Cinema and Agamben

Ethics, Biopolitics and the Moving Image

Edited by Henrik Gustafsson and Asbjørn Grønstad
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Propositions for a Gestural Cinema:
On “Ciné-Trances” and Jean Rouch’s Ritual Documentaries

João Mário Grilo

To be able to leap from one point to another is my essential dream. To be able to go everywhere, to ramble about like you ramble in a dream, to go someplace else. The mobile camera, the walking, flying camera—that’s everybody’s dream! Simply because making a film, for me, means writing it with your eyes, with your ears, with your body.

Jean Rouch, in an interview by Enrico Fulchignoni, August 1980

The English translation of Giorgio Agamben’s “Notes on Gesture,” published in 2000, is one of the major events in recent film theory since, at least, the extremely influential Gilles Deleuze’s Cinema books.1 Although, at first, its repercussions were discreet, it is easy to notice how the performative aspect of film has progressively gained a notorious protagonism in film thought, theory and critique. This circumstance is particularly evident when compared to a theoretical tradition more attentive to aesthetics—through the formal aspects of image, movement, sound and montage—or to semiotics and psychoanalysis—through the analysis of the textual, narrative, symbolic, and discursive dimensions of film.

It should be acknowledged, however, that part of this transformation was already present in the new theoretical framework created by the interweaving of film and philosophy, with the re-appraisal of certain philosophical concepts when applied to film identity, bringing forth a complexity that was put aside before. In this light (not to mention in detail the work of philosophers that recently brought fresh new perspectives on film, such as Stanley Cavell, Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, or Alain Badiou), contributions of philosophers such as Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Levinas or Merleau-Ponty have also been reassessed, especially through the persistent work of film scholars such as
In this context, however, Agamben's contribution possesses a particular and political dimension through the way he connects the performance in film with the performatve essence of the cinematic medium itself. Being attentive to gesture caption, but adapting it to the point of being able to determine its nature, “design” and potentiality, film has become a gestural means without end aiming to establish new forms of a prosthetic harmony between humanity, context and experience. In this sense Agamben believes cinema and gesture approach the relationship philosophy establishes with language “Cinema's essential ‘silence’ (which has nothing to do with the presence or absence of a soundtrack) is, just as the silence of philosophy, exposure of the being-in-language of human beings: pure gesturality.”

Expanding the scope of Deleuze's author based cinema-images-concepts (the foremost interest of the “Agamben effect” in film theory) relies, in this consideration of cinema's pure mediality, the quest for what one could call a “bare cinema”—that is, an iconoclastic vision of cinema, as deprived of films and authors—which has nothing to do with any ontological re-definition of it. Referring to the proximity, at this point, between Agamben's questioning of cinema and Walter Benjamin's position on media, Christian McCrea states: “As in that earlier critic, the state of meaning-making itself is constantly under enquiry, from which each medium can be made to speak either directly or indirectly to the conditions under which signs and power find themselves.”

One must therefore highlight this very important and innovative point in Agamben's position towards cinema: the changing perception of film (i.e. of “movies” as “products” of cinema) towards a general and much more open questioning of the essence and historicity of the media itself and of its social, political and conceptual determinations and repercussions. That is, an interrogation about the basic, or bare, difference of cinema in the constitution of the modern biopolitical world as well as in the constitution of modernity itself as its paradigmatic “closure” and prosthetic reification. Moreover, this rejoins Agamben's position in regards to art in general. As presumed by Claire Colebrook:

Agamben's conceptualization of the work of art – and art is always a work or outcome of the bringing into being of a positivity and not just a copying or representation of a prior content – is not a theory of aesthetics. On the contrary,
it is the modern notion of aesthetic theory or art criticism, and its delimitation
of the work of art from other social, political, ethical and productive domains,
that Agamben's work seeks to displace.⁶

In the context of modernity, the essential value of cinema must then be formulated not in terms of its aesthetical interest or implications, but in terms of its “practical reason”, of its ultimate raison d'être. Following Agamben's premises, one would say that, in the frame of the social experience of modernity, cinema is validated by its “orthopedic” and biopolitical effect. Departing from the known short paragraph of “Notes on Gesture,” in which he states that “in the cinema, a society that has lost its gestures tries at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss,”⁷ Agamben describes in detail the genealogy of this gestural condition of cinema, from La Tourette's studies of gait, to Marey's experiments on chronophotography or even, in a larger context, Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne and the will to establish in the plates of its Atlas “a representation in virtual movement of Western humanity’s gestures from classical Greece to fascism.”⁸ In a particularly dramatic and clear paragraph, Agamben writes:

_Thus Spoke Zarathustra_ is the ballet of a humankind that has lost its gestures. And when the age realized this, it then began (but it was too late!) the precipitous attempt to recover the lost gestures in extremis. The dance of Isadora Duncan and Sergei Diaghilev, the novel of Proust, the great _Jugendstil_ poetry from Pascoli to Rilke, and, finally and most exemplarily, the silent movie trace the magic circle in which humanity tried for the last time to evoke what was slipping though its fingers forever.⁹

Once more, one must understand that what is at stake here is the profound entanglement between what the cinematic media portrays and represents and the proper nature of the media itself, the search for an identity between the gestures in cinema and the gesture of cinema as parts of the same episteme, of the same rationality. We are dealing here with a modernist coherence which concerns not only the visuality of a paradigm but also its core functioning and presuppositions (ethical and political), even if inside this paradigm, cinema has developed a specific position and, as a consequence, an effect of its own.

But in reality from where comes what we now call “cinema”? In particular, if one accepts, following Agamben, that cinema is a “potentiality,” that is, a _mediality_ relatively independent of the precise media(s)—among others, film, television, visual or performative arts—through which it is actualized? In
artistic terms, a somewhat troubling answer to this question can be recalled from a known passage of the Chapter 3a of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (“La monnaie de l’absolu”), in which Jean-Luc Godard places Manet as the true inventor of the cinématographe. Not the inventor of the technical apparatus, of course, but of the images it will produce and of its visual, impressionistic “reversion”:

All Manet’s women seem to say: “I know what you are thinking,” surely because before this painter – and I understood it from Malraux – the inner world was more subtle than the cosmos. The celebrated and waning smiles of Da Vinci and Vermeer say “I,” I and the world after me. And even Corot’s woman with her pink scarf doesn’t think what thinks Olympia, what thinks Berthe Morisot, what thinks the barmaid of the Folies-Bergère, because finally the inner world has rejoined the cosmos and with Edouard Manet the modern painting begins, i.e., the cinématographe.10

The cue deserves an exploration and a deviation, because, of course, Godard’s injunction has nothing to do with a presumed aesthetical proximity between painting and film. In fact, Manet appears, to Godard, as much the “painter of modern life” as the cinématographe the technical-material realization of modern medially.11

**Excursus—Manet (Mme Guillemet attending cinema)**

In a paper titled “Unbinding Vision,”12 Jonathan Crary wrote a magnificent analysis of one of Manet’s latest painting, *Dans la serre* (*In the Conservatory*), of 1879. In the context of our exploration of modern “gesturality,” and its significance in Agamben’s thoughts on cinema, Crary’s analysis and Manet’s painting appear both as a powerful illustration of the bourgeoisie’s “state of affairs” at the end of the nineteenth century. Through his analysis of *Dans la serre*, and following the painting’s strategy, Crary clarifies the protocols of perception and attention configured in modernity and the way those protocols helped shape the ways of life and consumer patterns characteristic of this same modernity.

In his analysis Crary shows how, painting that scene the way he chose to paint it, Manet gave form to the tensions presented in modern life and visuality and to the way modernist plasticity was able to capture in the bodies and in their anachronistic gestures, the signs of a new (paradoxical) pattern of
attention, inattention and affection, dispositions, and actions. Thus, in Crary’s perspective, Manet’s painting emerges as a powerful statement about modernity’s cultural and life forms, through its expression in a complex, but very precise, arrangement of bodies, gestures and gazes in the enclosed and suffocating atmosphere of a Parisian conservatory.

Crary, by emphasizing the way Manet’s painting seems to signal a retreat in the painter’s characteristic formlessness and supreme indifference towards its subjects, demonstrates instead how the tableau gives substance to that particular modern visual threshold. On one side, one feels a strong effort to sustain the stability of perception and, through it, as Crary sustains, “the viability of a functional real world;” on the other, one perceives—from within the painting’s chain of details—the disturbance of this apparent harmonious stability in favor of an ever changing visual field, whose immediate expression is, precisely, not visual, but gestural and even choreographic.

The painting seems to present itself as a simple narrative and visual equation (also because it never disrupts its first sight impression): the Guillemet couple, who were close friends of the painter, are here in retreat from everyday life, and
they rest suspended in the enclosed space of a conservatory. But a close survey of some significant details helps us to diagnose how the painting is a powerful statement on the signs of the decisive dialectical movement between binding and dissociation. The signals are underlined by Crary: “Manet’s painting is about a more generalized experience of dissociation even while he maintains a superficially unified surface, even while he asserts the efficacy of a “reality function”.

The pattern of attention in the general economy of the painting is, in that sense, decisive. The man and the woman seem attentive, but their attention is not, as one could expect, on one another. Mme Guillemet, in “her inert waxwork quality,” overdressed and fixed by a complicated dress, which is a real fashion apparatus (she was, in fact, proprietary of a fashion boutique), seems medused, hypnotized, somnambulant. Her body, as Crary states, “is a body with eyes open but ones that do not see—that is, do not arrest, do not fix, do not appropriate the world around them.” The man, kept physically apart from his spouse by the green bench (and one cannot but reinforce the segregative significance of that sign, as a sign of “a perceptual order”), seems also out of what could be a love scene, his gaze being projected in divergent directions, the eyes focused in two disparate optical axes, neither of which, envisaging directly the woman’s face.

Therefore, Crary’s conclusion is clear and full of epistemological consequences: “within a work depicting two apparently attentive figures, Manet discloses an attentiveness that has actually been folded into two different states of distraction within which the stability and unity of the painting begin to corrode.” Finally, it is this statement about modernity visual (and historical and bodily) dialectics that is unveiled by the gestures that occupy the center of the painting: the paradoxical choreography of the hands, the wedding ring, and the cigar. This choreography seems to play outside the couple’s own bodies, binding and unbinding that catastrophic gestural situation.

If one accepts that this painting is, in its dissociative manner, a perfect representation of the bourgeoisie’s dispossession of gestures in everyday life and the urgent need to recapture this performance through another dispositif, then one can easily see at what point this analysis rejoins Godard’s idea of Manet’s painting as a precursor of cinema, of the coming logic of the cinématographe, of its essential, catastrophic, mobility, where, Agamben states, “the mythical rigidity of the image has been broken, and we should not really speak of images here, but of gestures.”

In conclusion: cinema is needed, and expected, but that need is not aesthetical or simply visual. It appears as a gesture to solve the catastrophic incapacity of a
society to control its frantic and disparate gestures or, to say it in different words, as an opportunity to resolve that schizophrenic dissociation between brain and muscle, body and history, consciousness and experience. The power of cinema and later the power of cinematic montage manifests itself in a promise to free the image from the paradoxical and unbearable state of Manet’s conservatory and develop it into gesture. In this movement, while exposing the potential of the image and the dynamic element that resides frozen in its interior, cinema looks to release it through a never ending movement, later expanded by the performative capacities of montage.

It is that perfect mediality—a condition of being-in-language, as a potentiality, a “purposiveness without purpose” which finds—in Dziga Vertov’s Man With a Movie Camera (1929) a conclusive celebration: the significance of cinema as a way to restore and to give a modernist “coherence” to the frantic proliferation of gestures in modern society. A celebration of dynamism and the way it accords itself with cinema intrinsic and ontological mobility.
Cinema possessed

Jean Rouch was dispossessed of his tripod, lost in 1947, during the shooting of the first of his ethnographic documentaries. He recalled this event several times as being one powerful and decisive constituent of his position towards film technology and, in particular, the movie camera: “During the first film I made in 1947, I had the good luck of losing my tripod after two weeks. It was a film on the descent of the Niger River. After I made the film I thought that there wasn’t anything that couldn’t be filmed without a tripod.” From that loss on, and the need to reinvent a strategy to continue shooting without the sustainability of a tripod, Rouch’s cinema was always concerned about the intimacy between cinema and gesture, i.e. the physical and mental experience of the mediality condition of cinema and the way it can give a cinematic form to a movement which, in reality, it doesn’t possess. Rouch has even designated this movement as “ciné-trance,” an experience in complete antagonism with the observational viewing practices manifest in the use of zoom lenses:

For me then, the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it, trying to make it as alive as the people it is filming. [...] Thus instead of using the zoom, the cameraman-director can really get into the subject. Leading or following a dancer, priest, or craftsman, he is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear. It is this strange state of transformation that takes place in the filmmaker that I have called, analogously to possession phenomena, “ciné-trance.”

As one sees, the concept of “ciné-trance” engages and is engaged by a ritual practice of cinema as well as by a cinema practice of ritual. For Rouch, cinema posits itself as a borderline vehicle between different worlds, also offering itself as an opportunity to pass between them. However, for this passage to occur a path is needed, which in Rouch’s filmic strategy takes the form of the ritual, and in particular the form of a performative kind of ritual.

For the late religious studies scholar, Catherine Bell, ritual simultaneously embraces three different levels: a first level, which one can assume as “physical”, concerns the eventful nature of the rite, that is, the manner in which each ritual posits itself as “a set of activities, that […] effects changes in people’s perceptions and interpretations”; a second level, which Bell retrieves from Gregory Bateson’s concept of “framing”, is essentially interpretive, concerning the way
ritual serves to frame acts or messages to make them understandable and repeatable by the community; finally, a third level concerns the performative dimension of the ritual, as the event of the performance itself and the way it is able to generate a flux of transformations, like the ones involving the transition from childhood to manhood or from life to death.\textsuperscript{26} It is at this performative level, that rituals have the power to operate a transformation in the flux of life, producing and bestowing a different state of things, even if momentarily.

From our perspective it is this last level of ritual that interests Rouch in the first place, because through the medial nature of ritual and the construction of its pure mediality it can rejoin the mediality of cinema in a common media whole. The camera—and through the camera the gestures of the cameraman-director—is then an alternative media to build the performative efficacy of the ritual, not already only in the scope of the group or the tribe who practices it but eventually enlarged to the spectators of the film:

I now believe that for the people who are filmed, the “self” of the filmmaker changes in front of their eyes during the shooting. He no longer speaks, except to yell out incomprehensible orders “Roll!”, “Cut!”). He now looks at them only through the intermediary of a strange appendage and hears them only through the intermediary of a shotgun microphone. But paradoxically it is due to this equipment and this new behavior (which has nothing to do with the observable behavior of the same person when he is not filming) that the filmmaker can throw himself into a ritual, integrate himself with it, and follow it step-by-step. […] For the Songhay-Zarma, who are now quite accustomed to film, my “self” is altered in front of their eyes in the same way as in the “self” of the possession dancers: it is the “film-trance” (ciné-transe) of the one filming the “real trance” of the other.\textsuperscript{27}

Rouch filmed around 40 films concerning spirit possession rituals among the Songhay, Zarma and Dogon tribes in western central Africa, on the margins of the Niger River. In the context of these rituals, possession signifies that somebody, i.e., some of the bodies present in the ritual event, will be possessed by the gods (génies), which means that some of those (humans) will be converted into horses for the gods serving so that the gods might appear and reveal their wishes, orders or impositions to the group who invoked their presence.\textsuperscript{28} The revelation of the spirit involves the trance of whoever is going to be his/her “horse”. The production of this trance is an extremely delicate moment determined by the whole of the event and the flux of energies that it is able to generate. It is because
of that fragile ecology, and of its complete involvement and agency, that “the observer’s presence can never be neutral.” As Rouch observes, “[w]hether he wishes it or not, the observer is integral to the general movement of things, and his most minute reactions are interpreted within the context of the particular system of thought that surrounds him.”

In several ways, one is able to see how much this trance collectively acts as a perfect negative of modern crisis concerning the bourgeoisie’s dispossession of gestures. The collective energy created through the ritual and its protocols envisages the production of an event, which not only possesses a global sense of its own, but a sense that is commonly understood by everybody who is involved in it. This includes the cameraman-director, Rouch himself, who then can state properly, invoking his own gods: “With a ciné-eye and a ciné-ear, I am a ciné-Rouch in a state of ciné-trance in the process of ciné-filming. So that is the joy of filming, the ciné-pleasure. In order for this to work, the little god Dionysus must be there. We must have luck; we must have what I call ‘grace’.”

Perhaps no other film presented more clearly this equation of reciprocities—this “ballet”, a term used by Rouch several times—than the small masterpiece titled *Tourou et bitti: Les Tambours d’Avant* (*Tourou and Bitti: The Drums of the Past*), which Rouch filmed in the late evening of March 15, 1971, in one single shot. Rouch described, in the following terms, the experience of this absolutely peculiar film:

On March 15, 1971, the Sorko fisherman Daouda asked me to come film at Simiri, in the Zarmaganda of Niger. The occasion was a possession dance to ask the black spirits of the bush to protect the forthcoming crop from the locusts. Despite the efforts of the zima priest Sido, Daouda’s father, and despite the use of two special old drums, *Tourou* and *Bitti*, no one became possessed for three days. On the fourth day I again went to Simiri with Daouda and my soundman, Moussa Amidou. After several hours passed without possession taking place, I decided to shoot anyway. Night was about to fall, and I thought I would take the opportunity to shoot some footage of this beautiful music, which is in danger of disappearing. I began to film the exterior of the compound of the zima priests, then, without turning off and on, passed through the pen of the sacrificial goats and then out into the dance area where an old man, Sambou Albeybu, was dancing without much conviction. Without stopping I walked up to the musicians and filmed them in detail. Suddenly the drums stopped. I was about ready to turn off when the godye lute started up again, playing solo. The lute player had “seen a spirit.” Immediately Sambou entered into the state
and became possessed by the spirit *kure* (the Hausa butcher, the hyena). I kept filming. Then old Tusinye Wazi entered the dance area; she was immediately possessed by the spirit *Hadyo*. Still without stopping, I filmed the consultation of spirits by the priests – a sacrifice was requested. At this point I began to walk backward, framing a general establishing view of the compound, now flushed with the coming of sunset. The filming was thus one continuous shot, the length of the camera load. 

Rouch’s description is interesting not only because it offers a first person explanation of the film, but also because it underlines the importance of *continuity* in the production of the event that relates the Songhay ritual to its cinematographic depiction by Rouch and Moussa Amidou, his soundman. This continuity, this powerful and uninterrupted movement—which in its proper materiality should be understood as a “ballet” gesture—is conceived to give form to a “whole,” in which the life of an African tribe appears indissolubly attached to the mediality of film and the work of a French filmmaker invited to portray it on film and even, following Rouch’s own terms, to engaged in it by (the means of) film. 

As stated by Stoller: “*Les Tambours d’Avant* not only portrays a Songhay possession

Figure 6.3 Jean Rouch, *Tourou et bitti: Les Tambours d’Avant*, 1971.
ceremony but is the story of a filmmaker who crosses an ethnographic boundary in Simiri, Niger, and enters the nether world of the Minotaur, the world of cine-
trance.” Outlying the common ethnographic image of the other, Tourou et bitti: Les Tambours d'Avant is a film about the possibility of encountering the “Other” in a sort of a unique community “made by cinema.” That community is, of course, not what the film presents or portrays, but what the film (each film) is able to engage in the specific form of the encounter rendered possible by the action of cinema with all its specific differences, from the use of technology to the physical behavior of the camera and cameraman.

Surely, the most decisive and revelatory moment in Les Tambours d'Avant happens when the music stops and Rouch decides to continue shooting in continuity, because, as he suggests in the text (and in his own voice-over during the film), something different than the playing of the drums is going to happen. If until then one could say that the gesture of cinema was guided by the presence and the sound of the drums and by the rhythm of its music, at that particular moment—almost a moment of suspension—the cameraman-director is guided by the perception of an immanent whole, even if, for now, the film has not
actualized it in terms of its effective images. It is a magical moment, a moment of trance which enables Rouch to organize his movements—his “ballet”—as if in a complete articulation with a superior force, as if he was one of the horses the gods choose to descend upon for the ritual.

We have lost, you and I, that taste for the thrill, that possibility of escaping ourselves, of living, with our body, the adventure of another, of being the horse of a god.” The paradox is that, maybe because I made films, I have never been possessed. For those who saw them, and I mean the priests and the people I showed them to in Africa, my possession was what I call a ciné-trance, and it was from making all those movements that are absolutely abnormal, from following someone in the middle of a trance arena, from pointing my lens at someone who was about to be possessed, indeed, at that very moment when a possession might take over.35

In-conclusion: Prospects for a gestural cinema (from a filmmaker’s point of view)

Being in the process of directing a film project that will deal with ritual and possession myself,36 Agamben’s and Rouch’s ideas about film movement and the significance of gesture resonate in my head as powerful indicators for opening up new paths for film composition and conceptualization. I ask myself: How important can those ideas be for a filmmaker? How can they improve or clarify the relationship between a creator and his film? How can they refresh a cinematic frame of reference based on visual effectiveness and saturated with formulas for narrative clairvoyance?

It is clear that Agamben saw very well the dependence of cinema on bourgeoisie interests and its inscription in the frame of a global biopolitical regime. It is clear also that, through a different path, Rouch saw almost the same thing, which explains many of his radical shifts (ethnographical but also cinematographic). He was not, however, the only one: Stroheim, Rossellini, Renoir, Godard and the Soviets (Eisenstein and Vertov), among (not so many) others, tried to escape the “aesthetical versus entertainment” bourgeois trap in which the potential of film has been encapsulated for many decades now. As a filmmaker, I feel that it is this path that has found in Agamben’s thought new names and new perspectives of development, and also new ways to approach the very singular work of “displaced” cinéastes like Jean Rouch or Guy Debord.
A (new) word in film vocabulary—gesture—comes, then, to the film scene (which I hope will not be only a scholarly one): gesture, with all its potential correlates and consequences. As a filmmaker, I am interested, then, in the following questions: Can we gesture a film instead of visualizing it? If so, what does that mean, to gesture a film? To both questions, the answer, I think, must be eminently political and in that respect both Agamben and Rouch understood very well the full implications of this state of things. Both of them make use of a common term: possession. For one, cinema served the bourgeois project to re-possess their lost gestures and recompose a prosthetic and “screenable” sense of experience and history; for the other, prophetically dispossessed of his tripod, cinema appears, exactly, as a mean to disrupt the bourgeois sense of gesture, making the mobile gesture of cinema “possessable” by others. It is as if one made, in retrospect, the theory for the praxis of the other. For the moment, one can say that the prospects are illuminating, because they open the path for a cinema more radically conscious of its own politics and more able to seek the freedom of its trance and of its own loss and dispossession. Even if probably deceived, Mme Guillemet would be, surely, astonished!

Notes


4 Deborah Levitt has recently elaborated a pertinent critical explanation of this Deleuze-Agamben relationship towards cinema position in philosophy and history: “Agamben submits Deleuze's vitalist cinematic image to a critical genealogy of life as the joint production of modern biopolitics and new media technologies. [...] And if Deleuze has alerted us to the circulation of the pre-individual singularities, the affects and percepts that create bodies of all kinds (including, of course, political ones), in “Notes on Gesture”—as well as in related essays on the work of Guy Debord—Agamben points to how these are linked to imbricated developments in the history of technology, medicine, industry and political economy.” Deborah Levitt, “Notes on Media and Biopolitics: “Notes on Gesture””, Work of Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life, Justin Clemens, Nicholas Heron and Alex Murray (eds) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 193–4.


7 Giorgio Agamben, “Notes on Gesture”, 59.

8 “Of the figures Agamben cites, Marey is perhaps the most persuasively emblematic. As a number of scholars have noted, social modernity and cultural modernity meet in the figure of Marey, in whose work physiological investigations of human movement, utopian dreams of a pristine and waste-free social hygiene and the impulse to find new imaging technologies converge” (Deborah Levitt, “Notes on Media and Biopolitics: “Notes on Gesture””, 197). For a brilliant and detailed exploration of this context and its implications on cinema, see Pasi Väliaho's Mapping the Moving Image: Gesture, Thought and Cinema circa 1900 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010) and the classical and remarkable studies of Marey by François Dagognet: Étienne-Jules Marey: La passion de la trace (Paris: Hazan, 1987) and Laurent Mannoni: Étienne-Jules Marey: la mémoire de l'œil (Paris/Milano: French Cinematheque/Mazzotta, 1999).


11 In an appropriate and humorous comment, Thierry de Duve wrote: “Godard is the Manet of film, unless Manet is the Godard of painting.” Thierry de Duve, LOOK: 100 Years of Contemporary Art (Ludion: Brussels, 2000), 227.


Crary states: “I see the painting as a figuration of an essential conflict within the perceptual logic of modernity in which two powerful tendencies are at work. One is a binding together of vision, an obsessive holding together of perception to maintain the viability of a functional real world, while the other, barely contained or sealed over, is a logic of psychic and economic exchange, of equivalence and substitution, of flux and dissolution that threatens to overwhelm the apparently stable positions and terms that Manet seems to have effortlessly arranged.” Jonathan Crary, “Unbinding Vision”, 30.

Manet painted Mme Guillemet other times, namely as a model for one of his “Parisiennes”. The conservatory sited at 70, Rue d’Amsterdam, in Paris, was the property of the painter Otto Rosen and Manet used it as a studio, between 1878 and 1879.


Ibid.

Ibid., 36–7.

Giorgio Agamben, “Notes on Gesture”, 55.

Ibid., 59.

And one knows at what point other responses were given to the political dimension of gesture, this time through their confinement, political arrangement and rationalization, as it happened, symbolically, with fascist parades, from military to gymnastics. At this point, one should mention the extremely significant influence of Foucault’s theory of power and biopower on Agamben’s thought. For an interesting and comprehensive analysis of this subject, see Anke Snoek, “Agamben’s Foucault: An overview”, *Foucault Studies* 10 (2010), 44–67.


Very conscious of the strenuous effort implied by this experience, Rouch stated: “I still have the taste of this effort in my mouth, and of the risk taken so as not to stumble, not to screw up my focus and lens setting, to be drifting as slowly as possible and then to suddenly fly with my camera as alive as a bird. Without that, everything had to start over, which is to say everything was lost forever. And when, exhausted by this tension and this effort, Moussa Amidou put down his microphone and I my camera, we felt as though the attentive crowd, the musicians and even those fragile gods who had haunted their trembling dancers
in the interval, all understood the meaning of our research and applauded its success. And this is probably why I can only explain this type of mise-en-scène with the mysterious term ‘ciné-trance’.” (Jean Rouch and Enrico Fulchignoni, “Cine-Anthropology”, 186).


28 For a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the possession rituals among the Songhay, see Paul Stoller’s Fusion of the Worlds: An Ethnography of Possession Among the Songhay of Nigeria (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Known as one of the most important ethnographers in Central Africa and one of Rouch’s closest friends and a research teammate, Paul Stoller signed a referential book about the filmmaker’s work: The Cinematic Griot: The Ethnography of Jean Rouch, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

29 Jean Rouch, “On the Vicissitudes of the Self: The Possessed Dancer, the Magician, the Sorcerer, the Filmmaker and the Ethnographer”, 97.

30 Jean Rouch and Enrico Fulchignoni, “Cine-Anthropology”, 150. In the course of her analysis of one of the most known Rouch’s ritual films: Les Maîtres fous (The Crazy Masters), Elizabeth Cowie remarked on this (ever) permeating nature of ritual and its global dynamics: “The ritual presents an intermixing of elements that remain distinct in a drama of their very juxtaposition, a conjoined image of embodied self and spirit, of power and weakness, where both the abject and taboo are celebrated and valorized. The boundary of self and other is permeated as meaning and identity slip between, for the adept is and is not the spirit, partaking in the spirit’s power and disowning it as much as he or she is disowned by it.” (Elizabeth Cowie, Recording Reality, Desiring the Real (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 149).

31 In reality, the film is made in two shots, as the long take that constitutes the film depiction of the ritual is preceded by a much smaller introductive shot in which Rouch’s voice-over explains the conditions for the shooting.

“Looking back at this film now, I think that the shooting itself was what unlatched and sped up the possession process. And I would not be surprised if upon showing the film to the priests of Simiri, I learned that it was my own ciné-trance that played the role of catalyst that night.” Jean Rouch, ibid.


This film, *Dun Atlantic*, now in pre-production, is supposed to be shot in early 2014, and it will be a documentary about African-Brasilian religion, namely *Candomblé*, and its dissemination in South-Atlantic geographical and cultural space.