the multi-lingual, multi-cultural context of continental Europe. The most salient point was his observation that many migrants had only limited linguistic access to the screen cultures they were encountering. And yet, so many migrants - who are also often illegal, poor, and lacking in both formal education, professional qualifications, as well as training in media and communications - still spent a great deal of time watching films and television programmes in languages they simply didn't understand. This language-less-ness in the diaspora, this exile from one's own language and, at the same time, exclusion from the native tongue, fascinates me and yet defies conventional understanding of what happens when people look at the screen. I now venture forth some ideas of what might be happening when non-native speakers encounter a work in a foreign tongue.

The first thing that should be said is that, in spite of some native speaker's objections to the interventions of the *vreemdelingen* (stranger), strangers to a local dialect nevertheless seek to and, whenever they can, participate in the process of communication, even if that is taking place in the most intellectually profound and socially exclusive language and reality games. Indeed, depending on the openness of the local communication network, interventions by migrants can

sometimes revise linguistic relations between local dialects and the world they purport to represent. This can effect the native tongue so profoundly that it transforms it altogether, perhaps showing scant – or even no – regard for the communicational intention, assumptions, and understanding of the originating message. This may sometimes cause those who regard themselves as *owners* of that message, or the tongue in which it is uttered, to become hostile. Migrant permutations of a local dialect can confront a native speaker with a serious problem: how to take migrant interpretations legitimately and incorporate them into a local discourse when they fail to maintain respect for the integrity of the original speaker's tongue? Incredulously as it might appear to native speakers, migrants sometimes refuse, or even reject, attempts to be incorporated into local language games, games that form the basis of reality in a host culture, not to mention the bonds and relations between the individual and the rest of the world.

Like tourists and other travellers (Grech 2002), migrants can slip through the intricate nets that ensnare the native speaker into reproducing the intended meaning of a particular linguistic expression. Indeed, strangers require native speakers to accept a *state of exception* if their foreign communication acts are going to be accommodated. Although this state is only temporary when it is a passing visitor talking, it threatens to permanently undermine the values and even sense of identity of a host community if a migrant continually refuses to adapt to the language games of a local culture.

i) Migration, Culture, Language, and *the state of exception*

The state of exception (Agamben 2005) describes the suspension of law and the rights that law confers to individuals so that a State appointed dictator can bring about the orderly restoration of the processes that the State itself has suspended. Migrants can also instigate a *state of exception* when an individual claims the right to communicate in ways that contravene the linguistic codes that govern communication in a particular social setting. The legitimacy of the migrant's *state of exception* rests on a claim that it is founded on the individual's sovereign need to participate authentically in the communication practices in that particular culture. A feature of this *state of exception* is that it can be called upon by any individual who claims *exception* to a localised linguistic order. The acceptance of this *state of exception* signals that a host community remains hospitable towards that individual who claims linguistic exclusion. The focus of this *state of exception* is thus the aberrant individual, and their acceptance represents a generosity and willingness by others to facilitate their inclusion.

As Raymond Williams argued, for linguistic expressions to become grounded in the living experience of the communicant, communication and belief must be mutually reflexive. For communication through a common language to remain authentic, therefore, a common language must allow those who participate in its processes to express themselves, and, more importantly, become the sources of what they express, in contradistinction to acting as agents for received ideas and linguistic strategies (Williams 1979: 292-293). Williams then concludes that

function and intention are not only openly declared but commonly approved and controlled... [language and communication] becomes a collective source, and he [who participates in the act of communication] will observe the standards of such an expression if what he is required to transmit is such that he can wholly acknowledge and accept it - re-create it in his own person. ... Any practical denial of the relation between conviction and communication, between experience and expression, is morally damaging alike to the individual and to the common language. (Williams 196: 304)

The state of exception migrants create becomes particularly significant when the communicative strategies realised by the immigrant gives rise to utterances that transform the intention and even the process of communication into new and sometimes novel representations and interpretations of a life-world not before imagined. In terms of decoding and attributing meaning to stories on the screen, this means that the individual's sovereign speech can only be said to authenticate that individual's expression once it is grounded in their experience. In spite of the denial of the immigrant's access to the culture in which they are acting – a denial that may be due to nothing more than that individual's lack of command over the linguistic codes of that culture – a migrant can nevertheless continue to claim the right to draw meaningful associations between their experiences and the languages their host culture uses, including the culture around the screen. When strangers insist on retaining the authenticity of their expression and experience – both on and of(f) the

screen – and even if that expression is articulated in a language that is so foreign to that of the screening culture that they bring about a *state of exception*, the laws governing the production of meaning are thrown into chaos. How a culture responds to this *emergency* reveals the nature and power of that culture's law and order enforcement agencies. This is when the (il)legitimacy of immigrant speech can result in a state of freedom that has the capacity to empower individuals, whether native or otherwise, to challenge rather than re-inforce, to re-work rather than reproduce, the governing structures of a particular discourse. This is also when a governing order is tempted to call a state of emergency.

The “contact zone” (Dibley 2005) created when migrants engage with the language of a host culture such as the screen might now be better thought of as a contamination area in which the skin of the screen and the skin of the audience are “irreparably” (Agamben 1993) opened. With organs spilling forth from permanently wounded bodies (Nancy 1993: 189-207), a zone of contamination becomes a transformational “abyss”, an interstice in which an unholy union takes place between heterogenous bodies – text and audience, language and experience – which brings about what Benjamin describes as the “monstrous abomination” of the translation (see Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” 1992: 70-82). Such translation takes it upon itself to reform not just the linguistic codes and structures that govern an act of communication, but even the possibility of what that language act signifies and means. In making their noticeable difference present, immigrants claim the right to both suspend existing linguistic codes and practices as well as the freedom to create new forms of dialogue and discourse.

ii) Translation and the Evolution of Screen Culture

In *The Task of the Translator*, Walter Benjamin (1992: 70-82) develops a theory that demonstrates how translation evolves the language of the translator. Benjamin uses the term “pure language” to describe this evolutionary process, but makes it clear that the realisation of “pure language” remains unattainable, for it is a projection on a horizon that always recedes from the present state of language. As Benjamin explains, the reason language must evolve but never reaches its ultimate state is that life itself continues to evolve, and in that evolution, never fails to transform itself into new and innovative forms, sometimes beyond recognition. According to Benjamin, the task of the writer, and in particular, the task of a maker of artistic expressions, is to use language to articulate and express living experiences. So Benjamin suggests that the work of artistic expression is to re-present experiences of life through the creation of linguistic artifacts. The task of the translation, on the other hand, is to make available the “effect on language” a particular artifact has on the tongue of its original utterance into different languages. Yet the paucity of language becomes evident in the limited capacity that particular linguistic expressions have in representing life events to others. This paucity is further highlighted as life finds new and innovative ways of expressing itself. So language must constantly find new and innovative ways of expressing living emergencies. Benjamin concludes that the introduction of new forms of linguistic expression, which he thinks takes place in translation, is the work translation does for language.

I suggest that we can approach the work of immigrant interpretations of screenplays in these terms. In so doing, we identify both a role for immigrant cultures, whether they are deemed legal or illegal, as well as the contribution their translations make to the evolution of screen and other cultural discourses.

Translation evolves languages by importing linguistic expressions of life into discourses that otherwise do not possess such expressive potentialities. However, the natural flow of a translation is to wholly move a text from one culturo-linguistic location into another. In contrast to this normal translation cycle, a migrant completes only half the process. Immigrant translations only partially transport their host community's communications, by half-forwarding and half-reversing cultural objects between two systems of discourse. In order to do this, migrants must first interpret and translate a work into a linguistic code that has its origins in their reality. Then the migrant must re-inject their work back into the work's originating cultural discourse. In a sense, illegitimate (migrant) translations that re-interpret and return a text to its point of origin pose even greater threats of interrupting the cultural flows, bonds, and relations embodied within globally totalising communication systems. Let me explain.

Ordinarily, a translator is regarded as an officiating medium who helps a text migrate between two different but indigenous

and discrete cultures. A translator's work enriches the translator's language by making it possible to encounter expressions otherwise not be available in their native discourse. Although subtle in its work, a translation may be regarded as part of a process of cultural diffusion that is today termed globalisation. As implied in the concept of "pure language", translation potentially homogenises local cultures, opening them up to being colonised by the values of the exporting culture's products. Although translation should bring about a higher evolution of values in both the language of the original as well the language of the translation, translations rarely enter into dialogues that feedback into and impact on the meaning and production of the original at its point of linguistic origin.

A migrant's translation, on the other hand, is different. For when a migrant translates a work into their own particular reality, they do so with the intention of returning it to and enacting their interpretation in the context of the original expression. To natives of that (screening) culture, the migrant's translation will at best be a distorted pigeon-like imitation of something the migrant does not really or fully understand. At worst, a migrant's translation becomes regarded as a mockery of the native structures of meaning and signification.

Yet what native speakers mistake as an imitation and abomination is actually the originality of the migrant's self-authenticating re-creation of a work into the world within which they live. Offended by what is perceived as transgressive acts of distortion, natives speakers patronise, summarily dismiss, and sometimes attack migrant interventions as aggressive and invasive inter-locutions founded on ignorance, stupidity, inadequate education, or poor acculturation. Compromised by the structures of the natives stronghold, the legitimacy of migrant expression becomes constrained. The host culture alone decides whether to rehabilitate a migrant's deviant ways by releasing them to become edified and corrected so to reflect the values of the host community, or to reject and sometimes even expel the migrant altogether.

Now it might be said that under normal circumstances, an illegal (immigrant) expression should expect nothing but exclusion from participation in a native cultural discourse, whether we speak of everyday discourses or discourses on the screen. However, once a migrant, whether legal or otherwise, draws attention to deficiencies in the signifying links of a communication system, a state of emergency can be declared to open a way for migrant utterances to be legitimately incorporated and fill the gaps. When a host culture defines itself as *tolerant*, migrant speech may be legitimised in ways that no longer threaten the internal values underpinning the bonds and relations between signs and what they mean. The preservation of native discourse is guaranteed.

A linguistic *state of exception* is activated when an interpretation traumatises representations of events to such an extent that such events cannot be reconciled within existing structures of meaning, codes, genres, or even conventions of expression. Such ruptures become particularly evident in the catastrophic collisions between different linguistic systems and different cultural realities. For this reason, migrant readings of native culture – whether public or otherwise – always challenge the standing orders of cultural discourse.

IV

Conclusion : Education, Migrating Screen Culture, and Recursive Narrative Dialogue

The act and impact of immigration (both legal and, more importantly, illegal) can never be fully quantified, qualified, or theorised in a static body of discourse. In as far as this phenomenon is far from being comprehensively understood, I tentatively move forward the following provisions and hope to create a dialogue for considering the work of migrants in re-working ideas concerning (screen) writing cultures:

1) Immigrant encounters with the screen creatively re-interpret screen-works to produce new and novel meaning not available to natives of an originating screen culture

Because of their lack of acculturation to the values of the work projected on the screen, immigrants introduce their own frame of reference, experience, value and systems of belief to underpin their interpretation of a particular work. This means

that immigrant interpretations of the screen are less predictable, and the outcomes of communication between screen and audience less stable, and hence less governable. However, migrant interpretations remain inherently democratic because immigrant audiences do not limit their engagement with the world on the screen to those prescribed by the producers of the screen's discourse. The disjunctions between immigrant and native discourses can lead to a higher levels of sophisticated, self reflexive, critical understanding of the workings of screen language and culture.

2) *Towards a radical practice in the education of screen writers and their audiences*

It is now possible to argue that the production of narratives attributed to or said to represent mainstream culture leads to formulaic styles of writing that educate audiences to perform predictable acts of decoding and interpretation. This establishes and supports the laws and conventions governing the practice of production while regulating the meaning these values can generate. In contradistinction, the production of non-mainstream storytelling results in the production of broader narratives, nuances, complexity, and differences. These reflect directly in the production of community discourses, values, and meanings. It is now possible to argue that the multiplicity produced by the non-classifiable categories of storytelling enable audiences to remain open and more accustomed to negotiating with other cultural discourses, systems of value, and production of meaning. Audiences of non-classifiable narratives are significantly more productive and adaptive in terms of cultural as well as economic outcomes and outputs. Such audiences are significantly advantaged in being able to deal with the exposure to screens from different cultures in the world and the uncertainty this brings.

3) *Diversity, education, and the cultivation of practical learning*

Regular exposure to formulaic modes and styles of storytelling predisposes audiences to become progressively more receptive to the repetitive reproduction of those modes and styles. This form of practical learning rapidly becomes "habituated" into "modes of existence" (Benjamin 1992: 233) that underpin both individual and collective life. Becoming programmed to telling tales about certain things in certain ways, the more practiced audiences become in reproducing things and situating them back into the narrative logics and rationalisations underpinning existing networks of social bonds and cultural relations. The more people perform the regulative consumption of formulaic storytelling function, the more adept they become in performing similar acts of narration when confronted by new cultural material. The more programmatic the logics and reasons of narrating events are, the more inventive people become in converting novel events into familiar formations.

On the other hand, screenwriters who expose audience to unclassifiable forms of narrative enable us to deal with innovative, unique, and original storytelling strategies, languages, and trajectories. A *de-programmatic* practice of storytelling creates logical rationalities that produce unique conclusions based principally, or even solely, on the particular events plotted on the screen. In such scenarios, it is reasonable to expect that the variety of endings, as well as the steps leading up to their conclusions, become more varied. They should continue to expand as each new encounter with the screen supports broader variegations that reconcile each screening with the everyday experiences of those who encounter it. This enhances both the diversity and authenticity of meaning in the story. Authentic storytelling for diverse cultures thus expects the production of the text to be met equally by the writer and those to whom the story is being told. Both collaborate to create meaning and significance on and off the screen. Now sender and receiver are legitimated as producers in interpreting and translating the events expressed on screen. This allows the stories themselves to remain open, available, and potentially meaningful for future and further recursive interpretation and translation.

For my father.

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