Réda Bensmaïa, Brown University

Becoming-animal, Becoming-political in Rachid Boudjedra’s L’Escargot Entêté

In *1000 Plateaus*, in a chapter mysteriously entitled « Becoming-intense, Becoming-animal, Becoming imperceptible », Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari tell us that, in specific situations, « the becoming-animal is neither a dream nor a phantasm » but rather « perfectly real ». In Rachid Boudjedra’s novel entitled *L’Escargot Entêté (The Stubborn Snail)* one witnesses a strange encounter between a State servant whose work is to get rid of the rats which invade the city where he lives and a…snail. One could easily interpret this aspect of the story as the phantasm of a man who is becoming mad or the victim of a delirious experience but, very quickly, one realizes that this encounter between a human being --who seems in fact in complete possession of his mental faculties-- and a snail, cannot be reduced to a dream or a simple lucubration on the part of the hero of the story. My reading of Boudjedra’s novel will allow me to reinterpret Gilles Deleuze’s notion of becoming-animal and to unravel many undetected and sometimes concealed characteristics of the concept of becoming in Deleuze’s oeuvre.

Timothy Bewes, Brown University

Free Indirect, or Who is the Subject of the Work of Fiction?

Dissensus, for Jacques Rancière, is “the essence of politics.” But there are two kinds of dissensus in Rancière’s thought: political dissensus and aesthetic dissensus. This distinction concerns the relation to subjectivation. While literature, says Rancière, “dissolves the subjects of utterance in the fabric of the percepts and affects of anonymous life,” the task of politics is to identify the anonymous – “those without part” – as a “collective, an us.” However, given that the mode of political subjectivation, for Rancière, can never be consolidated in terms of “interests”; given that the subjects of a political demonstration “are always precarious,” that a political difference “is always on the shore of its own disappearance”; given the forcefulness of Rancière’s statement that politics “has no proper place nor any natural subjects” – the relation between the two operations of subjectivation and desubjectivation is ambiguous, to say the least.

The stakes of this distinction concern the possibility of a non-regime mode of thinking in art and literature, a possibility that is implicitly discounted in Rancière’s writing. My paper will take issue with the way Rancière frames the terms of this question by identifying a difference within what Rancière calls the aesthetic regime, between two practices or modes of fictional writing. In one of the eight “lessons” of J. M. Coetzee’s novel *Elizabeth Costello*, dealing with Elizabeth’s encounter with the real-life novelist Paul West, Elizabeth differentiates two approaches to storytelling: “She no longer believes that storytelling is good in itself, whereas for West … the question does not seem to arise …” The distinction she is making is between a writer who writes
while no longer believing in the efficacy or virtue of writing, and one who writes in the belief that the story “has to be told,” that the telling of the story justifies the activity of writing. This difference is one that Rancière himself never allows. For Rancière, every form of “dissensus” within the aesthetic regime is ultimately a form of consensus. My proposition, on the contrary, is that the distinction between Elizabeth Costello’s (or J. M. Coetzee’s) writing and Paul West’s, a distinction within the aesthetic sphere, can be broadly mapped onto the distinction between dissensus and consensus. Elizabeth writes in the grip of “dissensus,” refusing all talk of the “dignity” or “vocation” of writing, as well as the idea that the task of writing is to communicate or transmit anything at all. West, as Coetzee constructs him, writes in the spirit of consensus, in the belief in his own activity; which is also the belief in the self-identity of the categories of perception, the commonality of those categories, and consequently the transmissibility of perceptions without significant loss.

Is an escape from the aesthetic regime possible within art and literature? Only, I propose, by vacating the problematic of subjectivity and subjectivation entirely. I will turn to cinema as the location of a mode of non-aesthetic dissensus, a mode whose subjective implications are best understood using a distinction first suggested by Pier Paulo Pasolini: between free indirect discourse and free indirect subjectivity.

**Vincent Debaene, Columbia University**

*Anthropology & Literature in the 20th & 21st Centuries: Figures of Temptation*

As a commemoration of sort of Roland Barthes’s centennial, I would like to explore the notion of an ethnographic impulse in connection with the evolutions of both literature and anthropological discourse in France in the 20th century until today. I intend to consider this notion in comparison and contrast with another notion (which can be considered both as an analogue and a converse), namely that of “temptation.” Indeed, while Roland Barthes refers to his own “tentation ethnologique,” Pierre Bourdieu clearly states that social sciences need to resist any “tentation littéraire”. On both sides, the issue is framed in terms of impulse and resistance or repression. But is it the same logic in both cases? What exactly are those impulses that should be refrained? And on what grounds?

**Richard Golsan, Texas A & M University**

*French Law and the Crimes of the Past: Tracing France’s Troubled Legal Vector of Memory*

Over the past three decades France’s efforts to come to terms with the crime of the past and to fulfill a “duty to memory” have resulted in three trials for crimes against humanity of former Nazi and Vichy officials, as well as the passage of controversial “memorial laws” that address issues including the denial of the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide at the hands of the Turks, the European slave trade, and France and its former colonies. This paper will examine the legal and historical pitfalls of these efforts, the thematic linkages between the trials and the laws, and conclude with a brief assessment of the legacies of both undertakings in France today.
Professor Kaplan will present the epilogue to a book that she just completed, entitled *Looking for The Stranger: Albert Camus and the Life of a Literary Classic* (forthcoming with the University of Chicago Press in fall 2016). A kind of "making of" story of Camus' 1942 novel, it is also a book about the life of *The Stranger* beyond its publication. *Looking for The Stranger* is narrated in the third person, from Camus' point of view as he begins to write. In the epilogue at the end of the book, "A Brawl on the Beach," Professor Kaplan takes up the first person to talk about her own quest in Algeria - her own search for the sources of *The Stranger*.

**James Le Sueur, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (The Keynote Speaker)***

*Literature in the Time of Terror*

The slain Algerian writer, Tahar Djaout famously declared “silence is death” with his steadfast, defiant refusal to bow to pressure from the Algerian government and radical Islamists to self-censor in the face of grave personal danger. His assassination in 1993 gave new meaning to dissent and galvanized an entire generation of writers and intellectuals around the world who also refuse to self-censor, despite death threats (*fatwas*) from radical Islamists or threats of imprisonment and even torture by autocratic regimes. The stakes of this dissent, especially in the context of the post-Salman Rushdie world, were clear and real. Nevertheless, these threatened writers generated a steady stream of important literary, artistic, and critical works and in doing so, have transformed the arts and publishing in Europe, America, North Africa, and the Middle East in fundamental ways. Importantly, they have also held to account Muslim-majority states that have oppressed and censored writers critical of despotic regimes as well as Islamic fundamentalism and religious authoritarianism. Collectively, these new dissident writers have brought to the fore today’s most important literary dispute about the role of art and criticism as a response to growing religious and political intolerance within Muslim-majority states. In the process, today’s writers (most of whom were forced into exile from Muslim-majority countries by death threats from radical Islamists), have become no less important than the dissident intellectuals and cultural actors during the Soviet era, including writers such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Václav Havel. Indeed, these imperiled and oft-exiled writers face similar burdens of responsibility and persecution, and yet have the same resolve not to cow to forces arrayed against them. My lecture, “Literature in the Time of Terror,” will focus on writers at the center of this dispute that highlights the intersections of literature, the arts, Islam, and State oppression. My talk will be accompanied by video clips from my documentary, *Exile and the Fatwa - Life and Death of the Artists Who Dare to Criticize Radical Islam*. 
Giuseppina Mecchia  
University of Pittsburgh  
*The Mysteries of Cinema: Raoul Ruiz in the 1970s*

One of the most idiosyncratic, immediately recognizable stylists of late 20th-early 21st century cinema, Raoul (or Raùl) Ruiz (Chile 1941-Paris 2011) remains somewhat understudied in current cinema studies. In a way, Ruiz remains somewhat of a cult figure among a restricted group of connoisseurs. There are only two single-authored monographs on his cinema, one in French and the other in English, although a special issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* was devoted to his work already in 1983. My paper examines the French theoretical and esthetic undercurrents of Ruiz’s cinema in the 1970s, after he established himself in France in the exodus from Chile that followed the establishment of Pinochet’s military dictatorship. My main cinematic corpus will be the two movies that he worked on with the writer and philosopher Pierre Klossowski, *The Suspended Vocation* (1978) and *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* (1979). I will also briefly allude to the more mainstream *Time Regained* (1999) and *La Maison Nucingen* (2008). I am arguing that Ruiz considers the image as a medium to access the intricacies of temporal events in their historical, intellectual, sensorial and even mystical impact. In Ruiz’s movies, the Image is what is left of a mystery that both narrator and viewer access in a sensorial manner but might fail to comprehend intellectually. The stunning detail of Ruiz’s black and white and full color cinematography, his “baroque” (as explained by Richard Bégin) costumes, color palette and plot complexity, constitute a neo-surrealist esthetics, that can be best accessed through a Deleuzian framework, combined with Ruiz’s own theoretical writings on cinema as well as his debt to French and Franco-Hispanic surrealist cinema, mainly Louis Buñuel. The stunning “sensorial blocks”, “Time-Images”, and intellectual challenges carefully framed by Ruiz create a space where the temporal life of images lead the spectator in a quest for the hidden Sense of historical, affective and sensorial experiences.

Pamela Pears, Washington College  
*Jean Genet: Political Consciousness and Black Identity from Notre-Dame des Fleurs to Les Nègres to the Black Panther Party*

In the trajectory of French author, Jean Genet’s, literary career, his perception of and political involvement with black identity evolve to the point that he becomes a Black Panther activist in the United States in the 1960s. This evolution is full of contradictions, manifesting ever-changing influences and subtle changes in perspective. His interest in black identity surfaces almost unconsciously in his first novel, *Notre-Dame des Fleurs*, but as Genet crosses paths thematically and aesthetically with Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and, perhaps most importantly, Richard Wright, his perspective will develop.

In *Notre-Dame* Genet gives a provocative account of the virtues of murder, thievery, and decadence among a group of criminals and transvestites. Two of his characters are black men: Seck Gorgui and Clément Village, and while Genet does not directly discuss the question of their racial identity, he alludes to it throughout the episodes dealing with either one or both of these characters. While his descriptions may not be intentionally prejudicial, there is an obviously stagnant nature to his black characters. It is as if Genet wanted to deal with black identity, but did not yet have the political vision to do so.
Ten years later, with the publication of his play, *Les Nègres* (1958), Genet brings racial identity to the forefront of his work. One of the most obvious indications of this is the reappearance of the character, Clément Village, first introduced in *Notre-Dame*. In his rewriting of Village, we see glimmers of Richard Wright’s uncompromising, brutal stance on racial, political consciousness. Village in both his iterations recalls Wright’s Bigger Thomas in more ways than one. Wright’s work will continue to find echo in Genet’s, leading the latter to say at MIT in 1970: “Je suis avec les Black Panthers. Comme Richard Wright était déjà avec moi quand je suis sorti de prison pour la dernière fois.”

The culmination of Genet’s evolutionary process is seen in his involvement with the Black Panthers and in his realization that black identity is tied to politics whether or not he chooses to acknowledge it. Just as critics remark the political undertones in *Les Nègres*, in spite of the fact that Genet never claimed to be espousing political truths, so too must we accept that even if he has no political agenda in mind, the evolution from *Notre-Dame des Fleurs* to his Black Panther involvement bears witness to the unveiling of a political consciousness.

**Gabriel Rockhill, Villanova University**

*Temporal Vertigo: Cinema in the Remaking*

Innumerable theoreticians have advanced claims regarding the essence of film, and they have frequently emphasized the extent to which it uniquely captures some reality, if it be psychic life, time, or the real itself. In doing so, they often unduly concentrate on the cinematic product rather than the entire social praxis of film, meaning its complex modes of production, distribution and reception. However, that which is supposedly captured by the cinematic apparatus is constantly being restaged, represented, re-framed in different settings. Moreover, the cinematic apparatus itself, whatever it might be able to capture, only seizes on the ‘real’ insofar as it remakes it, by framing it, staging it, flattening it, stripping away scent, taste and touch, etc. It is in this sense that it is worth exploring the extent to which cinematic practices remake and recast the given, perhaps precisely in such a way that they reveal the extent to which ‘the given’ itself was always already framed and cast.

In order to explore the possibility that the cinema, far from having a privileged essence, functions in various ways as a de-essentializing machine, a *machine à refaire*, this paper will trace the convoluted story of films in the remaking. It will begin with Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958), which is not only a remake of the novel *D’entre les morts*—and, for that matter, of *Hamlet* and *Remembrance of Things Past*—but is the story of a remake in the precise sense that the first half of the film is literally remade in the second half. Just as Madeleine is apparently trapped in the past of Carlotta Valdes at the beginning of the film, Scottie becomes ensnared in the past of his love story with Madeleine. He undertakes, like her, a restaging that eerily repeats Elster’s elaborate mise en scène, which had been meant to dupe him. More than spatial vertigo, the film is thus the story—as Chris Marker has powerfully argued—of temporal vertigo, in which the only possible escape from the trap of the past is through an intricate remaking and restaging. The path to the future reveals itself to be through the past, and more precisely through the cinematic restaging of ‘the given.’

When Chris Marker remakes *Vertigo* in his 1962 film *La jetée*, he takes a spatial location, like Hitchcock, as a site for an exploration of temporal vertigo in which the history of a past image...
and its *remise en scène* opens a path to the future. This theme of restaging is played out once more in Terry Gilliam’s remake of *La jetée*, *12 Monkeys* (1995), which recounts, yet again, the complexities of temporal vertigo and the power of remaking.

This paper proposes to follow these circumambulatory paths between the supposed power of cinema to capture the real and its constant remaking thereof, between spatial inscription and temporal confusion, between past and future, between literature and film. It also traces a very specific geographic itinerary, leading from California (*Vertigo*) to France (*La jetée*) and finally the East Coast (*12 Monkeys*). In this sense, it will not only be a *reprise* of some of the central themes and issues in the work of Phil Watts, but it will also restage, by remaking it in a different context, the trajectory of a life that led him from California to France and finally the East Coast. It will thereby explore the power of remaking and restaging at multiple levels in homage to a maestro of temporal vertigo.

**Steven Ungar, University of Iowa**

*Paris Springtime Zero: Le Joli Mai (1962) & Chris Marker’s Turn toward Militancy*

This paper explores Chris Marker’s 1962 documentary, *Le Joli Mai*, in conjunction with a turn toward explicit engagement with social and political issues that extends to *Le Fond de l’air est rouge* (1978), Marker’s epic account of failed global revolution over the previous decade. The paper retraces an early phase of this turn between 1962 and 1967; that is, from *Le Joli Mai* to Marker’s early work with the SLON filmmaking cooperative on *Loin du Viet-nâm* and *À bientôt, j’espère*.

*Le Joli Mai* marks less of a definitive break with films that Marker completed between 1952 and 1961 in Helsinki, China, Siberia, Israel, and Cuba than an effort to rethink assumptions and implications at work in these so-called travel films. *Dimanche à Pékin* (1956), *Lettre de Sibérie* (1957), and *Cuba Sí* (1961) had matched Marker’s openness toward societies in transition with his curiosity concerning offshoots of Soviet Communism. Yet both films inscribed engagement with politics and ideology within irony and quirks that precluded any kind of consistent position. A practical dimension of Marker’s turn toward militancy involved a decision to work on multiple fronts and in multiple configurations. The decision produced an intense period of filmmaking: not only what and where Marker filmed, but also how and with whom he filmed. Still, as Catherine Lupton notes, the Chris Marker who “donned the collectivist mask of left-wing radical politics in 1967 and largely ceased to sign the films that he produced over the following decade, differs in emphasis, not in kind, from the Markers who preceded and came after him.”

Despite *Loin du Vietnam*’s high visibility of among viewers outside France, SLON members considered a lesser-known project undertaken during the same year to be more in line with practices of cinéma ouvrier (workers’ cinema) as far back as the mid-1930s. Much like Joris Ivens and Henri Storck’s *Misère au Borinage* more than 30 years earlier, *À bientôt, j’espère* was a collaboration among filmmakers in support of striking workers radicalized toward militancy. *À bientôt, j’espère* is notable for what it implied concerning the evolved nature of Marker’s filmmaking as a collective--or even co-operative--activity. It also pitted Marker against Jean-Luc Godard in debate surrounding the nature and practice of militant cinema. The confrontation was predictable because Marker’s involvement with SLON and the Medvedkin Group between 1967
and 1974 more or less coincided with the 1968-1975 Dziga Vertov Group that Godard launched with Jean-Pierre Gorin. In both cases, affiliation with a radical tradition of Soviet filmmaking between the wars served as a model of renewed militancy.

**Christian Wood, University of New Mexico**

*Lévinas and Camus: Love, Literary Practice and Resistance*

Emmanuel Lévinas’s (1906 – 1995) unfinished novels (*Eros; La Dame de Chez Wepler*, written during the 1950s and 1960s), his poetry (written mostly in Russian, during the 1920s), as well as his philosophical notebooks on *eros* have recently come to light with the publication of the third volume of his *Oeuvres Complètes*. In his preface, Jean-Luc Nancy suggests that these works can be read as “evidence” of a “pratique littéraire” that both broadens the range of Lévinas scholarship and serves to reify an essential thread in Lévinas’s corpus: the practice of love and its relationship to the same and the other, to the “said” and the “saying,” to name some of the guiding examples.

Albert Camus’s (1913- 1960) oeuvre shows a similar, albeit generally overlooked thematic preoccupation with the practice of love and its relationship to his ethical suppositions. From his “absurd triptych” (*Caligula; The Myth of Sisyphus; The Stranger*) to his middle period (*Letters to a German Friend;* his engaged war journalism at *Combat*) up to his last decade (*The Rebel; The Last Man*), one can trace an evolving conception of love and its rapport with his ethical and political ambitions as a writer.

In this paper, I trace key instances of Lévinas’s as well as Camus’s articulations of love alongside their particular ethical ambitions during the period 1933 – 1945. How does love, when read alongside *captivity*, inform Lévinas’s oeuvre? And, how does love, when read alongside *solidarity*, inform Camus’s? More generally, how can we, and to what extent should we, use “love” to assimilate as well as to distinctly appreciate two of the most influential occidental thinkers of the past century? Through the concept of love, my paper reevaluates the intellectual legacies of these two thinkers as a function of their ethical and political responses to oppression, captivity and solidarity, and offers further indications of how to read their works in this way in general.