

Broj 2 / Književnost i kultura / R. Petković, K. Vuković - Postmodern Philosophy and the Impact of the Other in Jim Jarmusch's Films

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Although film history has mostly been understood in national terms,¹ there have also been attempts to present a general history of film styles. The history of film styles can be roughly divided into four distinct phases,² each drawing on different aspects of narration. In the beginning, cinema privileged documentation and spectacle, presenting the exhibitionistic aspect of the new medium,³ whose structural characteristics had yet to be explored. Noël Burch labeled this pre-narrative style a Primitive Mode of Representation, and this mode defied the narrative aspect of film-making. The shift towards narration occurred in the period between 1907 and 1909, when narrative films became the dominant mode of storytelling. The transition towards narrative cinema was mainly prompted by the demands of the market, which resulted in the gradual predominance of fictional narratives. The new style became known as the classical realist cinema, and Classical Hollywood Cinema⁴ became the leading representative.

The Hollywood narrative premise is character-centred and grounded in causal and motivational⁵ aspects of storytelling. Reflecting the audience identification with the main character, it is centred on delineating the active hero, whose goal is to overcome obstacles during the course of the film. Hollywood cinema emphasizes action and presents a clear underlying paradigm, whereby problems can be solved and any goal can be achieved, reflecting pragmatic American philosophy. While Classical Hollywood Cinema presents a unified and mostly linear storytelling centering on the narrative and character psychology, the modernist cinema explores more complex and ambiguous ways of presenting the world, emphasizing indeterminacy, contradictions, fragmentation and fragility. It questions the presentation of the human being as a meaningful unity, discouraging viewer identification and breaking the spell of the idealized worldview inherent in the Hollywood dream factory.

Modernism and postmodernism are not mutually exclusive styles and many of their characteristics intersect, although they can be differentiated on a general level. While modernism mostly rejects tradition and emphasizes the subjective and individual character of the viewing experience, postmodernism reevaluates tradition and openly plays with its rich heritage, often in the form of pastiche. The rise of postmodernism began in the eighties, which roughly corresponds with the seminal work of the postmodern fiction - *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* by Jean-François Lyotard, written in 1979.

Tracing the various epistemologies of postmodernism, Seyla Benhabib (106-111) has identified three directions of critique of the classical representational episteme. The first tradition overthrows the Cartesian spectator conception of the subject and instead posits an active humanity, which creates its own conditions of objectivity, as can be seen in the works of Kant, Hegel, Marx and Freud. The second tradition, represented by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Adorno, views the modern episteme through the prism of domination, while the third tradition, associated with de Saussure, Peirce, Frege and Wittgenstein, starts with an analysis of language. The analysis shifts from the private to the public sphere, and meaning can only be found by analyzing the multiple contexts of use in various language games. Benhabib concludes that the third tradition has prevailed and that the resulting paradigm of language has replaced the paradigm of consciousness.

The theoretical work of Lyotard can clearly be associated with this language dominated tradition. Analyzing the possibilities of representation, Lyotard recognizes the incommensurable aspect of language games and formulates the context-specific criteria, emphasizing the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative. The (post)modern era is an era of crisis and pervasive doubt and universal theories are no longer applicable. Lyotard calls the universal doctrines "grand narratives", and questions their ability to explain everything, which can be seen in the works of Hegel or Marx. Grand narratives repress individual creativity and exercise monopoly in their claim for universal truth.

Lyotard's groundbreaking paradigm can very easily be applied to the distinction among various film styles. While the Classical Hollywood Cinema presents a dominant mode of film storytelling and asks us to form hypotheses that are highly probable (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 38) and have universal appeal, modern American independent film, with Jarmusch as one of its leading representatives, presents us with stories that disrupt the

clear unified and causal structure of Hollywood films, thus resembling the pattern of Lyotard's "little narratives". While Hollywood films fall into specific genres and strictly adhere to its conventions, the leading representatives of the modern American independent cinema (Jarmusch, Hal Hartley, Quentin Tarantino, the Coen brothers, David Lynch) break up the generic structures, overthrowing the need for closure, one of the main characteristics of classical Hollywood.⁶ The temporal structure is distorted, as can be seen in *Mystery Train* or *Pulp Fiction*, while the focus of the films is not on the active, goal-oriented protagonist, but on the people from the fringes of society, outsiders who oppose the accepted social norms.⁷ This tendency recalls the work of Michel Foucault, who is also particularly interested in marginalized groups and those who are excluded from positions of power.

The underlying tendency of Hollywood films is to present the world as ultimately presentable and knowable, but a more thorough analysis reveals their realism as only partly rooted and clearly distorting external reality. Mark Cousins labels the Hollywood style closed romantic realism, emphasizing the fact that actors seem to live in a parallel universe (494). Emotions are heightened, main characters idealized and able to overcome any obstacle. Although presenting a parallel universe, Hollywood tries to create an illusion that the events shown on the screen correspond to the world around us, thus creating a falsified reality.

The representation of reality has been one of the main theoretical concerns of postmodern philosophers. Fredric Jameson believes that there is a crisis of representation in the modern world and that the mass media substitute images for reality. Signs no longer refer to the outside world, which is only presented through unreal images. Richard Rorty also criticizes the belief that there can be an accurate representation of reality, recommending irony, one of the most pervasive aspects of postmodernism, as the most appropriate attitude.

Foucault's and Baudrillard's analyses are even more detailed, providing the useful concepts of hyperrealism and simulation. Illustrating his concept of the third-order image, Foucault claims that "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal" (qtd. in *Sim* 279). Baudrillard's term for hyperreality is simulation and the world of simulacra presented to us doesn't refer to reality, but only to its simulation, representing nothing more than simulacra themselves. In similar fashion, Hollywood films depict a simulated reality which only partially refers to the outside world, presenting us the illusory world of the simulacra. Falsely supporting the foundationalist beliefs, Hollywood has created a body of films that disrupt our perception of reality.

The concept of time has similarly been disrupted. Hollywood has always concentrated on *kairos*, the significant time, while completely abandoning the presentation of *chronos*, the ordinary time. The difference between these two concepts summarizes the inherent difference between Hollywood and the modern American independent film. While Hollywood has concentrated on action and dramatic aspects of storytelling, modern American independent films have explored the moments in-between, the events devoid of dramatic tension, which explains why Jarmusch chose not to present the most dramatic element in *Down by Law*, when the three cellmates escaped from prison. Emphasizing the de-dramatized elements recalls the tradition of American avant-garde film, namely the films of Andy Warhol and Stan Brakhage. Reflecting the non-representational nature of modern art, these films have excluded the *kairos* and completely concentrated on ordinary events.



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Jim Jarmusch's films have questioned the various concepts of postmodernism and defied the accepted techniques of the dominant Hollywood paradigm. Ever since his first feature *Permanent Vacation*, Jarmusch's films have focused on outsiders and Beckettian antiheroes who wander the desolate and bleak wasteland of modern America. His second feature *Stranger than Paradise*, gloriously shot by Tom DiCillo in black and white cinematography, is divided into three parts and separated by fade-outs, whose function is to destroy the illusory nature of the Hollywood invisible style. The post-industrial landscapes of modern America are similar to those in Tarr's *Satantango*, providing an anticipatory cultural link.⁸ The main protagonists come from Europe, which plays a vital role in many Jarmusch's films, signifying the impact of the Other. His next film *Down by Law* again plays with Hollywood conventions by investigating deep focus cinematography and concentrating again on another European immigrant - the Italian Roberto.⁹ *Dead Man* and *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, his two films from the nineties, explore the Heideggerian concept of being-toward-death, the most profound mode of being which designates the absolute impossibility of Dasein (existence).

Constantly disintegrating the elements of the Hollywood paradigm, Jarmusch's films can best be explained in terms of postmodern and psychoanalytic theories. His films have constantly explored the impact of the Other, presenting modern America as devoid of referentiality, a land of *stasis* and hyperreal images. This inherent imbalance can only be rectified by the influence of the Other, mostly through European immigrants or members

of a disprivileged group (*Dead Man, Ghost Dog*).

Stranger than Paradise - The repressed Other

In this movie the Other is first represented by Willie's Hungarian cousin Eva. Her arrival at Willie's home deconstructs his American routine. She reveals that junk food is junk, baseball is stupid, the house needs to be cleaned (thus it is dirty), the dress he bought is ugly. Willie is embarrassed by his Hungarian origins and refuses to speak in Hungarian. Their wanderings across the United States, from Cleveland to Florida reveal always the same landscape: "You come to some place new and everything looks just the same". The true space is not of the landscape, but of the mind, which recalls the postwar tradition of film noir. Eva tries to escape to Europe, but Willie ends up there instead which signifies the inability to escape oneself. Whatever one does, wherever one goes, it is coming back to oneself. To quote Horace: "They change their climate, not their soul, who sail across the sea" (Hor. *Epist.* I.XI.27).

An example of the mutability of our desires can be detected in the turn that reveals Europe as Hungary and Willie for who he really is, Bella from Hungary. Namely, Willie was already tipsy when boarding the plane and we are not informed that he was forced to go. The ending even allows that he wanted it, that this was his repressed desire. This open ending liable to interpretation is an emblem of postmodernism. Namely, throughout the movie, Willie refuses to accept his other side, his Hungarian identity. He doesn't want to hear about it, let alone speak Hungarian. From a psychoanalytical point of view, Eddie and Eva, but especially Willie are informed by Lacan's big Other. It is as if there is some agency, a symbolic order that watches over him and makes him cling to his new American identity. In Žižek's words, although no one really believes in ideology, still we try to keep up its appearances (*Sublime Object* 198). However, just as this crude, cold reality of betting, watching TV, etc. is intermittently broken by the emotions of loneliness, wanting to go somewhere, Eddie's desire for Eva, so is the emotion of the other self a permanent unconscious undercurrent to the American world.

Therefore, the true Other of the movie is not that of Eva. In fact, she refuses to come home in the end which represents the culmination of her becoming American. The true Other is Hungarian identity itself. It is as if Jarmusch were speaking about himself, saying that his underlying identity is Hungarian which means that of a stranger in an American world. It is interesting how both Eva and Willie leave the Hungarian aunt behind (who plays the role of the Hungarian superego), the same one who beat them at cards, although they are swindlers. This symbolic victory (several times "I am the winner!") can be interpreted as the victory of the unconscious itself, the Other part of their repressed psyche. The lack in the characters can be interpreted as not only lack in Eddie's castration (Evans 98), but also metaphorically, as if to say that below the surface of that "American" habitual identity there lies a critical lack that has to be filled with something as simple and definite as the Other in the form of "Hungarian": old nationalism, old aunt, old childhood memories. However, to be Hungarian is here no comfort at all. It is mysterious, not defined, but seems no better than being "American," and is reduced to merely some repressed trauma which one avoids but is caught by all the same. In other words, the characters are defined by their lacks, none being better than the other. They are represented as incomplete, torn by contingent desires, thus fitting into the Lacanian notion of the fragmented self.

Thus, the problem of the (true) identity of the characters (as well as their "national" attributes) eludes analysis. Who are they really? This is the postmodern desubstantiation (the concept taken from Gilles Lipovetsky) of the subject which, according to Gianni Vattimo, leads back to Nietzsche's *dawning* and Heidegger's *Ereignis* whereby in postmodernism the old Aristotelian ontology of the permanent "being" of the subject is no longer valid as the being is no longer permanent but susceptible to time and the oscillating structure of a permanently new and unpredictable event (*Ereignis*). However, Vattimo's solution in weak ontology that gives a chance of finding a new being in technology and the media, often susceptible to critiques, is proven wrong in this example. The media are not a new opportunity for the subject, but on the contrary, Willie and Eva's watching television is a symbol of their alienation and desubstantiation of their being (Krivak *Filozofjsko tematiziranje* 67-77).

The other characteristic of this movie in particular is its lack of color, the famous American landscapes being reduced to meaningless black and white scenery. It is as if Jarmusch is not only expressing postmodern alienation, but shattering the illusion of Hollywood's rich scenery and the allure of unreal images - simulacra, the most vital concept in Baudrillard's philosophy. However, the bleak picture Jarmusch gives has much more depth than most of the shallow Hollywood film industry does. In the words of Aristotle: "If one were to smear a canvass with the most beautiful colors, it would not be nearly as joyful as a black and white picture" (*Poet.* 1450b).

Down by Law - In quest of the Other

"Life is sad and beautiful" is a seeming paradox that can be traced throughout this movie and marks the whole of Jarmusch's opus. Both of the characters (Jack, Zack- what's the difference?) are victims of a setup that brings them to jail. A setup reveals the true nature of things. One finds a teenage girl, the other a corpse. Their problem is thus a future (determined by a traumatic past) for which they have no long term plan. Their actions are simply

to "go on" in a kind of aimless, meaningless pursuit of happiness, regardless of the consequence. This is echoed in Beckett's words: "Where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" ("The Unnamable" 414).

A prison, according to Foucault, is a heterotopia, a space of otherness (*Of Other Spaces*). The issues we refuse to accept in common reality, we face in prison, a place that reflects and distorts this reality.¹⁰ Jack is another of Jarmusch's puns, just like Nobody in *Dead Man*. The meaning here can be interpreted as "nothing." The prison, as a space of otherness, brings about an essential change into American lives in the guise of Roberto, an Italian character.

Although he is trying to be more American than he can, with his words, phrases and hypercorrections ("I ham"), his spirit reveals itself as that of an innocent, naïve child striving for happiness. (From a Nietzschean perspective, he would be a Dionysian character.) The paradox (sad-beautiful) is again revealed in his pun I scream-ice-cream. He brings change into the monotony of the prison, he draws a window on the wall, engages his cellmates into conversation and playing cards. He brings about a (metaphorical) escape. While he lives in the simple present, thinking about the essential needs: food, drink, warmth, shelter, love. Jack and Zack mostly live in present simple thinking about what they usually do, clinging to their job, their ego, their habits. As opposed to Roberto, they are constantly burdened and encumbered by their past which defines their vision of the future (thus "going around in circles"). This is a postmodern vision of time as not only circular, but anti-linear (*Sim* 114) as can also be observed in Jarmusch's *Mystery Train* and *Night on Earth*. Everything is mixed, the past and the future and the present, there are no clear cut boundaries, one lives in a world of fluid illusion.

Roberto's vision is the vision of Thoreau, as depicted in *Walden*, a filled human life that finds happiness in the simplest of things. Thus, Roberto is the only one finding happiness while Jack and Zack's aimless wandering continues. Here, again we see an essential trait of postmodernism. According to Anthony Giddens, modernism has been strongly defined with the rational (scientific) resulting in a pervasive doubt (this skepticism evolved into one of the essential traits of postmodernism, Sardar 10) about all things around us. Giddens claims that the solution can only be found in creating relationships of trust ("pure relationships") which win over the postmodern skepticism (2-9). Such attempts to take up faith, trust, dialogue, performance or sincerity are also enumerated as the basic traits of post-postmodernism (Krivak "Wim Wenders"). Roberto is successful in this aspect, making "a leap of faith" in trust, while Jack and Zack are not, not even shaking hands when parting into the unknown. The narrative that remains open, a trait of many postmodern works, begs the question of what will happen to Roberto. Jack and Zack are lost as it is, but will he and Nicoletta be able to live in the American world without being assimilated?

Roberto's words "Wish you were here" are essentially optative of the whole of postmodernism. They express the Zen imperative to be truly here and now, to live this moment to the fullest, which is opposed to the capitalistic yearning for a fluid narcissistic present. This narcissistic present tends towards some undefined future (American dream) and is at the same time trapped in the traumatic past. In contrast, the liberating Zen imperative is expressed in *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*:

There is surely nothing other than the single purpose of the moment. A man's whole life is a succession of moment after moment. If one fully understands the present moment, there is nothing left to do, and nothing else to pursue.

Roberto as the Other of the movie, is stereotyped, but not a stereotypical Other. He falls into the category of what Žižek calls "the Other deprived of its Otherness" in postmodern postideology (*How to* 38). He is the Other without the usual sign of otherness, namely evil, a place of the projection of our own repressed corruption (the only mark is his confession of killing a person in self-defense). This has been the standard trait of the Other in the Western world for centuries (cf. St. Augustine's maxim: "malum est privatio boni"). Here, on the contrary, the Other is the privation of evil. Roberto is trying to fit into the standard American system, but without its evil. He quotes Whitman and Frost, the ideal of American literature, has no capitalistic traits, and is at a loss when faced with danger, lies or treachery. The most interesting element could also serve as a kind of moral of the tale. The American standard needs the Other to be able to find itself.

Dead Man - Heideggerian Exploration of the Being

Dead Man, as an anti-western, casts a new light on the American Wild West. We see characters that are ruthless, aggressive and destructive, not interested in anything but killing, hunting, money, sex, yet on the other hand weak and vulnerable to women, wearing dresses and sleeping with teddy bears. If a psychoanalytic perspective is to be taken, one should interpret their general behavior as false activity. False activity (Žižek *How to* 26) is a neurotic obsession to do something all the time: the busy men in *Machine* (the name itself implies a sort of capitalistic neurotic activity), the bounty hunter who talks all the time, the trappers with their discussions, the continual cowboy riding and killing. Such neurotic cover-ups always imply something hidden deep beneath the

surface layer so that, in order to interpret the true nature of characters, in the words of Hagakure (from *Ghost Dog*): "Matters of small concern should be treated seriously". This is one of the basic traits of Jarmusch's modus operandi similar to that of the director Stan Brakhage, expressed vividly in his statement: "to stop the overwhelming influence of drama in film, I began to concentrate on the glories of an undramatic present, which is literally the tabletop" (Ganguly 17).

Thus, the trivialities that seem to be mere humorous elements, such as Dickinson's speaking to a bear, carry a great weight of meaning, and imply a fundamental lack in a character, as if he lives his narcissistic domineering role with an unconscious need to fill the lack of such a life with something as simple and childish as speaking to a bear. The bear itself (as a mythologem) is a symbol of power and this implies the emperor's inability to truly be great and powerful as he aspires to. His name itself (Dick-in-son) implies this phallic impotence. As if his true power were to reside with his son (whom he cares little about) and who is unable to acquire the favor of one woman.

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Femininity here stands as a symbol of emotion, desire, the unconscious (truth) that the crude reality of cowboys has rejected and that remains in traces, ultimately carrying their doom. Thel Russell, the prettiest girl in town, has immediately given her favor to the Other, a stranger in town, but refuses to submit to the "powerful" Dickinson. His obsession to catch and bring back a beautiful pinto (horse) is again this same expression of his weakness, of the unrestrained (and unconscious) need to return and redeem the lost animality, his lost sense and emotion. Similarly, a bounty hunter Conway Twill sleeps with a teddy bear muttering words such as "sweetheart" and "mommy" in his sleep. His ceaseless blabber

(false activity) hides a trauma in his character, the repressed unconscious hidden under the layer of a bounty hunter. A trapper cooking, wearing a dress and reading from "The Good Book" is symbolic of the same aforementioned feminine element. Such objects can, in Lacan's terminology, be recognized as *l'objet petit a*, a remainder of the real that persists in resisting symbolization, some small insignificant detail that reveals the subject for who he really is (Žižek *How to 67*).¹¹

The Other in the story is first that of William Blake and then of his Indian friend Nobody. The very name Nobody is acquired by being rejected as the Other in both Western and his own native culture. The name which his tribe then gave him (He Who Talks Too Much Says Nothing) again sums up the false capitalistic activity of the Western culture. The obsession with work, habits, empty blabber, aggression, etc. is nothing but hiding the lost, traumatized child that lies within. Here, as the Italian in *Down by Law*, the Indian is the purveyor of the true nature of things, calling Blake a "dead man" and enabling him to know himself. He says that all the white man's cities are the same. The Indian speaks a language of symbols, a mythological language of images (of animals and poetry) thus recovering for us the universal Other of all cultures, the universal hidden unconscious in both its animal (id) and sublime (poetry, superego) aspect.

William Blake, through condensation (being equated with the poet he knows nothing about) becomes a carrier of universality. However, it should be noted, at the same time the Blake element (just like the name Nobody) sums up the legitimate postmodernism of the film: "Some are born to sweet delight, some are born to endless night", taken from W. Blake's "Auguries of Innocence", where the poet enumerates many seemingly trivial signs that reveal a deeper meaning. Thus, Jarmusch probably imagined the lacks in American characters to function as "auguries of innocence." It is said that these paradoxes used by Blake are an anticipation of postmodern relativity: "Do what you will this life's a fiction, / and is made up of contradiction" (Blake 154). This way, the ending that reminds us of Shakespearian bloody tragedy (the trail leading back to Seneca's plays) where everyone dies can be interpreted as postmodern defeatism and relativity, invoked at the very beginning with "Why is it that the landscape is moving, but the boat is still?" (easily explained only by Einstein's theory of relativity). On the other hand, however, there is a sort of religious salvation ritual that enables at the least a "modern" alternative to postmodernism, if not even a hope of another life. As in *Down by Law*, there is again the post-postmodern element of salvation from postmodern skepticism and chaos, lying in Giddens' faith, trust and dialogue: Blake's trust and his dialogue with Thel and Nobody.

The Other in the movie, represented chiefly by the Native American "Nobody" is thus literally reduced to nothing and nobody in the eyes of the dominant West. In the scene with the priest at the trading post, it becomes clear that this Other carries a deep evil dimension in their conception, a place of projection of the West's illicit desires. Namely, the Other is characterized as hellish, abominable and, by both the priest and the trappers, attributed the title of "Philistines". By being the enemy of the Biblical Jews, "Philistine" acquired the meaning of smug, ignorant, barbarous (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The name was preserved in the modern people of Palestinians. Thus, in a condensation of otherness, here Native Americans and Palestinians are united as victims of Western politics and

ideology. Edward Said's critique of Western perception of the Other, repeated in Sardar, applies well to this injustice: "postmodernism emerges as a worldview conjured from the pathological necessity of the west to define reality and truth as *its* reality and truth" (Sardar 15).

Tobacco is an important motif in this film. The fact that it is always being sought as gold is a symbol of the necessity to be a slave of habit, like betting, watching television and playing cards in *Stranger than Paradise*. We can connect this with Beckett's famous metaphor that "habit is a great deadener". The fact that tobacco is sought and never found stands for the elusiveness of neurotic anxiety.¹² This neurotic compulsivity is again a trait of Western (capitalistic) consumer society in general. There is always more demand than supply as the appetite for consumption increases every day and the thirst is never quenched. And what better way to show this than using tobacco, a plant native to American soil? When Blake finds tobacco in the end, he is told it is for his journey. Thus, humans as creatures of habit can never be fully rid of it. Blake does not smoke, but carries with him someone else's habit, a symbol how even in death, one is not rid of the pervasive presence of society and its ideology. Thus, tobacco and a "dead man" reveal the true, striking Beckettian message of this film:

VLADIMIR: ...Probably. But in all that what truth will there be...Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is a great deadener. (He looks again at Estragon.) At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (Pause.) I can't go on! (Pause.) What have I said? (Beckett "Waiting for Godot" 90/91).

Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai - In Search of Ancient Myths

It is a good viewpoint to see the world as a dream. When you have something like a nightmare, you will wake up and tell yourself that it was only a dream. It is said that the world we live in is not a bit different from this.

By quoting from the Hagakure *Ghost Dog* opens up the viewpoint from which to see this movie, as well as a possible "key" to its interpretation. There are many signs of postmodernism such as statements "Everything seems to be changing around us" and "Nothing makes any sense any more" to give us a perplexing web of meanings, all lost in postmodern relativity. Again, there is no clear cut boundary of meaning. In numerous examples we see how it changes, defers (Derrida) while passing through a plethora of identities. Mafia members watching cartoons, listening to rap, making childish animal imitations, not paying rent, etc.

The white mafia perceives black, Japanese and Indian as all alike ("Y eah, Indians, niggers-same thing") as when they almost kill an Indian thinking him black. Jarmusch uses a picturesque construction to express this blend: "you red nigger-looking Sitting Bullshit Motherfucker". Just as the concept of evil Other can be interpreted as projection in psychoanalysis, so this blend of multiple Others into a single entity can be seen as condensation as noted in *Dead Man*. The postmodern trait of multiplicity (plurality) is thus present, but used, according to Sardar, only to be subjected to the dominant view: "Thus postmodernism takes the civilising mission of the west to render the Other in its own image, into new arenas of oppression and subjugation" (Sardar 15). As Tzvetan Todorov points out in his work, this perception is not only racist and ethnocentric, but egotistic as well; namely, they speak of others not to characterize others, but only to characterize themselves (287-289).

The comparison of the world with a dream not only allows, but begs a psychoanalytic interpretation. The cartoons watched by the mafia are thus expressions of the unconscious, they are all by their nature oneiric. By itself, a cartoon implies childhood, the period of the development of the unconscious. The cartoon with the birds and a character waving a flag invokes the same action with pigeons and Ghost Dog waving the flag. Felix the cat and his bag of tricks that frustrate the old evil cartoon scientist are Ghost Dog and his suitcase that kill all the old men of the mafia. The cartoon with the exchange of the ghost scaring a chicken, and in turn the chicken scaring him starts the twist of the plotline when Ghost (Dog) moves in to kill the chicken (mafia). The ingenious ambiguity allows another interpretation with Ghost Dog being the Other (perceived by the mafia as chicken) which then turns into a threatening object for the scary ghost of the mafia. The cartoon where a character shoots his victim through a water pipe invokes the same way Ghost Dog used to kill the mobster. Itchy and Scratchy using guns that get bigger and bigger until the world explodes and one gets sent into the sun reflects Louie killing Ghost Dog.

The function of shamans in primitive culture was to communicate with animals and be mediators between this and the transcendental world. While his spirituality makes Ghost Dog (the name is a blend of spirituality and animality) a shaman, he is also depicted as silently communicating with animals more than with people. Like the shaman of primitive society, he goes through a traumatic experience that enables him to transcend into the spiritual world, he befriends animals (a pigeon on his shoulder, a bear, a dog) that become his emblem and considers



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them "equal with men" (the same mythology is professed by the alien community in *Avatar*). The shaman's ultimate quest is to continually face death, usually achieved through trance or ecstasy (Armstrong 25-30) which we see in Ghost Dog's stoic acceptance of death and in the following quotation from Hagakure:

The Way of the Samurai is found in death. Meditation on inevitable death should be performed daily. Every day, when one's body and mind are at peace, one should meditate upon being ripped apart by arrows, rifles...And every day, without fail, one should consider himself as dead. This is the substance of the Way of the Samurai.

Like in *Dead Man*, the main element of the film comes down to death which the mythologies of the world confess as their primary origin. This was also the belief of Heidegger who claimed it was the most profound mode of being. The shamanistic function, along with him being able to understand his Haitian friend without a common human language, proves that the true communication is not that of a symbolic order. His answer that this is sometimes an ancient culture again evokes his general mythic attitude to postmodernism. He assumes a code of behavior, a (primitive) religion and a master that saves him from the postmodern skepticism.

At the end, the book returns to its owner which signifies that it can be given again, and a new story can begin from there. However, this is a double-edged sword as the very intertextuality (flooding the movie with book quotations), although giving a modern (religious) message by itself, is basically a trait of postmodernism. A new story can begin, but no one is to say that this narrative is any better than the previous, or that it will provide more meaning as "grand narratives" (Lyotard) seem to do. The ending is not finite, but open, as one book is given to the girl, the other can also be passed on ("then later on you can tell me what you think") and spiritual life¹³ can continue enabling another escape from postmodern skepticism. However, the book *Rashomon* itself is a story by Akutagawa Ryunosuke which is also used by Akira Kurosawa in his *Rashomon*. The difference of perspectives that produces no objective truth can be applied here as well. The postmodern world in which Ghost Dog lives is completely indifferent to his worldview so that the narrative is relative and postmodernism wins the day.

Multilayered and extremely diverse, Jarmusch's films can be interpreted from a variety of standpoints. While the dominant Hollywood film industry has almost invariably shown the same aspects of American culture, idealized and adapted for universal audience, Jarmusch's films show that only through the eyes of the Other can this picture be complete. The view of the outsiders, immigrants and multiethnic minorities is essential to understanding the true nature of the American spirit. It functions as a chance for change and hope in places where humanity has lost its meaning. Mapping an almost uncharted territory, these films explore and attempt to fill the critical lack inherent in American civilization.

¹ For representative examples of the national framework of film histories cf. Sklar 1975 and Belton 1994.

² Filmska Enciklopedija 2: 211-212. Although the postmodern film style has been subsumed within the scope of modernism and its existence can be debated, reflecting the ongoing discussions in academic circles, it still deserves a distinct position within the history of film styles.

³ The film historian Tom Gunning labels the early cinema's tendencies toward spectacle a "cinema of attractions" (cf. Gunning 1998).

⁴ The most complete description of the style can be found in Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 1985.

⁵ Influenced by Russian formalism, David Bordwell mentions four types of motivation: compositional, realistic, intertextual and artistic, and emphasizes the dominance of compositional motivation, which enables the structural causality of the story (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson 19).

⁶ Typical examples are *Limbo* (1999) by John Sayles, and *No Country for Old Men* (2007) by the Coen brothers, which refuse to provide closure and satisfy the viewers' narrative expectations.

⁷ Emanuel Levy's influential book on the modern American independent film is called "Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Film", thus clearly identifying the antiheroic aspects as the focus of films.

⁸ Béla Tarr is a Hungarian, as well as Willy and Eva, the main protagonists of *Stranger than Paradise*.

⁹ Jarmusch has often been fascinated with Europe, and the three stories of the omnibus film *Night on Earth* are set in European countries - Italy, France and Finland. His latest film *Limits of Control* is set in Spain.

¹⁰ The cell remains literally the same, the only change is that of Zack's markings on the wall. This is quite reminiscent of Beckett's tree in "Waiting for Godot" which is (along with night) the only sign of time passing in the

Dog (the name is a blend of spirituality and animality) a shaman, he is also depicted as silently communicating with animals more than with people...

wasteland. Another wasteland is the forest, deprived of its fertility and wilderness, merely an endless row of identical trees where Zack's conclusion in the boat speaks best about the problem of time: "We've been going around in circles, Jack."

¹¹ In film terminology these ever-elusive narrative elements (such as the pinto in this film) are called McGuffins. In psychoanalysis, they are interpreted as *l'objet petit a*. For greater detail see Vrbančić 2010.

¹² Like the taxi driver in *Night on Earth* who constantly smokes cigarettes, but never half-finishes any one of them). One smokes a cigarette, but just like any other addiction or obsession, it never completely satisfies, it only calls for more consumption.

¹³ A similar concept was explored in *Barton Fink*, the prize-winning film by the Coen brothers.

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