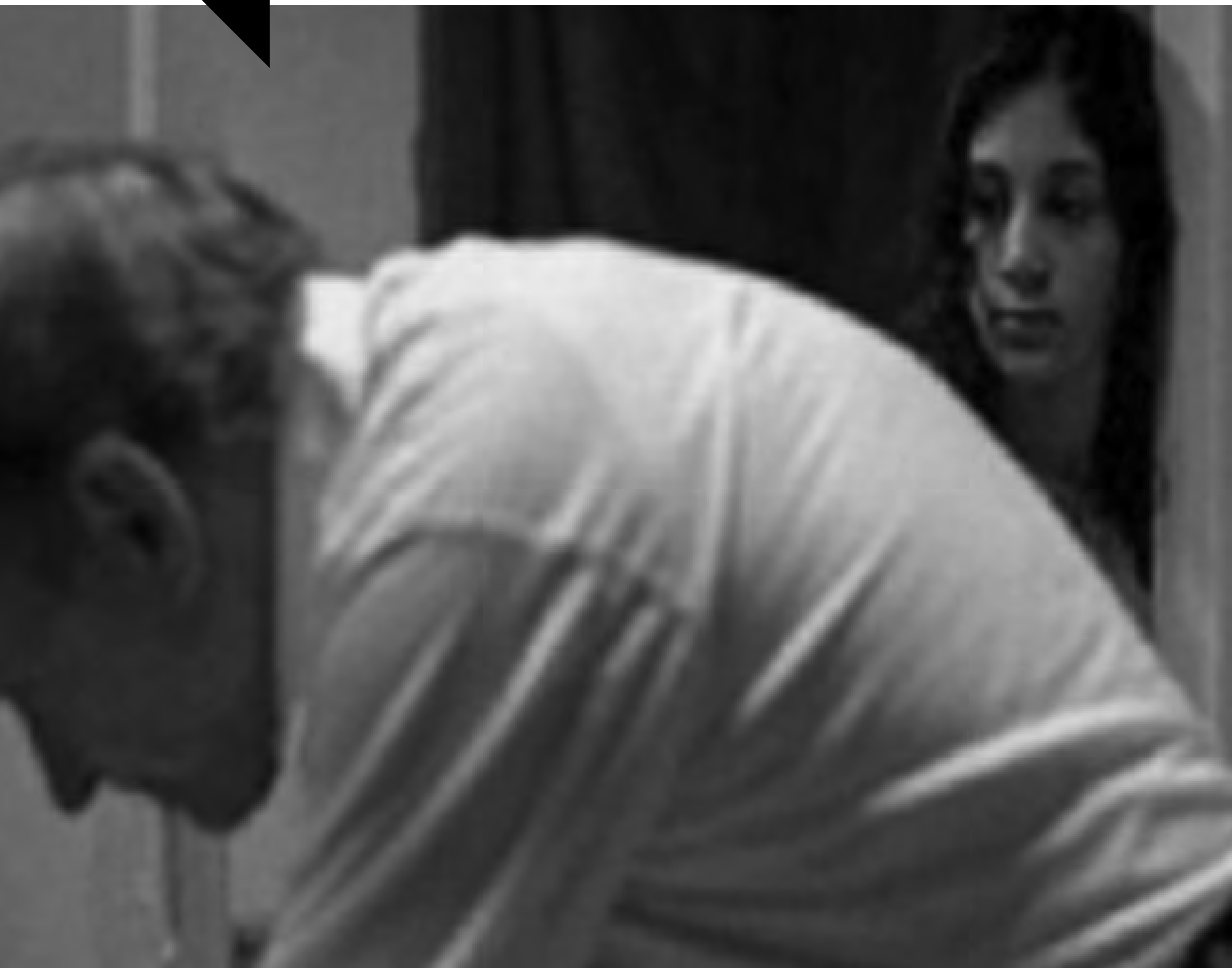
ESSAYS

ARTIGOS



THE PLEASURE OF TRANSLATION: SUBTITLES AND CINEPHILIA

by
Felipe Pruneda Sentíes

The idea of writing about subtitles came from an attempt at trying to make sense of my own spectatorship of foreign language films, given that most examples of the art form that I saw growing up in Mexico City, and even today, are indeed in a language other than my mother tongue. Considering that the number of films of world cinema (particularly American cinema) seemed much larger and much more readily available than national productions, subtitles were there from the beginning of my earliest film education– when I was not yet a scholar or film student in any kind of formal sense, but rather an eager spectator and aficionado, wishing to catch up with what sources, at the time, I considered authoritative and deemed essential viewing; in other words, my stage as a young cinephile. I wondered what role subtitles had played in shaping my enjoyment of the movies and, thus, if they could also be part of learning about the films beyond the linguistic dimension and into formal, thematic, and historical frameworks.

A second motivator was an increasing sense that subtitles were often summoned up as an objection to the viewing of foreign films, and wondered about the nature of such a protest. But rather than exploring the reasons for the objection, or if subtitles were in fact at its root and not some other operations (a fascinating topic in its own right), I decided to think of ways in which subtitles could be not an obstacle to, but an enhancer of, our pleasure when viewing films.

The article does make a few gestures toward outlining the process of how subtitles came to be equated with "work" and "education" and, thus, became antonymous with pleasure. But that account (or, more precisely, that mere sketch) does not take into consideration the hegemonic relationship between the centers of world film production – where the quantity of films in the national language renders subtitles uncommon – and their peripheries – where subtitles are not just present in art or specialized houses, but in the bulk of mainstream cinema offerings as well. What an aversion to subtitles suggests is far more complex a topic, one that I chose not to explore in detail. An expanded version of the article would include a more detailed reflection on the many reasons (both potential, perceived, and even statistical) to consider subtitles an unwanted presence. In any case, it is a topic that deserves far more space and attention than a single piece.

To accomplish the recovery of subtitles for cinephiliac discourse, the current essay considers subtitles as we find them in a given film – that is, it assumes that subtitles are fixed and are available for our appreciation of a film, perhaps in different versions, but always already written by the time the film is distributed. However, recent scholarship has emphasized the role of video production in film criticism. The increasing availability of the tools for the creation of video has made the appropriation and refashioning of audiovisual material an easier undertaking for spectators so that they become producers. In the case of the film scholar or reviewer, the use of cinema's own means to study film (see, for example, Christian Keathley's chapter on the video essay in the book *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*, edited by Andrew Klevan and Alex Clayton) blurs the lines between critic and practitioner. The creation of subtitles is but one form of this enterprise, as viewers generate their own subtitles to films, as part of their work of re-editing their own versions of established works, in order to lampoon, analyze, and revise them. A second part to this article would think of subtitles not just as a point of departure for the reading of a film, but as creative opportunities for video criticism and productive remixing, thus completing their role as tools for the cinephile.

Recommended further reading is the collection *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film*, edited by Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour; Gilbert Fong's *Dubbing and Subtitling in a World Context*, and *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* by Abe Mark Nornes.

THE PLEASURE OF TRANSLATION: SUBTITLES AND CINEPHILIA

Abstract

During the hey-day of French film appreciation circles in the first half of the twentieth century, subtitles were paired with cinephilia: only true lovers of the cinema and connoisseurs would prefer the versions originales *of the best world cinema had to offer. Reading subtitles was seen as part of a spectatorial practice that wished to preserve the integrity of a film and appreciate it in its artistic purity. Apart from enjoyment, there was a didactic urge in the cinephile's agenda. And that is only one instance in which screen translation was coupled with education – in other words, with the opposite of entertainment, which is a feeling that still today prevents many viewers from watching foreign language films.*
However, as cinephilia has experienced a rebirth in film studies as a legitimate source of research, I propose the incorporation of subtitles into new cinephiliac discourses as producers of cinematic pleasure rather than obstacles to it. Given that subtitles create dissonances between the source and target languages, participate in unexpected compositions as they invade the space of the images, and train our eyes to scan the screen in search for details within the frame, subtitles partake in the location of moments that viewers can fetishize and investigate, and thus are candidates for the generation not only of memorable instants in film, but also of writing that inspires both joy and knowledge in tracing the ways in which the linguistic flows and all their national and cultural associations interact with the moving image.

Keywords: Subtitles, Cinephilia, Translation, Transnational, Realism.

Introduction

To speak of the relationship between subtitles and cinephilia means asking: what does the presence of subtitles do to a viewer's enjoyment of a film? If experience is any indication, subtitles wreak havoc. Outside of the community of scholars and cinema lovers in which I find myself today, I find it surprisingly difficult to share the movies I have come to love, and the main point of resistance – the first, principal objection – tends to refer to subtitles. Versions range from the articulate: "I'd end up reading the movie rather than watching it" to simply: "Does it have subtitles? No thanks." And the viewers I speak of (which include students and acquaintances) are from a fairly substantial range of nationalities and cultural backgrounds, so anecdotally at least, the rejection of foreign language films is not particular to any demographic Admittedly, such position must be attributable to factors other than language, and we must allow for the possibility that the presence of subtitles is an easier condition on which to put one's finger than, say, a feeling of otherness dispersed through the fabric of a film that's both undeniable and elusive. Yet subtitles keep coming up as a problem, inside and outside the classroom.
This, of course, is not a novel situation, and there was even a time when the relationship between subtitles and cinephilia was established as confrontationally exclusive. In fact, the two came together to produce the very effect against which I am reacting: it turns out cinephilia is partly to blame for the status of subtitles as "work." I am referring specifically to a particular concept of cinephilia that is partially related to the one on which my investigation is based – namely, as it was understood by French film enthusiasts (France is arguably the country with the longest recorded history of cinephiliac film criticism) during the first half of the twentieth century. As Nataša Ďurovičová (2009) observes, given the inextricable relationship of subtitles to literacy, "subtitled films… came charged with the burden of 'education'" (2009:104). If that weren't enough, in France, cinéclub circles further saddled subtitles with the role of gatekeepers of one of the highest forms of culture:

> The subtitled releases *(versions originales)* were legally the sole prerogative of the small and urban *art et essai* circuit; in the discourse of the period their reading was rapidly construed as a form of connoisseurship (of voice, of language, of the soundtrack), that is, of cinephilia. But reading reframed as "work" could as easily be equalized with "non-entertainment" (2009: 104).

Subtitles, then, had an interesting role: they were simultaneously considered both vital to preserve the integrity of a film, and completely extraneous to it at the same time. But if that was the case for so-called cinephiles and connoisseurs, it certainly was (and still is) not for the casual movie-goer. Reading subtitles, it seems, is the opposite of movie-watching, so pleasure is not preserved, but contaminated beyond recovery. Now, such state of affairs poses great problems for those interested in tackling the subject of transnational cinemas – certainly a major, constantly growing trend in Media Studies – and developing their teaching and scholarship around the ways in which these films transgress and traverse ideas of nationality and nationhood. How can we do that if foreign language films are rejected because of their linguistic difference? In other words, how can interest be generated in foreign films in order to engage in the questions they raise outside academic and cinephiliac circles?
Yet the fact that cinephilia, or a manifestation of love for the movies, actually welcomed subtitles in order to guarantee cinephiles that they were watching the original versions of foreign films and thus kept their object of affection (or at least the possibility of the enjoyment they might yield from it) intact should be an encouraging sign for my project: namely, to wonder if there are ways to bind subtitles and entertainment. Can the viewer derive cinematic pleasure from the presence of subtitles? And if so, how can we, as transnational film scholars, overcome the hurdle of a resistance to foreign language films by employing what appears to be the source of the conflict? In the process, can we harness such pleasure to further illuminate these films and their border-crossing qualities?
First, a brief clarification: even though the films I will discuss are not explicitly about, or emerge as conscious explorations of, cultural encounters and the shifting notion and role of the nation state in a globalized world, they do carry, in the fact that they are films viewed in countries different from the ones that originated them (and, thus, are translated for audiences in those latitudes), a transnational impulse. In short, every film that falls into the category of foreign is an instance of a transnational phenomenon. Every film is a foreign fi lm somewhere.
There are two major problems in linking subtitles and cinephilia. One: specifying where to locate cinephilia within the context of transnational cinemas and transnational cinema studies; two: to provide an account of how subtitles can be a part of that kind of pleasure, particularly in the brand of cinephilia that interests me. It is a cinephilia that seeks "to bridge the gap between academic and lay audiences" (Ray, 2006:117), returning the term to its original, literal meaning – a love of cinema – and that embraces a poetic – rather than scientific – approach to film criticism.
And that's the first question: what kind of criticism can emerge from transnational film studies? Well, we can see if we can locate it within a critical spectrum that Roland Barthes (1972) constructs from two equally extreme objectives:

> Either to posit a reality which is entirely permeable to history, and ideologize; or, conversely, to posit a reality which is ultimately impenetrable, irreducible, and, in this case, to poeticize… We constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness. For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but we restore it to a state which is still mystified (1972: 158-159).

On the one hand, we are dealing with ideologically-charged concepts like nation and border. On the other, we're dealing with enjoyment and the risk that we might wax rhapsodic about the beauty of a film and yet reveal nothing about its transnational pathways. Put those two together and one might even be perilously close to falling into a kind of orientalism, of which scholars like Randall Halle (2010) have already warned us. In his article "Offering Tales They Want To Hear: Transnational European Film Funding as Neo-Orientalism," Halle posits how current film financing practices across Europe, particularly of films that might encourage the production of artistically ambitious films from both within the European Union and outside its borders, act in ways that favor very particular stories. "There is a market for films that tell the tales of foreign cultures and distant peoples," Halle claims, "and thus the for-profit system [of international coproduction] seeks to respond to the interest of this commercial audience" (2010: 304), or an audience that are "self-consciously cosmopolitan intellectuals" (2010: 303), mostly from Europe and the United States, eager to learn about the world. The fulfillment of such interests, according to Halle, has given rise to the production of films that "seek to offer insight into a type of person, if not an entire people," and which, "from the perspective of European values… provide the viewer with the grounds for a critical intervention in that foreign society" (304) The result is an ethos of coproduction that caters to limited, preconceived notions about these foreign societies, and which threatens to "keep as distant strangers people who might live around the corner or down the hall" (304). For instance, funding a Palestinian film could depend on whether or not the fi lm addresses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or not, since potential sources of funding (such as Ibermedia and Euroimages,) might bank on the fact that the familiarity that non-Palestinian viewers will have with that region is based on that very conflict, and hence they will see a film that promises to give them a good idea of what the conflict is about. So while we might enjoy these films, Halle asks us to question why and see if within the noble enterprise of cinematic cultural exchange there exists the possibility of developing a cultural myopia.
And yet, the enjoyment remains, and the fact is that many of these films, regardless of their appeal to an audience's biases and their (usually unwitting) participation in a vicious cycle where the foreign is fetishized rather than engaged with in meaningful, complex ways, are indeed extraordinary. Beyond the clearly erroneous pretention that the viewing of a few films might constitute a profoundly revelatory experience about a foreign culture, there is still a sense that we have seen good films – movies that show us something that we might have never seen before and compel us to follow their stories, to absorb their visions, and to relish their unique rhythms. To realize that some of the joys these films supply must be kept in check does not mean all the pleasures we gather from these films are equally suspect. Abé Mark Nornes (1999) even hints at the attraction-like quality of subtitles in foreign language movies, as they become "a locus of the individual and the international which can potentially turn the film into an experience of translation" (1999:2). What viewers witness then is the spectacle of the negotiation of linguistic differences, as it were. We must then devise ways to tap into those genuine pleasures for the production of knowledge about films and their "foreignness." I will here suggest how subtitles can help constitute one such method.
We're back, then, to Barthes's characterization of the central disjunctive. First, undertaking the study of the category of transnational film encourages methodologies such as Ella Shohat (2006) and Robert Stam's "relational approach to identity" (2006: 206), which, in its contention that it is necessary to compare identity struggles across geopolitical contexts (for instance, finding connections between, say, the cultural development of Ashkenazi Jews and Chicanos[208]) in order to better understand the object

of study, largely sees identity as "permeable to history" (following Barthes) and thus ripe for ideologizing. Second, the ties that many of the films that fall in the transnational category have with art cinema or with mainstream, global Hollywood lead them to the confection of narratives and images that ostensibly aspire to the fantasy of a timeless, universal quality, be it as stories about the" human condition" or as machines of sensual gratification – and thus to carry with them an inherent impenetrability, for they purport to deal with recognizable human emotions and aesthetic responses to beauty that their site-specific tales generate (an appeal to audiences beyond their borders). In short, movies filled with lyrical moments that make viewers imagine their endurance as works of art and, thus, as irreducible mysteries. Ultimately, any film that crosses borders provides ample opportunities for both stances, leaving the critic to face a choice between them.

However, there are scholars who believe it is possible (indeed, even vital) to reconcile the two approaches, and that cinephilia could be the means to do so. In Christian Keathley's (2006) view, film scholarship is currently (or at least in the last ten years) "dominated by the [ideologizing] critical method, one in which the scholar produces knowledge about the object of study" (2005: 134). Not only that: film scholars are "suspicious" of poeticizing and of "acknowledging their own experiences of the thing in question" (135) i.e., their experience of pleasure. A great part of the history of film studies has been cinephobic: pleasure is treated as a persona non grata, and it is "decoded such that [it] could be explained away and the film experience could be captured and contained. " In doing so, academics who were nevertheless cinephiles "gained a world (or a discipline they could call their own), but they lost their cinephiliac souls" (135). Still, film studies cannot shake off the haunting of the poetic impulse, most perfectly embodied, for Keathley, in *photogénie,* a concept that French critics and filmmakers Jean Epstein, Louis Delluc,and others appropriated to constitute their take on critical writing, which "did a wonderful job of emphasizing the mysterious, the impenetrable in the cinema," but failed to find its way into institutionally legitimized film studies because it was all about individual reactions and not the production of knowledge (135). That there are traces of such approach in the writings of André Bazin (135), arguably the most important film theorist of the twentieth century, is one of the reasons why Keathley endeavors to recover it without forcing it to replace the dominant scholarly mode. Are the same conditions present in the specialized discipline of transnational cinema studies? Are scholars who subscribe to it suspicious of intuiting the final impenetrability of any work of media arts, let alone one charged with place- and culture-specific questions (for example, questions related to a colonial past)? Since the field is still largely in construction and I can consider myself new to it, I'm afraid I'm incapable of making that judgment in any definitive way. But if we deduce that there is a tendency to create an academic field by legitimizing it through scientific and taxonomic (read: reproducible and applicable) classification (even if transnational cinemas consistently refuse such models), then we can steer the budding area of study toward an early communion of respect for spectatorial reaction and sharable learning. In the case of transnational cinemas, we can go a step further and postulate that there should be pleasure in learning: even if we define a certain transnational property in the articulation of an idea of nationhood and its transference into and mutual transformation of another idea of nationhood, and our job as transnational cinema scholars is to locate the universalizing or particularizing tendencies of those articulations, that does not prevent us from scrutinizing how, through those tendencies, transnational films generate a frisson that is sensually and intellectually stimulating. In other words, let us rearticulate our question after Keathley: is it possible to poeticize the encounters with unexpected similarities and differences between people and places that have been produced through an understanding of the concept of nation, which is inevitably ideological? Can one see the working-through foreign histories, geographies, languages and visual cultures as an impenetrable urge, and thus worthy of a mystified state? Specifically, I want to propose here that subtitles, precisely because they represent that very working-through (Nornes's "locus of the individual and the international") and make it part of the image, create opportunities for memorable, fortuitous encounters with a variety of cultures, nationalities, languages, and ways of understanding the motion picture that remind us of one of the main reasons (if not the original, most important reason) we go to the movies – to be delighted.

To answer the above questions, let me first reframe them: how can subtitles enter a cinephiliac discourse? We could start by wondering how cinephilia happens in the first place. As we have seen, it has to do with what Paul Willemen (1994) calls "the cinephiliac moment," a detail on fi lm which "resists, which escapes existing networks of critical discourse and theoretical frameworks" (1994: 231). Furthermore, it has to do with the fetishizing of "a particular moment, the isolating of a crystallizingly expressive detail" in the image. These details are "subjective, fleeting" and "variable," and they are "seen in excess of what is being shown." Cinephiliac moments, in short, are "not choreographed for us to see" or, if they are indeed choreographed and carefully placed, the audience is not intended to focus on them – they remain, intentionally or otherwise, peripheral to our vision (Keathley, 2006:30). So, besides their excessive and ephemeral properties, cinephiliac moments are also defined by their accidental quality. Their importance to cinephilia – and cinephiliac analysis – lies in that they are packaged doses of fascination: they are "a kind of *mise-en-abyme* wherein each cinephile's obsessive relationship to the cinema is embodied in its most dense, concentrated form" (2006: 32). *Mise-en-abyme*, replacing here the more familiarly cinematic term *mise-en-scène* (after the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics snatched it from theater and turned into a movie buzzword), refers to the placing in an infinity or an abyss (instead of the placing in a scene). It is a place for the cinephile to get lost into, for it is at the cinephiliac moment that the viewer feels closest to the film.

Having described the kind of film spectatorship that lies at the heart of my project, the next step is to provide an account for how subtitles can lead the viewer to have a cinephiliac moment, an instant of pleasure that is generated by the film, but goes beyond it. I will henceforth list the reasons why subtitles are conducive to close encounters with film.

1. Subtitles are shown but are not meant to be seen.

From the above, general characterization of the cinephiliac moment, it would seem the discourse of cinephilia does not shut out subtitles as agents of cinephiliac responses. Actually, they already exist in the contingent world that forms the basis of Keathley and Willemen's cinephilia. Subtitles, like a great many cinephiliac moments, are designed to inhabit the periphery of the film: while it is important to design subtitles so that the viewer can indeed read them, they are not supposed to steal the spotlight from that which the filmmakers wish to emphasize. In Europe, for example, the necessity of this dual quality –simultaneously visible and inconspicuous – led the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation to release a document, by Mary Carroll and Jan Ivarsson (1998), titled "Code of Good Subtitling Practices." Comprised of only twenty-six bullet points, which contain prescriptions for the spotting – locating the moments of appearance and disappearance of subtitles in the film's time code – and the actual translation of dialogue, these principles read almost like a vow of chastity, in which the translator accepts the primacy of the images and decides to diminish her intervention – I almost wrote "intrusion" – in the film as much as possible. It features specific restrictions, from a time interval for subtitles to appear ("no less than one second or, with the exception of songs, no [more] than seven seconds" [1998: 2]) to deciding that "the number of lines in any subtitle must be limited to two" (1), all the parameters are based on the authors' studies of how long it takes the eyes to read and to register the appearance of new subtitles (on the latter, "a minimum of four frames," [1998: 1] it turns out). But while Carroll and Ivarsson try to minimize the presence of subtitles in some instances, in others they actively seek for them to fuse seamlessly with the film or even accentuate it: precepts like "spotting must reflect the rhythm of a film" (2) consider editing the subtitles to shadow the tempo of the sequences; if they need to flash in the middle of such a scene, "subtitles must underline surprise or suspense and in no way undermine it." (1) Through this combination of minimal screen time and adherence to the movie's flow, Carroll and Ivarsson not only plan for subtitles to be elements of the image "not choreographed for the viewer to dwell on excessively" (Keathley, 2006:30), just as the sparks of cinephiliac moments, but they also tacitly acknowledge their excessive character, their alignment with centrifugal readings and experiences of the film.

But what if subtitlers decided not to minimize their excessive condition, but rather, to embrace it? That is Nornes's wish, to see "abusive subtitlers"

> [use] textual and graphic abuse– that is experimentation with language and its grammatical, morphological, and visual qualities – to bring the fact of translation from its position of obscurity, to critique the imperial politics that ground corrupt practices while ultimately leading the viewer to the foreign original being reproduced in the darkness of the theater (1999: 2).

Despite the unquestionable resonance between them, I hope to distinguish Norne's project from the critical work under discussion here. If subtitles came to the foreground through creative abuse, they would cease to be available for their discovery by the viewer, which is key for Willemen's cinephiliac moment. Certainly, that does not mean abusive subtitles would not be conducive to acts of writing that aim for the same production of poetic-critical material – only that they would become that kind of poetic-critical material themselves. In acknowledging, and making productive use of the impossibility of the translator's effacement, the abusive subtitler engages in a work of criticism that is, in Nornes's examples of Japanese animation "fansubs" (the playful generation of subtitles by non-professional viewers for their favorite shows), driven by a love of the source texts and a transmigration of that love into the linguistic interaction they represent. "Fansubs" could then be treated as forms of cinephiliac writing. That means a "fansub" would stand, side by side, with the responses I will further outline, albeit in a videographic format (to partially borrow the term from Catherine Grant, who has spoken of "videographic film studies" in multiple occasions).

Yet the abuse of subtitles places different demands on the viewer from the ones Willemen associates with the cinephiliac moment, for they increase the incidence of encounters with translation rather than allowing them to happen unexpectedly and surprisingly. In the following section, I am interested in how criticism can expose the ideologies behind what Nornes calls "corruption" – the very methodology for which Carroll and Ivarsson advocate, which tries to hide the mediation of screen translation and thus deny them as loci of knowledge – even from the most carefully produced subtitles. It is in those subtitles where the accidental is more likely to stand out when the viewer spots it and becomes curious about it.

2. Subtitles produce countless accidents that demand questions from the audience – thus beginning an investigation.

On the subject of accidents, consider what Jan Pedersen (2005) calls "extra-linguistic, culture-bound references" (2005: 2) which

give plenty of opportunities for curious dissonance. A translation scholar, Pedersen is interested in analyzing a film in order to determine the translation strategies the subtitlers might have followed. Instead, I suggest we operate in the opposite direction: to look at the translation strategies to ponder the filmmakers' choices.

Take Pedersen's example from a Danish subtitled version of the comedy film *Spy Hard* (dir. Rick Friedberg, 1996), starring the late Leslie Nielsen. In the scene, Dick Steele (Nielsen) demonstrates his knowledge of an enemy's espionage credentials by quoting a flurry of acronyms:

> You carry a UB-21 Schnauzer with a Gnab silencer. That's KGB. You prefer an H&K over an A.K.Your surveillance technique is NSA. Your ID is CIA. You received your Ph.D. at NYU. Traded in your GTO for a BMW. You listen to CDs by R.E.M. and STP. And you'd like to see J.F.K. in his BVDs, getting down with O.P.P. And you probably put the toilet paper back on the roll with the paper on the inside. (Friedberg 1996: 39.17)

The acronym NYU (for "New York University") makes an incongruous appearance alongside the abbreviated titles of intelligence agencies. Most of these acronyms would seem to form part of the encyclopedic knowledge of a global audience or at least have direct translations, except for NYU. For the Danish version, the translator "has opted to substitute the (in America) well-known abbreviation of 'New York University' for the (in Denmark) well-known anagram of (a part of) the 'University of Copenhagen,'" (2005: 7) specifically KUA (Københavns Universitet Amager), or the Faculty of Humanities at that institution. "Thus," Pedersen continues, "the joke… is kept, at the cost of a slight credibility gap, as not many American agents receive their education at the Arts and Humanities Department of the University of Copenhagen" (8). While the choices here are completely deliberate and purposeful, it is the viewer's reaction to the credibility gap that opens the film to unexpected scrutiny. Pedersen wonders why the translator decided on KUA to stand for NYU. But for cinephiles, the gap itself should prompt us to ask: why did the filmmakers chose to bring up NYU in the first place? Why not UVA (University of Virginia), FSU (Florida State University), or other university acronym? Probing into this choice gives us a pathway into the filmmaking process itself. We might decide, for instance, that the decision involved not the university, but the sound of its acronym, as the director, writers and actor were trying to create a certain musicality with the latter's voice. NYU, after all, does not have the same ring as the other quoted examples. Or is it possible that it rolls off the tongue more easily? The translator has even added a joke not intended in the film by giving the impression that a cold-blooded, highly trained spy might have received a PhD in Arts and Humanities – an irony based on a rather stark contrast between training and profession. The comparison tells us that the filmmakers were only interested on adding a university to the list and not the nature of the degree obtained there (as the translator is), making the mention of NYU, in hindsight, not so much a jokes as part of a resume. We assume that, even outside of the film's comedic universe, spies do go to college, and it is perfectly plausible that one went to a place like NYU. The translation makes us more aware of where exactly the joke has started, hence refining our interpretation of this moment and perhaps our grasp of the film's brand of humor. I could continue, but I merely wished to point out how the gaps subtitles create can launch an investigation into how films are made.

But we were on the subject of accidents, and in terms of subtitling, unintended incidents come in a wide variety: subtitles that are delayed or exceedingly prompt, appearing well before or well after an actor speaks; virtually invisible subtitles that blend into the color of the background; strange positioning of the lines, which may be too low or too high on the screen and thus block important details… the list goes on. According to Mary Carroll (2004), these problems are largely attributable to the availability of subtitling technologies (in the shape of user friendly software, like Apple's Final Cut Pro), which has led distributors to outsource to cheaper, independent options to subtitle the films they are selling (2004). The result has been some deplorable subtitling work in recent years. A recent, controversial case shows the extent to which noticing differing subtitling quality can hamper movie-watching pleasure. Blogger RobG (2009) of *Icons of Fright* posted a lengthy entry in his site on the highly successful and critically acclaimed Swedish horror film *Let the Right One In* (*Låt den rättekomma in*, dir. Tomas Alfredson, 2009). RobG has taken over a dozen stills from the film and set them right next to their American DVD release equivalents to express his discontent with the latter's subtitles. Putting the stills so close together reveals definite differences in the subtitle track.

Compare the original theatrical release of the film:

Image 1 – *Let the Right One In*, theatrical version. (Tomas Alfredson 2009: 44.35). ©Bavaria FilmInternational.

with the American version, distributed by Magnolia Pictures:

Image 2 – *Let the Right One In*, American DVD release (Tomas Alfredson 2009:44.35). ©MagnoliaFilms.

RobG's argument – which he articulates with the seething, barely-contained rage of the true fan – is that the producers of the DVD release of the film in the United States decided to "dumb down" (2009) the film's subtitles under the misguided goal of making it more accessible. In the above case, the first subtitle (credited, according to RobG, to Ingrid Eng, whom the blogger congratulates for her work) reveals the strain in the relationship between the characters Håkan (Per Ragnar), in foreground, and Eli (Lina Leandersson), in the background. The latter, it turns out, is a vampire-like creature that needs blood to survive. Håkan has been procuring the blood for an unspecified amount of time, to the point that the task has become the sole purpose of his existence. Eli has just told him he need not go out tonight to bring blood for her, but realizing that Eli might not need him proves too much for him to bear. The second subtitle, on the other hand, changes the meaning altogether, from self-deprecation to Håkan asserting why Eli needs him. This does not so much "dumb down" the scene as alter its meaning, but there is a sense in which the first translation is far more complex because it fleshes out emotions that are completely lost in the Magnolia version.(Incidentally, Magnolia responded to these charges by claiming their version is in fact more faithful to the novel, by John Ajvide Lindqvist, on which the film is based, and yet they still decided to rerelease the DVD with two options for the English subtitles: "English" and "English [theatrical]" [2009]).

RobG's goal was to convey his anger at how the cheapening of the subtitling quality had interfered with his enjoyment of the film and to call for greater care in this extremely important task, but his screen captures also reveal some moments in *Let the Right One In* where the craftsmanship shows through, and where we can once again begin an interrogative reading. Look at the two stills to the left.– how the composition makes Eli's head seem to protrude from Håkan's back. Similarly, the arm from the poster in far left of the screen appears to be emerging from Håkan's forehead, much like a unicorn's horn. On the one hand, the shot works thematically and to highlight the symbiotic relationship between the characters – they are bound by a murderous pact, in which one receives sustenance in exchange for company and dependence. In many ways, they are a single, two-headed entity, even if Håkan has started fearing Eli could survive on her own and he is thus redundant. But it also draws our attention to the kind of horror film this is. Unicorns, bicephalous beings, and other fantastic creatures are referenced, but never confirmed – when Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) asks Eli if she is indeed a vampire, she gives him a rather cryptic response: "I live off blood… yes" (Tomas Alfredson 2009: 1:19.31). Rather than completely identify herself as a vampire, she only admits to share her bloody diet with the latter, which makes us question if she really fits that definition. The title of the film and the novel allude to the magical relationship between the vampire and a place – they cannot enter a space unless they are let in. But beyond that, the film is largely unconcerned with vampire lore – crucifixes, stakes, garlic, are all absent symbols of the now vast mythology

of vampirism. Eli does not prominently sport the traditional fangs, or at least the film never reveals that she has them (besides a shot of the wound on a woman's neck, which could have been made by regular teeth). Such restraint is not only a product of subtlety or of the recognition that audiences need not be told what the film already unequivocally implies, but a questioning of the status of a fantasy film. Conventional wisdom suggests vampire lore eases suspension of disbelief, attaching the vampire to some kind of plausible reality – even in a world where vampires exist; there are rules by which their bodies must live. *Let the Right One In* does not contradict this dictum (and in fact reinforces it), but it also makes us wonder what would happen to the status of fantasy if the rules that govern vampire behavior were less structured and more mysterious. Would the film be less convincing if we thought of Eli as a very particular kind of hematophagous monster that might share some characteristics with the vampire, but is not one? Does lore always lend credence to vampire stories, or has the pendulum swung the other way and now signals them as shallow fictions in love with their many trappings? Other films, like Guillermo del Toro's *Cronos* (1990), where the monster is the result of the usage of an alchemist's ancient device, have successfully problematized this relationship, speaking more to the boundlessness of the fantasy genre than to the flexibility of the vampire myth. These are stories about the perils of immortality and how evil spreads, not about the mechanics of vampiric life. Forgetting lore might actually free filmmakers to explore narrative and aesthetic possibilities.
Yet, like with *Spy Hard* above, I mean only to open this investigation rather than carry it out. I just intend to demonstrate how the travails of screen translation can spawn larger inquiries into film as they catch our cinephiliac eye. So far, subtitles appear very closely aligned with some fundamental characteristics of the cinephiliac moment without fetishizing the foreign. Instead, it is the phenomena created by the need to overcome that foreignness that can inspire viewers to look closer.
A reminder is important at this juncture: if our readings of films will take their source as a springboard and finally depart from them, it behooves us to consider them works that are interconnected with the films that spur them, but which stand on their own as critical-creative pieces of writing. Similarly, given the ways in which subtitles affect our experiences of the films themselves, and how translations are in themselves critical-creative acts, a subtitled film should be treated as a unique text, intertextually bound to an "original" version, but with the independence with which the translator's contribution endows it. As Carroll and Ivarsson demand the subtitler be credited for her work, so we as scholars must also acknowledge, where possible, which translation of a film we are viewing and referencing, for our reading of a film will be heavily influenced by its subtitling. The acknowledgement should occur, I believe, regardless of whether the subject of our analysis is directly related to how the source language of the original film was translated.[1]

3. Subtitles are real

At this point, objections to subtitles as igniters of cinephilia might arise if one sees how Keathley draws the links between the cinephiliac moment and the very nature of the medium of cinema as interrogated by a theoretical tradition that binds the aforementioned Impressionists, André Bazin and Roland Barthes, to name a couple. It is a tradition that locates the power of cinema in a photographic ontology that reveals reality by reproducing it. The impact of the cinephiliac moment, Keathley tells us, stems from the fact that more than events, the cinephiliac moments are glimpses into an automatically and mechanically recorded reality that is equally outside of human control. Willemen encapsulates this idea by pointing out that

> The ontology of cinema, as voiced by Bazin, claims that, because a mechanical reproduction is involved, there is a privileged relationship between cinema and the real. What people like Bazin want you to relate to in their polemic is precisely the dimension of revelation that is obtained by pointing your camera at something that hasn't been staged for the camera (1994: 243).

Keathley then summarizes: "the cinephiliac moment is the site where this prior presence, this fleeting experience of the real, is felt most intensely or magically" (2006: 37). This would seem to exclude subtitles, which are not photographed alongside the profilmic event or even part of the photographable world. They are post-production additions and, therefore, not "real."
Or are they? Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that they are not real under a special sense of cinematic reality. In my view, there are three different realities to which subtitles are linked. First, there is the reality of the medium. Current work on André Bazin and his concept of realism have problematized what reality means in the cinema, and whether photographic ontology should be understood in relation to its indexical nature. Daniel Morgan (2006) argues instead for realism as a form of acknowledgment. "The task is to discover," Morgan tells us, "what it is that [a film's] style is acknowledging – what it takes the fact of the film to be – and whether that involves doing something with the knowledge of its ontological foundation" (2006:472). Think of film adaptations of literary works (like *Let the Right One In*). Quite apart from the reality of the events on screen, Bazin thought that there is another fact that the film is about: the reality of the book itself. His prime example is Robert Bresson's take on Georges Bernanos's *Diary of a Country Priest* (*Le journal d'un cure de campagne*, 1951) a film that heavily involves the book's text and thus hands the screen "back to literature" in a "triumph of cinematographic realism" (cited in Morgan, 2006:472). If the films are original, we might argue that subtitles help films acknowledge their screenplays, which appear most prominently in the film's dialogue. Furthermore, the very existence of titles as attachments to the film strip or digital file reminds us of a movie's physical carriers. In other words, subtitles make us aware of the artificiality of the medium itself, be it in celluloid or in digital form.
Second, there is the reality of the original subtitlers, and all the dynamics of distribution of which they are part. These audiences – viewers potentially similar to us, who at least speak the same language – have watched this film before us and left the mark of their experience in their translation of the film's dialogue and titles. We are, to a large extent, witnessing the result of those previous screenings, and thus the subtitles bind us to that prior, privileged audience tasked with the translation of the film's spoken and written language. If a cinephiliac moment brings us closer to the film, subtitles can bring us closer to someone else's experience of the film, hence also putting us in touch with an extra filmic reality. The real here appears in the form of the real audience that viewed and handled the film before the audience. Their specter is there in the words flashing across the screen.
Third, and most expansively, there is the reality of the undeniable presence of the nation state. Not only do the correspondences, translations and mistranslations generate curiosity that would allow us to linger on particular moments in the film. Certain word choices and omissions, like certain offensive or suggestive words, are actually sanctioned by the state. It could be called the transnational moment: the moment when the film makes us more acutely aware that one country created the film and another translated it. It is then that the spectator comes face to face with the encounter of her own culture with someone else's – when she feels in the presence of her nation and a foreign, different articulation of another nationality. Subtitles are thus connected to, and are glimpses of, geopolitical realities that although existing in a different ontological plane as the photographic real, exert just as much influence in life as anything that film or digital imaging can immortalize. On all three levels, the point is that subtitles participate in a process of acknowledgement of something in the world outside of the film: be it the process that creates it, the audience that first translates and filters the film's information, or the politics that constantly try to arrange the world. Now, one could protest that Morgan's contention – following Bazin's – is that this acknowledgement should come from the intrinsic style of the film, not from something that came to it after the fact. Yet as I have argued above, that would be similar to considering a novel's translation extricable from the original. Whenever we watch a film in a foreign language, the subtitles will be inseparable from the audiovisual experience, and so they must be considered part of the film's look and, thus, of its style. I should also add that if the style of a film comes from its filmmakers, the subtitlers often fall under that category, for it might be the producers themselves that arrange and supervise the translations. They are as responsible for a film's style as the director, the cinematographer, the score's composer, and the rest of the crew.

4. Subtitles are the Symbolic underscoring the Real.

If we'd rather think in psychoanalytical terms, subtitles are indeed representatives of the Symbolic realm, guiding us through the ritual of the Real event contained on the screen. From that Lacanian perspective, Slavoj Žižek (2004) asserts that we should not be wary of taking the outsider's position, because it might be more revealing than an insider's view. If we are watching others perform a religious ceremony whose core believes we do not share, we would still be, in Žižek's view, closer to the event than the participants themselves: "even the religious belief of those who participate in such a ritual is a rationalization of the uncanny libidinal impact of the ritual itself" (2004: 286).In other words, they need a Symbolic background in order "to sustain the Real of the ritual itself" (286). Subtitles could take the place of this rationalization – they make us privy to information that would otherwise constitute a "perplexing first impression" (286) which, while apparently incomplete and lacking in understanding, is more telling and revelatory – more intense – than one preceded by some kind of intellectual preparation. In that light, watching a movie in a foreign language without subtitles is even more direct, more in touch with the Real viewing situation than when subtitles are thrown in. However, rather than facilitating our access to the ritual of film watching in a foreign language, subtitles underscore our place as foreigners to the film – just as they mark the film as foreign, they can also make us realize our own difference vis-à-vis the world of the film itself. In the dark of the screening room, it is us who are entering the dominion of the film, not the other way around. If, in our efforts to catch an image at the risk of missing the meaning of the words, or in a moment of distraction, we lose sight of the subtitles, we crash against the Real of the film more strongly, for that fleeting instant, than if we had arrived from the start to an unsubtitled film. If the subtitles are there at the bottom of the screen, they act as a Symbolic line that highlights the Real of the screening and thus magnify the latter's intrusion, once again building a bond to an extra-filmic reality.

5. Subtitles train our vision to see more within the films they help translate.

Lastly, even when subtitles run smoothly, and we have no problems with their complexity or clarity, they still emerge as excellent tools of visual practice. The need to read them while paying attention to the film's actions leads to increase our reading speed in order to pick up more details in the frame. For Keathley, this ability is essential for the cinephile, and he calls it, borrowing a term from Wolfgang Schivelbusch, "panoramic perception: the tendency to sweep the screen visually in order to register an image in its totality" (2006: 8). Keathley sees it as a development parallel to modernity's cluttering of vision with unprecedented quantities of

stimuli, like the view from the top of the Eiffel Tower (and the elevator ride there), the sights and attractions in every corner of industrialized cities. Schivelbusch, after all, coined the term after observing how railway travel, the fastest mode of transportation at the time, changed the passengers´ visual capabilities as they looked out of the window and had to envision the landscape "as it roll[ed] past the window indiscriminately" (cited by Keathley, 2006: 43). In much the same way, the film spectator then exercises a capacity to take it all in, to scan the entire frame and, in the process, discover details that become part of her memories and produce cinephiliac moments. A cinephile then is as likely to remember a face in the background as a slight inconsistency in the subtitles at a crucial dramatic moment. But panoramic perception is of course no exclusive of the cinema. If globalization has given rise to the perception that a second modernity is currently under way, I would argue that just as the window in the moving train educated Schivelbusch's eyes in the wake of that first modernity, then the hypertextual screen has done the same for our eyes in recent decades. Images and words have interacted more than ever in our daily online surfing, and as touchscreens become ever more pervasive, it is likely that the ability to read them simultaneously is growing exponentially. Subtitles even give direction to the eyes for scanning the frame, for every language has a particular reading path, be it from left to right, from right to left, or from top to bottom of the screen. In short, subtitles allow us to see more, not less, of the film we are watching. Not only can they be part of cinephiliac moments, they can also alert us to them.

For all the above reasons, one can argue that subtitles do indeed stand to enhance the pleasure of movie watching by sparking our natural curiosity, by increasing our awareness of the interplay between the screen and the world, and helping us become more avid viewers, able to capture more details in the film than we would otherwise. And they can do so by deriving knowledge from the pleasure that a condition of foreignness allows.

Conclusion

In a recent article, film critic Mike D'Angelo (2011) reports, anecdotally, that it seems to him that

> Americans don't fear and loathe subtitles nearly as much as they did eight or 10 years ago. That's not to say that Joe Sixpack the Plumber is rushing out to see the latest Hong Sang-soo picture—foreign films remain marginalized in the U.S. and probably always will, global economy notwithstanding. But it's no longer necessary, thank God, for writers to twist themselves into knots trying to steer any given conversation into English (2011).

He then quotes the success of such films as *Munich* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 2005), *Letters from Iwo Jima* (dir. Clint Eastwood, 2006), and *Inglourious Basterds* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 2009) where English is sporadic or entirely absent. So perhaps this is all academic paranoia. Perhaps D'Angelo is right and audiences (American audiences in D'Angelo's example) are embracing subtitles (although his examples are from the Hollywood mainstream, but it's a start). Still, the objections to subtitles have not gone away, and I wonder if they are pervasive enough to short-circuit the diplomatic potential of foreign films, which could often work as peaceful ambassadors of their homelands. Whatever the case, becoming interested in subtitles and seeing them as latent fetishes could serve in both cases: to begin eroding, however modestly, a resistance to the unfamiliar, or to expand the taste of an audience already open to the cinemas of the world.

Bibliography

BARTHES Roland (1972) – Mythologies. LAVERS, Annette, trans. New York, USA Hill and Wang, ISBN-13: 978-0374521509,160 pp.

BLOGGER RobG – "Let the Wrong Subtitles In to Let the Right One In?!" in Icons of Fright. March 30th, 2009. http://iconsoffright.com/news/2009/03/let_the_wrong_subtitles_in_to.html (accessed in 01/13/2010)..

CARROLL Mary, IVARSSON Jan – "Code of Good Subtitling Practices" in European Association for Studies in Screen Translation. Berlin, October 1998. http://www.esist.org/ESIST%20Subtitling%20code_fi les/Code%20of%20Good%20Subtitling%20Practice_en.pdf (accessed in02/19/2010)

____ – Subtitling: Changing Standards for New Media?" in The Globalization Insider, VolumeXIII, Issue 3.5. Geneva, September 2004. http://www.lisa.org/globalizationinsider/2004/09/subtitling_chan.html (accessed in 03/20/2010).

ĎUROVIČOVÁ Nataša – "Vector, Flow, Zone: Toward a History of Cinematic Translatio": NEWMAN Kathleen, ĎUROVIČOVÁ, eds., World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives, New York, Routledge, 2009, 90-120, ISBN: 0-203-88279-2.

D'ANGELO Mike - "Scenic Routes: The Godfather" in The AV Club. January 24th. TheOnion, Inc. 2011. http://www.avclub.com/articles/the-godfather,50431/ (accessed in 01/24/2011). HALLE Randall – "Offering Tales They Want To Hear: Transnational European Film Funding As Neo-Orientalism": GALT Rosalind, SCHOONOVER Karl, eds., Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories, New York,Oxford University Press, 2010, 303-319, ISBN: 978-0-19-538562-5.

KEATHLEY, Christian (2006) – Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees. Bloomington, USA, Indiana University Press, ISBN-13: 978-0253217950, 232 pp.

MORGAN, Daniel – "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics": Critical Inquiry 32 (2006) 443-481, ISSN: 0093-1896/06/3203-0005.

NORNES, Abé Mark –"For an Abusive Subtitling" in Film Quarterly. Volume 52, No. 3, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999, 17-34.

PEDERSEN Jan – "How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?" in MuTra – Challenges to Multidimensional Translation – ConferenceProceedings. Saarbrücken, Germany, 2005. http://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005_Proceedings/2005_Pedersen_Jan.pdf (accessed in 03/12/2010).

RAY Robert B – "Film Studies and the Problems of the New Century" in New England Review Volume 27, No. 4, Middlebury, VT, 2006. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40244890 (accessed in 31/05/2010).

_____ (2008) – The ABCs of Classic Hollywood, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, ISBN-13: 978-0195322927, 424 pp.

SHOHAT Ella (2006) – Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices, Durham/London, Duke University Press, ISBN-13:978-0822337584,432 pp.

WILLEMEN Paul (1994) – "Through the Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered": Looks and Frictions, London, British Film Institute, ISBN-13: 978-0851703992, 240 pp.

ŽIŽEK Slavoj – "The Foreign Gaze Which Sees Too Much": EGOYAN Atom, BALFOUR Ian, eds., Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press ISBN 0-262-05078-1, 2004.

Filmography

Spy Hard (1996), Dir. Rick Friedberg, USA.
Let the Right One In (Låt den rättekomma in, 2009), Dir. Tomas Alfredson, Sweden.
Munich (2005), Dir. Steven Spielberg, USA.
Letters from Iwo Jima (2006), Dir. Clint Eastwood, USA.
Inglourious Basterd (2009), Dir. Quentin Tarantino, USA/Germany.
Diary of a Country Priest (Le journal d'un cure de champagne, 1951), Dir. Robert Bresson, France.

Notes

[1] A model for this kind of writing, which starts from a detail in the film and expands outwards, can be found in Robert Ray's remarkable book *The ABCs of Classic Hollywood* (2008), in which Ray (with the help of some of his students, who are credited for their contributions) finds an element for every letter of the alphabet in four Classic Hollywood films (*Grand Hotel*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Philadelphia Story*, and *Meet me in St. Louis*) and investigates each one. The resulting texts range from the brief and epigrammatic, to the lengthy and profound. In any case, they are always illuminating, often in unexpected ways.

Felipe Pruneda Senties
Felipe Pruneda Sentíes is a Ph.D. Candidate in Critical and Cultural Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, and holds a Master of Arts degree in English from the same institution. He earned a B.A. in Film and Media Culture from Middlebury College, which he attended as a Davis United World College Scholar. Before that, he completed a Bilingual International Baccalaureate Diploma at the United World College of South East Asia, located in Singapore. He has presented academic papers in the United States and Mexico, and is currently working on his dissertation, a history of Mexican film theory and criticism.