

Difference  
Indifference  
Anti-difference

Not Foreign

What are the mechanisms and procedures that produce foreignness? What patterns of perception display foreign as foreign? Is it enough to oppose the idea that we could understand the foreign, while keeping foreignness as a concept? What if foreign is a trope itself? How can anything or anyone be foreign, when I/we/you/she/he/it/they/us/them are difficult to maintain as dividing categories?

Rejecting the semiotic system that constitutes foreignness in order to shut up singularities in oppressive segregation is to become close to fearless without being detached from the world.

Written in fragments while traveling between 1914 and 1919 Victor Segalen described exoticism as the opportunity to see from the perspective of a different life form. Exoticism is *the aesthetics of Diversity, the notion of Difference*.<sup>1</sup> It is free of any idealization or a reduction of the singularities and exceeds the colonial project, *the Colonial is exotic, but Exoticism goes far beyond the Colonial*. Exoticism is not about *the tropics or coconut trees, the colonies or Negro souls, nor about camels, ships, great waves, scents, spices, or enchanted islands. It cannot be about misunderstandings and native uprisings, nothingness and death, colored tears, oriental thought, and various oddities*. In its escapist manner, leaving geography and history behind, exoticism is the *ability to accept difference*. It is the joy of diversity. Something that might be unknown is still accessible and doesn't need to be excluded. *Everything that so far has been described as foreign, unusual, unexpected, surprising, mysterious, amorous, superhuman, heroic, even as divine, in short, everything that is different*. One following question would be, if it is enough to reduce the colonial project to a mode of self-awareness, when subjectification is also constituted by economical determinations. Nonetheless, Segalen's concept of exoticism obtains an initiatory significance for the process of singularization and the interconnection of different cosmologies. It is a fundamental aspect of the critical practice in a process of becoming other, here and elsewhere.

Victor Segalen

Culture is the one that steals souls. Taken as a given it remains unaffected. What if culture is not "*a community of people that has a*

Clifford Geertz

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism, An Aesthetics of Diversity*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002.

*specific semiotic structure and meaning, and can be read like a text*<sup>2</sup>, but instead a way of separating semiotic activities (orientation in the social and cosmic world) into spheres, to which people are referred. These isolated activities are standardized and capitalized to suit the dominant mode of semiotization – they are cut off from their political realities.<sup>3</sup> Culture is the modern name for a (bad) spirit. Culture is a trick word, a barrier-notion that prevents us from understanding the reality of the processes in question. It operates as an ethnocentric spirit and in some cases a multiplication of ethnocentrism, for example when the constant demand for integration into one culture or one language – be it Sanskrit, Han Chinese or standard German – simply means an exercise of reduction and effacement. *The dialects (the mother tongues!) have been temporally and spatially shifted into the distance: 'the sons [and daughters] are forced not to speak them any longer, because they live in Turin, Milan or Germany. Wherever they are still in use, they have lost their ingenious virtue.*<sup>4</sup> Exposed to the spirit of culture objectified, homogenized and de-singularized people remain behind.

Felix Guattari

Pier Paolo Pasolini

*Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face, which endeavors to integrate nonconforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometimes tolerating them at given places under given conditions, in a given ghetto, sometimes erasing them from the wall, which never abides alterity (it's a Jew, it's an Arab, it's a Negro, it's a lunatic ...). From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be.*

Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari

To be not like us and to stay true to oneself is part of the same thinking: *We are not, or at least I am not, seeking either to become natives (a compromised word in any case) or to mimic them. Only romantics or spies would seem to find point in that.* I know he is talking about me! How can one conceptualize the cosmology of a body without being infected? Without desiring to be contagioned by alterity and difference? How to have human, animal or plant contact and stay unchanged? Identity is an impossible security anyhow, everywhere.

Clifford Geertz

Gilles Deleuze refers to repetition and difference as alternating processes, where difference overrides identity: *We propose to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it the same and the relation of different to different independently of those forms which make them pass through the negative.*<sup>5</sup> Self-identity and interiority should not be situated to any singularity. Temporality is the substance of subjectivity.

Gilles Deleuze

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<sup>2</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, Basic Books, New York, 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, Semiotext(e) Foreign Agent Series, Los Angeles, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Freibeuterschriften*, Wagenbach, Berlin, 2006, my translation.

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Continuum, London — New York, 2004.

## Plant, Animal and Social Becomings

In stratified societies the relationships and boundaries between humans, animals and plants are designed and conceptualized. *Those who now call themselves humans are thinking under the power of what can indeed be called an idea, an idea that causes them to define themselves as humans.*<sup>6</sup> Based on ridiculous concepts of evolution and hierarchical filiations the generalizing categories “plants”, “humans”, “animals” imply that life is determined by a certain biological order, where a nonhuman interest is not considered. But what is human in humans is primarily weak: *This attempt to sequence a genome which is defined as specifically human tends to overlook the fact that the overwhelming majority of genetic code at work in the human body is merely passing through or hiding out with a total lack of regard for the organism, which is hosting it. Only some ten percent of the mass of genetic activity in the human body is specifically human at all.*<sup>7</sup>

Isabelle Stengers

Sadie Plant

The conception of “standard human”, which corresponds with Deleuze and Guattaris description of “racism” (white, male, middle class, husband, father, citizen), has boosted a giant level of systematic violence against countless animals, humans and plants that is beyond compare. *Speciesism, the logic of humanism and rights is everywhere, and the substance of moral action is denunciation, prohibition, and rescue, such that inside instrumental relations, animals can only be victims.*

Donna Haraway

Within the ancient Asian concept of rebirth a loss of biodiversity is impossible, since everything is reborn perpetually. If too much pressure is caused due to too much fishing, hunting and logging beings come back to life as scary ghosts or bestial animals. But the idea of human exceptionalism is also present, since only humans can reach enlightenment. How to develop a non-religious awareness of finitude and mortality of all animals, plants, humans and things? Is it possible to create a responsibility toward plants and animals by eradicating signification and distinction? If we were able to feel and think, to be engaged beyond our own species, we might gain a similar understanding as that of Spinoza’s famous dictum about the body: we don’t know what kind of relation we are able to entertain with our surrounding.

Some singularities have internalized ecology into the social. Leaving out the concept of humanity, all animated beings are placed on an equal footing and treated as persons, while plants are subject to the spiritual.

Plants, humans, animals – whatever singularities – are influenced by and infused with immaterial fluctuations such as migration, mutation

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<sup>6</sup> Isabelle Stengers, *Including nonhumans into political theory: Opening the Pandora Box?*, in *Political Matter*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis — London, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Sadie Plant, *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture*, Doubleday, New York, 1997.

and ghosts. There are animal and plant modes of becoming, plants that become animals and animals that become plants. The aswang splits itself in two parts, transforms into a vampire, into a pig, a dog, a snake, into a manananggal, a tik-tik or a wak-wak. *We believe in the existence of very special types of becoming-animal, that penetrate and carry the human away, and which concerns the animal as well the human.* The orchid becomes the gender of a female wasp to attract a male wasp who then, as pollinator becomes orchid. How can a plant know what the wasp looks like? How can it possibly store all this information? In order to co-exist within a community recognition must be present. Plant perception and *communication involves nucleic acids, oligo-nucleotides, proteins and peptides, minerals, oxidative signals, gases, hydraulic and other mechanical signals, electrical signals, lipids, wall fragments (oligosaccharides), growth regulators, some amino acids, secondary products of many kinds, minerals and simple sugars.*<sup>8</sup>

Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari

Anthony Trewavas

The subsurface truffle produces a scent that attracts pigs to search and eat it. When excreted after digesting the seeds get spread over large distances with fecal matter as fertilizer. African Acacia Tortilis trees that belong to the mimosa family are able to warn each other with a messenger substance as soon as an animal is approaching that might want to eat the leaves. As a result the trees release toxic tannin that renders the foliage inedible, thereby repelling the animal. This in-betweenness of animal and plant, human and animal, plant and human is where everything happens.

### Landscape Face Landscape

Who does the earth think it is? It is a body without organs. There is a struggle of the earth against over-codification and landscapification. The forest retreats, the despotic formation of the city spreads endlessly in all directions and earth stops being earth. How to decolonize the earth? There is certainly something positive within these territorializations, such as chaotic oases, ceaseless fissions and revolts, ranging from sex-worker to mad-cow-meat-mob uprisings: a new potential that is constantly under pressure through regulations and reterritorialisations by churches, army bases, police, paramilitary units and real estate investments.

If the earth were a body without organs, the landscape would be its face. *When does the abstract machine of faciality enter into play? When is it triggered? Take some simple examples: the maternal power operating through the face during nursing; the passionate power operating through the face of the loved one, even in caresses; the political power operating through the face of the leader (streamers, icons, and photographs), even in mass actions; the power of film operating through the face of the star and the close-up; the power of*

Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari

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<sup>8</sup> Anthony Trewavas, *Aspects of Plant Intelligence*, Annals of Botany, Oxford Journal, Volume 92, 2003.

television. *It is not the individuality of the face that counts but the efficacy of the ciphering it makes possible, and in what cases it makes it possible. [...] If we consider primitive societies, we see that there is very little that operates through the face: their semiotic is nonsignifying, nonsubjective, essentially collective, polyvocal, and corporeal, playing on very diverse forms and substances.*

*This polyvocality operates through bodies, their volumes, their internal cavities, their variable exterior connections and coordinates (territorialities). How to decolonize the face? Viveiros de Castro in his introduction to Pierre Clusters claims that primitive societies do not recognize the 'abstract machine of faciality', producers of subjects, of faces that express a subjective interiority.*

Viveiros de Castro

Does filming a landscape produce a face of the earth? Just like culture, the landscape – both the reality as well as the notion – is tied to a very specific semiotic system and very particular apparatuses of power. To decolonize a landscape might be an exploration of the world, in as much as it is an interrogation of style.

In *Too Early, Too Late* from 1981 Jean Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet filmed different landscapes in France and Egypt. The shots in France are accompanied by Huillet's recitation of a text by Friedrich Engels, describing rural poverty before the French revolution. With the images being devoid of people the text strangely politicizes the French landscape. The visual organisation of the colors and lines resemble the semiotic system of early modern landscape painting (similar to that of Camille Corot). The second part of the film is twice as long and depicts rural areas in Egypt. For a while a voice-over cites a contemporary text by Mahmoud Hussein on the anti-colonial struggle of Egyptian peasants against the British rule. The images of the densely populated countryside in Egypt reveal the ethical and aesthetical search of the filmmakers for an appropriate camera angle. Whether intentionally or not, the camera follows the colonial path, and is mostly positioned wayside, along train tracks, rivers or roads, sometimes on the top of a hill or a truck to allow for a wider view. During a shot outside a factory leaving workers timidly exchange a few glances with the filmmakers/the camera. In a suburban area the virtue of the children tilts over and the national security guards help to restrain their excitement in the distance, so that the filmmakers can complete their pan shot. But most of the time the camera is mysteriously rendered invisible.

The historically informed filmmakers know more than the peasants; the title suggests that their revolt is always *too early* and succeeds *too late*. Historical writing does have effects; it erases differences within the past and forces a continuity of time. There are social formations, which do not assign to a theory of causation and evolution, and which refuse to let (written) history act upon their bodies, while instead favor forgetting as their point of departure: *Forgetting is as active as remembering. The Lisu, by refusing to pin themselves down to any account of their past – except for their tradition of autonomy – have no position to modify.*

Hjorleifur Jonsson

*Their room for maneuver is virtually limitless. But Lisu historylessness is profoundly radical in a second sense. It all but denies 'Lisuness' as a category of identity – except perhaps for outsiders. By denying their history – not carrying the shared history and genealogy that define group identity – the Lisu negate virtually any unit of cultural identity beyond the individual household.* Forgetting allows for discontinuity as a different perception of time and production that prevents the past to be conquered from the hands to the minds. Nonetheless, the use of the film material, the movement and the time economy of *Too Early, Too Late* create the impression that through the journey and the connection with another knowledge, something is opened, allowing for a new physical experience in the world, an intensity that goes beyond identifying the context. In Egypt it seems as if Straub/Huillet have difficulties to stop filming. At that point the film dissolves into autonomous aesthetic traits, into a horizontal cosmology, where the landscape is set free rather than being psychologized or objectified by abstraction; and where social relations aren't moralized any longer. Is this where "peasant-cinema" comes into being?

Looking for hinterland. Hills and mountains – giants – can be spaces of both refuge and resistance. The "maroon societies" of Cuba, Jamaica, Brazil and Surinam, as well the Zomians of Southeast Asia, went to the hills to escape forced labor and slavery, or simply the stratification of organized religion, civilization and culture. *There is a nomadism in the hills.*

James C. Scott citing  
Jean Michaud

It's true, I can't see the face/landscape any longer, the theatrical illusion, the panorama. I see something I am made of, something I am moving through.

### Fairy Tales No Myths

Why take an interest in oral history, when I can not even finish a sentence properly, tell a simple joke or recount a story with a natural flow? When every commentary in a film is regarded as feeding into Western indexical knowledge production that gives control over subjects, which are not us. When just the concept of "story" has a taste of decay because of its imbedded anthropocentric dilemma that cuts us off from all kinds of expressions. Flourishing from a shaman tradition, it is said that Korean pansori came from unemployed men, married to busy shamans. The term pansori consists of *pan*, which stands for public space and *sori*, which means sound. Performed only by a singer and a drummer, it is regarded as a collective, oral entity without single authorship. The performance alternates between chanting and narrating parts. It is believed that in the beginning pansori was performed during rituals of chasing away evil as well as in street entertainment. If we compare the modern order of things where everything is perceived as separate and distinct with the oral tradition of story telling, we realize that the pansori narrator switches between different characters in a pre-modern manner. The I and you are merged into one single entity that

overrules human, animal, gender and age specifiers. Pansori travels beyond the content/form distinction and reaches in extra-linguistic, aesthetical or biological domains, while spreading between an ensemble of heterogeneous, expressive materials. But these expressive, linguistic and non-linguistic substances are installed in the discursive chains of the song. In doing so both the singer and the drummer fuse and establish new virtualities, similar to object/subject fusions known from higher cognitive processes such as trance and hypnosis.

Following two pansori stories we came across other narratives, anonymous tales, which stand outside the control of today's pansori mastership tradition. Anonymous tales can breed without anxiety. Leaving identity behind to escape the master's control. No single person, no distinct version or certain school – anonymous tales that have no real master. They circulate without origin, and no storyteller should care to know where they come from or who invented them.

*It is raining now, but when the weather is clear you can see two offshore islands of identical shape. The local people call them Brother Islands. There is a cave between the Brother Islands and it is said that a Imugi, a giant serpent used to live inside that cave. The story goes that when the people in our village went fishing between the islands the Imugi came out of its cave and happily helped the boats to return home safely. One day warplanes from the US Army airfield in Gunsan started dropping bombs on one of the Brother Islands. That island was turned into a bombing practice area with bombardments taking place once or twice a month. Subsequently the middle part of the island was cut out almost completely and the bare red soil was exposed. It is said that the Imugi got killed in the bombing raids during those days. The dead Imugi was pushed into Yeompo, our neighboring village. So the people from both our village and Yeompo felt sorry for it. This story happened 40 years ago. Originally the Imugi was destined to become a dragon and rise to the sky after one thousand years had passed. Once it takes to the air a dragon is said to be able to obtain a magic stone bead called Yeouiju. Then it can trigger rain or wind and perform miracles, since it can do whatever it desires. This is why Imugis take so long to turn into dragons. But the Imugi that had lived in the cave between the Brother Islands died before it could change into a dragon.*

Contrary to myths, tales follow an external movement with unexpected twists and turns, prophecies and visions. The visionary man who told us about his experience of the *Licking Tigers* told another tale predicting the future: *If a nonaggressive agreement with Kim Jung-il can be made within the next 30, 50 or 100 years the scientists of our country are going to figure out a new world, which they will envision during the practices of meditation. Three rockets will be made that will penetrate the earth, ground and rocks – and then open into a new world, which is yet difficult to understand.*

Undoing Surplus

Some singularities follow an economy that doesn't allow the production of reserves. *The domestic mode of production conceals an anti-surplus principle: adapted to the production of subsistence goods, it tends to immobilize when it reaches this point.* Their time devoted to economic activities is measured; the ideal is to produce just enough to satisfy all needs. Labor is not divided by knowledge, but by sex and age. Neither work force, nor resources are exploited; and while there are trade relations, markets do not exist. In exceptional cases kinship can be compromised when individual needs stand opposed to obligations towards distant relatives. *Structurally economy does not exist.* In other words, a society that refuses economy or in fact, *a society against economy.*

Marshall Sahlins

Pierre Clastres

Felix Guattari imagined a new mental economy, which is not motivated by surplus but rather relates to the intimate, to micro relations between singularities and their expressions, be they of *social, animal, vegetable, or cosmic nature.* *The Three Ecologies* describes a conception of a new mode of life within existing relationships, such as the family, the work and the urban: an economy that relates to the ecological, the mental and the aesthetical/social world. A strategy for singularities on a micro level, an on-going aesthetico-existential process that includes the necessity to create local centers for collective subjectivities in order to become heterogeneous and to re-singularize existences.

Felix Guattari

This aesthetico-existential process is an experiment. It reminds us that we are equipped with the power of re-arranging and transforming rules according to our own imagination. It is part of a greater ensemble of re-subjectivization processes.

### Film (Chaos)

While we do not know what film chaos really is, we can dream and invent it as an aesthetic figure. How can we allow a zone of indistinctness and contradictions, a zone of dependence to operate on our bodies without feeling entirely lost? Is it important to be fully carried away, or is it enough to permit small portions of film chaos to take effect? Similar to a sip of water that can have the same impact on the body as a high-dose drug. But why should chaos be more productive than order in the first place? Conceptual boundaries, coherent themes and topics, continuity, and a narrative all help to ward off film chaos. Film chaos is viscosity that is too long, or too short for time. Film chaos causes us to constantly lose our train of thoughts. But where to stop, if the dramatic unit of traditional film time is no longer applicable and the potential meaning rests within the jumpy course of fragmentation, as much as in the individual scenes? In what arbitrary moment should a filmic experience be interrupted, according to which criteria should any sequence be shortened or later cut out during the editing, if the entire intensity of an experience is based on an absence of dramaturgy?



Topicality, a montage structure, or the limitation to a certain space ought to save us from film chaos. *A film about what? – A film about Senegal. – But what in Senegal?*

Trinh T. Minh-ha

Film chaos doesn't offer topics; it is a constant diffusing and rediffusing, a dipping into the existing chaos. There will always be references, compositions and forms that enable one to look and to listen. All that matters is to take away opinions: *The struggle with chaos is only the instrument of a more profound struggle against opinion, for the misfortune of people comes from opinion. Science turns against opinion, which lends to it a religious taste for unity or unification.* Film chaos is an agitation against the disciplining of film, a deliberate cruelty of the film material against both the filmmaker and the viewer, and at the same time a proposition of the possible.

Gille Deleuze, Felix Guattari

Within film chaos the material uses the filmmaker, as much as the filmmaker uses the material. It functions like a *plant [that] contemplates by contracting the elements from which it originates – light, carbon, and the salts – and it fills itself with colors and odors that in each case qualify its variety, its composition: it is sensation in itself.* Film chaos is a negotiation of the sensation of the self with the help of various materials and their ghosts – light, darkness, colors, sounds, shadows, silver halide crystals, silicon, zeroes and ones from different points in time. What was found is placed outside its proper field of practice and mingled within a corequisite multiplicity. *Chaos is beautiful if you look at all of its components as equally necessary.* Like in a polyvocal space where languages are used without identification and utterances are detached from the body. Fragments, sequences, blocs, no series. Segments and movements, which dissolve again. Oral sequences, rhythmic sequences without subordination or unification, for intensity to enter. Intensity as an active exteriority. An introjection of exteriority, many kinds of exteriorities.

Édouard Glissant

Film chaos operates in a space where one obsession infringes on another and exceeds it, thereby dipping into even more chaotic moments. A space where the imaginary is not sheer ornament or subordinated otherwise, but a real source. In the end, nothing falls into place of a higher unity. The grammatical order that aims at a final solution can not take hold.

And then the Sea

The absolute movement. Everything is clear now, but it is not the clarity of the microscope, more the clarity of a microperception, of the water and the air we breathe in. Everything seems fluent with holes and scratches, amorphous clouds, oceanic chaos, reflections and streams of lines. I think now I have understood everything, and I even have a mission – to become molecular, to be where everything starts to speak with everything else, so that an ever expanding pervasiveness is growing, where we have stories without authors and differential

coalitions, where no interiority remains and we intimately involve in things, plants and animals.

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