

Beyond Words: The Acoustics of Movement, Memory, and Loss in Three Video Works by Martina Attille, Mona Hatoum, and Tracey Moffatt, ca. 1989

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Around 1988–89, a cluster of art works on film and video appeared that, in retrospect, offer themselves for analysis under the rubric ‘migratory settings.’ In its own singular fashion, each work addresses the double movement of actual relocation as the result of migration, forced or chosen, and the selection of a time-based aesthetic medium. The works all restage moments of reflection, critical, affective, and interrogative, on the significance for the enunciating subject of both migration and its setting into audio-visual form. The works in question were made by three women from diverse cultural spaces and histories: Aboriginal-Australian; exiled Palestinian living in Britain; and African-Caribbean living in Britain.

Furthermore, in the three films I consider here, the artists attend specifically to relations between mothers and daughters that open up themes of connectivity and separation, identification and distanciation, in time and space. The freighted bonds between women of two generations in these works are inflected by dispossession and mourning, as well as by the aesthetic processes of their *re-setting* in a time-based audio-visual medium, the moving image. The familial-subjective and the historical-political are interlaced as a mirror, in which to see their intimacy and their transformative interaction. Film and video work to represent and restage aspects of migratory subjectivities. Here, the notion of migration may involve movement through time on one hand but, on the other, also the violence of cultural rupture and spatial disorientation, to which aesthetic activity bears witness.

In these works, poetic as well as striking in their visuality, sound functions as the decisive dimension of the exploration of migratory subjectivities and their settings. Beyond migration as experience or history, ‘migratory,’ adjectivally suggests that

experience can travel, and that difference can be registered as the movements of modes of living that resonate in varied spaces. My contribution explores the specifically acoustic dimension of the geographical dislocation and psychological separation of the migratory, and plots the role of sound in the challenge that is posed in audio-visual art by the subjectivities that are reshaped by migration, with their deep sense of loss and estrangement, to existing modes of narration, imagination, and memorialization. Three art works created by Tracey Moffatt (b.1960), Mona Hatoum (b. 1952) and Martina Attille (b. 1959) make possible, I argue, what can be called a ‘holding together’ of postcolonial feminist visualities and auralities, with questions of migratory aesthetics in a complex set of sense-based strategies. Time-based practices of montaged and sequential film or video work, these films simultaneously create a resonant acoustic atmosphere that sustains these movements precisely through the weaving of the audio and visual in ways that go beyond words.

Why did this seeming coincidental cluster of works of shared projects emerge at this date? Why do they share such a specific exploration of the acoustic as the means to aesthetically examine the migratory in relation to the maternal, as well as vice-versa? Why was it necessary to stage various aspects of historical traumas through an exploration of the daughter’s relation to the mother? Does the focus on sound in this domain concern language as the site of lost translations? Or does sound unconsciously suggest a deeper relation to primary child-mother relations that move beneath the formal and symbolic structures of language? Have these women, each of them dealing with a migratory or postcolonial trauma, found in their feminist rewriting of film and video a medium that enables the political to be experienced and transformed by means of the aesthetic—the latter marking the intersection of subjectivities and affectivities that are subjacent to language without ever escaping or even aiming to resist its necessity? It is the tension between the finely structured artworks and what that structuring allows to occur that I wish to explore by attending closely to the acoustic dimension of these three films.

The absence of linguistic communication is the hallmark of Tracey Moffatt’s *Nightcries* (1989). In Mona Hatoum’s *Measures of Distance* (1988), the competing sound of spoken Arabic, the sight of its script, and the careful tones of a spoken English translation of that writing all work with the epistolary as a genre between speech, writing, and the body. Martina Attille’s *Dreaming Rivers* (1988) uses Creole song that is sung by disembodied voices, so that vocalized music marks not only the ruptured geographical spaces of African-Caribbean migrant subjectivity, but also the historical relation of generations of women to these alterior places. Translation, or its failure, at the level of articulated language therefore seems a factor in all three works, while sounds, voices, songs, and silence function as a transport for a deeper pathos with which each film is charged in different ways.

Some Theoretical Wandering/Wondering

Sound has been much less theorized and analyzed in cultural theory than the visual image, the gaze, and its related spectatorships. This has perhaps been overdetermined by the relative lack of attention to sound or the voice in psychoanalysis itself, a powerful resource in cultural theory. The significance of sound for both subjectivity and the aesthetic at the intersection with audio-visual media might be plotted through a range of theoretical resources in psychoanalysis. I can only introduce a few of these here—signposted by work by Julia Kristeva, Christopher Bollas, and Bracha Ettinger—as provisional paths toward my three films as cases of acoustic memory in migratory settings.

To begin, sound may concern the sub- or preverbal; the ‘semiotic,’ in Julia Kristeva’s terms. The semiotic is not so much associated with the mother as ‘object’ for the emerging subject, but rather with the mother as a transitional, pre-symbolic space or environment. The invocation of the musicality of song—or, in the case of one of the video pieces, at least for the non-Arabic speaking subject, the sounds of someone speaking without semantic effect—makes us aware of something at play beneath the logical and symbolic purpose of language as signification: meaning by means of signs. Beyond words, there is sound, and sound is subjectively charged once it is what psychoanalysis specifies as ‘the voice.’ The voice is not someone’s specific voice or anyone speaking. Just as the gaze is not about organ-based vision, but concerns the subject and its desire in the scopic field (the eye becoming an erotic zone rather than a mechanism for perception), so, too, the voice identifies something other than hearing by means of the ear. It might come close to what Bracha Ettinger theorizes as ‘resonance,’ a term to which I will return shortly (“Resonance”).

In Kristeva’s early thought, the semiotic suggests a spatializing and rhythmic dimension within the initial transactions between baby and the maternal other: at the same time a locus or environment and that which punctuates this space, initiating necessary gaps as well as seams of continuity that the patterns of formal language will later fracture and connect. To distinguish the semiotic dimension from signification proper, Julia Kristeva specifies a separate signifying process—she names it ‘signifiante’—to enable us to recognize that there are, at least, two modalities constantly at work in the making of meaning: the semiotic and the symbolic. The former, though always already embedded within the symbolic dimension, is nonetheless open to the formative processes of subjective becoming, while the latter, the symbolic, is identified with the ordering and unity of communicative language. A poem, for instance, opens itself up to the drag of kinetic rhythm, while a law report struggles to be rigorously symbolic and communicate its meanings with a minimum of baggage or color. Kristeva writes:

These two processes are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative,

metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved; in other words, so-called “natural” language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic. On the other hand, there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example). But, as we shall see, this exclusivity is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject. Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying process he produces can be “exclusively” semiotic or “exclusively” symbolic, and is instead marked by an indebtedness to both. (Revolution 24)

Subjectivity is enthralled to this dialectic. The importance of Kristeva’s thinking lies first in stressing signification as process rather than structure; then, in identifying this dialectic; and finally, in establishing that, because of the process and/as dialectic, linguistics is opened up to philosophy and history: the speaking subject is always divided (between conscious and unconscious levels) (Reader 28). The semiotic, then, is a privileged aspect of that which opens signification to the intersubjective field, and hence to an aesthetic dimension of subjectivity and signification that is open to change, that is ‘migratory’ itself. As Kristeva specifies:

The point is not to replace the semiotics of the signifying systems by considerations on the biological code appropriate to the nature of those employing them—a tautological exercise, after all, since the biological code has been modeled on the language system. It is rather to postulate the heterogeneity of biological operations in respect of signifying operations, and to study the dialectics of the former (that is, in fact, that, though invariably subject to the signifying and/or social codes, they infringe on the code in the direction of allowing the subject to get pleasure from it, renew it, even endanger it; where, that is, the processes are not blocked by him in repression of “mental illness.”) (Reader 30)

Practices that Kristeva identifies as ‘aesthetic,’ such as dance, music, poetry, and the visual arts, operate with a special hospitality to the semiotic pole of the signifying process. They open their portals to the semiotic’s conditions of emergence in the pre- and nonverbal intensities of the drive-riven corporality of the infant, emerging as a subject through the ‘holding space’ that Kristeva designates as ‘chora’.

Kristeva borrows the concept from Plato; it is, she writes, “the essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases.” In addition, “the *chora* as rupture and articulations (rhythms) precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality” (Revolution 25–26). “Neither model nor copy,” Kristeva argues, “the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous to vocal or kinetic rhythm” (Revolution 25–26). She draws here on the Kleinian expansion of the Freudian theory of the drives to ascribe semiotic potentiality to the “pre-Oedipal energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother” (Revolution 27).

Were we to investigate the three artworks in question through a Kristevan lens, we would hence be looking *beyond* the use of symbolic languages and their translations,

and the indication of loss within the fields of historical and generational meaning. Instead, we would look *toward* the ways in which the films in their duration, montage, rupture, and articulations—hence in their rhythms—may work to predispose the viewer to intuit again an unrepresentable and pre-Oedipal mobility together with the holding space that once oriented the body to the mother, while neither the body nor the mother were separate objects of knowledge, representation, or even fantasy for the infant at that early stage. The imprint of our becoming that remains with us as the semiotic dimension of the signifying process may be set in aesthetic practice through the invocations of rhythm and environment.

Beyond this Kristevan possibility, the works under discussion invite us to take recourse to Christopher Bollas' idea of a specific aesthetic of infant being. Bollas accounts for our adult engagement with what he calls the 'aesthetic' as follows:

We know that because of the considerable prematurity of human birth the infant depends on the mother for survival. By serving as a supplementary ego or a facilitating environment she both sustains the baby's life and transmits to the infant, through her own particular idiom of mothering an aesthetic of being that becomes a feature of the infant's self. The mother's way of holding the infant, of responding to his gestures, of selecting objects, and of perceiving the infant's internal needs, constitutes her contribution to the infant-mother culture. In a private discourse that can only be developed by mother and child, the language of this relation is the idiom of gesture, gaze and inter-subjective utterance. (13; emphasis added)

Physical holding, visual embrace, and vocalization forge connections that link the infant to its 'm/Other,' and bring about transformations in its inner world long before any kind of formal psychic apparatus or organized means of communication exists. The baby's inner world can still be 'moved' at this point, and its states, altered by the envelope of voiced sounds, participate in this aesthetic culture of mother-infant contact. In pursuing the insights that follow from this proposition, Bollas suggests that, before the mother is personalized for the infant as a whole object, she functions as a region or source of transformation (28). The mother is not a subjective object; rather, she functions as a subjectivizing environment that "transforms the subject's internal and external world" (28).

Thus, the mother is a transformational object. Bollas argues that we continually search for this nonverbal experience of the "metamorphosis of the self" in adult life:

The mother's idiom of care and the infant's experience of this handling is one of the first if not the earliest human aesthetic. It is the most profound occasion when the nature of the self is formed and transformed by the environment. The uncanny pleasure of being held by a poem, a composition, a painting, for that matter, any object, rests on those moments, when the infant's internal world is partly given form by the mother since he cannot shape them or link them together without her coverage. (33)

Bollas views the mother not as an object to be recalled or refigured, but as the external source of the process of nonverbal, though not soundless, transformation that is internalized in time: what he calls a “metamorphosis of the self,” effected in later life by our relation to aesthetic forms and processes, which may ‘hold’ and ‘move’ us in a similar fashion.

Thus, we are invited to think along two lines of enquiry with respect to the ‘aesthetic of being’ that I am construing here. The first concerns the artist’s search, through aesthetic practice, for contact with this ‘movement’ within and of the self through what Bollas terms the “shadow of the object,” the traces on the emergent ego of the pressures of the transformational maternal object. The second line turns attention to the viewer, who encounters an artwork that has the capacity to restage an experience of the transformation of an inner world. These effects, both for the artist and for the viewer, might depend, in terms of the signifying process at work, on heightening semiotic, that is, non-verbal and non-syntactical elements without, of course, eliminating the syntactic and semantic shell in which these must dialectically be housed. These semiotic elements are already removed from the primary aesthetic of the transformation of the infant. Yet, these long embedded effects can still imprint upon adult artists or viewers a trace of that profound ‘unthought’ feeling, which have been part of the earliest drawing of the shape of the emerging ego-self.

Like Kristeva, Bollas analyzes the most archaic of infant-other interactions, locating in these some of the specific aesthetic effects—aesthetic in the sense of transforming and moving through the senses—that our adult selves seek again through aesthetic practices. Kristeva and Bollas invite us to attend psychoanalytically to an aesthetic dimension, a dialectic of formal and affective elements, that is situated beyond words, beyond the symbolic, beyond language. That dimension may well also be operative for bringing about the strong affects that are generated by the three works at stake here.

Finally, the works at stake here may also be available for analysis through what Bracha Ettinger has described as ‘matrixial resonance’ (“Resonance”). In her distinctive contribution to post-Lacanian feminist psychoanalytical theory and practice, Ettinger invites us to extend our theories of subjectivity beyond the Freudian and Lacanian models that initiate subjectivity only after birth, and that theorize that subjectivity as inevitably marked by a cumulating series of separations, all culminating in the castration that both severs and forms the subject through its access to language. Instead, Ettinger proposes a concurrent passage that acknowledges the effect of the prenatal and prematernal connection, so that, from the very earliest intimations, we must think of one dimension of subjectivity as ‘subjectivity as encounter.’ The distinctive legacy of our form of becoming is that, long before the separation model kicks in, the becoming human subject is a partner in a *severality*—of at least two, and possibly, through the fantasies of the pre-maternal partner of her own matrixial

encounters, more than two (*The Matrixial Borderspace* and “Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference”).

Sharing an interest with Kristeva and Bollas in the archaic formation of subjectivity as well as its intimacy with the aesthetic as affectivity and transformation, Ettinger traverses the limit imposed by classical psychoanalysis, birth, to suggest that the later stages of prenatality already involve the participating subject (the becoming mother) and the presubject (the becoming infant) in what one might call an ‘aesthetics of co-emergence and co-affectation,’ which leaves traces in both psyches, one of which is still to be formed. Ettinger is not alone in this (see Freud, Irigaray, and Meltzer). These traces, like Bollas’ aesthetics of transformation, can be animated and mobilized again in psychological and aesthetic life in situations of co-affecting encounter. The trace that the coincidence of prenatality and prematernity leave jointly, but differently, on and in the two partners in this severality from-the-beginning is what Ettinger calls ‘co-habit(u)ation,’ a term that catches visually the double meaning of *accommodation* as ‘adjustment’ or ‘tuning in’ as well as ‘habitation’ or ‘shared space’ (“Wit[h]ness-Thing”). Thinking through the transsubjective capacities that are traced by the primary encounter-event of our simultaneous becoming and being-transformed by the unknown other, Ettinger writes of the relations between an I and a non-I, the latter referring to an unknown and unknowable other whose co-emergence nonetheless affects and transforms the I. These partners-in-difference add to our resources for the analysis of the psychic work that art does, beyond words, that is reducible neither to Kristeva’s pre-Oedipal chora nor to Bollas’ idea of the wordless infant being moved by the tending of its post-natal mother (*Matrixial Borderspace*).

We have been accustomed by psychoanalysis to imagine the emergence of subjectivity through various scenes—Freud’s primal scene or the effect of the sight of anatomical sexual difference, for example—a and through the work of the gaze: Lacan’s mirror phase and his later theory of the gaze as *objet a*. Only recently have we begun to think about psychoanalysis in relation to sound.¹ Ettinger has made a significant intervention in the psychoanalysis of vision with her proposition of the matrixial gaze, which shifts Lacan’s concept of the gaze as *objet a* to a matrixial sphere that brings to the fore the sexual difference of the feminine subject in relation to which a prenatal and prematernal severality is shaped (*Gaze and “Gaze-and-touching”*). However, Lacan, also already identified an invocatory drive, and suggested the voice, too, as an *objet a* (Dolar). Ettinger explains Lacan’s *objet a* as follows:

The objet a is the part-object and the archaic Other/mother, linked to pre-Oedipal impulses, forever unattainable, whose lacking being is created during the primal split of the subject, when language blurs its archaic modes of experience, and discourse, introducing the laws and order of language, nestles in their place and constitutes them as forever unattainable. The objet a resides on the borderlines of the corporeal, sensory and perceptual zones, but it eludes them all, itself being a psychic entity produced

and lost according to the lanes carved by libidinal energy invested in the drives. It is a borderline mental inscription of the residues of separation from the partial object. According to Lacan's late theory of fantasy, subjectivity is not only the effect of the passage between signifiers of language but also the effect of basic separations which instigate the subject to desire unconsciously both the lost part-object—the lost archaic Other (mother)—and the unreachable symbolic Other. Thus, subjectivity is fatally intermingled with “holes” in the Real, in the Imaginary and in the Symbolic, with psychic objects as lacks. (Matrixial Gaze 1)

Shifting theoretical ground from the absolute force of the signifier to exclude the real from any form of subjective knowledge or affect, Lacan's move of introducing the concept of the *objet a* allowed into his theory of subjectivity something from that hitherto excluded real. The *objet a* is a paradoxical psychic object, or rather, an inscription like a scar on the psyche, a trace that marks inside the psyche the loss of a dimension of the connective condition of the infant to its originary Other—the m/Other.

Only when severed from the acoustic envelopment by and with the m/Other, does the/her voice become determined as a locus of desire, a potential for libidinal investment that will fuel a desire for an acoustic element in intersubjective relations. Ettinger calls upon the semantic potency of specific forms of verbs to shift the phallic legend of desire that is predicated on Lacan's vision of a castrated subject, scarred and adrift in loss. She proposes a 'matrixial gaze' as *objet a*, which invests our relations to the gaze with something less terrorizing than Lacan's, because, in the matrixial dimension, nothing is absolutely lost, since nothing was never fantasized as being absolutely present to begin with. Instead, Ettinger writes of a psyche that works through attunement, through fading in and fading out, and through transformation in a shared transsubjective borderspace. Taking this into the arena of the acoustic, Ettinger proposes the concept of 'resonance' in a Derridian move to capture a continuous process, at once outside yet 'resonating' physically and psychologically inside the being who longs for that which is never quite 'lost' to begin with.

These ways of theorizing the legacies of our archaic formation as subjects in relation to the psychically charged potentials of sound and voice, from Kristeva to Bollas and Ettinger, invite us to pay special attention to maternal-infant relations. Ettinger is not so much concerned with maternal-infant relations per se as she is with the pre-existing encounter between an I and non-I that is predicated on the intimacy with an unknown other that defines the feminine. For her, postnatal feminine subjectivity not only negotiates a phallic ordering of sexual difference that visits lack upon the girl child. It is also able to draw upon, or alternatively may sense more acutely, the potentiality of a particularly intimate relation to matrixial severality, since, as a feminine subject, she not only carries its trace, but may also activate its fantasy-material in childbearing or other symbolic relations that restage such transsubjective encounters 'in the feminine.'

I now want now to reflect on the three films, experienced on video (Mulvey), to see what they reveal to us, viewed again from a point almost twenty years later, of the intimacy between a geographically expanded and culturally challenged feminist aesthetics that responds to the inevitable ‘postcolonialization’ of difference, and the evolution of the terms of representation of gendered as well as diasporic subjectivities. How do psychoanalytically inflected theorizations of subjectivity, pivoting on the construction and play of sexual difference provide us with tools to read aesthetic negotiations of historically specific articulations of geographical and cultural dislocation, marked by a politically generated and racially wounding trauma? In all three cases I will consider, these questions are articulated through the restaging of personal relations between daughters and mothers. They figure narratively the psychic spaces associated with a semiotic, choric, and matrixially resonant relationality. At the same time, they necessarily allow for the shadow of the paternal, the law, or Other as structuring presences, which are, however, not invested with the affective ambivalence that seeps through in relations with the maternal.

The works trace the relations of genesis and separation that form the mark of post-colonial histories imaginatively experienced as the repetitions of the formative space of the ensemble made up of mother and child. However we choose to theorize this, we are forged as subjects in whom an archaic aesthetics of being operates—an aesthetics of being moved and transformed with and by an unknown other—in a pre-linguistic and non-verbal intensity of affective motions that are traumatic and unthought to the extent that they occur before a fully cognizant psychic apparatus exists, which allows for fantasy, memory, and knowledge. Is sound then a privileged, or just recently explored, passageway to processes of subjectivization that are even more archaic than the visual, while yet remaining closely linked to the most symbolic of articulations, to language, and hence to sociality? Can I pose a historical and political relation between the dialectics of sound and subjectivity and the dialectics of migration, made poignant subjectively and culturally, at the point where living social subjects ‘in the feminine’ feel compelled to ‘figure’ something unfinished, or something still binding, in the relation to the mother as both woman-subject-other, and as what Ettinger indicates by the term ‘m/Other,’ the presubjective Other of matrixial severality and encounter?

The weight of these theoretical ‘wonderings’ might prejudice the interpretation of the works in question. But I have not introduced these three theorists to use their ideas as a template for the films under analysis. Rather, psychoanalytical theory is invited to alert us to the intensities and complexities at work in our subjectivities. Thus, when we approach specific aesthetic practices as texts we wish to read, responding to their provocation to bring forth a reading, we aim to consider the *work* that the artworks are doing at an appropriate depth. Close textual engagement with the specifics of the three works will refute an attempt at their reduction to the most arduous theoretical formulations. My opening discussion only serves to lay out a range of processes, levels, and

potentialities that the economy of each completed art work will weave, strategically and unconsciously, into the fabric of a singular enunciation that provokes cultural recognition while never considering these theoretical problematics at all. Instead, the film or video texts work their materials into unique aesthetic configurations. As journeys through the psychic spaces that provide affective ‘resonance’ as well as unique emplotments that become holding spaces—patterned, like Kristeva’s chora, with a rhythm of sound and image, word and silence—these films can, in the double space of formative and performative subjectivity as well as of a situated exile or displacement from a home that is identified with the mother, begin to make visible and audible what we are calling here ‘migratory settings.’

Tracey Moffatt: A Piercing Cry

Tracey Moffatt’s seventeen-minute, 35 mm film *Night Cries: a Rural Tragedy* (1989, with Marcia Langton, Agnes Hardwick and Jimmy Little) uses no dialogue. That does not make it a silent or a ‘mute’ film. The absence of dialogue forces the viewer into an intensified acoustic attention as well as into a hyper-charged visual scrutiny of the scenario that unfolds before her in the controlled time of the cinematic. At the same time, the lacking dialogue between the only two characters we see on the screen actively signifies the failure of communication between the protagonists, who are framed, nonetheless, into the intimacy of daily life. Defamiliarized by being filmed on an artificially created studio set, in intense and searing color, the visual scene is freighted with references to both modernist and contemporary Aboriginal and European Australian painting, struggling to find in both traditions the means to catch this unique and anciently populated landscape. For the one people, it was an ancient homeland; for the other, a desolate and challenging wilderness. But sound preempts the intensely colored sets. The opening credits over darkness introduce us to harsh animal sounds and those of a train chugging ever closer; its whistle, promising movement, escape, and a destination other than the present, merges into a metallic screech that, reaching a crescendo, can also be heard as a distorted human cry that brings onto the screen the fractured lettering of the title: *Night Cries*. Cries are visceral emanations of the body, physically painful to produce. Who cries in the night? Cries are also primary invocations, releases of inner pain from one subject that yet imply that someone is calling in desperation to another. Who is crying for whom? (Kristeva, “Place”)

Silence follows, and then the melodious singing voice of an Australian Aboriginal gospel singer, Jimmy Little, smartly dressed in a western suit and tie, tells us musically that, were we to have any troubles, we can use the Royal Telephone to Jesus to alleviate them. Representing accommodation to Christian evangelization, this jolly sound of religious comfort, connecting modern telecommunications with the ancient concept of a single deity, serves as a counterpoint to the deep tragedy that the film stages

economically in its harshly-lit and colored tableaux: the endless days of two women living in a shack in the emptiness of the Australian outback. Painfully ironic, this song's happy confidence contrasts with the desolate sound track that follows, which consists of howling desert wind, far-off animal cries, and the grating sounds of daily movements, such as preparing food and going to the outside toilet built of corrugated and squeaking metal, each sound magnified by impenetrable silence. The scene is a stage-set that places a run-down cabin in the midst of a lurid Australian landscape heavy with art historical references to the European imaginings of this symbolized space, to which both occupants of the cabin are now foreign. This is the prison house-home of two women, where an Aboriginal 'daughter' cares for her elderly white 'mother.'



Tracey Moffatt, Still from *Night Cries*. 1989. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Melbourne

Moffatt's film creates a personal yet politically focused testimony of the recently acknowledged Australian cultural policy of the forced Europeanization of the indigenous peoples that was indirectly taken up in the last film by Charles Chauvel, titled *Jedda*, made in 1953. In that film, a newly-orphaned Aboriginal child is adopted by the white farming family as part of the colonial vision of 'rescuing and civilizing her.' Education in white ways prepares her, however, only for a higher level of domestic servitude rather than for the self-realization or freedom by which the Europeans define their superiority in contrast to the indigenous people who work their farms. *Jedda* (Nagaria Kunoth), once grown-up, is torn between the assimilated farm manager assigned to her as a

'proper' husband, and a passing renegade man of her own people, Marbuck, who kidnaps her, and takes her back to his own territory from whence the couple are driven for having broken a marriage taboo. Pursued by the adoptive father and proposed fiancé, Marbuck goes insane and the film ends tragically for the couple. In its overall tone, the film nonetheless seems to condemn the action of the white 'mother' of adopting the Aboriginal child as an ill-considered attempt to force the Aboriginal peoples into class and gender moulds that are shaped by an active European racism.

Forty years on, Moffatt's film re-imagines the legacy of the policy: the white mother is now aged, arthritic, wheelchair bound, and dependent for every intimacy of nourishment and toilet on the middle-aged Aboriginal woman, who is tied lovelessly to her service. The 'daughter' dreams of travel and escape from her tireless round of drudgery. Her boredom is pierced only by the surfacing of anxious memories of childhood fears and remembered moments of maternal comfort that were once found by the relocated child in the arms of the younger version of the aged woman for whom she must now care.

There is one scene of telling tenderness, in which a Caravaggist-like composition, lit with warm reds against a deep, dark background, places the daughter at the mother's feet, which she tenderly bathes. They begin to hum together a line or two from "Onward Christian Soldiers," re-invoking the trope signaled by Jimmy Little at the beginning of the film. The lapping of the water and the reversal of the gesture triggers a memory. An inserted scene in black and white opens. A little girl and her two brothers are at the sea coast, on a rocky escarpment from which the white mother dives into the sea, leaving the boys to tease the little girl by throwing long strips of seaweed at her that cling around her neck like strangling serpents. Feeling the desolation of abandonment against the crashing sea and harsh rocks, the child is shown, yet not heard, crying alone as a metallic rasp rises into a crescendo of anxiety, an impression made more violent by the repeated cutting between images of the child's weeping face and the violence of the sea behind her. Jimmy Little's image is intercut but is also silent, failing to provide a communicational channel. Suddenly silence, and the same Caravaggist warmly lit Pietà reappears. This time, it is the younger white mother comforting her little 'daughter' in a moment of maternal tenderness, wrapping her in towels before a flickering fire.

As this image fades, the sound of an artificial respirator plays on the sound track. An empty shot of the toilet hut appears against the landscape that is made lurid by a stripe of red. A shot follows from inside a now empty cabin, where all signs of habitation have disappeared. Then, the camera, focusing on the distant mountains as seen through the cabin's windows, descends slowly over the balustrade of the window to reveal the porch bathed in the chill blue of night. Laid out on her back is the old lady. She appears to be dead. Curled up in a fetal position beside her, with only her face warmed by an inner light, is 'the daughter.' The respirator continues, but the sound track is now, at last, punctured by the visceral heaving sobs of a distressed and desolate baby.

In a touch of brilliance that makes the film so profound, the baby's cry seems to be emanating from the heaving chest of the middle-aged woman, who weeps—I am tempted to say—for everything that is lost with the death of this absent old lady, whose face she covers tenderly with her handkerchief. Having previously observed in fierce and unloving gestures her active hatred of the old woman and of the situation that binds them to each other, the viewer is catapulted by this reversal onto a deeper level, one that consists of the involuntary emotion that is the thread that binds the child to its carer, a neediness suddenly exposed in a death that is at once a release from servitude and, yet, a second and final abandonment, a permanent exile from the link with any mother. The baby's pure sound of distress is a signifier without a signified: it is the body's cry, the condition and state of an archè-grief that has no subject, just a vocalized affect wracking a tiny helpless body, which can no longer be contained, heard, transposed, resonated. It tears into the visual scene as the sound of a fear and a loneliness beyond words that 'tells' us that the nature of this death as well as of the abduction from her culture must be grasped as the deepest of woundings. The sound calls out, hopelessly, to the very maternal response that death, even in old age, of the ragged remains of an ambivalent mother-figure, who has screened the missing mother from whom the child was initially torn, has foreclosed. All severality seems breached, and the baby's heaving sobs punctuate as the sound of that catastrophic abyss of human loneliness.

The representational economy of the film, using a repertoire of visual quotations that are animated by the iconicity of the sound track, attends to the politics of the everyday, the very everydayness of the enactment of the legacy of the politics of the Australian Europeanization program, which Tracey Moffatt knew intimately. But it also reshapes this history through a specific aesthetic, placing us, the viewers in the present, in the presence of something suffered and performed that permeates every moment. In seventeen minutes, the agony of a life-sentence is produced, centering on the mutilated subjectivity of the trapped daughter. Yet, the final cry of the baby, seemingly the 'voice' of the grown woman, the stripping of history back to the psychological desolation of the lost infant who is her psychic core, changes the register against which what has been shown now starts to resonate.

My suggestion is that this shift pierces the distance that a simply political critique of the policy of removing Aboriginal children from their own mothers would create as an intellectual form of knowledge, in which the experience of the daughter remains ultimately incommunicable to her perpetrators. But the sound of the baby, mourning wordlessly its irremediable and confused loss of the m/Other, plaits together her original mother, the space of and link with a culture, a peoplehood, a land, a history, an identity; the mother who loved and comforted her when distressed; the mother she now lies beside as a wretched old corpse; her own place and her non-belonging; and her beginning as well as the politics of the imposed, cultural rupture. Through

watching these formally constructed tableaux, we come to grasp something of this complexity, witnessing and listening, hearing something that could not have been grasped through political denunciation alone. For love and hate are mixed here. They cohabit in ways that the sudden shift to the preverbal intensities of an archaic field of infant-maternal relations alone can make us feel in their impossible complexity. These transformative affects can pierce the armor of political understanding to undo the barrier of difference, without allowing the fact of historico-political difference to disappear from critical view on the other side of this shockingly impossible, disturbing regression to a sound that rends the sound track, and that defies the visual-vocal matching that secures the conventional reality-effect of cinema (Chion).

Mona Hatoum: A Measured Loss

Let me now move to a shower scene. I do not mean Hitchcock's famous encoding of naked feminine vulnerability and masculine sadistic voyeurism that culminated in a hysterical act of surrogate matricide in *Psycho* (1962). Rather, my second case-study is a work of video art by the contemporary Palestinian artist, born in Beirut, and working in London, Mona Hatoum (b. 1952). Initially conceived as a performance work, *Measures of Distance* was remade as a sixteen-minute video in 1988. It is composed of several sound tracks and layers of imagery that together convey the pain of separation and the longing caused by a double exile, as well as an affirmation of intimacy as situated within a culturally specific feminine subjectivity and sexuality.

Across what at first is only a densely pixilated field infused with intense colors that form indecipherable shapes, lies a superimposed grid, a blow-up of first lined, then transparent writing paper covered with handwritten Arabic script. On the sound track, as though coming from an interior, there is the continuous sound of women's voices, chatting in Arabic and occasionally laughing. Two forms of intimacy are layered onto each other here. One involves the physical proximity of the home; the other is mediated by language and by a script that has had to travel great distances to deliver its charged text to a dear one no longer at home. The letter's existence is predicated on the physical distance that forms a counterpoint to the space of togetherness that is remembered by the tape recording and the photography, indexing a moment of sharing of space. From time to time, this ambient sound is overlaid by the carefully modulated tones of a woman speaking Arabic-inflected English. She reads the loving letters addressed to an absent daughter by her mother. The speaking woman is the artist Hatoum, working in London and making the video in Vancouver. Her mother lives in and writes from her home as a Palestinian exile in Beirut, which the British passport-bearing daughter revisited during the mid-1980s.

The slowly changing video image comprises photographs that are screened on a grainy surface, suffused with color that only slowly renders an image that, with some surprise, we recognize as that of a mature woman, taking a shower. Through the

compilation of sound, letter, and image we come to read the body as that of the mother whose letters form a screen before it, and whose thoughts and feelings are enunciated by the translating voice of her now distant daughter. In an interview in 1996, Hatoum commented on the relation of this project to the recurrent anxiety expressed in feminist art theory about the representation of the naked female body, given the risks of misappropriation by the pornographic, voyeuristic, or colonial gaze that underpins Western visual culture (Doane).



Mona Hatoum, Still from *Measures of Distance*. 1988. Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

As Hatoum explains,

Well, in early feminism the attitude was that any way of representing a woman's body is exploitative and objectifying. This question had to be reassessed later on because women vacated the frame and became invisible in a sense. When I made Measures of Distance, the video with my mother, I was criticized by some feminists for using the naked female body. I was accused of being exploitative and fragmenting the body as they do in pornography. I felt this was a very narrow-minded and literal interpretation of feminist theory. I saw my work as the celebration of the beauty of the opulent body of the aging woman who resembles the Venus of Willendorf—not exactly the standard we see in the media. And if you take the work as a whole, it builds up a wonderful, complete image of that woman's personality, needs, emotions, longings, beliefs and puts her very much in a social context. (Mona Hatoum 141)

About five minutes into the video, the voice-over tells us of the father's shock, during one of the daughter's rare visits to Beirut, at finding his wife and daughter in the shower, together and naked. His distress was compounded by the fact that his daughter was taking photographs of her mother. This exchange of looks, recorded in the images on which the video piece is based, and commented upon in the exchange of letters that recall that rare moment of mother-daughter intimacy, captures a radical shift, a reorientation between the looker and the looked-at. That reorientation overturns the hierarchical and gendered asymmetry of knowing subject versus known object that have been encoded into Western art as both the elevated artistic nude and the base nude pic.²

In the scene, the mature woman's body, naked in the shower, only seems to become a sexual object within the politics of vision of the father. He claims this woman's naked body as his alone to see, one that should not be seen by any eyes but his, and thus should not be enjoyed—the verb in both French and English has sexual meanings and connotations of property—by anyone save him. The 'crime' of the exposure of the mother's naked body does not lie in *her* pleasure in *her* sexuality, including the histories of the body, its generativity and age-related transformations. The affront arises from the sexual possessiveness of a masculine viewing eye, from the fact that, in fantasy, the eye becomes an eroticized organ, and sight a pathway of not merely desire, but also of mastery, framed by a politics of veiling and exposure (Ettinger, *Gaze*).

Measures of Distance is exemplary of the aesthetic and feminist project to challenge the legacy of what the feminist theorist Jacqueline Rose named 'sexuality in the field of vision,' which attempts to represent the female body as the site of her own proceedings, the sign of inscriptions on a cultural text 'in, of, and from the feminine' (Pollock, "Inscriptions"). Hatoum's work contrasts the conventional sexualization of the feminine body with the inscription on the screen of affective relations, spoken and written, between a Palestinian-in-exile mother and her artist daughter in secondary exile from her mother's home, working in Europe/Canada; we encounter their feminine sexualities 'in the buff,' as it were. During these snatched moments of togetherness, mediated by image and recalled in words, the mother and daughter begin to talk, and the daughter to make images that support and refract their generationally, and now also culturally, fissured conversation about shared but different female bodies, pleasures, anxieties. Their words concern their own, generationally diverse and culturally located experiences of sexuality, motherhood, and a non-sexual yet almost erotic woman-to-woman intimacy. Criss-crossing the space that divides mother and daughter are the words written by the mother, translating love and affection, longing and lack, as well as the acoustic echo of their repetition in the body of the daughter as she reads them. The viewer is both offered and screened-off from the moment of recorded and remembered proximity of the two grown women, who have found a new intimacy in making an art work together.

In traditional Western painting and its modern and popular pornographic sister arts, this intimacy would typically be refracted through the voyeuristic Orientalist fantasy of the harem, where women sensuously prepare themselves and await the summons of the master-lord (Said). In radical dissidence from that regime of viewing relations, Hatoum's work allows speaking and self-reflecting female-embodied subjects a guarded but luxuriant visibility that is nonetheless screened by a writing that is the site of subjective inhabitation of the corporeal. Meanwhile, the video format frames the shifting and shadowed image of the mature body together with female voices in the sonorous space of the mother-daughter relation, strained by the historical predicament of the exiled Palestinian people that has created multiple levels of dislocation and, hence, of longing. It offers, therefore, as radical a gesture with regard to the historical staging of feminine sexuality, generation, and cultural identity as have any of the historical feminine nudes at the traumatic beginning of modernism, such as Manet's *Olympia* (1863–5, Paris, Musée d'Orsay). Through the slowly revealed relation to the body of the mother, the sonorous tracking of the difference between the ongoing chorale of conversation and the isolated and well-articulated rereading of the mother's written words by the daughter, Anglophone but accented, the video registers an aesthetic of suffering 'in the feminine.' In the space between the ordinary and the imagined, it suggests what I want to call the 'sonorous aesthetics of the migratory' that catches the space and the sound of loss and longing—as well as an undiluted joy in the rapport between the two women in an instant of 'home-coming.'

Martina Attille: Echoes in the Mind

Loss and mourning through an imaginative historical retrospect at a life are at the core of Martina Attille's *Dreaming Rivers* (1988, 16 mm, 30 minutes), which opens with the sound of an older woman's singing. The voice sings a French Creole song about the loss of a sweetheart who has left. The song needs subtitles for the English speaker to understand; this is the transcription:

*The boat in the harbor
Took my sweetheart away
My sweetheart you left me here
Alas, alas what am I to do?*

The poignant lament of the woman, not left behind by a lover who abandons her, but by the sweetheart who was forced to become a migrant worker, sets the scene for an exploration of a Black feminine subjectivity in a history that already has its own, feminized, aesthetic modality for dealing with loss, registered in this poignant lament by women of the islands. Throughout the film, the question as to why this woman from 'there' came and died 'here' is answered: she loved him. This inscribes the passion

of desire into the history of economic migration from the Caribbean to England during the twentieth century. Three children stand before the body of their dead mother as the bewildered monuments of their parents' interwoven histories of love, dreams, necessity, and dislocation.

As the subtitles of the song fade to black, the sound of waves follows, that iconic signifier of the passage that brought Africans to the Caribbean, and centuries later brought them to inhospitable, war-ravaged, and racist Britain. An image of a black woman dressed in white fills the screen; she is lying down. We are seeing her from above. She is laid out beneath what appears to be an impossible viewing position. Who is looking? Who is she, whom we thus see, laid-out yet with her eyes open?

Voices are heard that comment on the way the woman's hair is styled—apparently not the way she preferred—and ask: “Why did you come here, Mum?” Another fade to black shifts the point of view, and the viewer is now aligned with the woman laid out on the bed, looking up at three faces looking down on the woman who is alive, yet laid out as if already dead. She responds to what her children say; however, their speech and her response are in different temporal or subjective zones. She is the object of their reflections; she is also the shared subject of their varied memories. She, too, will be her own subject of reminiscence as the film opens the space between living and dying, memory and remembrance, a space revealed to be the very condition of the migratory generations that this mother-children scenario explores. Surrounding the mother in scenes when, rising from her bier, she revisits her own history through the mementoes, photographs, and pieces of clothing in her room, is a chorus of older women from the islands, singing occasionally, but mostly commenting in a Creole French that remains untranslated. The space between here and there is also between then and now, between generations who have a memory of the home elsewhere and those for whom intimacy becomes a matter of heritage, history, and a potentially mobilizable aesthetics. The son speaks of the “too many secrets in our West Indian heritage”; his older sister, born there, reminds him “of too much pain.” Trauma is thus the condition of the unsaid that these mourning children come to glean and process.

The film brings together the three children of their Caribbean mother, Miss T., affectionally referred to as Miss Titi, who gather around her deathbed to share their memories of their mother and their migrations at different ages (two are born in Britain, one remembers the island). Voices and stillness are punctuated by the memories of the dead woman herself, which are enacted voicelessly through gesture and backed-up by the singing of *her* ‘mothers.’ A poignant reflection on migration, memory, and history, the movement of the film's affective structure weaves together a past and present that are indexed by sound, by accent, by musicality. The film is structured around the mother's body, around her hair—done up in the plaiting that was her favored mode, itself an idiom of the countryside at home—her clothes, her room, its mementoes, religious icons, and around what can be described as an

'aesthetic of memory' that is figured through photographs, jars of ointments, herbs, bowls, and other rituals of the self.

What is singular about Attille's film is the contrapositioning of the children's variegated memories of their mother and the mother's own exploration of her memories of love, place, and loss at the moment of her passing. The son is ashamed of his mother's home, of all the "things" in it that index precisely its migratory aesthetics. The older sister retorts: "what is left is like her memoirs, history, her autobiography." Yet, her history is recounted by the voices of other women watching her from the space of home, using the voices of the elders that suggest the inclusion of another, African-Caribbean aesthetic. A tender scene is set in Miss Titi's room, when the dominant chilly blue color for once yields to the warmth of bodily tones. It inscribes the mother's momentary pleasure in being together with the children's father, dancing in a circling proximity, as a longed for and always too brief surrender to the love articulated in the film by the interspersed voices of the other women.

This marks a break in the film. The elder daughter comments: "England had begun to lose its milk and honey appeal." A disenchantment of climate, both meteorological and ideological, sets in. England is signified acoustically by a thundering storm on the sound track. The rest of the film registers the physical pain of the cold and the psychic pain of abandonment and loss. As the children gently lead the woman back to the bed, laying her out under silken sheets and embroidered covers, she turns to her son, saying: "I want to go home." These scenes are inter-cut with images of the woman moving through her room in a flurry of anxiety, moving in distress through her own memory-space. It concludes with a transition that returns to the white bridal-shroudal robe of the opening scene—yet now the woman does not lie still. She moves; her robes move. There is only music and song and the phrases of the older women, the voices of the Caribbean mothers, talking of the never counted, the never finished, the never forgotten.

Bath of Sounds

The three films I have discussed are all set in the ordinariness of everyday spaces; two are marked by mourning for the mother; and all address a trauma of movement and separation. They interweave encounters with death with moments of subjective loss through an aesthetic of sound: wordless in Tracey Moffat's work, moving between vocalization and writing in Mona Hatoum's, and finally incarnating in Martina Attille's subtle use of two notes on a pipe that punctuate the film, disorienting the viewer, and allowing the spoken words to circle around the silent heart of the piece: Miss Titi, the mourned mother, herself a palimpsest of a distant home that was already migratory. At the outset of this article, I posed an impossible question: why did these three films emerge around 1988–89?

All we can really do, I believe, is note the event of their convergence as evidence of a pressure that resulted in the three films being made independently around

similar themes. We can see their convergence in the significant intersection between an emerging postcolonial aesthetics and a practice of independent feminist filmmaking that had started to make use of accessible technologies of film and video for art making and distribution. In addition, I want to suggest that the present of this writing marks a new moment for reading these works, not simply as recovered historical artifacts from the 1980s. In this moment of the exploration of migrant settings, their sonorous passages reemerge as imaginative inscriptions that, in effect, anticipated our current interest in a specifically *aesthetic* processing of the historical, cultural, territorial, and affective conditions of migratory subjectivities. A contemporary retrospective look cannot only reinvigorate these important works in a larger setting, but receive them again with the hospitality of a cultural analysis that is now theoretically catching up with what was planted into culture by these works some time ago.

I have tried to add to the engagement of postcolonial subjectivities and the political histories of migration that these films evidently warrant my own interest in the ‘sounds of subjectivity,’ theorized through variegated strands of psychoanalytical thinking. I have wanted to suggest that the audio-visualities of film and video open up a possible setting for migrant stories of separation, loss, love, and memory, accommodating a sensuous environment for the transmission of affects and meanings. Sound—not just voice or music—can be thought of as a more primary zone of intersubjective contact and mutual affect than vision. In *The Skin Ego*, Didier Anzieu refers to a ‘sound-envelope’ and a ‘sound-mirror,’ suggesting as well that the baby is enveloped in a ‘word-bath.’ “The self forms as a sound envelope through the experience of a bath of sounds (concomitant with the experience of nursing),” he writes (166). Anzieu places sound in a fundamental relation to the earliest exchanges between adult and child:

Parallel with the establishment of boundaries and limits of the Self as a two-dimensional interface analytically dependent on tactile sensations, there forms, through the introjection of a universe of sound (and also of taste and smell), a Self as a pre-individual psychical cavity possessing a rudimentary unity and identity. The auditory sensations produced when sounds are made are associated with respiratory sensations which give the Self a sense of being a volume which empties and re-fills itself, and prepares that Self for its structuring in relation to a third dimension of space (orientation and distance) and to the temporal dimension. (157)

Building on these insights, Bracha Ettinger has added the idea of a prenatal ‘resonance’ that not only envelops the becoming infant, as I have discussed above, but also installs the foundation of a reciprocity that she names ‘borderlinking’:

Unconscious “musicality” and knowledge by resonance are already prenatal and they are sense-giving by means of the matrixial apparatus. The originary matrixial borderspace is a resonance chamber. It is via such an archaic resonance cavity that the transmissive space works, in the here and now of the analytic hour. Not in order to regress to pre-history but in order to borderlink to another in transferential space and to turn an encounter

into a subjectivizing and creative event. The maternal cavity does not stand for emptiness and silence—except at its most pathological edge—but for emissions, transmissions and receptions, a space where sounds reverberate, are echoed and transferred, and vibrations manifest the continuity of a caring outside, inside. (“Resonance” 13)

Ettinger is not alone here. In “The Sonorous Bath,” Edith Lecourt remarks that “[t]he sonorous bath and the sonorous cavity allow aspects of the foetal experience of the uterine cavity to be revived, figured and represented.” (214). Ettinger, however, makes a significant addition. To her, the originary moment is not just a retrospective fantasy figured by postnatal developments; it has acted as a subjectivizing dimension in itself. It has created not only the pathways that may be activated again in later transferences and, it must be added, in aesthetic experiences, but also leads us to seek out actively experiences of ‘borderlinking’ with the other who is unknown, and yet holds the capacity to co-affect and co-emerge with an I that is always becoming in trans- and intersubjective relations. Thus, the sonorous pathway is not just a condition in which the self/ego is shaped in postnatal space and relationality. It creates strings that long to resonate, not desiring an object to satisfy a lack, but yearning for an encounter.

In my encounter with the three art works that speak of experiences that are not my own, I record here, in my writing, not only their cultural significance as compelling works of creative thought. I also receive their transmissions affectively. What I have wanted to draw out from those is the subjectivizing dimension of sonority, which creates the emotional resonance of the works as historical statements of migratory subjectivity in a postcolonial moment. Beyond that manifest content, however, sonority in each of these three films also appears to function as the field of possibility for their ‘saying’ of the unsaid, as well as of the unsayable that is at once the trauma of loss—of homeland, mother country, mother tongue, mother’s body, mother—and, at the same time, of the *jouissance* [ecstasy] of transsubjective transmissibility: a potential for an encounter with open borders that produces a creative event. Were the works in question only freighted with the trauma of loss, they would not be either art or work; they would not *work*, in the Freudian sense of *Trauerarbeit*, the work of mourning, or *Traumarbeit*, dream-work.

It seems to me that, in Ettinger’s double move of pinpointing an originary dimension of subjectivity in an encounter that lays down the strings of yearning for being touched and transformed by the unknown other, as well as her recognition of the animation of that primordial possibility in key situations such as analytical transference and the aesthetic encounter (both making or viewing), we can locate the *work*, the poesis of creative transformation that is brought about by the works of art I have discussed. I find these works charged with a ‘beauty’ that rests on neither image nor objecthood, but on their finely calibrated affective charge—a charge that swims through their sonorities and musicalities that are at once the figurative supports for stories about mothers, and the very substance of what matrixial severality might be: a resonance.

Clearly, my reading is situated. Alerted to these works by my own preoccupations with maternal loss and with the lost moment at which feminist discourse was able to research the significance of the m/Other for feminine subjectivities, I write of works the motivations and resources of which are neither mine to imagine nor mine to disown, because of my already active place within them as the bearer of white histories of the colonial, migration, and displacement. Yet, in the expanded international and postcolonial plots of feminist thinking, there is space for theoretical translations that enlarge cultural spaces by attentive readings of historically situated aesthetic invocations of the pulses of desire and loss. That space is formed by the holding together of what one might call a politics of migratory settings—of what divides us and forces recognition of specificity and difference—and of what Ettinger's concept of resonance can perform. We long for connection, we long to be moved, and we have the capacity to be hospitable to the other whom we do not know at the level of the 'content' of our various histories. That is not because we are all human subjects, though we are. Rather, the openness to the work that is done by and in and through the work of art is a result of the specific desire to be co-affected. Beyond the words that speak a text of historical and political difference, sonorities such as those that form the aesthetic force of these three films call out to the desire to share, and thus do the work that will enable us to hear their particular orchestration of certain, always migratory, sounds of subjectivity.

Notes

1. CentreCATH organized a research theme year on Aurality, Musicality and Textuality in 2002–03 and, during that time, we ran two seminars on Psychoanalysis and Sound, having identified a limited psychoanalytical bibliography on this topic across classic Freudian, Lacanian and post-Lacanian studies. The archive of texts and special presentations will appear in Pollock and Chare.
2. I am not qualifying this as Western alone as there is a strong tradition of representation of the sexual female nude in ancient Middle-Eastern culture. See Bahrani.

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