

Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia in the Mirror of Dorian Gray: Ethnographic Recordings and the Aesthetics of the Market in the Recent Films of Ulrike Ottinger

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New German Critique, No. 60, Special Issue on German Film History. (Autumn, 1993), pp. 77-99.

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Mr Derrydown had received a laborious education, and had consumed a great quantity of midnight oil, over ponderous tomes of ancient and modern learning. . . . His lucubrations in the latter branch of science having conducted him, as he conceived, into the central opacity of utter darkness, he formed a hasty conclusion "that all human learning is vanity"; and one day in a listless mood, taking down a volume of the *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, he found, or fancied he found, in the plain language of the old English ballad, glimpses of the truth of things, which he had vainly sought in the vast volumes of philosophical disquisition. In consequence of this luminous discovery, he locked up his library, purchased a travelling chariot, with a shelf in the back, which he filled with collections of ballads, and popular songs; and passed the greater part of every year in posting about the country, for the purpose, as he expressed it, of studying together poetry and the peasantry, unsophisticated nature and the truth of things.

Thomas Love Peacock, *Melincourt* (1817)¹

* An early version of this talk was given at the Ottinger Symposium at Cornell University in 1990. Many thanks to Pandemonium Germanicum for inviting me; to Ulrike Ottinger, for her interest in my arguments, and for the opportunity to translate the screenplay of *Diamond Dance*; to Miriam Hansen and Richard Maxwell for their helpful suggestions; to The Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin, for the use of their library, and to the Arsenal, as always, for showing Ottinger's *oeuvre* and everything else.

1. Thomas Love Peacock, *Melincourt* (1817; rpt. in *The Novels of Thomas Love Peacock*, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948) 145-46.

I

At the beginning of Ulrike Ottinger's 1990 film *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*, Lady Windemere (Delphine Seyrig) travels on the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Mongolian Railroads to reach what her European fellow travellers perceive as the overwhelming emptiness, the "Green Dreams" of Asia. Following the tracks first laid down by sixteenth-century explorers and meditating on the problems of setting signs in the "green void," she travels to the site where she will compose her ethnographic portraits of Mongolian tradition in a Czarist-era luxury carriage formerly used by "princes and diplomats." Thus she arrives at an anthropological immersion in tribal life by the vehicle of a self-consciously decadent aestheticism, tinged with the memory of feudal privilege.

Ulrike Ottinger's own filmmaking career follows a parallel and equally paradoxical trajectory.² For it moves from a *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism which sees the primitive as always already corrupted (Noa-Noa drinks Coca Cola), back towards a more romantic fascination with cultural difference, and from a militantly critical feminism which confronts head-on the violence both internalized *and* externalized by women to a feminism which is more utopian and more essentializing.³ Ottinger's early films celebrate marginalized subcultures, whose position outside

2. Ottinger's feature films released to date are: *Madame X — Eine Absolute Herrscherin* [*Madame X — An Absolute Ruler* (1977)]; *Bildnis einer Trinkerin — Aller Jamais Retour* [*Ticket of No Return* (1979)]; *Preak Orlando* (1981); *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* [*Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press* (1984)]; *China. Die Künste — Der Alltag. Eine Filmische Reisebeschreibung* [*China. The Arts-Everyday Life, A Travelogue* (1985)]; *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989); *Countdown* (1990); *Täiga* (1992). Her shorts include: *Laokoon & Söhne* [*Laocoon and Sons* (1973)]; *Berlinfieber* [*Berlin Fever* (1973)]; *Die Betörung der blauen Matrosen* [*The Enchantment of the Blue Sailors* (1975)]; *Superbia — Der Stolz* [*Superbia — Pride* (1986)]; *Usinimage* (1987).

3. Indeed, where *Madame X*, Ottinger's first full-length feature film, revolved around the cruel power-tripping of an autocratic female pirate queen (who ruthlessly destroys not only her enemies but also most of her cosmopolitan crew of female adventurers), *Johanna d'Arc's* gentler female autocrat rules over a cross-cultural matriarchy; the recent film celebrates both the benign power of women and what fascinates them about each other. It celebrates what binds them together despite cultural differences that should keep them apart.

The feminist reception of Ottinger's films themselves has been deeply divided. On *Madame X*, see for instance Sabine Hake, "'Gold, Love, Adventure': The Postmodern Piracy of Madame X," *Discourse* 11:1 (Fall/Winter 1988-9): 88-110; Patricia White, "Madame X of the China Seas," *Screen* 28:4 (Autumn 1987): 80-95; on *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, see the negative reviews by Claudia Lenssen, Ilse Lenz, and Karin Reschke in *frauen und film* 22 (1979): 23-29; Monika Treut's "Ein Nachtrag zu Ulrike Ottingers Film *Madame X*," *frauen und film* 28 (1981): 15-21, and Miriam Hansen, "Visual Pleasure, Fetishism and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse: Ulrike Ottinger's *Ticket of*

of social norms Ottinger replicates in her own unconventional filmic vocabulary, radical refashioning of film genre, and critical stance toward a normative filmic apparatus. Her recent films, in contrast, celebrate traditional cultures — whose practices she “records” using far more conventional and unobtrusive filmic techniques — and a belief in cultural authenticity that often suppresses the memory of its own role in inventing what it records.⁴

Such shifts need to be understood as part of a much larger transformation of the dominant political aesthetics of the 1960s and 1970s into that of the 1980s and 1990s, as *La Chinoise* has given way to *Les Chinoises*, *Les Guerillères* to *Naked Spaces*, and *Daughters of the Dust* and *Too Early Too Late* to *Powaqqatsis*. What Ottinger’s newer work makes particularly clear is the internal logic of this *Wende* [turn]. Reading *Johanna d’Arc* and Ottinger’s recent films back against her 1984 *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (a pivotal film in Ottinger’s political and aesthetic development), against Ottinger’s earlier films, as well as against a more

No Return,” *New German Critique* 31 (Winter 1984): 95-108. On the more recent films, see Roswitha Mueller, “The Mirror and the Vamp,” *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985): 176-193; Janet Bergstrom, “The Theater of Everyday Life: Ulrike Ottinger’s *China: The Arts, Everyday Life*,” *Camera Obscura* 18 (1988): 42-51; Therese Grisham, “Twentieth Century Teatrum Mundi: Ulrike Ottinger’s *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia*,” *Wide Angle* 14:2 (Gay and Lesbian Film Production and Reception): 22-7; and Brenda Longfellow, “Lesbian phantasy and the Other woman in Ottinger’s *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia*,” *Screen* 34:2 (Summer 1993): 124-136. With a still from *Madame X* on its cover, Julia Knight’s *Women and the New German Cinema* (London and New York: Verso, 1992) also devotes considerable space to Ottinger’s work, situating it within West German women’s film culture. See also the interviews with Ottinger by Roswitha Mueller in *Discourse* 4 (Winter 1982): 108-125; Mark Silberman in *Jump Cut* 29 (1984); and Therese Grisham in *Wide Angle* 14:2, 28-36; as well as Annette Kuhn, “Encounter between Two Cultures: A Discussion with Ulrike Ottinger,” *Screen* 28:4 (Autumn 1987): 74-9, and Roswitha Mueller, ed., *Ulrike Ottinger: A Retrospective* (Goethe Institute, 1990), a critical annotated filmography designed to accompany the Goethe Institute’s North American Ottinger retrospective.

4. Questioned about the ethnographic “naturalism” of much of *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia* during a symposium on her work held at Cornell University in October 1990, Ottinger argued that she was helping the Mongolians to record and preserve a threatened traditional culture. During the same session, she also recounted the provenance of the oral epic poetry recited in the film: she had found a translation of traditional Mongolian epics in a German book, shaped her own German composite out of this material, had a native speaker retranslate it into Mongolian, and filmed it being performed, finally, by the Mongolian actors of *Johanna d’Arc*. Had the “creative” compilers of the Romantic period, from Herder and Percy to the Grimms and Lönnrot, been challenged during a question period about their editorial creations, one imagines they might have given much the same answers and told much the same anecdotes, with an equal faith in the scholarly necessity and utility of their work.

mainstream New German Cinema, this essay attempts to give historical delineation both to the shifts and the constants of her work. Probably the most characteristic feature of all of Ottinger's films is their insistence on framing political questions and historical phenomena in aesthetic terms. Here, with equal insistence, their aestheticism will be analyzed both as a historical phenomenon and as a political position.

II

Near the beginning of *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (1984), the evil newspaper magnate Frau Dr. Mabuse (Delphine Seyrig) invites Dorian Gray, a naive young aesthete, to the premiere of a new opera. Her plan is that he will fall in love with the leading actress, and thus continue the sentimental education she has charted for him, an initiation into new worlds of pleasure, love, and pain. Appropriately enough, the opera itself is concerned with the conquest of a new world. Mirroring the overall movement both of Frau Dr. Mabuse's and Ottinger's plots, it begins as a love story and ends as a tragedy. On the paradisaic shores of the Canary Islands, just conquered by Spain as a prelude to their American colonizations, the Spanish Infante, Don Luis de la Cerda, falls in love with the island's native queen, Adamana, and she with him. As a new emotional union between conqueror and conquered, their love promises to heal the scars of political violence left by the conquest, but finds itself doomed, in the end, by the opposition of the Grand Inquisitor of Seville, just as the indigenous culture of the island itself will be doomed by the program of economic exploitation the Grand Inquisitor initiates.

As Alexander Kluge argues in his 1983 film *Die Macht der Gefühle* [*The Power of Feelings*], along lines laid down by Lukács and Adorno, the representation of history in European opera has traditionally been limited by its need to find allegorical or synecdochic forms. The particular love plot of Ottinger's conquest opera deploys a love plot absolutely central, as Kluge and others have pointed out, to the cultural representation of empire, from the legends surrounding Malinche and Pocahontas onward to *Madame Butterfly*.⁵ Ottinger's staging of this traditional contact

5. On Kluge's views of an operatic history, see also *New German Critique* 49 (Winter 1990), Special Issue on Alexander Kluge, esp. Gertrud Koch, "Alexander Kluge's Phantom of the Opera" 79-88, and Alexander Kluge, "On Opera, Film and Feelings" 89-132. Kluge, in fact, comments explicitly on the ubiquity of nineteenth-century operatic plots in which "Western men become infatuated with exotic foreign women . . .

narrative, however, complicates it considerably, since a number of stylistic and generic disjunctures break the smooth synecdochic functioning of the allegory. Thus the story's tragic drama is frequently undercut by comic or ludicrous business, while the acting itself parodically recapitulates disparate traditions within film history: church officials traipse across the beach with a grotesque self-righteousness right out of Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or*; "native extras" perform their bit parts with the hammy Hollywood "exoticism" of *Bird of Paradise*. The opera's leads, at the same time, employ an odd gestural language whose force is at once bathetically anti-heroic and moving in its very clumsiness.

Even in their most dramatic duets, moreover, the actors' singing voices do not match their moving mouths, exceeding "realistic" sound both in volume and force. This disjuncture threatens to break what Kaja Silverman has dubbed the "acoustic mirror" of film, the conventional correspondence of body and voice, sight and sound, which underpins both opera and mainstream sound cinema.⁶ Here, at the level of *mise-en-scène* as well, the opera's action threatens to exceed the theatrical space that frames it. Its highly stylized pageantry is filmed naturalistically in what is clearly an outdoor setting: the actors stand on a real beach, surrounded by real waves, and buffeted by real winds. Framing and containing this natural setting, however, is the static proscenium arch of an ordinary indoor theater. Not only the actors, but also the spectators, as they watch the opera from loge-like seats in the surrounding cliffs, appear to be situated at once inside and outside of a conventional theatrical space.

seduce them and then return home. The exotic women die of such love. The operas insist on this fatal conclusion. Adorno mentions Halévy's *The Jewess*, Giacomo Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, Giacomo Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, Richard Wagner's *Kundry* . . . the exotic *Carmen*, the Inca son in *The Power of Fate*, the earth spirit *Lulu* . . ." (Kluge, "Ein imaginärer Opernführer," cited and translated in Koch, "Alexander Kluge's *Phantom*" 81). On the centrality of this plot of "exogamous" unions to allegories of colonial consolidation, see also the analysis of *Aïda* in Edward Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. Ch. 5, "Eros and Abolition," and my "National Character, Nationalist Plot: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of *Waverley*," *ELH* 60 (Fall, 1993) 685-731.

6. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988). See also *October* 17 (Summer 1981), Special Issue on The New Talkies, esp. Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body" 22-36. For the centrality of voicing issues to the anthropological encounter itself, see James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: U of California P., 1986) 98-121.

If the spectators are thus located physically, geographically — and historically — at a great distance, almost in a different world, from the events they are watching on stage, Ottinger also makes visible the process of emotional identification through which they can partially cross this divide. For as we watch Dorian Gray watching the opera below and falling in love with the actress playing Adamana, we also realize that Don Luis de la Cerda bears Dorian's features, just as the Grand Inquisitor bears those of Frau Dr. Mabuse. In a more extreme version of the situation described in the Wildean original, in Kafka's "Auf der Galerie," or in Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.*, the spectator succeeds in projecting himself into the spectacle, and in staging his personal longings on center stage. But such spectatorial dramaturgy ends up by sacrificing both the historical address and the cultural objectives of the original narrative.

Eyes only on the love story, in which he has cast himself as the male lead, Dorian Gray misses what we are able to see, the opera's applicability both to his own situation and to the overall political world of the film. In fact it should warn him of Mabuse's will to personal domination, her attempt to get control of his life, and of her will to global domination as well, in her attempt to attain monopolizing control of the world press. Now busy orchestrating a love story between Gray and Adamana for her own ends, Frau Dr. Mabuse (like the Grand Inquisitor whom she so closely resembles) will eventually move with equal force to destroy their love and then the lovers themselves. Now mobilizing all the aesthetic pleasures of the known world to aid her seduction of Dorian, Frau Dr. Mabuse will eventually attempt to destroy all the free play which aesthetic experience bestows. What is to replace it is the distorting mirror of the yellow press, which will turn Dorian's life into a media prison and impose its own flattened worldview onto every place on the globe.

Staged to further Frau Dr. Mabuse's ends, the conquest opera foretells her ultimate triumph over the forces of love, as well as over the last vestiges of autonomous and indigenous cultural production throughout the world. Yet the distinctive and disjunctive staging which helps the opera to escape the predictability of its storyline also helps it to resist its own subordination to political plotting. *Dorian Gray* at once enacts the cooptation of aesthetic experience to the ends of conquering market forces, and continues to insist on the aesthetic realm as the main resistance and alternative to its enforced uniformity. Meeting point of emotion and convention, nature and artifice, voice and body, performance and spectacle, the operatic theater continues to transcend both its

preordained plot and its patron's plotting. In stark contrast to the monochromatic perspective of the yellow press, it offers the prospect of endlessly new worlds, a mental theater of rich landscapes and open horizons. At the same time, of course, Ottinger's emphasis on the narcissistic structure of spectatorial identification with the art work suggests that art's operation as a realm of personal liberation can occur only at the price of its historical and geographical indeterminacy, and its ultimate separation from the sphere of the political.

III

At first glance, *Dorian Gray*'s organizing obsession with the aesthetic and political ramifications of a monopolistic media capitalism and with the rhetorical power of the spectacle might appear to align Ottinger's films with the overtly political filmmaking of the New German Cinema in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet Ottinger's constant insistence, both thematically and formally, on aesthetic autonomy and her faith in art's power to transcend political pressures, a recurring critique of the Left's deployment of an Enlightenment discourse of political improvability in her early films, and finally, her growing discomfort, in the films after *Dorian Gray*, with the Left's emphasis on repressive state and ideological apparatuses, all place Ottinger's *oeuvre* as much in conflict as in affiliation with the "committed" mainstream of West German film-making.

From the student actions against the Springer Verlag [Springer publishing house] in the late 1960s to the widespread protests, during and after the constitutional crisis of 1977, against the *Gewaltmonopol* [power monopoly] of an *Überwachungsstaat* [surveillance state], the West German Left was acutely critical of the monopolistic functioning of the right-wing press, as of the linked effects of media saturation and of government surveillance on the operations of the public sphere. In close parallel, the left wing of the New German Cinema produced filmic meditations on the place of media in the public sphere and self-critical reflections on the social role of the cinematic apparatus itself.⁷ The New German Cinema's own history, however, left most of its filmmakers far better able to perform the first than the second kind of critical

7. See for instance Helke Sander's Godardian short, *Brecht die Macht der Manipulateure* (1968); Kluge's films of the 1960s and 1970s; Völker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta, *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (1975); the collectively made *Deutschland im Herbst* (1977); Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Mutter Küsters Fahrt ins Glück* (1975) and *Die Dritte Generation* (1979) and perhaps even Niklaus Schilling, *Der Willi Busch Report* (1979).

exercise, so that the degree-zero analysis of Godard's films of the late 1960s found very few German imitators.

Together with the New Left itself, Young German Cinema had emerged in the mid-1960s in part as an attempt to use film to voice social concerns and to perform a new kind of sociological and historical analysis. Yet with some notable exceptions it remained largely uncritical in its adoption of the verist conceptual and filmic vocabulary of the documentary film. While many films saw themselves as acts of historical revision, attempting to give voice to silenced segments of West German society, and to write new histories "from below," their unselfconscious adoption of documentary conventions often meant that they left intact the conceptual and discursive frameworks of the old histories. Deployed unquestioningly, the filmic apparatus often threatened to swallow up and ventriloquize the very voices it attempted to record and broadcast. In Werner Herzog's 1971 documentary *Land der Dunkelheit und des Schweigens* [*Land of Darkness and Silence*], for instance, the attempt to fathom and represent the subjectivity of deaf-mutes quite literally reduced its subjects to romantic spectacles for the hearing and speaking world. For different reasons, overtly Marxist filmmaking often threatened, as well, to reduce the complexity of the lives it recorded. For despite repeated attempts to accommodate "subjective factors," the dominant tendency of the New German Cinema, well into the mid-1970s, was to treat the psychological as an almost Pavlovian response to "objective factors" of social conditioning.⁸

At the same time, however, the more experimental among the German filmmakers — Alexander Kluge, Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, Werner Schroeter, Harun Farocki, Vlado Kristl, Hellmuth Costard, Werner Nekes, Hartmut Bitomsky, Helga Reidemeister, Helke Sander, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, and the early Fassbinder— manifested a far greater degree of political and formal self-reflexivity. Like their more mainstream counterparts, these filmmakers saw the problems of capitalism, alienation, and the public sphere as crucial subjects for film (and indeed several explored at some length the ways alienation had served historically both as a central motivation and as a central effect of cinema, from its beginning). In an overwhelming number of their works from the 1960s and 1970s, these problems are figured formally

8. See here my article "Reconstructing the New German Cinema: Social Subjects and Critical Documentaries," *German Politics and Society* 18 (Fall 1989): 37-53.

through the films' "voicing." Presenting ironic gaps between music and text, between actors' voices and the lines they recite, between characters and their ideological inner voices, between the impersonal, omniscient narrative voice-overs of "history" and the confused or harried voices of subjective experience, these films call into question the survival of a bourgeois individualism under capitalism, and break decisively with a monopolistic cinematic realism.⁹

Similarly critical of would-be authoritative voices, as of the adequacy of psychoanalytic or sociological modes of social explanation, Otinger's early feature films attempt to articulate a politics and an aesthetics of experience from the edge or outside of dominant discourses. *Madame X — Eine Absolute Herrscherin* [*Madame X — an Absolute Ruler* (1977)], *Bildnis einer Trinkerin — Aller Jamais Retour* [*Ticket of No Return* (1979)], and *Freak Orlando* (1981) are all centrally concerned with the disjunctures between subjective experience, subcultural identifications, and the normative discursive framework which attempts to shape them

9. Consider for example Helke Sander's short *Subjektitude* (1966); the implementation of "antitheater" distantiated speaking techniques in virtually all of Huillet and Straub's films as in some of Fassbinder's early films — *Katzelmacher* and *Liebe ist kälter als der Tod* (both 1969) — as well; experiments with the genre of the musical bio-pic from Huillet and Straub's *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* (1968) to Fassbinder's *Lili Marleen* (1980) and with operatic conventions (Werner Schroeter's films, Straub and Huillet's 1974 *Moses and Aaron*, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's 1982 *Parsifal*, Kluge's 1983 *Macht der Gefühle* and Helke Sander's 1986 *Der Beginn aller Schrecken ist Liebe*); the parodic presentation of documentary voice-over in many of Kluge's films as in Rosa von Praunheim's *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist Pervers sondern die Situation, in der er lebt* (1970), and the experiments with its limits in Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Ludwig* (1982) and *Hitler — ein Film aus Deutschland* (1977) as, very differently, in Helga Reidemeister's *Von wegen 'Schicksal'* (1979); and varied experiments with lip-syncing from Hellmuth Costard's *Besonders wertvoll* (1968) and Schroeter's *Der Tod der Maria Malibran* (1971) to Syberberg's *Parsifal* (1982).

This emphasis on sound as a crucial point of narrative closure or disruption occurred, presumably, due to a number of different influences. From Renoir and Carne to Bergman, Fellini, and Ophüls, European art film had already emphasized cinema's origins in the performance traditions of theater and opera. The rediscovery of Brecht in the 1960s and 1970s — including extended critical discussions of his collaborations with Hans Eisler on *Kuhle Wampe* — reintroduced into German filmmaking the notions of *gestus* and alienation effects, linked to Brechtian experimentation with the sound in sound cinema. Godard's influential *Lehrfilme* of the late 1960s and early 1970s, from the 1969 films *Le gai savoir*, *One plus one* and *British Sounds* to *Numero Deux* (1975) and *Ici et ailleurs* (1977), meditated at great length on the ideological relationship of image and sound in the cinema. And a new critical film history emphasized the ideological over-determination and economic impact of sound cinema; the *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s famous piece on John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*, for instance, thus stressed the way the transition to sound had made possible the monopolistic restructuring of the Hollywood studio system.

and claims to describe them. Taken as a sequence, *Madame X*, *Ticket of No Return*, and *Freak Orlando* shift emphasis from the political subtexts and meditations on violence inherent in the conventions of mainstream film genres, to the way in which conventionality itself functions as a kind of social violence and as a means of political domination. The murderous sensual excesses of *Madame X*, the aesthetic aggression and self-destructive violence depicted in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* and *Freak Orlando* are thus presented with celebratory gusto, as practices which turn the violence of the system against itself, or at least derive an aesthetic surplus value from the deployment of such violence. *Freak Orlando* inflates the stereotypes of subcultural difference until they explode; attempting to imagine a history of freaks freakishly, the film "violates" filmic and social, temporal and historiographical conventions together. The fetishistic self-display of *Madame X* and of the *Trinkerin* [alcoholic] derive their visual majesty in part through their contrast to the obsessive verbosity and verbal looping of many of the subordinate characters who surround them. What is most powerful is that which doesn't get voiced, that which cannot be measured either by Karla Freud-Goldmund's obsessive psychological testing, or within the categories put forward by droning characters like Social Question, Common Sense, and Exact Statistics.

Through such personification allegories, Ottinger's early films repeatedly mock the liberal pieties by the concerned, "charitable" and finally condescending voice-overs of the "social question" documentary. Ottinger's own deployment of stereotypes might at first appear to define and limit a range of social positions more rigidly than any sociological questionnaire. Yet her real interest is in what happens when these positions collide. For Ottinger, the social field is constructed through a kind of anarchic heteroglossia. A variety of discourses find allegorical embodiment as individual characters, each continually reidentifying herself through delirious self-obsessed monologues. Alternately, such characters will shift their self-presentation in subtle ways as they play off of the other characters, and then again, threatened by such contact with a loss of internal characterological consistencies, retreat back into themselves, to rehearse the old monologues with new belligerence.

Insisting on the tension between the social world as an interactive and dialogic field, on the one hand, and the driving forcefulness of individual discourses in their will to monologue and to conversational monopoly, on the other, Ottinger's early films anticipate *Dorian Gray*'s threatening vision of global discursive monopoly. In *Dorian Gray*, of course, the monopolistic voice conceals itself beneath a siren's song.

Walkie-talkie sewn into her evening dress, Frau Dr. Mabuse controls a media concern which extends from New York and Moscow to China and Africa. Embodying the yellow press's logic of surveillance and marketing, she destroys the autonomy of a life, piece by piece, in order to have something to report on, to create material for her newspaper, and to increase circulation. Again and again her famous seductive voice lures Dorian Gray from his innocent narcissism, his sheltered life as a student of "subversive aesthetics" and "introductory computer programming," into a high-society life of self-destructive decadence and dependencies, while the whole world watches. Taking over his life narrative and recording his every move, she turns a man into a character, or at best a famous face. Her aim, in the long run, is to turn the whole world into a Baudrillardian totality; one closed consumption circuit in which her publications will dominate the entire market. From her underground headquarters Frau Dr. Mabuse and her assistants already monitor the whole world on closed circuit tv: constantly tuning into "test kiosks" in London, Peking, New York, Berlin, Moscow, they carefully observe and note every shift in newsstand selling patterns.

In the mirror of the yellow press, as circulation is bound up in an ever-expanding and ever more constrictive newspaper chain, all places begin to appear remarkably the same. The same actors appear on the tv screen each time Frau Mabuse tunes in and in each place she tunes into, differentiated only by a slightly different cardboard backdrop, and by minor changes of body language, gesture, and intonation. As if this monitoring were not enough, Frau Dr. Mabuse also summons the editors of her newspapers from around the world (Mr. Bow wow Africasia, the editor of the Pago Express, as well as Mr. Charles Chronicle and Mr. Standard Telegraph) in order to coordinate global media efforts more closely. Even the film's apparent signifiers of difference become mirroring parts of the system of media. The roll call of Mabuse's editors and of their (stereotypical) differences which opens the film takes place only as a preliminary to further standardization: the humanist editor who wishes to go his own way will be quietly eliminated. At the same time, the film's own complex network of intertextuality imbricates its own plot, even as it is being played out, in preexisting systems of representation. The Siamese . . . twins, Mr. Bow wow Africasia, a faithful Chinese family retainer who is fittingly named Hollywood and whose gestures reiterate a hundred-year tradition of bit parts: in the mirror of post-modernity, even characters who literally embody new worlds of

racial difference are at the same time nothing more than flatly familiar, two-dimensional exoticist tropes.

In the world ruled by Frau Dr. Mabuse, everything is under her surveillance, even the underworld she guides Dorian through to corrupt him. When the *l'art pour l'art* of the nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle* is recast in twentieth century *fin-de-siècle* terms, media appears as message. The Wildean or Huysmanian immersion in sensation and search for immediacy are experienced only in order to be recorded, stimulated only in order to be simulated. Pleasure is produced, along with underground cultures and media superstars, as part of a larger, and largely invisible plan, as byproducts in the manufacture of impressions and representations. Although Dorian deserts the lectures on "subversive aesthetics" to experience all the voluptuousness of life firsthand, he learns in the end that he has really been acting for the camera all along. And as an aristocracy of the senses comes to be produced by and for a vicarious mass consumption, the desirability of aesthetic autonomy is linked clearly to its growing historical impossibility. Orphan heir of wealthy parents killed by the anarchic and random violence of the Chinese revolution, and raised in their stead by the faithful family servant, the young Dorian Gray represents the last, obsolescent survivor of an earlier mode of domination, equally narcissistic, self-contained, and self-serving, but no longer self-reproducing.

IV

Dorian Gray: orphaned in the aftermath of the Chinese Revolution, a subversive aesthetics nurtured by Hollywood attempts in vain to resist the encroachments, the centralization, the levelling effects of a globalizing media. *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*: in the aftermath of the Chinese Revolution, a separate culture maintains itself successfully against the encroachments, the centralization, the levelling effects of communism, just as its oral traditions remain unaffected by the media revolution and the presence of modern recording devices, and its traditions of gift-exchange and hospitality remain unaffected by the incursions of mass tourism and modern consumer culture. From *Dorian Gray* to *Johanna d'Arc*, Ottinger's move is from the test-kiosks, monitoring a virtually identical life in every part of the world, to a place off the railroad line, the telephone line, and the telegraph line. As it moves within this open space, the travelling nomadic culture of the Mongols seems able to gather and integrate all differences, and to welcome all

comers.¹⁰ The strength, the resilience, the resistance of this culture renders unthreatening even Western attempts to record it. Thus the scene in which Lady Windemere draws a portrait of her hosts is no Levi-Straussian or Derridean writing lesson, no display or contest of power, no scene of inscription or erasure. Tribal facility at syncretic bricolage apparently allows the absorption of Western silverware, Western machinery, Western baseball bats, Western tourists without difficulty, and without transforming the culture's sense of itself; the presence of Western observers adds to the festivities and the routines of everyday life but does not change them, let alone corrupt them.

Last seen as Frau Dr. Mabuse, the diabolical wiretapper, Delphine Seyrig reappears in *Joanna d'Arc* as Lady Windemere, recording angel. From surveillance to participant observation, from media monopolies to oral recitative — the voice of seduction becomes the voice of tolerant explanation, translation, and mediation which in fact guides the viewer through much of the film's second and third hours, serving as a kind of intermittent voice-over, our Baedeker to Mongolian life. Leaving Frau Dr. Mabuse's hall of mirrors, the viewer enters, with relief, the wide-eyed world of Lady Windemere, moving from a vision of the media as all powerful and imprisoning to a vision of the media as informative and empowering. And leaving behind the claustrophobic underground world of the yellow press, the viewer reaches, with relief, the timelessness, the open spaces, the green dreams of Mongolia. Kidnapped from the Trans-Mongolian Railroad by a tribe of Mongolian women warriors and taken to live among them on the Mongolian plains, the seven Western protagonists of *Johanna d'Arc* can each find what she was searching for. For indeed it is here, in the wide-open spaces of Central Asia, that Karla Goldmund-Freud's prognosis at the end of *Madame X*

10. Indeed a significant part of European experimentation with narrative temporality (right down to recent films like Elfi Mikesch's *Marokain* or Brigitte Rouan's *Outremer*) is bound up with exotic subject matter and with an Orientalist insistence on the asymmetrical temporality of cultural development. From André Gide and Victor Segalen to Alain Robbe-Grillet and Marguerite Duras, the French experimental tradition, to give only one instance, is situated again and again on the cultural terrains of Africa and Asia. Ottinger's repeated casting of Delphine Seyrig (particularly as Frau Dr. Mabuse and then as Lady Windemere) works to evoke this tradition as well as the parallel tradition of narrative experimentation of the French New Wave. In the wake of her famous starring roles in Alain Resnais's *Muriel* (1961) and *Last Year at Marienbad* (1963), Marguerite Duras's *India Song* (1975), and Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielmann, 23 Quai du Commerce* (1975), Seyrig's very voice and face have come to stand, in some ways, for the interlocking problematics of time, memory, and exoticism.

can finally come true — that women are able to find a new realm of possibilities, as large as the room within themselves.

As the Western women, far from their ordinary lives, come into their own, the camera too, adapts itself, and adopts a looser kind of choreography. As if von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express* could arrive in an ethnographic Shanghai rather than a Hollywood movie lot, the glossy production numbers of *Johanna d'Arc*'s first reel give way in the second to "native dances," filmed with a virtually ethnographic camera. So too the satiric edge, the alliances and enmities, the obsessive monologues of the first part give way to the gentler identifications, the going native, the self-transformations of the second. Once off the train, the European characters lose their stridency, and their hard definition. So too, during the second and third hour, the viewers themselves are gradually cut adrift from the identification figures they came in with and begin to operate in a looser mode of participant-observation.

Off the train, off the tracks, away from the satiated epicureanism of the dining car, away from the endless reminiscences of Bakunin's descendants — the film moves into a free space. The movement of the film (and with it the overall movement of Ottinger's oeuvre), is from parody and pastiche to documentary, and from an Orient figured only in Western fears of "inscrutability," trapped in the tropes used to define and domesticate it ("Hollywood"), to an Orient (only faintly self-parodic at moments) figured by the open space of the steppe, the mobile space of the tent, the celebratory time of the ritual, the repetitive time of the song. In this space, in the chanting and incantatory voices of the Mongolian tribeswomen, orality comes back into its own. The danger of global Americanization expressed in the multilingual, cosmopolitan dining car of the Trans-Siberian, the threat of ethnic music swallowed up into the culture industry, is rendered meaningless by the discovery of a whole realm of unheard, unschooled, invincible voices, a realm of warriors' yells, and ethnographic songs. In the desert, even Fanny Ziegfield no longer sings "The Desert Song" or "The New Moon of the Royal Siamese Court" — instead she attempts to keep her voice by singing the Western scale into the mirror of her makeup kit, then to an admiring audience of women. The danger, of course, is that the film is still caught in the mirrors and the acoustic mirrors of the West: Mongolia's apparent emptiness comes from its position as the blind spot where Western mirrors intersect. And the forms, too, in which the Western visitors apprehend its plenitude, remain mainly projections and reflections of Western fantasies.

The ending of Ottinger's film suggests a partial recognition of this danger. When Lady Windemere and the other passengers rejoin the Trans-Mongolian, to return to their quotidian lives, the idyll vanishes with them, and the apparently "authentic" life of the yurts reveals itself, in retrospect, to be nothing more than an annual pastorate. Inviting Lady Windemere into *her* luxury car, the Mongolian princess unmasks herself as a Europeanized sophisticate, who returns from a Western life each summer to play at ethnic traditions, so as "to preserve in some measure the illusion of the free nomadic life." The conclusion Ottinger draws from this is that it is not only the West which exoticizes Asia. The Mongolians, too, exoticize and stage their own ethnic heritage, as much for themselves as for any stray tourists. In addition, as the Princess suggests, the East's cultural influence on the West, and the tradition of Eastern Occidentalism, is as extensive as Western Orientalism. "The mutual exotic attraction," Lady Windemere concludes, "has a long history."

Yet although both here and throughout the Mongolian interlude, Ottinger intermittently attempts to maintain ironic distance from a fully utopian fantasy of Mongolia, the local and the overall effect of most of the filming, from its visual rhythm to its vocalizations, is almost a complete capitulation to it. The inauguration of the Mongolian interlude marks a clear stylistic turning point in the film, as the train is stopped by the Mongolian ambush, and stopped from carrying towards their destinations its many passengers, each representing different linguistic and cultural groups, all with their own stories. The huge stylistic gaps between the first and the second parts of the film, between the still allegorical and teleological stories told and lived on the train and the more fluid observations and relationships played out on the steppes beyond it, reveal what has happened when these stories are derailed: history has stopped, and we have left the straight tracks of a linear Western time to experience a recursive, ritual time. What marks this new time is no longer a chronicle of events, causes and effects, but rather mythical transformations: now the earth itself shifts its shape in response to spiritual forces.

What is being negated here, of course, is what (at least until recently) seemed the most powerful Western narrative of epochal upheaval, a Hegelian and then Marxist notion of historical teleology, a narrative of world historical forces, and of the inevitability of revolution. Indeed the moment at which Western prototypes and categories fall away, is

simultaneously, paradoxically, the moment of their greatest concentration. The scene in which the train is slowed, then halted, is a recurrent moment in every film genre of exoticism and conquest: *The Great Train Robbery*, *Shanghai Express*, *Lawrence of Arabia*; even Fanny Ziegfeld's new musical is to end with a stagecoach ambush. This scene could be seen, indeed, as the epitome of "the Western," in all the senses of that word: the embattled forces of Western civilization are ambushed by an anarchic lawlessness, bandits or revolutionaries who refuse to recognize the value and values of Western domination. If this ambush was already parodied in the piracy scene of *Madame X*, here its values are overturned completely. Seventy years after Pudovkin, the *Storm over Asia* is not revolutionary, gathering ethnic traditions for the communist cause, but anti-revolutionary, celebrating a rescue of ethnic authenticity from the forces and order of modernity, across the borders of the communist state.

Here the revolution is on the train, as it carries the Red Guard, and the descendants of Bakunin. We learn from the narration of one Red Officer, that his great-grandfather, founder of a horse-railroad in Siberia in 1865, was thereby "already almost a revolutionary," and indeed pleaded also for the abolition of serfdom. In a sense, indeed, the revolution is the train itself. Its very construction was a triumph of modern technology against the forces of nature, which simultaneously harnessed some seven-thousand workers into a new work discipline and a new communal way of life. Functioning, directly and indirectly, as a force of modernization and of centralization, the railroad also initiates an apparently irreversible process of cultural dispossession, dispersion, and emigration ("Toot Tootsie, Goodbye." sings Micky Katz). Then the train is stopped to reveal a nomadic culture which communism has not even been able to touch, and which the infrastructures of modernity — telegraph lines, telephone lines, embassies, Red Guards — have apparently not been able to reach. Under other circumstances, some of the premodern aspects of the nomads' culture — with its hierarchical and feudal (although completely matriarchal) political structure and martial ethos — might seem somewhat problematic themselves. Here, however, within the context of Marxist and Maoist centralization, any survival of an indigenous cultural realm appears as a zone of political autonomy, and as a resistance of the local to the forces of cultural imperialism.

Yet doesn't *Johanna d'Arc* itself, in the way it celebrates this cultural

autonomy, unwittingly replicate the logic of the cultural imperialism it criticizes? "How thoughtful of them to stop the train so that we can observe this exciting spectacle," Frau Müller-Vobwinkel announces in mid-ambush, gets out her camera and takes a picture. The moment is of course an ironic one. But what does it mean to stop the train and observe a culture as spectacle or to project a matriarchal fantasy onto a real tribal people, a screenplay onto footage that is shot as ethnographic? What does it mean to stop or step outside of historical time, into the stasis of pageantry? "We have just seen an unbelievable steppe drama," say the Kalinkas. "So who wants to speak of Time or of convenience?" In order to immerse themselves in a different time-space, the Westerners must in fact surrender their usual logic, give up their normal itineraries and identities, as well as the normal sense of the cumulative and teleological narratives which organize their lives. The film itself, to a large degree, takes over this historyless, cyclical, magical time, justifying it as the mode in which cultural contact always takes place.

Recapitulated in *Johanna d'Arc* is an Enlightenment tradition, foundational to ethnographic and modernist narrative alike, of experiencing the cultural alterity of foreign places as temporal alterity, and thus of depicting the travel through a cultural space of unassimilable alienness as a kind of time travel. The problems, or at least the dangers, with this framing of cultural contact have been articulated again and again over the last twenty years, as a central concern of critical anthropology, subaltern and post-colonial theory alike. For the Enlightenment, of course, the assertion of the temporal alterity of "underdeveloped" cultures could serve, on occasion, as the excuse for their colonization by the West, and thus for their forcible insertion into historical time and developmental progress. The Western ethnographic tradition, as Johannes Fabian has recently argued, builds on the assertion of temporal alterity for different ends, but with some of the same local consequences.¹¹ As a narrative genre, Western ethnographies have

11. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983). On the problem of time for ethnography, see also Hermann Bausinger, *Kontinuität? Geschichtlichkeit und Dauer als Volkkundliches Problem* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1969); M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P., 1981); John Bender and David E. Wellbery, eds., *Chronotypes: The Cultural Construction of Time* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991); Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), as well as my "The Time of the Gypsies: A 'People without History' in the Narratives of the West," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer

been obsessed with the anthropologist's feeling of timelessness both at the moment of first contact with the culture under study, and then as he or she comes to understand the rhythms of its life-world. Experiencing severe temporal dislocation, the anthropologist may take refuge in a kind of timeless presentism, insisting, like Lady Windemere at the beginning of the film, that when cultures meet "it's always the first time," again and again. Yet for many of the cultures under study it is actually not the first, but the thousandth time they been contacted or entered by outsiders. To emphasize the temporal primacy of the anthropological experience may thus be to deny a history to the contacted cultures themselves, a history before contact but also a history of previous contacts, some violent, coercive, and openly imperialistic.

Pleading for the fruitfulness of cultural cross-pollination, Ottinger's emphasis in *Johanna d'Arc* is on a history of mutual admiration and fascination between cultures rather than a history of aggression. She continues to give primacy to this register of cultural contact right through the moment at the end of the film in which she brackets (or retracts) most of the film's other utopian fantasies. Yet despite the importance of such cultural fascination and influence, the long history of European conquest, exploration, and expansionism in various parts of the world has constructed a relation that is almost entirely asymmetrical. It was thus Japan which Admiral Perry "opened" to America, not America which opened itself to Japan, Christianity which was imported into China and India by missionaries, not Taoism or Hinduism into Italy and Spain, England or Scotland. In the light of this history, Ottinger's assertion of cultural reciprocity can at moments seem disingenuous. A camel tows a motorbike through the desert; "now I know where we Americans stole our idea of mobile homes," exclaims the Broadway singer. Kosher food in airplane trays, Yiddish theater in China, klezmer music in New York: what this version of travelling cultures clearly and deliberately

1992): 843-884. For influential recent anthropological work problematizing the stance of the ethnographer, see for instance Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989); Clifford and Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture*, and George W. Stocking, Jr., *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983). This new disciplinary self-consciousness about the role of the ethnographer has had enormous implications for anthropological practice itself: see the overviews provided by Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no 1 (1984): 126-166, and by George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986).

leaves out are conventional histories of persecution and displacement, as well as polemical accounts of uneven development and power relations.

V

In one sense, Ottinger's move from *Dorian Gray* to *Johanna d'Arc* is a move from one end of the postmodern to the other, from Baudrillard through Foucault to De Certeau, from camp and image recycling through the *Neue Wilden* to new age and world music. In epochal terms, the move is from a *posthistoire* in which all differences are erased, and all politics are rendered meaningless in the glittering spectacle of mirroring representations to an archaizing interest in mythic time, and to tribalist fantasies about culture without the state. From an apocalyptic obsession with a monolithic culture industry which forces art to be about nothing but itself, Ottinger moves to embrace both a pastoral vision of a preindustrial culture whose art has no separation from the practice of everyday life, and a pluralist vision of cultural syncretism, in which consumption choices are raised to a realm of collective autonomy. These two visions find their synthesis in Ottinger's sense of the coevalness of disparate cultural worlds — and perhaps more alarmingly, of the innate compatibility between traditional and consumer societies as well. “Folk art” and mass culture, caravan and Winnebago come to be seen simply as coexisting rather than successive, or competing cultural forms. It is as if there were not specific political and economic determinants, social and ecological consequences attached to each, and as if the market did not exist.

Yet Ottinger's films since the mid-1980s, paradoxically, are as preoccupied with free markets as they are with aesthetic autonomies or with ethnic enclaves. From *Dorian Gray* onward, indeed, Ottinger's earlier emphasis on social normativity and determinism is replaced by a series of meditations on the marketplace as a locus of choice. What tends to be valorized, in the process, is the relative “plurality” of the capitalist system. If *Dorian Gray* still located the primary threat to aesthetic life within monopoly capitalism, Ottinger's subsequent films all relocate this threat within the planned economies and state capitalism of the Communist world. Set in China and in Mongolia, in the former Soviet Union and in the former German Democratic Republic, Ottinger's recent films — *China: Die Künste — der Alltag, Eine Filmische Reisebeschreibung* (1985); *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989); *Countdown* (1990), and *Taiga* (1992) — all explicitly or implicitly criticize a communism whose economic

conomic centralization and aesthetic dogmas worked to level cultural and aesthetic differences alike. Now, Ottinger suggests, the process is working in reverse: as crumbling communist economies give way to the “free” marketplaces of capitalism, cultural diversities and aesthetic differentiations can reemerge after a long history of suppression — and with them, a realm of cultural authenticity, free at last from its history of mediations. Her 1990 documentary *Countdown*, which counts down the last ten days in Berlin before the German-German monetary “union,” and with it the economic incorporation of the GDR into the Federal Republic, thus focuses not so much on indigenous social forms about to be lost as on the spontaneous eruption of new marketplaces, with all the new, syncretic cultural forms (and new forms of cultural tension as well) that go with them.

Ottinger’s earlier documentary, *China: Die Künste — der Alltag* (filmed as a kind of notebook for *Johanna d'Arc*, and sharing some structural features with it) explores the texture of an only superficially communist China in order to establish an even more elaborate equation between aesthetic liberty, free markets, and traditional cultures. *China* works, first of all, to discipline and orchestrate its gaze according to what it conceives as indigenous “Chinese” principles (Ottinger has commented repeatedly that much of the film’s camera movement is conceived as the unrolling of a Chinese scroll). At the same time, since the film dispenses with voice-over narration, and there is thus no verbal direction of what the viewers see before them; it creates what is, by documentary standards, an almost unprecedented realm of freedom for the eye to explore each tableau for itself. As the film’s title announces, the film has a dual focus and purpose. It attempts to demonstrate the highly developed character of Chinese aesthetics as it permeates everyday life (particularly in the form of thousands of street-corner artisanal practices). At the same time it celebrates the *exoticisme pur* experienced by the aesthete who enters a deeply foreign culture for the first time and, unable to understand its verbal and visual languages, feels free to hear and see the culture as pure music or pure form.

As it unfolds and unscrolls, the film as a whole repeats the same paradox narratively and geographically. Its first third is set in a Beijing whose domestic, imperial, and Maoist spaces are given aesthetic richness by the survival of pre-communist markets, the encroachment of proto-capitalist ones, and the huge array of goods each offers up for the eye. Then, for the rest of the film, Ottinger travels (backwards) into

more and more “remote” provinces of China and finally, into several “ethnic preserves.” Here, in the world “before” organized marketplaces, aesthetic diversity and ethnic color appear to fill every part of everyday life. In retrospect, then, the significance of the marketplaces of Beijing — and of the marketplace of modernity more generally — is that they are still able to present, if only as a trace, the aesthetic fullness of these remote life-worlds. Far from representing the destruction of traditional cultures, modern markets preserve something of their spirit.

Diamond Dance, Ottinger’s current film-in-progress, continues this line of argumentation. Taking the international diamond market as its central focus, it celebrates the diamond trade for the way it at once structures an international circuit of exchange and, at least within the Russian Jewish emigré community of Brooklyn that is the main locale of the film, works to preserve premodern cultural traditions and business practices alike. The film’s shooting script suggests that both visually and narratively, Ottinger will depict the diamond cartel in ways which parallel *Dorian Gray*’s presentation of Frau Dr. Mabuse’s newspaper monopoly, with a network of Diamond Booths instead of Test Kiosks dotting the globe. Yet the emphasis no longer seems to be on the will to power and the economic dominance that usually accompany a cartel. Instead, as an industry and a trade traditionally dominated by Jews, the diamond cartel will be presented as an enclave of ethnic traditions and values. No longer presented as a threat to cultural autonomy, the monopoly seems instead to have become its privileged locus.

As Ottinger’s script argues, the Jewish stake in the diamond business stems directly from a long history of persecution. Forced into involuntary and repeated migrations, Jewish merchants were able to establish important circuits of exchange, with gems (as objects both transportable and precious) serving as their *passe-partouts*. Circulating on the world market, the diamonds are made to function simultaneously as commodities and as aesthetic objects. So too, in their “eternal wanderings,” the Jews themselves, as Ottinger notes with fascination, functioned as the bearers of cosmopolitanism. At the same time, their persecution and diaspora drew them together as a group, and constantly reinforced their sense of ethnic identity. In Ottinger’s script, they thus appear as emblems at once of cultural hybridization and of cultural purity. Surveying a wide variety of New York Jewish subcultures, Ottinger’s narrative finds an important center in a love story which brings these various tendencies together: an Orthodox diamond dealer

falls in love with an openly gay psychoanalyst, the son of survivors, now himself dying of AIDS on Fire Island. The story, of course, recapitulates the comparably cross-cultural, reconciliatory, and ill-fated island love of Don Luis and Adamena, standing on a historically fresher shore. In the meantime, however, the tone of the story has changed. In its earlier, operatic incarnation, set simultaneously at the dawn of the New World and on the eve of a postmodern media monopoly, the story mocked the survival of narcissistic illusions of wholeness, agency, and love in the face of cultural conquest, fragmentation, and erasure. In its new version, the story suggests the possibility that a cultural identity can be reassembled from diasporic fragments, becoming more inclusive in the process. What makes it all possible is the reconciliatory and redemptive power of love.

VI

In 1978, the year after the release of *Madame X* had created considerable controversy in feminist and left-wing circles, publishing house Roter Stern published a facsimile edition of Ottinger's original script for the film. A typescript scattered with felt-pen deletions and corrections, and illustrated, on each facing page, with a continuous collage of photographs, paintings, and clippings. The published script effectively conveyed both the sense of associative, discursive play and the working methods which shaped Ottinger's filmmaking. Reading simultaneously the final shooting script and, beneath the deletions, earlier drafts of the same work, the reader is able to reconstruct, at least in part, the imaginative evolution of the work, as Ottinger makes plot and casting changes, rewrites or reassigns particular speeches, and adds instructions for their mode of intonation or musical accompaniment. The most significant revisions appear in the heavily overscored casting list and in the foreword introducing the *dramatis personae*, where substitutions of characters and their leading characteristics seem to have been made according to the final availability of the particular actresses for whom they were originally written. Thus *Madame X* ("the narcissistic charismatic pirate queen of the eastern seas"), Noa-Noa ("a native of the island of Taipi"), Karla Freud-Goldmund ("a degree-holding psychologist—reaching the limits of her knowledge"), Blowup ("American photo-model"), Hoisin ("Chinese cook—the faithful womanservant") and the rest of the "representative" female pirate's crew were originally to have been joined by "Mercedes (a black female mine worker from Johannesburg)." As

Ottinger's deletions, additions, and deletions suggest, two different actresses had to be scratched for the part, and the role itself dropped out of the film altogether.¹²

One can only speculate what effect Mercedes's presence might have had on a film preoccupied with the simulacrum of political violence, how it might have shaped or intensified left-wing criticisms of the film (and thereafter, critical attention more generally to the political economy of Ottinger's aesthetics) or how, on the other hand, it might have created some precedent within Ottinger's own work for confronting questions of race, class, and economic injustice as well as the more general, pervasive, and diffuse problem of "discursive construction." In 1977, scripting a film about the deployment of absolutist power and the limits of female freedom, Ottinger's original intention was clearly to allude, at least in passing, to the racial and economic as well as gender oppression of the black workers in South Africa — and thus perhaps, almost unavoidably, to the links, epitomized by the diamond mines themselves, between apartheid as a racialized form of social control and capitalism as a form of economic organization. Fifteen years later, when Ottinger returns to the economy which arises from the diamond mines, her interest promises to be very different: the colourful ethnic customs of the diamond merchants, and the aesthetic pleasures of the precious stones.

12. Ulrike Ottinger, *[Drehbuch zu] Madame X — Eine Absolute Herrscherin* (Basel and Frankfurt: Stroemfeld and Roter Stern, 1978) 3.

[Footnotes]

³ **Visual Pleasure, Fetishism and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse: Ulrike Ottinger's Ticket of No Return**

Miriam Hansen

New German Critique, No. 31, West German Culture and Politics. (Winter, 1984), pp. 95-108.

³ **The Mirror and the Vamp**

Roswitha Mueller

New German Critique, No. 34. (Winter, 1985), pp. 176-193.

¹¹ **Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties**

Sherry B. Ortner

Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 26, No. 1. (Jan., 1984), pp. 126-166.

NOTE: *The reference numbering from the original has been maintained in this citation list.*