

# The Mosaic Film - An Affaire of Everyone: Becoming-Minoritarian in Transnational Media Culture

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In contemporary media culture the formal, narrative and stylistic structure that prevail can be described as “aesthetics of the mosaic”. Multiple main characters, multiple interwoven story lines, multiple or fragmented spaces, different time zones or paces seem to be specific for the migratory nature and politics of our times. In this essay I will look at three mosaic films, *Babel* (USA: Inarritu, 2006), *WWW.What a Wonderful World* (Morocco/Germany/France: Bensaidi, 2006) and *Kicks* (Netherlands: Ter Heerdt, 2007) and discuss in which ways in these films an aesthetics of the mosaic is related to migratory movements and contemporary globalized media culture.<sup>1</sup> This aesthetics, I will argue, is closely related to transnationalism which can take on different forms. I will argue that by means of a “nomadic style” and “nomadic politics” these films call for a becoming-minoritarian as “an affaire of everyone”.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Albert ter Heerdt and Mimoun Oaissa for giving me the possibility to see *Kicks* outside its theatrical release and René Wolf (Dutch Film Museum) for a viewing tape of *What a Wonderful World*.

## **Part 1: Mosaic Aesthetics**

### **Earlier Mosaic Aesthetics in Cinema**

The “mosaic film” is not a new phenomenon. Although it has never explicitly been classified as a genre, from early film history onwards there have been films with multiple stories. In *Intolerance* (USA, 1916) D.W. Griffith cross cuts between four stories, set in four different periods and places (a Modern story set in America 1914, a Judean story taking place in A.D. 27 in Christ’s Nazareth, a French story of the St Bartolomew’s massacre in 1572 and a Babylonian story set in 539 B.C.). Although each story was shot in a different tint (amber, blue, sepia, grey-green) that made each story recognizable, it was already a complex, non-linear way of epic story telling, bound together by the theme of human intolerance, hypocrisy, injustice and discrimination. Nevertheless this type of narrative structure did not become the main form of classical Hollywood, nor of other film schools or movements. In classical Hollywood the two plot-lines (action-plot and romance-plot) usually perfectly unite in the story of a goal-oriented protagonist (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985). Epic stories that tell larger stories of a period or of a nation are usually told in a linear fashion.

Other examples of mosaic films can be found in Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* (USA, 1941) and Akira Kurasawa’s *Rashomon* (Japan, 1950). *Citizen Kane* starts with the death of newspaper tycoon Charles Foster Kane and the last word he pronounces, “Rosebud”. A journalist then starts out to investigate the meaning of this word, interviewing many people he has known who all tell their story of Kane in a mosaic flashback structure that together brings about a colorful picture of Kane (but leaves the mystery of “Rosebud” unresolved). In *Rashomon* the central point of return is the murder of a samurai that is accounted for from four different points of view, each presenting a very different version of the same story. These famous examples of mosaic films are less

epic than Griffith's early film but give multiple versions of a single person or a single event. In these films there is a central point that unites the different pieces of the puzzle and in that sense presents a different type of mosaic structure than the multiple epic narratives of *Intolerance*. What all the early mosaic films have in common is the fact that they relate to the past, either to collective history or personal memories that are presented as different moments or different versions of past events.

In contemporary media culture it seems that the mosaic film has changed and gained importance to the point that we could even speak of a new type of film. Usually the first film that is indicated as the starting point of the new mosaic film is Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (USA, 1993).<sup>2</sup> *Short Cuts* gives indeed a new dimension to the mosaic film. Most strikingly this mosaic film does not refer to history, a person or an event that has to be recalled, but relates to a shared time and place in the present. The film presents a cross section of Los Angeles at the beginning of the 1990s. Here twenty-two characters are presented in 10 interwoven stories (based on short stories by Raymond Carver). None of the stories, or rather "occurrences" as Altman himself calls them in the documentary *Luck, Trust and Ketchup* (USA, John Dorr and Mike Kaplan, 1993), really ends or is forcefully connected, except by the event of a small earthquake at the end of the film and by the television news that is part of every household. The characters meet sometimes in significant ways, at other moment much more superficially. Compared to the earlier mosaic films, the frames of individual stories are opened up and intertwined in much more complex, subtle and sometimes even random ways in the contemporary mosaic film.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To the point that filmmakers that presents a mosaic story are quickly labeled as "an Altman-clone" (Ockhuysen 2006: 1)

<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that all mosaic films today are just about randomness. In some mosaic films, like *Magnolia* (USA, Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999) the different plots are much more tightly connected around a few themes (facing

Television and other media seem to play an important role in this random connection of otherwise often unrelated people. Another dimension that is new, though not yet present in Altman's film, is the transnational connections made possible not only by the media but also by the increasing migratory nature of today's people flow. The new mosaic film seems to be very suitable to express the complex and intertwined nature of today's transnational and media reality.

### **Types of Contemporary Mosaic Transnationalism**

Besides emphasizing the present, many contemporary mosaic films have a very transnational dimension. This dimension can manifest itself in different ways. Of course by defining different categories of transnationalism in the mosaic film I do not wish to make absolute distinctions. The distinctions are fluid and never completely pure. Nevertheless the films that I am focusing on here, *Babel*, *What a Wonderful World* and *Kicks* take different positions in respect to contemporary transnational migration and its implications, which is why I think it is useful to make a rough categorization on this basis.

A first group of recent mosaic films literally moves between countries and continents.<sup>4</sup> *Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh, USA, 2000), for instance, gives a multi-layered picture of the drugs war between Mexico and the USA, in which three stories are alternating and finally meeting each other. *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, USA, 2005) also moves between continents to tell four intertwined stories related to the not so clean oil

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death, relationships between parents-children, regret) and a surreal 'biblical' ending of a rain of frogs.

<sup>4</sup> This literal transnational movement between countries and continents can also be found back in non-mosaic films that are related to migratory politics. For instance, the French beur-filmmakers (second generation Maghreb immigrants) now frequently leave the banlieue in order to travel back to the country of origin. For instance *Beur, Blanc, Rouge* (Mahmoud Zemmouri, France, 2005) and *Du cote de chez soi* (Rahma El Medani, 2004).

industry.<sup>5</sup> In its own particular ways *Babel* belongs to this “cross-continental”-type of mosaic films. *Babel* tells four stories, divided over three continents, spoken in five different languages. The film starts in a small Berber village in the bare mountains of Northern Morocco where a shepherd sells a gun to a neighbor who wants to use it to chase jackals that attack his herd. His two young sons, Said and Yussef, are in charge of the gun to protect the goats. We then move to San Diego where a Mexican nanny, Amelia, takes care of blonde Debbie and Mike. Back in Morocco Australian Susan and American Richard are on a bus tour and clearly have an argument to settle during their vacation. Then the film takes us to Japan, where we witness a volley ball game by deaf and dumb girls, among whom Cheiko, who is watched by her father on the tribunes. The stories will be connected by an accidental bullet, fired by Yussef in a play with his brother, hitting a touring car with American tourists. It is Susan who is hit by the bullet. While Susan and Richard have to stay longer in Morocco than planned, Amelia takes their children, Debbie and Mike, to her own son’s wedding in Tijuana. In Tokyo the police investigates whether the gun that was used formerly belonged to Cheikho’s father. In *The Making of Babel* on the DVD of the film, Inarritu says he has always been fascinated by the air that we all breathe and travel through, that invisible entity that what we all share. With this film he wants to show that although we are in different spaces and different time zones there is a literal cross-continental connection. Not only the same air that we breathe connects us, but also a Japanese gun, given as a present to a Berber shepherd in Morocco can have enormous consequences for people in Morocco, Mexico and the USA. On a less literal level, the film expresses another transnational aspect that we share: a common way of expressing through the body when words fail. All these points

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<sup>5</sup> Another example of such transcontinental mosaic film would be Claire Denis’ *L’Intrus* (2005).

will be elaborated in later parts of this essay but for now it suffices to see the typical mosaic cross-continental transnationalism of this film.

A second type of transnationality can be found in mosaic films that take place in countries of the “Third World” that are marked by transnationalism because of the fact that parts of the population have migrated, others want to leave and yet another group decides to stay, come back or arrives from the West to settle. In this type of mosaic film there is always a “longing-for-elsewhere” that is part of the stories. In André Téchiné’s *Loin* for instance, the lives of French Serge, Jewish Sarah and Arab Said meet in Tanger where the fate of those from the West who travel to Morocco intersects with those illegal immigrants who want to leave North Africa to find a better living in Europe.<sup>6</sup> *WWW. What a Wonderful World* would fit into this category of transnationalism in the mosaic film. The setting of the film is Morocco, mainly Casablanca and Rabat, cities that are rendered as hyper modern urban spaces. Here too multiple characters interconnect: contract killer Kamel, police officer Kenza, cleaning lady and occasional prostitute Souad, hacker Hicham and his father and several other characters give together a picture of contemporary Morocco. Here the transnational dimension is not given by the cross continental settings, nor by a transnational cast, but is related to the paradoxes of globalization and postcolonial conditions in many former colonies. The biggest paradox is embodied by hacker Hicham, who gets access to the digital murder assignments of Kamel. Although he can communicate with the whole world (“Club Internet l’Univers” is the name of the internet café where he accesses the computer), his dream to actually travel to Europe is an impossible one. This aspect of transnational culture, called “fake-globalization” by filmmaker Bensaidi (Bensaidi

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<sup>6</sup> In *Loin* and also in *Les temps qui changent* there are multiple Western characters who choose to stay in Morocco for several reasons. See Pisters 2007.

2007: 1), is clearly addressed by the film. References to French colonialism can be picked up when Kamel and Kenza speak in French instead of Arabic. More aspects of this film will be elaborated later on, but for now it is important to note that this type of mosaic film presents a virtual transnational dimension that causes paradoxical situations in post-colonial cities.

First I want to mention a last type of mosaic film related to transnationalism and the migratory mobility of people: the “multicultural meeting point”-film, usually set in a western city, where people of all color and origin compose contemporary urban space. Here the main sentiment is not so much a longing for an elsewhere but the difficulties of living together in a new mosaic composition of the population. Ignorance of cultural differences, misunderstandings, racism and (fear of) terrorism are at the basis of these stories. *Crash* (USA, Paul Higgis, 2004) is an example of this type of mosaic film. Comparable to *Short Cuts* the film presents a cross section of Los Angeles, this time at the beginning of the second millennium. In *Crash* a transnational dimension is added because of the racist tensions that are sensible, though never in a one-dimensional way. Perhaps the most touching scene in this film is when a racist white cop (who takes care of his old father) saves a black woman from a car accident, even though we just saw him humiliate this woman a few moments before.<sup>7</sup>

In a different way *Kicks* presents a similar type of multicultural mosaic society of the Netherlands in the new millennium. Dutch-Moroccans and indigenous Dutch from different classes who live more or less segregated lives in the same city (Amsterdam) are portrayed in several plot-lines. The

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<sup>7</sup> The car accident seems to be another typical characteristic of the mosaic film. Also in *Winterschläfer* (Germany, Tom Tykwer, 1997), *Amores Perros* (Mexico, Alejandro Gonzales Inarritu, 2000) and *21 Gramms* (USA, Alejandro Gonzales Inarritu, 2003) a car accident is a connecting force of random lives. In *Crash* the car accident is used more politically, with the implication that in LA today it almost seems the *only* way people can still connect.

film deals with contemporary society in several ways. Kick boxer Said has a Dutch girlfriend Danielle (“a cheese head chick” as she is unappreciatively called by other Dutch-Moroccan) and works with youngsters to keep them off the streets; his younger brother Redouan is more of a rebel and loves rapping political texts with his friend Karim; Kim is a well to do Dutch woman who one day decides that she should get to know some of her Moroccan fellow country men and enters a Moroccan snackbar to talk to “real Turks”. Here she meets Nordin, a funny and conservative Dutch-Moroccan who loves singing typical Dutch songs of Boudewijn de Groot; her husband Wouter is a frustrated filmmaker looking for a good story; trainee police officer Aaliya and Marouan, who works for the Dutch army, are about to marry and Lisette runs a shelter, has a husband and son but longs for a different (more glamorous) life. Here too the connections between the people are made possible through an accident: the killing of Redouan by Dutch police officer Frank at the moment when he is caught at what seems a burglary attempt (in fact he is inspired to write more rap texts and has called Karim to join him to enter the club house). Here too, questions of racism, but also ignorance and misunderstandings are the underlying tensions that are fed by the consequences of migratory movements in the Western world. As for the other two types of films, more elaboration will follow.

What can be said in general about all these multiple storylines and multiple characters is that in a transnational world, the centre and periphery are shifting and taking turns in importance. In the three films central in this essay Morocco is a main location or point of reference, which displaces the traditional centrality of the West. Also on the level of the characters centre and periphery (Hollywood stars and amateur actors) shift: the multiplicity of characters render all characters of equal importance. Even Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett, Richard and Susan in *Babel*, are just a part of the

larger cast in which also a lot of non-professional actors take place.

### **Media Technology: Binding and Separating Forces**

A further general characteristic of the new mosaic film is the importance of media technology. In the first place the television news appears to be both a binding and splitting force. Both in *Babel* and in *Kicks* the news of the accident is quickly spread and related to contemporary ethnic tensions and threats of terrorism. In *Babel* the bullet that hits Susan is immediately explained as a terrorist attack on American tourists, a news item that Cheiko in Japan sees while zapping. In this way global television news creates a strange (paranoid) kind of transnational "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991), one that functions like an anxiety-machine. "Media are spreading the fear of the other", Innaritu says in *The Making Of Babel*. A similar view on television news is given in *Kicks* where journalists confront Said after the death of his brother with the rap texts he sung earlier, trying to pinpoint Redouan one-dimensionally as a (potential) terrorist. The television news enhances polarization by announcing that an opinion poll held immediately after the incident shows that 79% of the Dutch-Moroccans think the motives for the murder were racist, while 77% of the indigenous Dutch think this is not the case. On the other hand it is also the news (both on television and on the radio) that gives a common reference to all members of the community and that is for Dutch Kim the direct reason to start, naively as it may be, changing her own attitude, looking for connections beyond her own circle of friends.

In *WWW. What a Wonderful World* the main technologies are the computer and the mobile phone. As already indicated the internet connects Hicham (and many other Moroccans) to the rest of the world, while at the same time actual travel conditions are limited. The mobile phone another important connector. Kenza earns some extra money by renting her mobile phone to friends and acquaintances.

Here too new technology does not change everything: still not everybody owns a (mobile) phone, the new is not for everybody. Technology connects and disconnects.

In *Babel* the telephone is also used as a cinematographic “enfolder of time”. Most of the film is told in a more or less chronological order. Except for one moment where time is enfolded in a sort of loop.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of the film Amelia, the Mexican nanny picks up the phone when she is playing with the kids Debbie and Mike. It’s Richard, who phones from Morocco to tell her that his sister will take care of the kids the next day so she can go to her son’s wedding across the border. He also asks Mike on the phone who tells him about his day at school. At the end of the film we return to this phone call – but now we see it from Richard’s point of hearing in Morocco. What makes this scene particularly touching is the fact that not only we now know what has happened to Richard and Susan before the call was made (we didn’t know the first time that Susan was hit by a bullet and Richard calls from the hospital in Cassablanca). We also know what will happen to Amelia after the call. Richard’s sister will not come after all and in desperation Amelia takes the kids with her across the border. In Mexico they have a wonderful wedding party but on the way back home they get stopped at the border. Amelia’s nephew, Santiago, who is driving the car, panics and drives away, leaving Amelia and the kids finally in the desert. They survive but Amelia, who has been taking care of Debbie and Mike since they were born, gets sent back to Mexico for illegally taking American kids over the border. Knowing this the second time round, Amelia’s “Everything is fine, mister Richard” is just as heart breaking as Richard’s tears when he hears the voice of his son while Susan is still in critical condition. The telephone is here

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<sup>8</sup> There is also one flashback in the film that occurs at the moment when Said has been shot by the police and we see how he and his brother Yussef used to hang into the wind on the top of a mountain, imagining they could fly.

used for its dramatic possibilities of the play between embodied and disembodied voices, and the amount of knowledge one has of a particular situation. In *What a Wonderful World* Kamel falls in love with Kenza's voice that he has only heard through the phone and does not recognize in embodied form until the very end of the film.

Finally then there is the film technology itself that makes these films possible in the first place. In the second part of this essay I will look at the political implications of the mosaic film and argue that these types of films can perform particularly political and resisting forces in the larger media networks. Here I'll first move on to the particular nomadic styles in which these films are shot that relate them to contemporary reality.

### **Nomadic Style: Mixing the Codes**

The contemporary mosaic film is often presented in a nomadic style. The term is derived from Deleuze and is often misunderstood, so let me briefly redefine Deleuzian nomadic thought before returning to the films. Postcolonial theory has made many objections towards Deleuzian concepts to describe the postcolonial situation. The concept of the nomad has met particularly heavy criticism. It is often seen as an all too easy way of describing everybody as a nomad without any roots, or without any hierarchical relations. This notion of the nomad is both romanticizing and assimilating. Hence this concept is believed to contribute to "perpetuating a universalized and unmarked western norm, [leaving out], or marginalizing local knowledges and prioritizing theoretical validation over political exigencies" (Wuthnow 2002: 194). Acknowledging these dangers of simplified equations of the nomad and the migrant and the assimilating powers of conceptual thinking, I would like to argue however that the films under discussion are nomadic experiments in the way Deleuze describes this in his essay "Nomadic Thought". Here he argues that "the nomadic adventure begins when the nomad seeks to stay in

the same place by escaping the codes” (Deleuze 2004: 260). As is clear from the different types of mosaic films, real mobility is not a strict necessary condition for the transnational dimension of this type of films, hence the nomad does not need to be a migrant. There are other elements of the mosaic aesthetics of these films that makes them nomadic.

By presenting complex, fragmented and multiple stories and characters, the films that I’m discussing here are mixing the codes of conventional filmmaking with a central narrative and clearly focussed main characters.<sup>9</sup> In this way *Babel* escapes the code of a star driven plot by giving Hollywood stars and amateurs equal amounts of attention and screen time. Also the unusual combination of Moroccan, Mexican and Japanese settings and story lines are refreshing. Even though the cinematographic means of making the transition from one scene to another are conventional (match on action, graphic matches or sound bridges) these are done so brilliantly that crossing continents feels quite enchanting.

*WWW. What a Wonderful World* is stylistically more obviously mixing the codes of the crime film, the romantic comedy, Buster Keaton (director Besaidi who plays Kamel himself has an inexpressive face like Keaton) and Jacques Tati (some of the scenes where Kenza directs the traffic of Casablanca call *Playtime* in mind). And by presenting such a stylized and modern image of Morocco the film breaks also with the cliché image of Moroccan cinema of pitiful women, poor children and powerless or/and tyrant males.

The multiple characters in *Kicks* may be typical for certain recognizable figures in contemporary Dutch society, the fact that both Dutch Moroccans and Indigenous Dutch meet and start talking to each other is a social mixing of codes which is not often seen in Dutch cinema. Cinematographically

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<sup>9</sup> This does not mean however, that more conventional stories cannot have other means of “escaping the codes” in other levels. Or that mosaic aesthetics of multiplicity are always already nomadic to begin with.

the characters break another code: especially at the beginning during the introduction of the characters, but also at moments later on in the film, the characters look straight into the camera, into the eyes of the spectator. This is unusual in feature films and has a very powerful effect of direct address and direct involvement of the spectator: it's not just the world over there on the screen but our own world that we are engaging with.<sup>10</sup> And this leads me to the second characteristics of the nomadic, namely its political implications.

## **Part 2: Mosaic Politics**

### **Nomadic Politics: Outside and Intensity**

Mosaic aesthetics calls for a nomadic politics. The mosaic films that I'm discussing here all express a political engagement with the contemporary world which is characteristic for this type of films. Therefore it has to be noticed that "escaping the codes" does not mean just leaving the world in some transcendental realm where no politics is necessary anymore as Peter Hallward and others have objected against Deleuzian nomadism (Hallward, 2006). On the contrary. The main aspects that Deleuze distinguishes as characteristic for Nietzschean philosophy, which is at the basis of nomadic thinking, point towards an engagement with the world. Nomadic thought connects works of art (here cinema) to the outside and to intensity. Both the idea of the outside and intensity relate to what Deleuze describes as "being in the same boat" where everybody is pulling an oar and sharing something beyond any law, contract or institution:

We are in the same boat: a sort of lifeboat, bombs falling on every side, the lifeboat drifts toward subterranean rivers of ice, or toward rivers of fire, the Orenoco, the Amazon, everyone is

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<sup>10</sup> In *High Fidelity* (GB, Stephen Frears, 2000) the main character also looks into the camera regularly. Here the camera and the spectator are addressed by way of a confession of the character's attitude towards his previous girl friends.

pulling an oar, and we're not even supposed to like one another, we fight, we eat each other. Everyone pulling an oar is sharing, sharing something, beyond any law, any contract, any institution. Drifting, a drifting movement or "deterritorialization": I say all this in a vague, confused way, since this is a hypothesis or a vague impression on the originality of Nietzsche's texts. A new kind of book. (Deleuze, 2004: 255)

The relation with the outside is thus *not* the exclusion of reality but on the contrary the opening up of a philosophical text, a work of art or a film to the forces of life. As Deleuze points out further:

What is this: a beautiful painting or a beautiful drawing? There is a frame. An aphorism has a frame, too. But whatever is in the frame, at what point does it become beautiful? At the moment one knows and feels that the movement, that the line which is framed comes from elsewhere, that it does not begin within the limits of the frame. It began above, or next to the frame (...) Far from being the limitation of the pictorial surface, the frame is almost the opposite, putting it into immediate relation with the outside. (Deleuze, 2004: 255)

Let me first look at some of the ways in which *Babel*, *WWW* and *Kicks* open up to the outside and engage with the world. This is done in several ways. A classic way of engaging with politics in art is by means of metaphors or other tropes. When film is not overtly political (such as the Russian revolution films of the twenties, or overtly propaganda films) political references are often made by using a small incident to show something bigger, or by using symbolic images that allow allegorical readings. At moments *Babel*, *WWW* and *Kicks* all express a concern with the contemporary world in this classical way. In *Babel* the accidental gun shot that sets all other events in motion is clearly to be read in an allegorical way. By means of this small incident, we understand how quick assumptions and misunderstandings turn every incident into an act of terrorism and add to the fear of the other. It's not just this story that is being told. *Babel* shows all the tragedies

behind every action that ends up as a news item. And in doing so, the film shows actually not what divides us, but what binds us: loneliness, love and tragedy.

*WWW* presents symbolic images that have evidently political significance. When Hicham after his first attempt to cross the ocean (which cost him and his father all their money) is thrown back on the Moroccan shore, he starts throwing out all the computers of Club Internet l'Univers and sells the separate parts to get money for a second attempt. Most striking and heart-breaking, while at the same time almost comic in its absurdity is then the image of the little boat with Hicham and other immigrants which encounters an enormous cruise ship, full of lights and music. The people on the boat start waving and screaming to the cruise ship, but they are mercilessly crushed by the ship that does not even notice them. We never see Hicham again after that moment.

*Kicks* opens with the announcement that everything in the film is based on true events. Here too, a gun shot accident is at the basis for further reflections on the role of the media to quickly categorize "the other" as a potential terrorist, and on the other hand immediately label the police officer (and indigenous Dutch society) as racist. Although the rap songs of Redouan and Karim are strongly expressing frustration about their own situation related to or projected onto world politics<sup>11</sup>, in fact tragic misunderstandings, fear and frustration are at the basis of this tragic incident, which stands for many other tragic incidents and misunderstandings in contemporary multicultural society. More explicitly the film also comments self-reflexively on the role of the media that can abuse multiculturalism out of pure sensationalism and

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<sup>11</sup> The text of the song they perform together is as follows in English translation: "What we can't forget how Palestines sweat/how they sigh, cry and die/young Palestinians defend their land/ caught up in the struggle/ stone in the hand/ fathers and mothers all are dead/ missiles, grenades, bullets in the head/ moms and kids are the ones they scar/ dirty fucking Jews have gone too far (...)"

opportunism. In this sense the role of filmmaker Wouter is telling. He is looking at news items to find an idea for his new film and when he reads about illegal women being abused by dogs in a shed he sets of to reproduce the story, looking for “real illegal women” and “real dogs” to tell a “real story” of present-day Netherlands. Wouter’s eagerness to “do something” with multicultural society without any real involvement can be considered as another commentary on the abusive potential of the media, while at the same time *Kicks* itself clearly addresses all these multicultural issues in a much more clever way. So the use of symbolic and allegorical images is one way of relating to “the outside”.

In *The Making of Babel* there are a few other instances that indicate how this film relates to the outside more implicitly, beyond what can be seen on the screen. One of the scenes that is shown in its rehearsals is the scene where Said, Yusef and their father are surrounded by Moroccan police officers with guns and Said gets shot. After several failed attempts Said finally gets it right and the Palestinian-Arabic translator of the film starts crying. She explains that the scene reminds her of a moment of her own past where she and her father were surrounded by men with guns. In the Mexican part of the film, the actor who plays the border police that arrests Amelia remarks that his own parents are Mexicans who in the past illegally crossed the border to settle in America. And that for him it now feels very paradoxical to perform as American cop who could have arrested his own parents (which would have prevent his role in this film now). All this DVD-extra information does not directly feature in the film. But the real emotions and direct engagements of cast and crew are felt beyond the frames of the images. In all cases, the outside that the films relate to is shared by the audience, either by personal experiences they can relate the images to, or by the wider shared image culture (including DVD extra’s) through which we know or can imagine more than what is strictly seen on the screen. In these ways the mosaic film is

“hooked up to its [external] forces, (...) like a current of energy” (Deleuze 2004: 256).

The second characteristic of nomadic politics is therefore the relation of the work of art with intensity:

The lived experience is not subjective, or not necessarily. It is not of the individual. It is flow and the interruption of flow, since each intensity is necessarily in relation to other intensity, in such a way that something gets through. This is what is underneath the codes, what escapes them, and what the codes want to translate, convert, cash in. But what Nietzsche is trying to tell us by this writing of intensities is: don't exchange the intensity for representations. (...) The intensity can be lived only in relation to its mobile inscription on a body, and to the moving exteriority of a proper name, and this is what it means for a proper name to be always a mask, the mask of an operator. (Deleuze 2004: 257)

The intensity of the images in the mosaic film is also felt through the bodies of the actors. In *Kicks* the nomadic, non-representative intensity is mainly felt in the body of kick boxer Said (Mimoun Oaïssa). He is the one who has learned to channel frustrations and anger in a positive way, taking the news of the death of his brother apparently calmly, waiting for the official investigation before judging what happened. This reaction is not appreciated by Karim and other friends of Redouan. Said remains controlled but one can feel the mounting tensions expressed in the body, the look in the eyes. It is only in the final boxing game that Said expresses his pain that translates a whole series of intensities related to the complexity of the contemporary situation, both personal and collectively. Other characters as well express themselves bodily. Most strikingly is the silent scream that Lisette (Eva Duyvenstein) utters the day after her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday party: she is fed up with everything and longs for bigger recognition, a career in as a singer or as an actress perhaps. In this way Lisette translates a typical contemporary feeling that in order to count one should actually become a media star. Everything

else is dull and boring. It's a sad sign of time, but one that can cause intensive feelings of longing and boredom. Chiel (Jack Wouterse), a middle aged drop out of Dutch origin expresses his anger and frustration by bursting into racist slogans and getting into fights all the time.

WWW becomes intense by abstraction and minimalism, especially in the body of Bensaidi as Kamel. His face is always unmoved like a blanc slate, his body performing in ritualistic ways his actions: downloading the details of his next victim, performing the murder, having sex with Saoud whom he literally throws out of bed at 4.00 o'clock sharp, etc. The only time we hear his voice is on the phone with Kenza. Which is when we realize she must mean a lot to him. It is by this minimalist and non-realistic approach that WWW translates the intensity of love.

In *Babel* it striking to notice how the body takes over when communication fails. This is why Innaritu has given much emphasis to close ups of faces and hands, so called affection-images that directly work on our senses (Deleuze 1992: 87-111). Susan and Richard are both devastated by the loss of their third child and cannot communicate. It is only after Susan is shot and all emotions become translated in an extreme physical way of a wounded body that things between them start to move again. In Mexico it's through Amelia's body, carrying the children through the extremely hot and dry desert, that we experience the intensity and tragic implications of the situation. And since Cheiko is deaf and dumb, her way of expressing is physical from the beginning. Her movements are very expressive, she tries to embrace her dentist and she takes of her panties out of frustration of not being accepted by boys as soon as they discover her deafness. The camera work and use of sound indicates very well how Cheiko perceives the world. Especially a scene in a hip Japanese night club is amazing in its stroboscopic light effects and sudden silences that translate Cheiko's perspective. Cheiko's loneliness and longing is also captured in the last scene of the film, where she

is standing naked on the balcony of a very high Tokyo apartment. When her father puts his arms around her, the camera zooms out until we see only the lights of Tokyo by night to the point where all becomes particle. And we feel and know what intensities are traversing the city, the world.

The outside and intensity open up the interiority of the text or the image, relating it to the virtual (invisible) but very real forces in the world that we truly share, which we can call the universal consciousness of becoming-minoritarian that I will develop further in the last part of this essay.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Becoming-minoritarian:**

As mentioned in the quote in the previous section, nomadic politics is never representational politics and the fragmentary and multiple nature of the mosaic film already indicates that it is difficult for these films to follow a representational logic. The nomadic nature of the mosaic film relates to a politics of becoming-minoritarian. Again this is a concept to be used with caution. Just like the nomad should not (automatically) be equated to the migrant, becoming-minoritarian does not necessarily mean becoming member of a minority group. This is in the first place because becomings in general are not representational. In fact, “any becoming is a movement of de-identification” (Marrati 2001: 211). The notion of becoming too has stirred many debates, but here I would like to refer just the political aspect of becoming-minoritarian as it is explained by Paola Marrati. Marrati compares becoming-minoritarian to the concept of the majority. The majority is usually related to its representational value in politics. However, Deleuze has argued that the majority can never have genuine representative value:

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<sup>12</sup> A third characteristic of nomadic thought is “humor”. Although this is an aspect that can certainly be related to *Kicks* and *What a Wonderful World* (though less to the emotions in *Babel*) I will not deal with this aspect in this essay.

First and foremost, the majority is a *constant*, a *model* determining what is, independent of relative qualities, what is majoritarian and what is minoritarian. (...) The representation cannot but confirm the relationship between existing forces.(...) The majority represents literally *no one*. It is a model of the construction and attribution of identities; as such, it is necessarily an *empty model*." (Marrati 2002: 207, 208)

The majority is thus the normative but in fact empty model of measurement. According to Deleuze (and Guattari) the face relates to Nobody (Ulysses) because it functions as an "abstract machine". The normative face provides a model of identity and normality in relation to which deviations can be detected.<sup>13</sup> Becoming-minoritarian on the other hand, is always a process of de-identification and de-figuration. It needs an encounter that "allow for new relations to be established and new experiments in life to take place." (Marrati 2001: 212). It is a flight from the face which in its final stage will reach a becoming-imperceptible.<sup>14</sup> As Marrati explains, the "man of becoming" must go unnoticed; there must be nothing special to be perceived from the outside. Becoming involves a becoming-everybody,

but "becoming-everybody" (*devenir tout le monde*) is not just a matter of being unrecognisable, of being like "everybody else". Deleuze and Guattari are playing here with the different possible meanings allowed by the French expression "tout le monde". Thus *devenir tout le monde* also entails a *becoming of everybody*, a *becoming-everything* and a *becoming of the world itself*. (...) Deleuze and Guattari oppose the figure of a *universal minoritarian consciousness* that in principle concerns everybody

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<sup>13</sup> Deleuze and Guattari take the face of Jesus (white man) as the prime marker of this normative model, that functions as a "computation of normalities" and then as a "deviance detector". It is an "abstract machine" in that it very often works in an unconscious or implicit way without a particular agent. See the chapter on "Faciality" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 167-191).

<sup>14</sup> A film that most beautifully expresses a "becoming-imperceptible" is *Bin-Jip* (South Korea/Japan, Kim Ki-Duk, 2004).

to the majoritarian “fact” that itself is the product of a state of domination, but is the analytical fact of *nobody*. (Marrati 2001: 214).

Becoming-minoritarian is what Deleuze and Guattari call micropolitics, which is not related to any form of representation neither of majorities nor of minorities. Its aim is to resist, to resist to power, resist to the intolerable, resist to fear and to shame, resist to the injustice of the present. The contemporary mosaic films are precisely such micropolitical acts of resistance, first and foremost by proposing the spectator an affective encounter that can provide a slightly new perception of the world. A final aspect that should be noted in this respect is that this act of resistance does not entail a pure moral judgement on who is good and who is bad. On the contrary, micropolitical acts of resistance show the complexity of all emotions and does not express any judgemental value. In *Babel*, *Kicks* and *What a Wonderful World* none of the characters is judged, precisely because they are shown in their context of multiple relations. In *Kicks* the Moroccan boy who seems a burglar is actually innocent; the police officer who shoots him seems terribly racist, but the film also presents him as a stranger in his own country (especially when he visits the Moroccan wedding of his colleague) who simply does not very well how to deal with this new situation. Richard in *Babel* seems a jerk at first, not letting his Mexican nanny go to her son’s wedding, until we find out why he does so. In *What a Wonderful World* nobody (murderer, hacker, prostitute, drunkard, police officer) is judged either. This non-judgemental quality of the mosaic film is part of its non-normative strategy provoking a universal minoritarian consciousness. It is through the nomadic aesthetics and its political implications as described above that these films relate a becoming of the world as a “possibility of inventing new forms of life, different modes of existence”. (Marrati 2001: 214) As Mexican actor Gael Garcia Bernal (who plays Santiago) says in *The Making of Babel*: “We still haven’t realized we are

sharing the same planet, building fences where there are none; things have to change, one day will change". In any case the contemporary mosaic film clearly addresses a micropolitics of becoming-minoritarian and makes us feel and experience that this is an affair of everyone, transversing minorities and majorities by affecting and addressing us as "participant observers" of the same world beyond the screen.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The term "participant observers" derives from visual anthropology but is introduced by Martha Blassnigg to discuss the experience of the film viewer (Blassnigg, 2007).

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