

**New Iterations of the Auteur**  
**Lecture 4: 21st-century 'European' art cinema**



*Personal Shopper* (Assayas, 2017)

# Structure of the Lecture

- **From the national to transnational**
  - *The transnational (again)*
  - *European art cinema in context*
  
- ***Personal Shopper* as 'European' art cinema**
  - *Assayas as auteur*
  
- **Borders and liminality**
  - *From the postnational to the posthuman (and post-cinematic themes?)*

# Transnational Film Studies

## 1990s: from the national to the transnational

- ‘Transnational film studies approaches the cycle of film production, dissemination and reception as a dynamic process that transcends national borders and reflects the mobility of human existence in the global age;
- it explores the narrative and stylistic features of films that come about as a result of this supranational cycle of film-making and reception’

(Dina Iordanova, ‘Transnational Film Studies,’ in Pam Cook (ed) *The Cinema Book. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, p. 508. London: BFI, 2007)



France/Italy/Canada  
/West Germany/UK  
(1989)

France/Spain  
(2002)



## Elements highlighted by transnational film studies

The transnational critique explores the ‘contingency or instability of the national’ and favours readings that stress ‘hybrid’ and ‘impure’ elements.

Places stress on 1) new identities 2) new economic processes

(See Andrew Higson, ‘The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema’, in Hjort and McKenzie (eds) *Cinema and Nation*, pp. 63-74. London: Routledge, 2000)

# 1) New multicultural realities resulting in composite identities

Patterns of migration: **diasporic cultures;**  
**multiculturalism within the nation state**

'Beur' cinema but also other  
'accented cinemas' (Naficy)

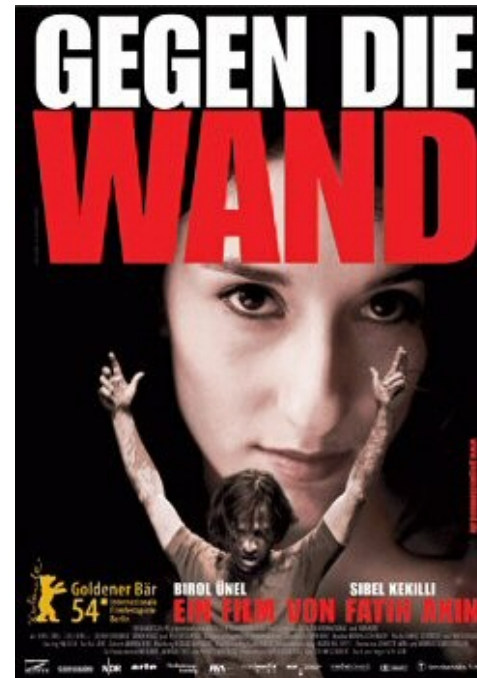


*La graine et le mulet/Couscous* (Abdellatif  
Kechiche, France 2007)

Gurinder  
Chadha, director  
of mainstream  
hits *Bend it like  
Beckham* (2002)  
and *Bride and  
Prejudice* (2004)



*Gegen die  
Wand/Head-On*  
(Fatih Akin, 2004)



## 2) Impact of the economic processes of globalisation.

- IN films



- And at the level of PRODUCTION:

- Mobility of funds and personnel across the globe
- De-centered structures of multi-national corporations: e.g. entertainment conglomerates
- Supra-national character of funding bodies e.g. the *Eurimages* and *Media* European programmes
- Globalisation of film culture: digital formats allow for the circulation of previously inaccessible national traditions: landmarks in film history co-exist with current releases in theatres, DVD, internet...
- Powerful popular cinema industries: France but also Bollywood (India); Nollywood (Nigeria).

# Transnational trends and film history

Film history looks at the way successive waves of cosmopolitanism throw into question the idea of a purely national cinema

- o From the mid-1920s to the early 1930s: the possibility of a pan-European cinema, or 'Film Europe'

- o After the coming of sound, multi-language versions of films

- o Contribution to British and Hollywood cinema by European émigrés:

eg. Billy Wilder (director; born in Austria), (Audrey Hepburn (star; born in Belgium) – developing their careers in Hollywood.

Hungarians Emeric Pressburger (director); Alexander Korda (producer) - key figures in British cinema.

# Mette Hjort:, ‘On the plurality of cinematic transnationalism’

Hjort locates value in transnational practices that:

- resist “globalization as cultural homogenization” and
- pursue and promote “aesthetic, artistic, social and political values” (p. 15)

Types proposed by Hjort:

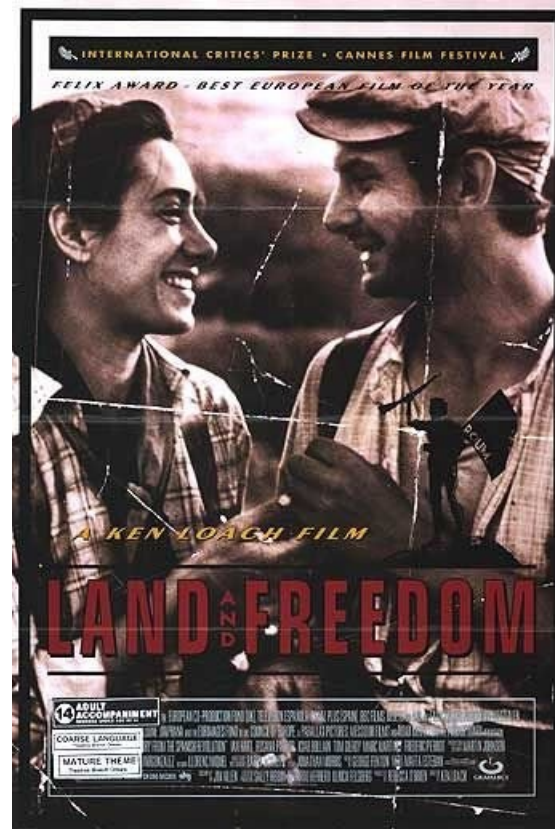
1. Epiphanic transnationalism: shared cultural space; ‘deep transnational belonging’
2. Affinitive: based on cultural similarities
3. Milieu-building: cultural similarities lead to industrial initiatives for collaboration
4. Opportunistic: economic-driven collaboration
5. Cosmopolitan: mobility of directors
6. Globalizing: genre and star-based vehicles seeking to compete with Hollywood
7. Auteurist: established national cinema *auteurs* set up collaborative projects
8. Modernizing: supporting industrial development
9. Experimental: non-fiction films that reflect on the formation of identities; expanding the possibilities of collaboration.



# Hjort's Categories

## Affinitive & milieu-building transnationalism: Red Road

(Andrea Arnold, UK/Denmark 2006): alliances between agents from small nations: The *Advance Party* initiative – Producers: Sigma Films (Scotland) & Zentropa (Denmark). Cities (Glasgow) become creative hubs.



Ken Loach  
(UK/Spain/Germany/Italy/France,  
1995) - CLIP

Epiphanic & auteurist transnationalism:  
Auteur film directed by Ken Loach, which seeks to unearth a shared history and ideals, and put forward a message of transnational belonging.

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**In practice: films may fit more than one category; critical readings can activate diverse types of transnationalism.**

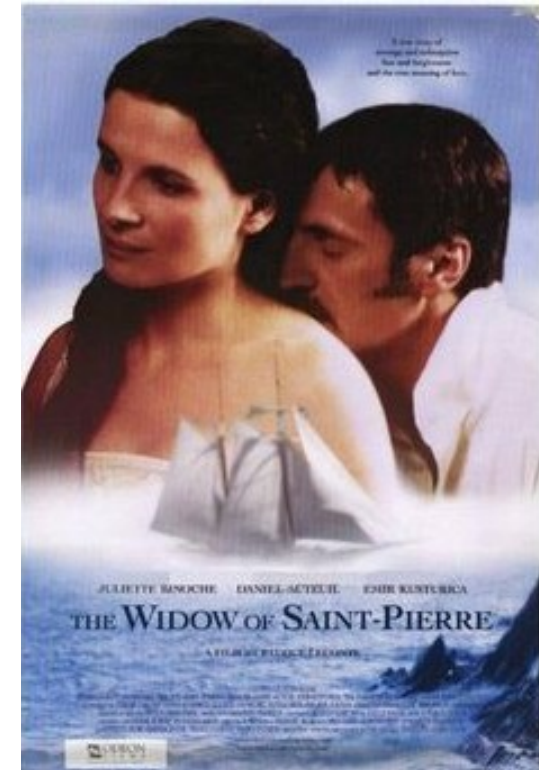
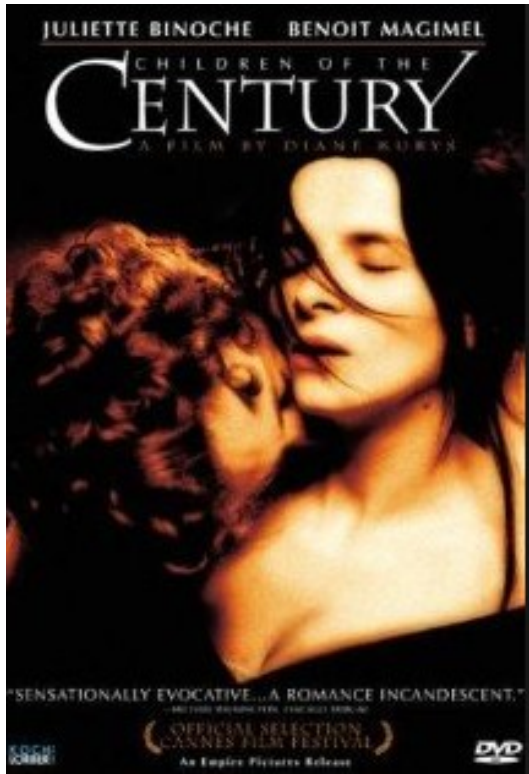
## 'On the plurality of cinematic transnationalism'

- Hjort attaches critical value to practices that show the progressive potential of transnationalism - e.g. *Red Road, Land and Freedom*: art films that escape traditional national classifications.
- A model that stresses the value of *auteur* intentionality and production arrangements that reflect a philosophy of collaboration ('strong' forms of transnationality). Less value attached to globalised productions driven by economic opportunity, on a par with Hollywood: e.g. *Bride and Prejudice*.

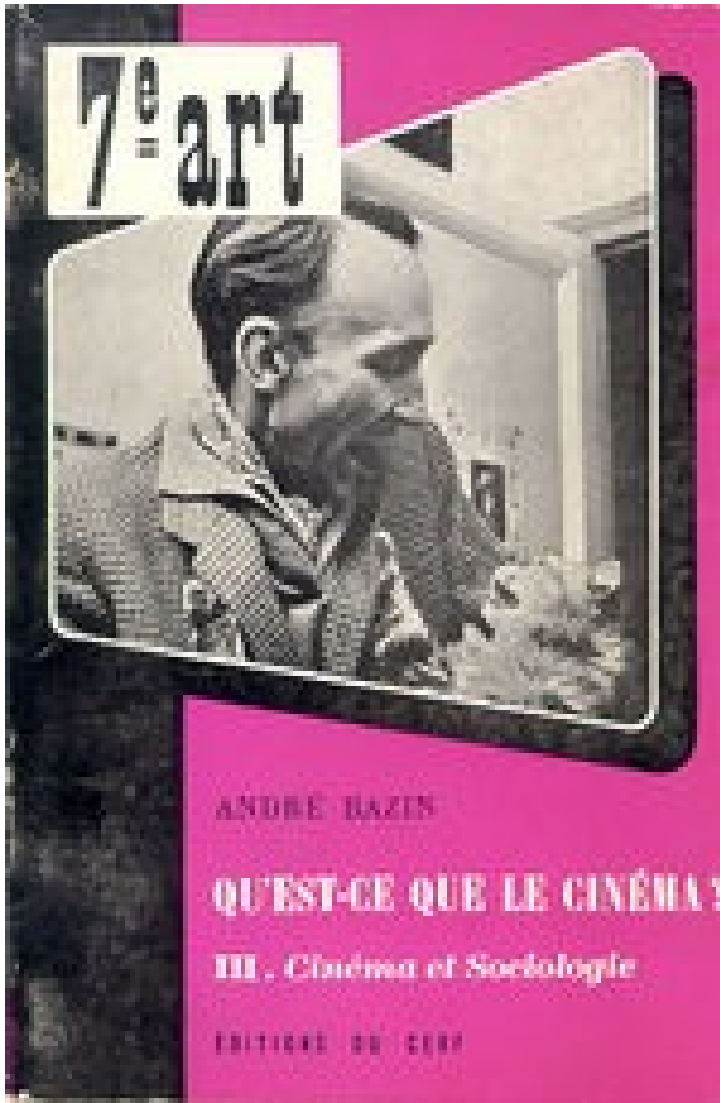
# Diluting specificity?

Cf. Danan (extra reading)

‘These stars are turned into images of themselves just as French history itself is turned into a series of beautiful images’ (p. 240)



# Classical Film Theory



A multi-volume collection of the writings of highly influential post-World War II film theorist Bazin.

A focus on cinema's ability to capture objective reality.

Develops pioneer analyses of the work of auteur filmmakers, prominently including Italian 'neo-realists' such as Luchino Visconti and Vittorio de Sica, as well as the French Jean Renoir and some US filmmakers such as Orson Welles.



*Une partie de campagne/A Day in the Country* (Jean Renoir, 1936)



Realism as an effect of form e.g.

- wide screen composition
- deep focus (contrast e.g.

*The Battle of Algiers* [Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966]



And an effect of theme

- focus on ordinary people

*Ladri di biciclette/Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio de Sica 1948, CLIP)

# 1960 (and '70s) Theory: Contesting the cinema's direct link to reality

A turn to TEXTUALITY: media as a complex system of meanings.

Roland Barthes, 'Rhétorique de l'image'.  
In: *Communications*, 4, 1964. pp. 40-51.

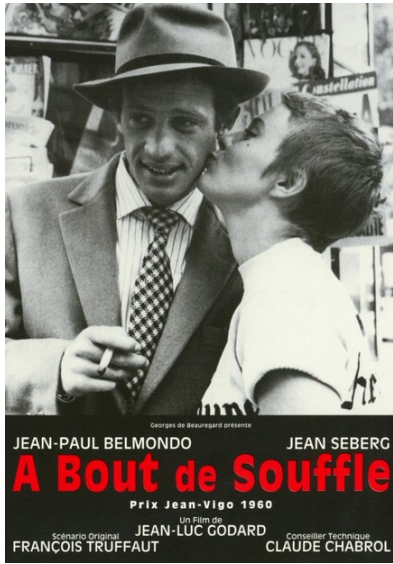
See also:

'La Mort de l'auteur', 1967

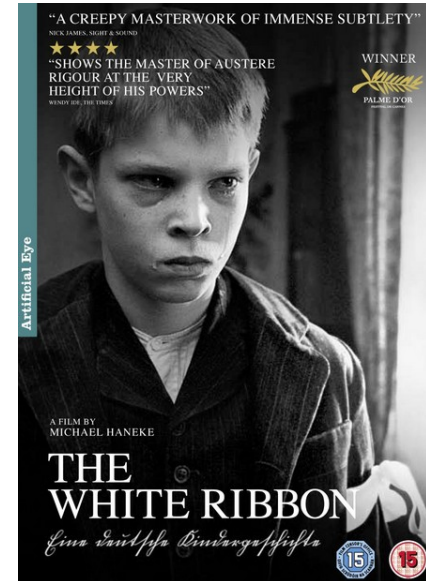
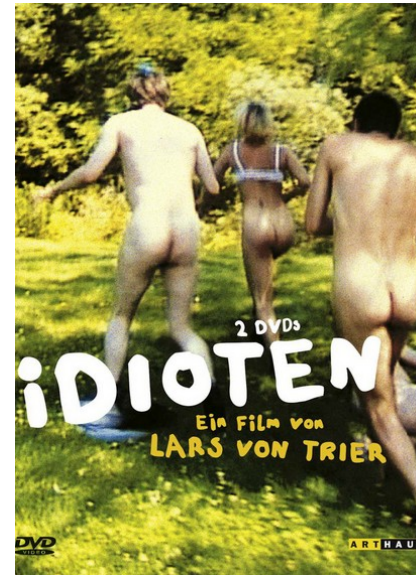


# Auteur film as point of European distinction

From the post-war years....



... to the contemporary period



See Thomas Elsaesser:

- *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (2005).



## Auteurism beyond Europe



'Proto-Europeans' like Abbas Kiarostami  
(Iranian)

See also Vincendeau (2014, week 8 extra reading) on Binoche as 'the perfect European star'.



US 'indie' auteurs like David Fincher

See also Mazdon, 'Hollywood and Europe: Remaking *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*,' in Harrod, Liz and Timoshkina, *The Europeanness of European Cinema* (2014).

Cf. Elsaesser (2005) on European cinema as just another category in world cinema?  
OR (2015) something else again...

## Assayas as auteur

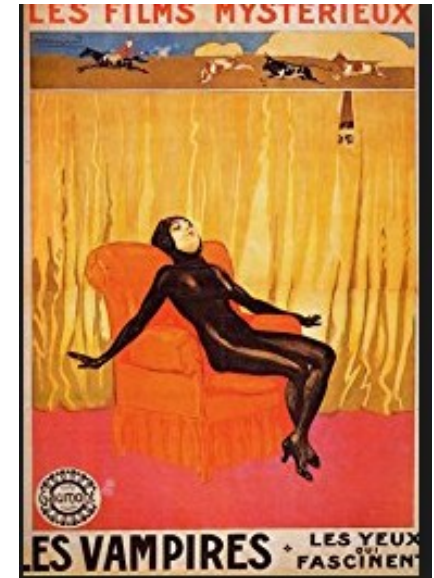
- **Observable stylistic and thematic consistencies across his oeuvre** (albeit following two strands – ‘people chasing each other across the globe with guns and expense accounts’ (Jones p. 34) in globalised (erotic) thrillers with English-language titles (*demonlover*, (2002), *Boarding Gate* (2007), we can add *Personal Shopper*) v. ‘people talking in cafes’ in other films
- **Enigmatic films that invite hermeneutic readings/decoding**
- **Profound questions; a social message?** Not ‘only entertainment’. E.g. a critique of mass media and the breakdown of communication – a theme with a pedigree in critical theory, notably through Jean Baudrillard’s concept of ‘simulacra’ as well as ‘Situationist’ work by Guy Debord and others.
- **A marketable brand?** Including festival accolades e.g. Prix de la mise-en-scène for *Personal Shopper* at Cannes.

# The auteur brand

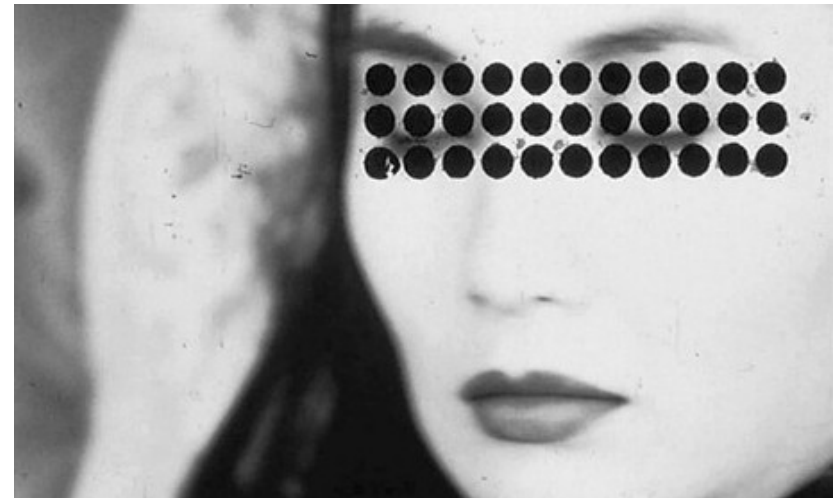


depicts the remaking of...

by starring



1915



Lettrism

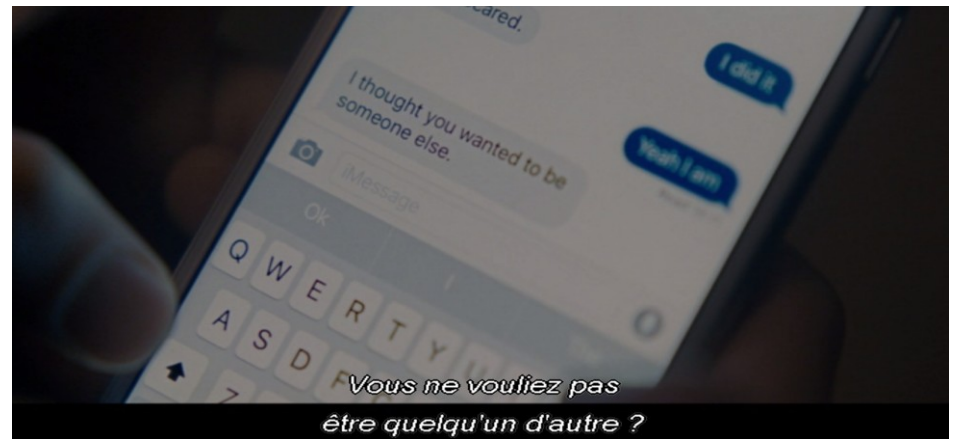
## From situationism to globalisation

- Situationism – an avant-garde movement from late 1950s to early 1970s with links to Marxism
  - suspicious of the growing role of objects in mediating social relations
  - Emphasised the immediate presence of interpersonal dynamics (contrast post-Structuralist ideas)
  - In Assayas' interpretation, attributes importance to human agency (including collective) and even responsibility cf. Jones p. 22 on 'the sense of personal agency shared between characters, the phantom awareness of how one measures up against other people, within society, as *a citizen of the world*.'
- = the definition of cosmopolitanism, linked to transnational identity formation



Assayas, 2007

# Technology in *Personal Shopper*



# Gendered fear of technological change

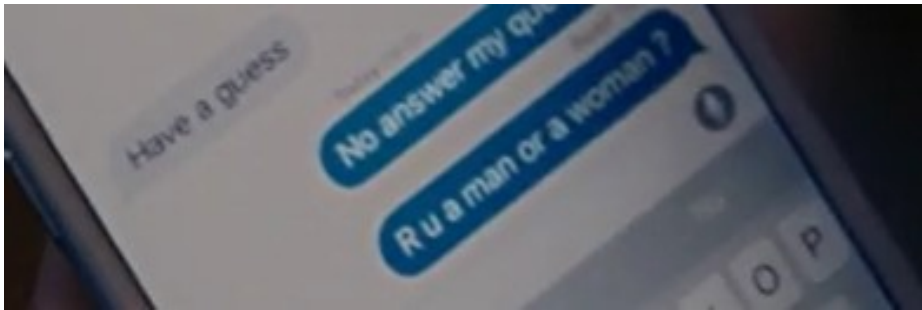
## *Ringu/The Ring*

(Hideo Nakata, Japan 1998)

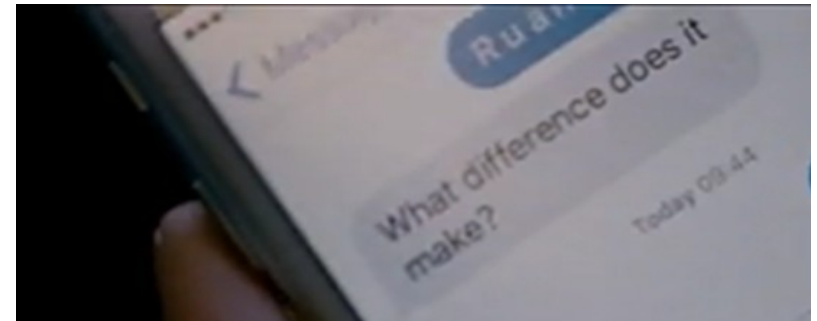


## Slavoj Žižek, “No Sex, Please! We’re Post-Human.” (2000)

<http://www.lacan.com/nosex.htm>



*Personal Shopper*



‘What if [...] once sexual difference is abolished, a human being effectively becomes indistinguishable from a machine? [...]

The end of sexuality [...] will simultaneously signal the end of what is traditionally designated as the uniquely human spiritual transcendence.’

See also Haraway (2000).

# 'Continental' Humanist Thought

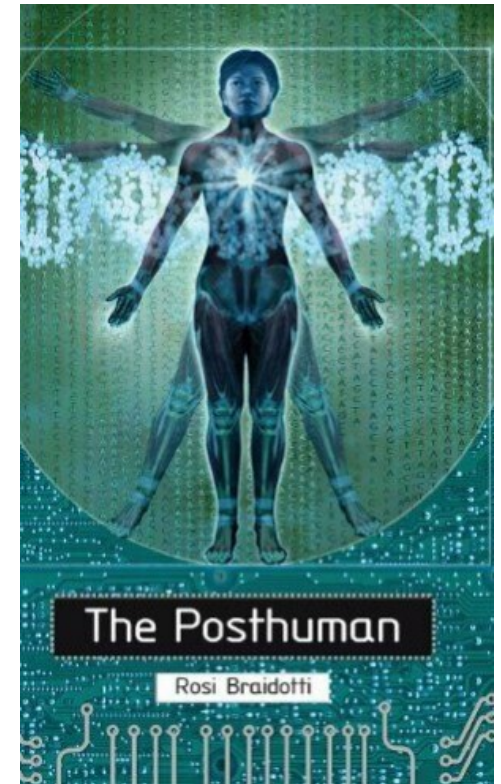
Cf. Baudrillard's fear of cloning (*Screened Out*, 2002).

Zygmunt Bauman's critique of 'subjectivity fetishism' connected to electronic media (*Consuming Life*, 2007).

For Rosi Braidotti

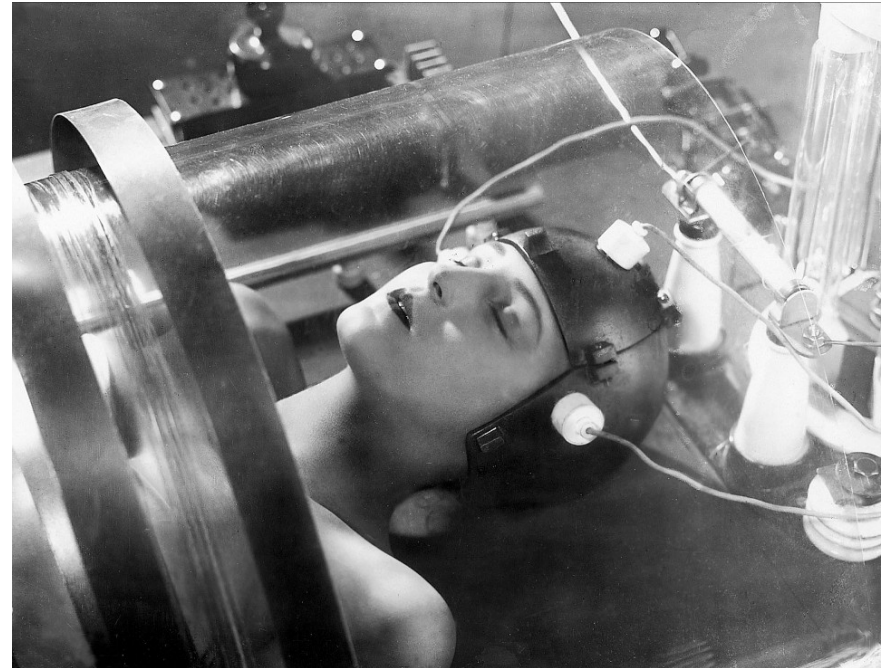
Humanism is a 'Eurocentric paradigm'.

(*The Posthuman*, 2013: 15)





# Gendered fear of technological change



See Andreas Huyssen (1982), 'The vamp and the machine: Technology and sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*'

## Gendered fear of technological change

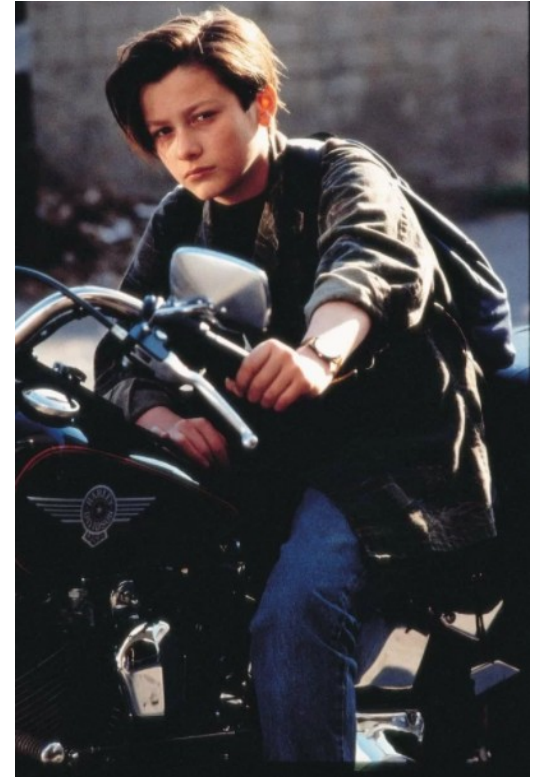


1924

‘Both L’Herbier’s character Claire in *L’Inhumaine* and Lang’s Maria express the highly sexualised and deeply gendered relationship of the twentieth century to its industrial technology and machinery.’

Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 106

## Maureen's queer associations



## Maureen's queer associations



## The Carpenter's Song

You often hear folks squabble over what good fortune means:  
One fellow calls the other “fool”, but neither knows the truth.  
The very meanest pauper seems to others far too rich.  
Fate clamps them all into its vice and planes them equally.  
The young forever strive with might for constant happiness  
But once you age a little bit, you settle for much less.  
My wife oft nags me woefully, but I don't turn a hair;  
I knock the shavings from my plane and let her grumble on!  
**And when Death shows up one fine day and beckons, brother  
– come!**  
I'll act a little deaf at first, and simply look away.  
But when he says: dear Valentine, don't give me trouble, go!  
I'll lay my plane down on my bench and bid the world  
farewell!

## Maureen's 'posthuman' erotic disembodiment



See also Steven Shaviro on *Boarding Gate* in 'Post-Cinematic Affect', *Film Philosophy* 4 (1).



## Lewis as ghost?





## Troubling sex and gender in recent auteur films



*Spring Breakers*



*Personal Shopper*



*The Bling Ring*



*Happy End*

## Additional Bibliography

- Richard Grusin, *The Nonhuman Turn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
- Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,' in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 2000), 294-312.
- Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- Mette Hjort: 'On the plurality of cinematic transnationalism,' in N. Ďurovičová and K. Newman (eds), *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Routledge/AFI, 2010), 12-33.