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The violence of money

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One of the most frivolous enactments of money Hollywood ever had to offer can be found in Busby Berkeley's *Gold Diggers of 1933*. The musical routine a group of showgirls is rehearsing at the beginning of the film is entitled "We're in the money" and entails a double promise. Clad in costumes adorned with glittering dollar coins, their song and dance routine celebrates the end of the depression by proclaiming that the resurrected silver dollar will once again turn their dreams to gold. With Ginger Rogers leading the other showgirls in their jubilation at regained prosperity, we are offered an erotization of the American dream of creative capitalism. As is usually the case in musicals, this economic encoding of desire, welding money with the beautiful feminine body, is negotiated by virtue of the gaze. The showgirls perform a surplus of money, which gestures towards the pursuit of happiness the constitution declares to be the right of every American. At the same time, albeit more implicitly, an analogy unfolds between the work the showgirls perform on Busby Berkeley's stage aimed at entertaining the cinema spectators on the one hand, and, on the other, the work performed in the Ford factories, meant to fight the economic depression after the stock market crash in 1929.

As they practice the routine, the individual bodies of the showgirls seamlessly transform into a collective body of an erotic display of femininity, even

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while the fusion of dollar coins with the barely clad showgirls produces a surplus enjoyment. Both objects of desire – the women and the money – stand in for each other. At the same time at stake is the classic fetishization of capital. By calling forth erotic desires, the economic fantasy the showgirls evoke is one they embody by proxy. Indeed, what Busby Berkeley offers us is a chain of surplus satisfaction on the level of fantasy, with the barely clad bodies of the showgirls standing in for notions of luxury, freedom and self-determination, even while their glittering self-display turns back on itself. As is so often the case in the musical genre, this particular show routine self-consciously articulates the artificiality of the sparkling spectacle it is in the process of putting on display. To highlight the lack of any mimetic referentiality for this unabashed celebration of money, Busby Berkeley has Ginger Rogers resort to pig Latin in her song solo. While his camera moves into an extreme close-up of her face, which threatens to dissolve into pure white light, her voice articulates sounds distorted in their meaning. Afterall, the pleasure of money requires primarily a cheerful confidence in its fantasmatic power.

This opening scene from *Gold Diggers of 1933* serves as a useful point of departure for the argument about the violence subtending cinematic enactments of creative capitalism I seek to unfold in this article, precisely because it references not only the glamour but also the despair the American pursuit of economic happiness contains. At precisely the moment during the rehearsal, when the director of the show asks his showgirls to mimic a wave of gold coins with their arms, the sheriff and his men break onto the stage and begin to confiscate the props and costumes. Before the astonished eyes of those on stage and off – but also ours – the dream of luxury that was being rehearsed suddenly turns into a fragile illusion. The police begin to tear the costumes made of false coins off the bodies of the show girls, not only literally stripping them to their bare skin, but also economically leaving them bare as well. To Joan Blondell, who is clueless about what is going on, Ginger Rogers snidely responds, 'they're closing the show, dumbell'. From one moment to the next the showgirls have lost all confidence in their dream of prosperity and find themselves instead faced, once again, with the breadline. Of course the musical genre insists on a happy end. After a bout of misfortune, which usually serves to morally fortify the hero and the heroine, the wave of good luck always returns. At the end of *Gold Diggers of 1933* we, indeed, find ourselves again in a Broadway theater, witnessing the spectacular final musical routine of the show Ginger Rogers and her friends are performing to an enthusiastic audience. The producer, the director, the stars and the showgirls are once again in the money, only now they use their financial good luck to give voice to social injustice. This routine does not

celebrate the victory of capitalism. Rather, it commemorates the forgotten veterans of the First World War.

As Stanley Cavell has compellingly argued, Hollywood has consistently served as a cultural site where America thinks about itself critically, even while it makes its audience laugh. The spectacular singing and dancing does not, in fact, detract our gaze from the cultural malaise genre cinema symptomatically enacts. It simply makes it more palatable.[1] In the 50s, after another World War, Marilyn Monroe came to enact a shamelessly erotic investment in luxury similar to Busby Berkeley's showgirls, when in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* she will not cede her desire for diamonds both on stage and off. One should not forget, however, that in the final sequence of Billy Wilder's sex comedy, the father of the happless young man Lorelei has ensnared ultimately consents to the marriage he has done everything to prevent precisely because Lorelei is able to convince him that she has very intelligent ideas about money. After yet another war, Madonna parodically appropriates Monroe's tight-fitting pink outfit and strip-tease body guestures, only to give her performance of an erotic investment in money a post-modern spin. Off-stage her material girl prefers the man with the pick-up truck and the daisys to all the diamonds in the world.

Given my premise that mainstream cinema has always functioned as a seismograph of the American cultural imaginary, the question to ask is why, at the beginning of our 21st century, such playful engagements with money, which comes and goes like a wave, and whose erotization is self-ironically staged, can hardly be found in Hollywood today. Of course we do have George Clooney's Ocean, whose ever-growing troop of clever heisters helps him contest his enemies' economic affairs by attacking their wealth and redistributing it. Glum critics who insist that this movie franchise is silly and not really worthy of the more serious work Soederberg normally produces, have a point, regardless of whether one enjoys these films or not. The images as well as the dramaturgy do *not* touch the nerve of our times. To find more compelling examples in contemporary cinema's engagement with the dream of money and the creativity it inspires, we must – thus my wager – foreground the violence and fatality, which was always also inherent to the American pursuit of economic happiness. With the surplus of images of war in mind, which have inundated American media since 9/11, we notice that Hollywood has been oddly inhibited in transforming the reality of war into successful cinematic tropes. The war films that have come out in the last few year, even if their political critique of the war in Iraq is laudable, appear strangely unfitting precisely because screenwriters, directors and cameramen seem unable to find appropriate stories and images for this catastrophe.

By contrast the films that were both economically and critically successful in the last year return instead to the classic narrative of social criticism, as though they were the articulations of cultural revenants. In *No Country for Old Men,* for example, the Coen brothers unfold a narrative about the desire for money hinging on a lust for violence, which – as D. H. Lawrence once so brilliantly noted – has haunted the American imagination since James Fenimore Cooper. As though he were offering a description of the protagonists in *No Country for Old Men*, the British novelist claimed, "All the other stuff, the love, the democracy, the floundering into lust, is a sort of by-play. The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer. It has never melted".[2] Let me briefly recall the plot: Somewhere in the south of Texas, near the Rio Grande, a hunter comes upon the traces of a massacre and soon realizes that this is the scene of a drug deal, which went fatally wrong. To preempt the economic discussion I will develop further on, one might call this illegal exchange of money and drugs an embedded subculture of capitalism, or to be more precise, its anamorphotic reflection. As the lone hunter approaches the scene, he finds the blood-covered corpses dramatically composed on the ground next to two cars, as though they were extras on a movie set. Because he is able to read these body signs correctly, he soon discovers yet another dead man, resting by a tree not far from the scene of the massacre, with an attaché case containing two million dollars.

Although Llewelyn Moss is not directly responsible for this collateral damage of creative capitalism, he, like so many heroes in *film noir*, has a longstanding desire to transgress the laws of legality. The scene of violence he accidentally finds himself a witness to appears like an answer to his clandestine dreams. By stealing the money from the dead thief, he inaugurates a wave of violence, which will cost the lives not only of him and his wife, but also of all the others, who were involved in this particular transgressive exchange. He is, however, willing to gamble with both his life and that of others precisely because he represents the terrible individual of the white male killer D. H. Lawrence had in mind in his discussion of Cooper's Leatherstocking novels. If we recall further that Lawrence is, after all, speaking about the cultural soul of America, what is compelling about McCarthy's narrative is that his hunter's violent desire for money is, in fact, engendered by a phantom, which takes on the shape of the contract killer, so brillantly performed by Javier Bardem. Chigurh, too, is a hard, solitary and stoic hunter, much like the one who stole the abandoned suitcase. With his appearance, however, Llewelyn Moss not only seamlessly transforms from hunter to prey. Picking up on Derrida's point about the specter of Marx, one might claim: At the beginning of our 21st century, another specter is prowling not only through Europe but rather our glo-

balized world, and it is indeed a specter, which has been haunting our culture since the 17th century. Its name, however, is capitalism. Its promise – as Busby Berkeley's showgirls cheerfully proclaim – is that with enough greenbacks in one's pocket, all dreams will turn to gold. This dream, however, also entails a terrible logic, which discloses the violence subtending the fantasy that any pursuit of economic happiness can run without collateral damage. Within a cultural logic, in which no one can resist taking money that accidentally comes ones way, even though one didn't properly earn it, there will always be greed, which like love is notoriously blind, in this case to the humanity of all others involved.

Paul Thomas Anderson's *There will be Blood*, is a second example for the successful return to a morally informed criticism of capitalism to be found in contemporary mainstream cinema. Even though he has denied all political intenions, his adaptation of Upton Sinclair's novel *Oil!* recalls the anti-war slogan "No blood for oil". Embodying a far more sinister form of vampirism inherent to all economic greed than that of Busby Berkeley's showgirls, Daniel Plainview, digging for gold, stumbles upon his first oil mine. His view is indeed a plain one. As the 19th century turns into the 20th, he transforms into a successful business man, with only one goal in sight. He wishes to expand his production of oil as liberally and creatively as he can, so that he might acquire ever more capital. He openly acknowledges that no stake is too high in this utterly uninhibited pursuit of economic happiness, neither losing his son nor selling his soul to the equally power hungry preacher Eli. As Anderson explained in an interview, "The question we must ask ourselves is which price we are willing to pay for progress. Which price must the hero pay for his wealth? Which exchanges is he willing to undertake? Is it worth staking the loss of one's family so as to acquire riches?" Laconically he finishes by proclaiming, "I don't think so".[3]

Aimed at an economic logic, which insists on growth at all costs, Anderson's critique bleakly unfolds capitalism's vampiristic tendency to suck out the blood of those who fall prey to its logic, only to leave them behind as living dead. By staging exploding oil fields that perpetually demand more blood, Anderson uncovers the destructive side of capitalist creativity. At the same time, the moral argument of *There will be Blood* is complex in the sense that Anderson has sympathy with his representative of old capitalism. After all, Daniel Plainview not only honestly acknowledges the lengths to which he is willing to go to satisfy his greed for economic growth. He remains consistent in his core set of values, heartless and demonic as they may be. Even though a criminal intelligence can be found at the heart of the extraordinary energy, with which he ruthlessly buys up all the land he requires for shipping his oil, he does not privilege an economic innovation that changes

every day. Instead, he stoically insists on continually developing his own interests as well as the interest on his money. Terrifying about Anderson's film, however, is not merely the maelstrom of violence, in which the representatives of capitalism and religion come to be joined together, functioning as doppelganger of each other. Nor is it merely the bloodbath their greed calls forth, which disturbs us. What is truly horrific about *There will be Blood* is the way in which the film forces us to acknowledge how relentlessly the violent force of creative capitalism continues to haunt western culture. The burning oil fields of the early 20th century Anderson brings to our attention are monstrous in the sense any prophetic revelation is. They are meant as a warning that what we require is more than simply another interpretation of capitalism.

In his *Culture of the New Capitalism*, Richard Sennett focuses his critique on what we have come to call a liberalization of markets, which privileges fluidity, an orientation towards the present, as well as a foregrounding of possibility, rather than the progressive development of values.[4] Owing to the global dissemination of production, markets and finances we find at the forefront of this 'new' economy an unstable energy, aimed at constant innovation, which does not hesitate to destroy anything that is old and familiar. Short-term, impatient capital is considered in positive terms, stability appears as a weakness. According to Sennett, primarily at stake is the opening up of new possibilities, which is to say new markets, regardless of the physical, psychical and ethical costs such innovation and creativity entails. The ideal person to embody this 'fresh-page attitude' of new capitalism is the socially flexible person, willing to let go of everything and hold on to nothing, neither his home, nor his familiar rituals, not his craft. Instead – and this is Sennett's core critique – a flexible person is one willing to perpetually learn new skills and change his base of knowledge.

Significant for my own thoughts on the murky interface between capitalism and violence is the manner in which Sennett draws our attention to the militarisation of the new liberal economy. In order to speak about the manner in which money constantly takes new paths or finds new locations for development, we have, for example, come to speak about the 'hostile takeover' of one company by another. However, state of war emerges as a resilient trope for a positive encoding of aggressive economic energy not only for liberal economists. David Cronenberg uses what seems to have become a linguistic commonplace in his recent film about the world of the Russian mafia in London, the *vory v zakone*, which he conceives as a re-appropriation of the 'old' capitalism Sennett has a certain nostalgia for. Though the trafficking of women and drugs, around which *Eastern Promises* revolves, entails a global model of exchange, it exhibits an interesting (if disturbing) response to

what Sennett critiques in 'new' capitalism. Both target a discontent with notions of economic liberality, flexibility, perpetual innovation and new page attitude. At the same time, Cronenberg's portrayal of this counter-economy serves an equally critical portrayal of a decentralized, self-regulated system of the economic exchange of illegal goods, and as such offers a poignant critique of any nostalgic reappraisal of the culture of old capitalism.

What, one might ask, is the neuralgic point of contemporary capitalism addressed by all three films I am discussing? According to Sennett, in a culture of 'new' capitalism, people interact rather than relate to each other. Great distance exists between the various levels of a company, going in tandem with an eradication of bodiliness. Let us remember, the economic advisers in favor of changes and fresh-page attitudes rarely take responsibility for the human consequences downsizing a company will have. By contrast, the economic model of Henry Ford's factories, which for Sennett is decidedly different from 'new' capitalism, contained a paternal employer, who maintained close proximity to his workers. Given the analogy between showgirls and factory workers I invoked in my opening discussion of *Golddiggers of 1933*, one might now add, in classic musicals from the 30s, the position of the paternal employer is occupied by the producer or the director of the show, who imposes harsh work conditions on his singers and dancers, even while he constantly shares the hardships on stage with them. The bodiliness of factory work finds a correlation in the physical strength required of the showgirls during rehearsals, the loyalty of factory worker correlates with their willingness to do everything so that the show will go through successfully. Sennett's claim is that in old capitalism, duty and responsibility were highly valorized, as were authority, legitimacy and charisma; and indeed, one need only to think of the paternal president Roosevelt, who promised the American people a new deal. By contrast, 'new' capitalism according to Sennett, is characterized by low institutional loyalty, the depreciation of trust among employees and the diminishing value of traditional knowledge.

How does this contrast between two economic models translate into Cronenberg's *Eastern Promise*, where the rehabilitation of 'old' capitalism serves as the privileged mode of economic exchange for the Russian mafia? In the world of the *vory v zakone,* every man is fundamentally responsible for the violence he commits in the name of duty towards the 'familiy' he belongs to. We also find a charismatic, paternal figure of authority, who demands unconditional loyalty from the members of his family. The brothers' working for this *pater familias*, must, in turn, implicitly trust each other, while any expression of distrust can have fatal results. At the same time, institutionalized, traditional knowledge is seminal to the rituals of the *vory v*

zakone. The codes of behaviour are known to those who seek initiation, and as such consist in a shared *habitus*, which requires no explanation.

To recall the plot: The hero Nikolai, a member of the Russian Secret Service, seeks to be admitted to the Semyon family, and is willing to eradicate his actual identity completely in order to achieve this aim. That the secret service functions as the anamorphotic double of the mafia in *Eastern Promises*, both outside the official social order, is the tragic but also compelling point of Cronenberg's argument. Dramaturgically, the return to a proximity between entrepreneur and employee is shown most poignantly in the scene, in which Viggo Mortensen receives tattoos on his breast and knees so as to mark him as a new member. In other scenes it plays on an erotization of violence. No guns were used in the film, because in the Russian mafia killing is done with knives. As Cronenberg explains, for the gangsters bodily proximity is extremely important: "It is like a personal confirmation. The choice of weapons expresses their mentality, the inheritance of many hundreds of years of the bleak, fatalistic and deeply religious cultural history of Russia."[5]

What we thus find in the rituals of the *vory v zakone* is precisely the tone of nostalgia I am also claiming for Sennett's conception of 'old' capitalism. While 'new' capitalism cultivates indifference under the guise of liberalization and innovation, because power and responsibility are no longer connected to each other, the codes of behaviour regulating the *vory v zakone* are everything but indifferent. Like Coppola (in the *Godfather* trilogy) or Kitano in his films about the Japanese Yakuza, Cronenberg not only uses a situation of strife among different criminal families as his trope for economic crisis. He also foregrounds the consequences of a loyalty enacted *at* the body and *over* the body of others. This loyalty, furthermore, has to do not with the question of *what one does*, but rather of *where one belongs*. The split between center and periphery Sennett criticizes, because it produces a thriving economy on the margins of society, where hegemonic symbolic codes don't hold, is precisely what the world of the Russian mafia stands for in *Eastern Promises*. Indeed, Cronenberg has explained that what interested him in the script was the way British law has come to be suspended in the embedded community of the *vory v zakone*, such that other rules and codes dominate, as though they were the law of nature.

The point to highlight is that globalization produces this periphery. The embedded economy, in this case the trafficking of women, guns and drugs, is the result of the liberal opening of global markets. Which is to say, even though this illegal economy must necessarily take place on the periphery of the host culture, it can also thrive precisely because of the multiculturalism of urban centers such as London. On a more cynical note, one might even go so far as to ask whether it

is not in the interest of global liberal economy that these illegal sites of exchange, embedded within its social fabric as one of its logical products, should split off from the center. After all, while the logic of globalization supports migration, it is less concerned with *what* those who immigrate work at, or *where* they work. At stake, rather, is that they *take part in* the new markets. A sense of belonging, lost upon immigrating from one's home, may well come to be satisfied by self-enclosed, cultural communities, which thrive under the auspices of 21st century's logic of multiculturalism, a culture which is precisely not the cosmopolitanism of the urban centers of modernism.

If in *Eastern Promises*, the splitting off of an embedded market from the symbolic codes and laws of the host culture constructs a site of criminal activity, the police, as in *Gold Diggers of 1933*, ultimately intervenes. Only in this narrative, they arrive at the end not the beginning, while, in contrast to the mirth that is ultimately regained in the musical genre, the unredeemable violence of turning bodies into commodities is foregrounded by Cronenberg. This shift in tone is significant. Rather than the glamorous three-point light of the 30s musical we have a quiet, deep blue. Rather than the sparkling, witty showgirls we have the sad young women, who have left eastern Europe and come to the West, only to end in prostitution and drug addiction. To recall the other strand of the plot: One Christmas morning a baby girl is born in a hospital in London. Her mother, Tatiana, dies, but the midwife Anna (Naomi Watts) gives her the name Christine, because it sounds like Christmas. Among the possessions of the deceased woman, Anna finds a diary, written in Russian and in it the card of a Russian restaurant. Because she wants to find out who the mother is, in order to prevent the baby girl from being sent to a foster home, Anna goes to this restaurant, not knowing that she has entered into the headquarters of Semyon (Armin Müller-Stahl), *pater familias* of the London *vory v zakone*. He asks her to leave the diary with him, because he immediately recognizes it as the one that belonged to one of his prostitutes. Anna does so, but makes a copy first, which her uncle begins to translate for her. As she begins reading these transcriptions, we hear the spectral voice of the deceased Tatiana, recalling the hopes she had set in moving to London. "My name is Tatiana," we hear her explain. "My father died in the mines of my village, so he was already buried when he died. We were all buried there, buried under the earth of Russia. Which is why I went away, to find a better life".

At the end of the story, after she has discovered that Semyon is the father of Tatiana's child, Anna will adopt the little girl, hoping that Christine will be able to fulfill her mother's eastern promise. Ironically, however, she is only able to succeed, because the undercover agent Nikolai has an eastern promise of his own,

namely to infiltrate and take over the London *vory v zakone*. Under the auspices of the resurrected voice of the dead Tatiana they come to help each other, because Anna's persistence in finding out the identity of the little girl born on Christmas day ultimately furnishes Nikolai with a reason to have Semyon arrested by the London police, so that he can take over. In so doing, Cronenberg offers us a narrative, which challenges the violence the 'old' *qua* criminalized culture capitalism, even while appropriating some of its values. Both Nikolai, the new leader of the London *vory v zakone*, as well as Anna, the foster mother of Christine, can claim usefulness for themselves. In contrast to the short-lived, breathless flexibility of 'new' capitalism, both follow the logic of their craft. Their selfless actions stand for responsibility. They act in the name of a cause – Nikolai for justice, Anna to save an orphaned child. As such, the responsibility they make a claim for stands in contrast to the economy of the free, liberal market. Both Anna and Nikolai willingly give up the idea of flexible possibilities for themselves in order to do what Sennett connects with craftsmanship, namely concentrate on one thing. In the final sequence of *Eastern Promises* we see Nikolai, sitting in the restaurant. He has accepted his fate with dignity, because he interprets this as his duty towards a dead woman. For him, there are no further creative possibilities to develop. He is now completely contained by the role of the *pater familias* of this branch of the Russian mafia, even if his is a double identity, since he continues to be a member of the Russian Secret Service as well. This is the fulfillment of his promise.

Decisive is, then, the manner in which Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises* offers a systemic analysis of the equation between money and blood, between depersonalized work and vampirism. He admits that he was drawn to Steven Knight's script, because "a primitive, raw form of capitalism is coming to the West from Russia, a criminal form lacking four hundred years of refinement. This raw capitalism obeys the same laws of necessity and mistrust as does the world of crime".[6] In light of my previous discussion, one might call this a feudal form of capitalism, centered on a charismatic, authoritarian paternal figure, who treats all forms of exchange – be it illegal goods or revenge – as a family affair. This raw form of capitalism, which Cronenberg tropes as the world of the Russian mafia, emerges as a response to the 'new' global capitalism Sennett critiques. It appears to be atavistic, even while it occurs within a post-modern, multicultural society.

Let us return to the last sequence of the film. When the police finally enter the restaurant and arrest Semyon, they partake in a intervention, which ironically only serves to strengthen the old, criminalized capitalism, even if the man who will be the new head of the operation, Nikolai, is clandestinely also a representative of the symbolic law. What is decisive is that this atavistic re-installment of a figure of

paternal authority re-introduces coherence into the complexity of globalisation. It brings with it clear boundaries between friends and foes, as well as clear codes of conduct. At the same time, Cronenberg reveals this solution to be a flight into a system of exchange based on symbolic rules, which do not adhere to the hegemonic codes of law. The emphasis on corporeality as the significant, common language, which I have been foregrounding as a form of economic militarisation, corresponds to this withdrawal from the public domain. Apodictically put, in this return of a culture of 'old' capitalism *corporality*, as an enmeshment of eroticism and violence, is pitted against the *bodilessness* of a culture of 'new' capitalism, even while it corresponds to the loss of a common, everyday language. The gangsters, most of whom speak only broken English, not only keep switching back into Russian, but communicate primarily through body language. In a scene underlining the homoerotic bond between Semyon's son and Nikolai, Kirill offers his friend a bottle of cognac. His father, he explains, exchanged it for a girl from a Russian village. In another scene, we are shown how the tattoos on the skin of a murdered man give his history of internment in various prisons and camps in Russia. Most poignantly, in the scene in the bathhouse, in which Nikolai successfully defends himself against the knife attacks of two Chechenian killers, his body literally becomes the surface over which several exchanges take place: Semyon's wish to protect his son from the revenge of a rival clan by sacrificing the newcomer, as well as Nikolai's hope that by gaining Kirill's trust, he can turn him against his father.

In this world of speechlessness, Tatiana's diary takes on a significant role not only because it sets the entire plot in motion. It also offers the only coherent narrative. Only through the voice of this dead woman can the collateral damage of the reversion of 'new' capitalism into an older, rawer, criminalized form find its articulation. At the same time we hear her voice only in translation. Tatiana herself wrote in Russian, while the voice-over we hear is that of a young Russian woman, who speaks accented English. In *Eastern Promises* we thus also have a specter on the loose, a phantomatic symptom of capitalism, giving voice to the destruction inherent to all creative economic takeovers. But in contrast to the killer in *No Country for Old Men*, Tatiana's ghost insists on sympathy and mutual understanding, and it is in her conciliatory gesture that one might locate the fragile hope Cronenberg offers for a situation of economic crisis, after 'new' capitalism has reverted back to an older, rawer form.

Eastern Promises ends with two competing final images. During his initiation into the *vory v zakone*, Nikolai had claimed, "I died when I was 15 years old. Now I live all the time in the zone". Like Tatiana, capitalism has turned him into a living dead and it is her voice, which haunts him even after he has reached his goal. In the

final sequence of the film, we see him sitting at the table in the restaurant, where Semyon used to sit. We once more hear Tatiana's voice, explaining in her diary about how she had hoped to find a better life in the West. Nikolai is frozen into the pathos gesture of alienation, which is also the pathos gesture of responsibility. That he has taken this sacrifice upon himself for a dead woman, offers him – and us – a meaningful interpretation of the enmeshment of violence and economy his story unfolds. He has disappeared into what Stanley Cavell calls the "unintelligibility of the ordinary," since he can reveal his true identity to no one.[7] At the same time this act of self-sacrifice entails a gesture self-empowerment. Like Tatiana's decision to move to London, his willingness to live the life of a living dead man is borne by the hope that his action might produce a better life for others, in the future. The film ends on this open, undetermined and undecided note, so resonant with Derrida's notion of a democracy, which is always still to come (*avenir*).[8]

At the same time, this scene of quiet despair Thoreau had already claimed to be the fate of the modern subject is introduced by a second economy of the ordinary. Anna and her daughter are spending Sunday afternoon with her mother and her uncle. Little Christine, dressed in a perfectly starched white costume, is indeed in the process of fulfilling the promise of her mother. As Nikolai explained to Anna early on in the film, London may well be the better place for a little Russian girl to grow up in, even if her mother failed. Whether Anna is still thinking about the mysterious man who helped her save Christine remains open. What clearly, however, continues to connect the two protagonsits is the spectral voice of Tatiana. Both of their lives are dictated by a responsibility toward realizing the promise that brought her to London. As Anna takes her daughter on her lap to feed her, we can not understand what she is telling her, much as the silent Nikolai, caught up in his daydream, does not share his thoughts with us. Both are unintelligible. But we can surmise that their thoughts are aimed toward a yet undetermined future. On the periphery of London – in a Russian restaurant, in a garden behind a small house – we find spaces, where those inhabiting them are confident that in the future there will be a shared world, with a binding and intelligible public language. If the birthday of Christ resonates in Christine's name, the promise of his resurrection on Easter Day and the hope this entails are intonated in the title of Cronenberg's film.

No film by David Cronenberg has struck the key of grace, mercy and sympathy with such pathos. Tricky as this may be, I want to suggest that it is in this tone of sober hopefulness that the answer to the violence of money might reside. Croneberg, like Thomas Anderson, has borrowed his narrative from the moral imagination of the Victorians, who knew only too well about the ethic collateral damage of the culture of 'old capitalism'. Perhaps this is why their socially critical narratives

are the ones whose complex moral closure better touches the nerve of our time. In his nostalgic critique, Sennett insists that democracy expects of its citizens the willingness to think like craftsmen and craftswomen. He uses this term in part as a trope for the attempt to find out how the world around one functions. But one might also take the notion of craftsmanship to indicate a responsible relation to the world in which one lives; not a fresh-page attitude, but rather one of taking responsibility *in* and *for* the world one lives in. If it is time not merely to describe the violence of our economy but to change it, Cronenberg's promise thrives off the pathos that a binding democracy is still to come; achievable but not yet achieved, as Emerson already surmised at the beginning of the 19th century, and as Derrida insisted at the beginning of the 21st century. It is a state we strive for, in the sense that one is constantly willing to work for it.

For me, this hope is aimed at a cosmopolitan, not a multicultural city; at a symbolic order, to which we are committed, because we trust in it; centralized but changeable; binding precisely because it is the site for constant negotiations. The regulation this cosmopolitan city requires is not merely economic. The moral imagination underwriting all three films I have been discussing is one of our more positive inheritances from precisely the Victorian culture, in which 'old' capitalism found its acme. And like the violent greed for money, the vision I am invoking has always had something to do with the stories we tell and the images we create about ourselves. In order to alter the economy, we must be able to imagine it differently. Recent films, monstrously wedding a dream of money with its violent collateral damage, not only serve as a warning to us that things must not remain as they are. In order for something new to begin, we need intelligent images. They may be aimed at visualizing perfectibility inherent to democracy. But what is equally to the point is that they need to affect us viscerally to such a degree that we are ready to embark on crafting a new world. The viscerality of the cinematic images, which directors like Anderson, Coen and Cronenberg confront us with, reveal not only how urgent an engagement with the mutual implication of violence and money is. They also insist that if change is to occur, it may well need to unfold on the level of a cultural imaginary. The visual violence they deploy is aimed at violating our ways of viewing and telling. It is conceived as an apotropaic gesture.

NOTES

[1] See Stanley Cavell's discussion of the connection between American philosophy and Hollywood genre cinema, *Pursuits of Happiness. The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1981), as well as Michael Wood, *America in the Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), who also reads Hollywood genre films as a cultural seismograph.

[2] See D. H. Lawrence (1923), *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 68-69.

[3] Interview with Thomas Anderson conducted by Thomas Assheuer, "Unser Kampf mit der Natur ist das Problem," *Die Zeit* Nr. 7 (7.2.2008).

[4] Richard Sennett, *The Culture of New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[5] Interview with David Cronenberg conducted by Gerhard Midding, "Die Globalisierung des Verbrechens", *Die Ost-West-Wochenzeitung* 51 (21.12.2007). Quotation translated by the author.

[6] Ibid., "Die Globalisierung des Verbrechens".

[7] For a discussion of the state of unintelligibility that a disappearance into the ordinary entails, see Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[8] For a discussion of democracy as a political state of the future, which is to say still to come (à venir), see Jacques Derrida, *Rogues. Two Essays on Reason*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).