

TRANSTOPIAN MOVES: THE RHIZOME IN JONAS CARPIGNANO'S FEATURE
FILMS *MEDITERRANEA* (2015) AND *A CIAMBRA* (2017)

ANDREAS HUDELIST

andreas.hudelist@aau.at

Andreas Hudelist studied media and communications and German philology at Klagenfurt University and the University of Belgrade. He received his PhD in media and communications with an empirical work on performative arts. He teaches at Klagenfurt University and the Carinthian University of Applied Sciences. His research focuses on cultural studies, film and television studies, media philosophy, and media pedagogy.

KEYWORDS

migration, lines of flight, Jonas Carpignano, rhizome, distribution of the sensible

PUBLICATION DATE

Issue 10, April 21, 2021

HOW TO CITE

Andreas Hudelist. "Transtopian Moves: The Rhizome in Jonas Carpignano's Feature Films *Mediterranea* (2015) and *A Ciambra* (2017)." *On Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 10 (2020). <<http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2021/16024/>>.

Permalink URL: <<http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2021/16024/>>

URN: <urn:nbn:de:hebis:26-opus-160244>



Transtopian Moves: The Rhizome in Jonas Carpignano's Feature Films *Mediterranea* (2015) and *A Ciambra* (2017)

Abstract

Film comes to its fore as a cultural product, which frames social experiences, relations, and is constructed through these itself. Dealing with our current global and fluid society the analysis will focus on constructions of marginalized individuals who challenge the viewers with their modulations and variations of identifications. Being (someone) evades the subject of becoming, which as an empty subject makes the potential of alternatives transparent and invites us to pursue lived connections, and not only in human-to-human relationships. Following Stuart Hall (1994), this is where a transtopian space is created, which not only collects and allows common knowledge, but also gives space to something new to emerge. The movies *Mediterranea* and *A Ciambra* by Jonas Carpignano show us a current picture of marginalized people as well as a rhizome of migration with line of flights.

1_ Introduction

With the shift in meaning of race (for example, in slogans like “Black is beautiful”), Stuart Hall explains how trans-coding makes it possible to recast dominant meanings and thus contribute to reinterpretations. The space in which this happens is a transtopian space, which can potentially be created by the encounter of different individuals.¹ In the feature films of director Jonas Carpignano, such encounters (by strangers) with both marginalized space and marginalized people are at the center. The theme of the films is quite close to the director's biography: Carpignano's mother is from the Caribbean island of Barbados, and his father is from Rome; Carpignano himself was born in New York, and spent a great deal of time with his father's side of the family in Italy. He represents diverse cultural and national identities, and at the same time addresses these in his films. Carpignano seems fascinated with Calabria and the events that take place there: in this geographically and economically marginal region of Italy, one can locate even more marginal experiences. In *Mediterranea* (2015), the refugees from Burkina Faso have nothing to do with Italy, while in *A Ciambra* (2017)², the teenager is Italian, but at the same time belongs to a group of Roma.

In Carpignano's films, the protagonists Ayiva, a refugee from Burkina Faso, and Pio, a Roma, serve as examples of the “liquid modernity” that Zygmunt Bauman describes in his book *Liquid Modernity* (2000). Bauman emphasizes the adjective “liquid” in his effort to show how stable identities have never been so stable as they appear in

postmodern times.³ While Pio is Italian, he is still marginalized in Italian society; Ayiva is also marginalized, but in a different way. What the characters have in common is that it is difficult for them to participate in public life. This is one reason why they find each other, befriend each other, and ultimately cheat each other.

Their different processes of adaptation and constant changing of identity demonstrate their attempts to create transtopian spaces in which each is not and need not act as a marginalized person, but as someone else.

It is this appearance in popular culture of marginalized individuals, especially “by the voicing of the margins,”⁴ that has transformed cultural life as we know it. Following the reflections of Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Valentin N. Volosinov, Stuart Hall emphasizes the possibility of appropriating an existing meaning by reoccupying it, a process which he calls the politics of representation. Specific counter-strategies develop a transcoding of common meanings: in this manner, the films’ protagonists expand their agency. With their attempts to break out of the external attribution of families and society, they test new life strategies, though these are soon shattered due to the strong hierarchical interconnectedness of their society. Echoing Gilles Deleuze, we can talk about lines of flight, which enable groups or individuals to escape certain appreciations: “Lines of flight are realities; they are very dangerous for societies, although they can get by without them, and sometimes manage to keep them to a minimum.”⁵ But since refugees and asylum-seekers are strangers, are constantly addressed as such, and are thus additionally constructed, they are not capable of building relationships. This is a characteristic of liquid modernity,⁶ in which encounters are events without a past and usually also without a future. Because encounters on the run are singular and without duration, potentials for improvement must be seized at the moment, otherwise it is not possible to repeat them. Life, therefore, and without exception, can only be lived in the present: all hope and despair are suspended in the now, and are also constantly being constructed anew.

With the idea of rhizomes, coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, we can both analyze the films, and understand how the protagonists seek their own ways to improve their situations. They do not plan for the long term, but hope to initiate changes by building on the short-term improvements.

A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. [...] any point of a rhizome can be connected to

anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. [...] *Collective assemblages of enunciation* function directly within *machinic assemblages*; it is not impossible to make a radical break between regimes of signs and their objects.⁷

A rhizome strengthens the possibility of tackling problems without finding linear-causal connections. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is the connecting lines in the root network that can create something new, as we will also see in the actions of the protagonists, still to be discussed. Whether this results in liberating or oppressive situations, in the sense of agency, cannot be predicted. What we can trace, however, are changes that at least move the protagonists. Like an utopia in thought or a mirage in the distance, possibilities open up in the short term, sometimes even for improvement, but sometimes also for regression. What is important here is the movement, the becoming. Rhizomes always mean being *between* things, or even an in-between: an interlude with the aim of seeking a new connection. Connections that can be seen between the two films can be called intramedial. They show us certain changes in the protagonists, but also different aspects of their lives in space and time. They play different important roles in both films but find each other through the fact that both are marginalized in society. Although Pio is Italian, he belongs to the Roma in Calabria, and thus to an ethnic group that is almost absent from the public image of society. Ayiva survived the refugee route across the Mediterranean on a small ship and has now come to Calabria to detach his life from the poverty of his homeland Burkina Faso. An examination of such rhizomatic entanglements within and between *Mediterranea* and *A Ciambra* will answer the question of whether lines of escape can be found for the protagonists.

2_Rhizome I: *Mediterranea* (2015)

Director Jonas Carpignano began to address the themes of *Mediterranea* in his short film *A Chjàna* (2012). In 2010, riots broke out in the Italian town Rosarno: shots were fired at African immigrants, and over 50 people were injured.⁸ Rather than seeking a valid explanation for what happened by shooting a documentary about the events, Carpignano used his short film to attempt an approach as to *how* the riots could have happened. During his research for *A Chjàna*, Carpignano met refugee Koudous Seihon, who stars in both the short film and the feature film. Carpignano works with non-professional actors, who are playing themselves. This characterizes his way of working, which on the one hand pushes the artificiality of the film into the background and on

the other hand strengthens the rhizomatic connections between the films. *Mediterranea*, which expands upon the issues addressed in *A Chjàna*, was released in 2015 as the director's debut feature film.

In *Mediterranea*, Ayiva and his friend Abas decide to flee from Burkina Faso to Europe; their journey includes overcrowded trucks, desert marches, as well as exposure to gangs of robbers. Finally, they cross over to Italy on a refugee boat, which they steer themselves in the hope for greater success in their crossing. Though the boat capsizes, both survive and arrive in southern Italy, where they meet an acquaintance. They are shouted at by locals to “disappear” when greeting one another too loudly in the evening, and on the way to the sleeping place of the acquaintance, a car repeatedly passes them at a threateningly close proximity. In such scenes we can observe the precariousness of the refugees' lives, which have no value for the Italians. With other people they go to a reception camp, where they can stay and from which they have to find work within three months, otherwise they will be deported. Ayiva steals a backpack from the train. He keeps the warm clothes and resells unused ones. Meanwhile he starts working with Abas on an orange farm. Ayiva is able to adjust well to the conditions and keeps track of what is going on in the event of an accident at work, thus drawing attention to himself. Abas cannot really motivate himself because of the xenophobic treatment, and because he doesn't want to work on the farm every day, as they are exploited there as cheap labor. While Abas cannot see any improvement for him and he does not want to fall into a similar position as in his home country, Ayiva sees possibilities for betterment in the current situation. Neither of them plans for the future, however Ayiva is visibly happier by continuously biting into the oranges and enjoying the sweet juice. Although he came as a refugee he acts like a farmer, and in addition, he manages, again and again, to earn money with small deals, and as a diligent worker he gains the trust of his employer and makes friends with the family.

When the vacant houses in Rosarno, where migrants live, are cleared by the police, resentment among the migrants begins to grow. At the same time, everyday racism among the villagers is also growing. Ayiva goes to work anyway and asks his boss if he could give him an employment contract so that he can get a residence permit; his boss declines, explaining to him that his grandfather also tried to earn money abroad but got too little. Returning from work, Ayiva cannot immediately find Abas, and learns that two black people have been shot. A group of refugees forms, and begins to protest

in the streets, using the slogan *Don't kill black people*. The Italian villagers throw objects at them; the demonstration escalates; cars are burned, and windows broken. Finally, the police use tear gas against the protesters. Ayiva is able to escape through a side alley, but his friend Abas is beaten badly, sustaining life-threatening injuries.

The following morning, Ayiva looks toward the sunrise. He learns that, for humanitarian reasons, Abas could now get a residence permit for at least a year, but Ayiva thinks it would be better to return. He calls his daughter over video; she has received the mp3 player he sent her, and she dances happily to the song *We Found Love* by Rhianna. Watching his daughter dance, Ayiva realizes he can contribute to the betterment of his family while remaining in Italy after all. In the final scene of the film, Ayiva is working at his boss's daughter's birthday party, and the boss invites Ayiva to have a drink with him. As *Sarà Perché Ti Amo* by the band Ricchi e Poveri plays, we see Ayiva entering the building, as the picture becomes blurred and fades out.

Carpignano's film is a fictitious retelling of the riots in January 2010, in which a revolt broke out after shots were fired at refugees in Rosarno, Calabria. However, since the film was shot with a handheld camera, its aesthetics resemble those of a documentary, which allows Carpignano to pull the audience more quickly into the cosmos of the film, and thus identify more closely with the characters.

From the beginning of the film, the attitude of the inhabitants of the Italian village toward the refugees is clear. In a few excerpts, Carpignano reveals the xenophobia that prevails in Rosarno: the villagers shout from their windows to quiet the refugees, in one scene a woman is sexually harassed. To this is added the mafia organization 'Ndrangheta, which dominates the fruit and vegetable trade and occupies influential positions in local politics; when the African refugees were taken out of town in a bus, a loudspeaker on a van announced: "If we catch you, we will kill you."⁹

The moment the refugees become protesters, they move on a line of flight. Through creating noise in the streets and through their protest, intrusions into the quiet life of Rosarno that upset its orderly circumstances and temporarily block the system of representation, the refugees are able to question the order of the society in the manner described by Dick Hebdige.¹⁰ The refugees de-subjectivize themselves and detach themselves from the structures and the limited agency given to them by their severely restricted role already ascribed by law. Through this ascription, hierarchical structure, and strong oppression, refugees experience an intense threat from that they feel they

must fight against. This fight is a break with being a refugee, that leads the refugee to become something different, something new, to take a counter-position that also allows for a new diversity of positions, which can be seen in the intensity of the protesters, whose actions range from chanting in the street, to acts of vandalism, to fighting with the police.

Through this line of flight, the subject becomes a pure multiplicity that eludes its stability and can therefore be more adequately described by the term singularity. According to Deleuze and Guattari, these actions are already contained in the social field of oppression. Nevertheless, the field under attack is always recomposed in a new yet similar fashion: “Immanence everywhere. Lines of flight are immanent to the social field. Supple segmentarity continually dismantles the concretions of rigid segmentarity, but everything it dismantles it reassembles on its own level.”¹¹ The line of flight therefore does not always promise redemption, nor even the more modest improvement, but can also change the situation in the way that death is provoked. It is here that the different power structures and struggles that exist between the state, citizens, criminal organizations such as the mafia, and refugees become transparent. The film focuses on dissent and uses fictional narrative to make comprehensible which events could have led to the racial riots in Rosarno.

Arjun Appadurai emphasizes the difficulties of the state to dominate within a territory when there are more than merely citizens with their concomitant rights and duties who live therein:

More exactly, what these diasporic pluralisms expose and intensify is the gap between the powers of the state to regulate borders, monitor dissent and distribute entitlements within a finite territory and the fiction of ethnic singularity on which all nations ultimately rely. In other words, it becomes increasingly difficult to view the territorial integrity that justifies states and the ethnic singularity that validates nations as seamless aspects of one another.¹²

In the music at the end of the film we see such a dissolution of national borders and a rapprochement of the protagonists. First, when Ayiva talks to his daughter on Skype, she dances to Rhianna’s *We Found Love*, the chorus of which describes finding love in a hopeless place, such as now seems to exist in Rosarno. This is further underlined by the song *Sarà Perché Ti Amo* by Ricchi e Poveri, who sing about the chaos of love. Here the narration of the film is disturbed; at first glance, it does not make much sense that, after the race riots, Ayiva would be working for his boss again or helping at his

daughter's birthday party. According to Guattari, such a disruption or breakout of the narration, which was previously created by the protest, could be understood as a new arrangement of subjectivation. The choruses of the two songs accompany Ayiva and make it clear that he has found something he was looking for in this chaos or hopeless place. After the riot, we observe a noticeable improvement in his face-to-face interactions. There are no more scenes of oppression and Ayiva himself seems to move with confidence.

A story is by definition something discursive. There is a term, then another term, then a third that relates to the first two. There is more montage than composition, whereas in my way of seeing things the subjective mutation made by the aesthetic refrain is not discursive, it is the outbreak of the non-discursive at the heart of the discursive. That is why it always crosses a threshold of non-sense, a threshold that ruptures the coordinates of the world.¹³

Ayiva's world coordinates could not be torn apart, but his coordinates seem to reassemble. In the film, the plot remains open: we assume that Ayiva goes to his boss, who has just invited him for a drink at the bar; rather than Ayiva getting a refreshing drink away from curious eyes, he is in the thick of the action. Here, a potential space opens that at the beginning of the film would have been unthinkable: through these new relationships, a transtopian space is created, a place where something new can emerge. What remains unclear, however, is whether Ayiva can escape the subordinate structure here, or if by accepting the invitation he subordinates himself again.¹⁴

3_Rhizome II: *A Ciambra* (2017)

Carpignano's second feature film, *A Ciambra*, focuses on a Romani community living in a battered apartment complex in Gioia Tauro, Calabria. Carpignano met the movie's main character, Pio Amato, while shooting the short film *A Chjana*, when the Roma teenager stole the director's car. Carpignano recalls: "The first time I met the Amato family was in 2011 after the Fiat Panda filled with my crew's film equipment was stolen. We were in Gioia Tauro (Calabria) shooting *A Chjana* (the short film which would later become *Mediterranea*). In Gioia Tauro, when a car disappears, the first thing you do is 'go to the gypsies.' That's when I saw the *Ciambra* for the first time. I immediately fell in love with the energy of the place."¹⁵ Carpignano's retelling of this story elucidates his attachment to the area and its people; his devotion can also be seen in the camera work, which seems to trace the characters.

The director did not notice Pio in his first encounter with the location, but on his second visit Carpignano became fascinated with the young car thief and wanted to know more about him. Through Pio, Carpignano gained insight into local Roma life. Two years after finishing the short film *A Chjana* (2012), he completed another short film, *Young Lions of Gypsy* (2014), which focuses on one night in Pio Amato's life, from which the idea for a feature film about Pio was born. First, however, Carpignano finished the film *Mediterranea*, in which Pio appears briefly when Ayiva wants to sell him some stolen objects. There Pio appears as a smoking minor and (apparently self-sufficient) sovereign child, for whom the trade in stolen goods is an everyday business. During the shooting of *Mediterranea*, Carpignano was developing ideas for his second feature film, in which Pio would play a decisive role.

A Ciambra (2017) concentrates entirely on the life of the youngster and the world of Gioia Tauro's Roma community. Pio is 14 years old, but since the teenager wants to be considered an adult, he tags along with his big brother Cosimo, and tries to help at every (criminal) opportunity. One day, the police arrest Cosimo and their father Rocco. While the two are in jail, Pio wants to prove that he is old enough to provide for the family. Against the will of his mother Iolanda, he takes over his family's criminal business and proves to be a skillful and determined negotiator in the sale of stolen goods. Here we find a transmedia reference to the previous short films and the feature film *Mediterranea*. Not only have the actors been chosen again for the same roles, but these roles have been further developed, and through the perspective of the new plot provide further insight into their lives a few years later. The connections between the films show rhizomatic relationships as characters appear and develop in similar scenes as in *A Chjana* and *Mediterranea*, and *Young Lions of Gypsy* and *A Ciambra*. In *A Ciambra*, for example, we learn that he not only pursues crookedness in the family tradition, but also has friendships outside the family. In a dialogue between Pio and his grandfather, the latter says: "Once, we were always on the road. On the road. We were free, we didn't have bosses. We answered to no one. We were free, always on the road. Now, we are here. Remember, it's us against the world." When Pio's grandfather dies, he acts against the mafia boss who harasses his family, and the conversation between them motivates Pio to rob this boss. Pio manages to break into the boss's house, but he is caught, and, when taken back to his family, his father kicks him out of the house because Pio would have brought the family's honor into disrepute. He has nowhere to go

and goes to Ayiva's, where, for a short time, he sleeps on a mattress on the floor and lives the life of Ayiva. Soon, Pio receives several messages from his brother Cosimo; the brothers meet, and Cosimo explains to Pio that Pio only gets respect in his family and nowhere else, so he must decide between family and his extra-familial relationships (pitting the marginalized Roma and migrant groups against each other). Cosimo then suggests to Pio that they do a 'thing' together, so that Pio might make up for his mistake: Pio should do something with Ayiva to distract him, Cosimo suggests, so Cosimo and his friends are able to clean out Ayiva's storage facility. Pio deliberately crashes his bike and calls Ayiva for help, and Ayiva takes care of him. In the last scene of the film, Pio is back with his family. He greets his grandmother on the street, while being called to the adults by his brother; on the other side of the street, his friends are playing. We can see him moving towards the group of adults and the image becomes blurred.

As in *Mediterranea*, Carpignano makes use of a restless and distanced handheld camera, which, combined with shooting in original locations, enhances the feeling of naturalness. The viewer develops the feeling of being part of the action. In *Gioia Tauro*, we get to know several people and can empathetically understand Pio's actions. We constantly see how individual protagonists are able to worm their way out of problem situations, only to have to deal with a problem of at least the same size right afterwards. In a conversation between Pio and Ayiva, for example, when asked how he is doing Ayiva tells Pio: "You know, life is a bit complicated. Sometimes you think you're moving ahead, and then you hit a setback." As the largest container port in Italy is located in Gioia Tauro, the mafia has been active there for a long time, and, through their actions on the ground, they strongly influence the lives of residents like Pio's family. As such, individual needs are only met if they do not overlap with those of the mafia, and life in Gioia Tauro becomes even more precarious: economic marginalization is compounded by social marginalization, geographical marginalization, and mafia structures, such that the experiences made here are therefore marginalized at least doubly if not further. Creating visibility for the marginalized is certainly one of Carpignano's main motivations and interests.

In *A Ciambra*, the end of the film promises a further development of the character, because at least his wish from the beginning of the film has come true: from now on he will be perceived as an adult. For the viewer, however, this end will not be especially positive, or remains at the very least ambivalent, because although the film shows no

other way to earn a living, being in the adult community seems to signal Pio's final entry into a life of crime. There are several moments in which Pio's perspective of 'we' expands to include the African migrants, as both groups are not only always fighting for better lives, but also simply to survive. Had Pio followed Ayiva's example, he could have learned how to better get himself out of difficult situations. As a refugee, Ayiva had to find his way around the village, and slowly secure his survival with small jobs: in *A Ciambra*, we learn that Ayiva trades in different goods, which he hopes to sell to Africa as soon as a container could be filled. He has built up this business alongside his everyday life. When Pio suggests that Ayiva steal cars, which they could break down and sell as spare parts to Africa, Ayiva only answers: "Stop thinking about stealing cars!" In this scene you realize that it is not so easy for the two to build up a friendship. Although their lifestyles and similarities in everyday life bring them closer together, they are sometimes far apart in their actions, customs, and their families. Pio's thinking is strongly rooted in the tradition of his family. Ayiva mostly tries to get by without criminal acts, which he seems to almost succeed in doing. If Ayiva earns money through criminal acts, he does not want Pio to be a part of it: after all, there is an age difference between the two, so Ayiva could be perceived as a father figure. However, both have the same basic problems. Their individual backgrounds, which differ greatly, are forgotten, because their marginalized positions unite them. They do not know how to live without financial worries and have to constantly think about how to provide for their families. Their situations recall a quote by Zygmunt Bauman:

In liquid-modern society we all, and each one of us, are instructed [...] to seek, biographical exits from the socially concocted mess. So we are all individuals by (unwritten) decree – spending most of our life trying to gain an individuality de facto. This is a tall order of a task, and no wonder we tend to dream of respite.¹⁶

Neither Pio nor Ayiva allows himself to dream of a breathing space, as each are constantly looking for a way out of his current situation. Pio, for example, tries to skip biographical stages, as an adolescent child who already wants to take on the actions and responsibilities of an adult. Both try to shake off the external markings and find new identities. In *Mediterranea*, Ayiva transforms himself from refugee to protester to labor migrant; in *A Ciambra*, like a trader, he diligently collects a wide variety of goods that he plans to sell. These are attempts to escape from social chaos, as Bauman puts it, and to build an individual order. They are driven to look for breathing space, but this goal seems to be steadily receding into the distance. Through this constant change, they

are always in search of themselves, as they are entangled in various (rhizomatic) networks that ascribe identities to them, but hardly allow any attributions of their own.

4_ The Distribution of the Sensible

Both movies are driven by the director's interest in the Other; an encounter with the foreign is a common denominator of both films. In *Mediterranea*, it is the refugee Ayiva from Burkina Faso who stands in the spotlight; in *A Ciambra*, it is the Roma teenager Pio. Despite the fact that they are fundamentally different, both figures are marginalized in society, connected by their exclusion from participation in public life because of their origins: one as a refugee, the other as a Roma. Following Jacques Rancière, these are two perspectives that demonstrate an inability to take part in society. Through these characters, Carpignano manages to give an insight into marginalized lives and thus make visible something that has been marginalized in our perception. Rancière calls this the “[t]he distribution of the sensible[, which] reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed. Having a particular ‘occupation’ thereby determines the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc.”¹⁷

Rancière often refers in his reflections to the events of May 1968. For him, power relations were not clarified by theory but by the reality of ideological conflicts. The race riots in Rosarno bear witness to such an ideological conflict. When refugees are on the run, we do not know to where they are fleeing, nor whether they will survive at all; as refugees, they remain without any right to participate in society. However, when they gather in Rosarno, they not only become a part of the everyday life of the Italians living there, they also receive a new group identity. A collective identity is formed both by their coming together and getting to know each other in a new place—their work on the orange farm helps to form a sense of belonging, for example—but also by having their rights curtailed in such a way that their existence is threatened. As Zygmunt Bauman describes:

Identities do not rest on the uniqueness of their traits, but consist increasingly in distinct ways of selecting/recycling/rearranging the cultural matter which is common to all, or at least potentially available to all. It is the movement and capacity for change, not the ability to cling to once-established form and contents, that secures their continuity.¹⁸

On the one hand, as a member of a minority group, Pio can be used to demonstrate how easily a figure can be located in the nation state, as a living person with hardly any rights, in a place where he can be controlled and monitored. On the other hand, as an Italian, Pio stands for the invisible element of the population who cannot participate in society because they lack the bureaucratic prerequisites to go to the polls, for example, or to pursue even a trivial job.

After Ayiva works on the farm for some time, he learns that his boss also has an immigrant background; as we see the difference between them grow less and less, we also witness them becoming friendlier with each other. And as Ayiva becomes a political subject on the streets as a protester, he seems to awaken something in his employer that changes his boss's perception of him. Here we see that the refugee is no longer perceived as such, nor necessarily as someone who is becoming "Italian," per se, but nonetheless begins to become someone with whom a friendly relationship may be established – as if his employer has discovered the strangeness within himself and can therefore better accept Ayiva. However, the extent to which Ayiva's dependence on his boss (or his boss's dependence on Ayiva) changes, after Ayiva accepts the boss's invitation to enter his home and mingle with those inside, is ultimately unclear.

For his part, in becoming political subject as a protester, Ayiva not only gains a heightened self-confidence but also finds his voice. As Rancière puts it: "Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time."¹⁹ In *A Ciambra*, we see Ayiva no longer working on the orange farm, but earning his money as a trader. He is no longer invisible: he moves through the streets on a motorbike, with agency; at one point he even helps Pio, who is afraid of traveling on trains, to get home again.

In *A Ciambra*, we know that Pio's Roma family has a different background than the local Italians, so it is easy to imagine that the two outsiders, Pio and Ayiva, will get along well together. When Pio finally cheats Ayiva, however, the inequality between them and short-term planning becomes transparent. Still, each protagonist stands as a paradigmatic figure of his particular group of invisibles: the refugees and the Roma.

5_Conclusion

In 1923, Béla Balázs anticipated the “visual turn” with his proclamation that film images represent inner experiences (not rational thoughts) that would have remained unspoken if man had already said everything that can be said with words. What is to be expressed here lies deep in a layer of the soul that cannot be reached by words and concepts, just as our musical experiences cannot be captured in rational terms.²⁰ We especially understand this in the films *Mediterranea* and *A Ciambra* when music serves to set the scene. Here we can again observe how demands and expectations are passed on to the characters from the outside: although the actions are always imbued with hope, hope never moves closer, but rather recedes into the background. In the last scene of *Mediterranea*, for example, it is unclear whether and how the relationship between Ayiva and his boss might develop further. The music that plays and the fact that Ayiva receives an invitation to the party as a guest suggest that he has been able to break down hierarchies. Being invited to the party as a guest means that a line of flight has formed, opening a transtopian space for Ayiva – at least at this moment. He no longer has to ‘play’ the refugee here but can act as an equal.

The cinematographic images confront us with a visual reality that is far away from us, and it is precisely this distance that enables viewers to make the foreign their own, or to discover it as something within themselves. The distance not only shows us something foreign that is not integrated in our environment, but also exposes *us* as disintegrated with the foreign. This recalls Julia Kristeva’s wish for both the acceptance of the foreign in our disintegrated self and the acceptance of the own in the distance, without abolishing the two levels as they would then be unnecessary as terms.²¹ If we adopt this view, something new emerges, a transtopian space or a line of flight.

Deleuze and Guattari write: “Lines of flight, for their part, never consist in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a hole in a pipe; there is no social system that does not leak from all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight.”²² It cannot be guaranteed that movies will twist ordinary structures upside down to allow something new to emerge, but they do carry that potential, for images are not only created by the filmmakers to capture feelings and moods they have experienced themselves. Thus, an expansion of cinematic possibilities of expression can also lead to an expansion of human

possibilities of expression.²³ And it is precisely this breaking through of the unquestioned dichotomies that shows us to be on the mental horizon a potential of possibilities. Through the image from a distance, we are not confronted with a dystopia – i.e. a reversal of the immediate situation being experienced – but with a multitude of other scenarios. And pluricentricity does not promise a singular result, but a variety of possibilities. This aesthetic experience through the film images is culturally framed and socially formed.²⁴ Film without exception is conditioned by the conditions of its creation, but at the same time this condition makes alternatives possible. And, in this way, film offers a transtopian potential for viewers. In both films, the end is blurred so that we cannot see concretely what is happening. The ambiguity, however, is a visual promise, perhaps even an iconography of transtopia, that something is possible.

Endnotes

- ¹ Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other,’” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practice*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 270.
- ² The film titles can cause confusion, as Carpignano made two short films (*A Chjàna* 2012 and *A Ciambra* 2014) before adapting their stories into feature films (*Mediterranea* 2015 and *A Ciambra* 2017). Since the second short film has the same name as the corresponding feature film, the short film will be referred to by its international title *Young Lions of Gypsy*, the feature film by the original title.
- ³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000).
- ⁴ Stuart Hall, “What Is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture,” in *Social Justice* 20.1/2 (1993), 106.
- ⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 204.
- ⁶ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 95.
- ⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6–7.
- ⁸ Rachel Donadio, “Race Riots Grip Italian Town, and Mafia Is Suspected,” in *New York Times*, January 10, 2010, accessed July 16, 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/11/world/europe/11italy.html>>.
- ⁹ Tom Kington, “Italians cheer as police move African immigrants out after clashes with locals,” in *Guardian*, January 10, 2010, accessed July 16, 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/10/calabria-mafia-africa-immigration>>.
- ¹⁰ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture, The Meaning of Style* (London/New York: Taylor & Francis, 1979).
- ¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 205.
- ¹² Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 2016), 3.
- ¹³ Félix Guattari and Oliver Zahm, “On Contemporary Art: Interview with Oliver Zahm, April 1992,” in *The Guattari Effect*, eds. Éric Alliez and Andrew Goffey (London: Continuum, 2011), 41.

- ¹⁴ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity’?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1994).
- ¹⁵ Jonas Carpignano, “Meet the Amatos - with THE CIAMBRA Director Jonas Carpignano,” in *Peccadillo Pictures*, no date, accessed November 7, 2020, <<https://www.peccapics.com/meet-amatos-ciambra-director-jonas-carpignano/>>.
- ¹⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, Interview with Zygmunt Bauman, in Tony Blackshaw, *Network: Newsletter of the British Sociological Association* 83 (2002), 2.
- ¹⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004), 12.
- ¹⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture as Praxis* (London: Sage, 1999), xlv.
- ¹⁹ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.
- ²⁰ Béla Balász, “Visible Man, or the Culture of Film (1924),” in *Screen* 48.1 (2007), 91-108, here 96.
- ²¹ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, transl. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
- ²² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 204.
- ²³ Balász, “Visible Man,” 108.
- ²⁴ Norman Denzin, *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur’s Gaze* (London: Sage, 1995), 15.