

Psy- chologi- cal Land- scape

Érik Bulloz is a filmmaker and theorist. His most recent books are *Renversements 2. Notes sur le cinéma* (Paris: Paris Expérimental, 2013) and *Sortir du cinéma. Histoire virtuelle des relations de l'art et du cinéma* (Geneva: Mamco, 2013). He was visiting professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo (USA, 2009–2011). Currently he teaches film at the École nationale supérieure d'art de Bourges (France) and is director of the postgraduate program Document and contemporary art at the European School of Visual Arts (Poitiers-Angoulême, France).

Érik Bulloot

Psychological Landscape with Film: Notes on Unmade Film¹

Translation: John O'Toole / Caroline Hancock

Why summon a model based on film to organise the series of visual art works making up the overall project known as Unmade Film, Uriel Orlow's multipart body of work that is bound up with the memory of Deir Yassin? This Palestinian village is the site of a massacre in 1948 where, three years later, a psychiatric hospital was established for survivors of the Holocaust. The obvious presence of film and its paradigmatic function appears to be at the core of the work. The title immediately sets the tone: Unmade Film suggests "film to come" and "future film", while the modifier "unmade" of course brings to mind something left undone, stressing process and production as well as promise. Moreover, it is not a stretch to hear in "unmade" a critical allusion to the Duchampian ready-made. But rather than found film in the sense of found footage – in other words a reused, recycled object – the project involves a future film, one that is pending, on hold, and what we are presented with is the preliminary work (the reconnaissance, the storyboard), or elements that are separate from the film itself (the staging, the voiceover, the score).

Critics have often pointed out the filmic dimension attending the gesture that is the art exhibition. Making one's way through an art show amounts to experiencing a film by laying out a route, a narrative, a loop. A number of contemporary artists have developed this hypothesis. Here the allusion is literal. Unmade Film is less about making an exhibition a film than about exhibiting the film process itself: each of the pieces refer to the stages involved in the production of the "coming film", hence their singular, somewhat elliptic character. Not only do the art pieces as a whole often employ some form of riddle (one needs to know the protocol to understand the meaning and issues at stake), but the elements as a whole may give rise to a literary sort of experience featuring texts, readings and illustrations. Film, it seems, has taken the place of books as a paradigm. Why?

In the final section of his essay The Book to Come, entitled "Where Is Literature Going?", Maurice Blanchot points out numerous writers' interest in the process instead of the work (fragments, sketches, succeeding states of the work), and questions this paradoxical, even negative, future for literature. He writes (I have substituted the word film for literature):

But the essence of [film] is precisely to escape any essential determination, any assertion that stabilises it or even realises it: it is never already there, it is always to be rediscovered or reinvented. It is not even certain that the word [film] or the word art corresponds to anything real, anything possible or anything important.²

Does Unmade Film perform this blueprint? To know, we need to take a look at the role assigned to film in the exhibition through the dispersal of its constituent parts (locations, script, story board, staging, voice over, score,

- 1 The present study describes *Unmade Film* at the time of its display at the Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris in 2013. Each iteration of the project gives rise to a spatialisation and layout that is specifically tailored to the particular exhibition venue.
- 2 Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p.121.
- 3 Jalal Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster* (Forthcoming Books, 2009).

credits) on the one hand, and the connection between this fragmented form and the possible or impossible narrative of a traumatic situation on the other. The dispersal of the “film to come” suggests the situation of a place that is destroyed, obliterated and invisible. It is a question of conjuring up a buried, repressed memory by establishing a future, prophetic time through the inversion of the temporal axis, where the future of a film clarifies the past of a psychological landscape.

The work The Voiceover, in some sense, offers a decisive marker or milestone to guide the visitor. Installed in a white room that is equipped with moving lights and disconnected from the other elements of the work, The Voiceover occupies a protected site and conjures up an imaginary film or film for radio, recalling avant-garde experiments like Walter Ruttmann’s imageless radio film (Wochenende, 1930). Crucially, it makes use of direct address to the viewer through the use of the imperative and certain deictics: “Let’s go up these steps. Turn. Feel that. Let’s go up to the roof. Look, the view is a nice one. See the columns holding up the building. You can see. Here is the city I wanted to show you. Look behind the distributor.” The voice “shows” us something that cannot be seen, makes present an absence, before the remains of Deir Yassin, bringing out the spectral nature of a visit that recalls Jalal Toufic’s analysis of the necessary resurrection of a tradition following a “surpassing disaster.”³ Once outside this room, viewers are left to themselves. They have to decipher each of the pieces and connect the fragments to a whole that they are deprived of. Is Unmade Film comparable to a rebus? Does this imply that we have to make an effort to replace the presented elements in order to understand them? Viewers have to carry out a delicate interpretation of signs, which is however helped by the overall layout of the exhibition, which allows them to draw parallels and make connections between the elements. The succeeding stages in the production of the film are provided simultaneously, replacing the temporal verticality of the film with the spatial horizontality of the exhibition.

The use of the film paradigm is not unfamiliar to contemporary art, which has been exploring the share of promise found in the medium as well as how film can be extended and enlarged. Film has moved away from

its technical and ideological base in order to borrow other avatars: one might mention here, for example, Pavle Levi's fascinating work on "cinema by other means", seeking in collage, the poetic screenplay, sculpture, or performance art fully fledged experiments in film.⁴ Can a collage or a performance be a film? One could also point to "paper film": that is, the written document as film, be it screenplay, outline or "score" for photograms. Or we could look to what the critic Morad Montazami calls "scriptology": the "science of works to come", a science that focuses on the study of unrealised scripts in their dual temporality, something past and still to be.⁵ Through its fragments and documents, Unmade Film offers an expanded script. In a text written in 1965 called "The Screenplay as a 'Structure That Wants to Be Another Structure'", Pasolini examines the paradoxical status of the screenplay.⁶ It should not be conceived as a structure but instead as a "true process"; that is to say a "morphological structure in movement", a text that has lost its autonomy as literature in order to be read from the perspective of a film "to come".

The sign of the screenplay therefore not only expresses "a will of the form to become another" above and beyond the form; that is, it captures "the form in movement" – a movement that finishes freely and in various manners in the fantasy of the writer and in the cooperating and friendly fantasy of the reader, the two coinciding freely and in different ways.⁷

4 Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

5 Morad Montazami, "La scriptologie: science des œuvres à venir", *Pyramide, diapason, roue crantée* 1, 2011, pp.133–150.

6 Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Screenplay as a 'Structure That Wants to Be Another Structure'", [1965], *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp.187–196.

7 Pasolini, "Screenplay", p.192.

8 Félix Guattari, *Un amour d'UIQ*, ed. Silvia Maglioni and Graeme Thomson (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2012).

9 Serge Daney, *Perséverance, Entretiens avec Serge Toubiana* (Paris: P.O.L., 1994), p.144.

Beyond the critique of structuralism with which it engages, this position also sheds light on the preliminary work Pasolini did for his films (the series of Appunti is part of this same reflection on the non finito). Hence Pasolini's presence in Unmade Film, thanks to his Location Scouting in Palestine for "The Gospel According to Matthew", a 1965 film in which the filmmaker presents the story of his reconnaissance trip to Palestine and admits his practical disappointment (his words are part of the text for Orlov's The Reconnaissance, the first work of Unmade Film). But it also tells us about the way the screenplay today has been taken over by artists, playing with a paradoxical temporality between forgetting and promise. I am thinking of the film made by the Otolith Group from a screenplay by Satyajit Ray that was never filmed (Otolith III, 2009), or another by Graeme Thomson and Silvia Maglioni (In Search of UIQ, 2013) which is based on Félix Guattari's screenplay, UIQ.⁸ Contemporary art explores the power of film that has been left fallow in the form of unrealised scripts.

Unlike the examples mentioned above, however, Unmade Film implies neither redoing nor extending an initial script, unless one considers trauma as a repressed script, in this case the destruction of a village by Zionist paramilitary forces in 1948. Must these historical facts be interpreted as if they were scripts? Unmade Film proposes an effort in anamnesis, in recollection, that takes deletion and repression into account. The exhibition evinces a kind of indecisiveness around the event. Yet film, as is well known, has occasionally been mixed up in the utopian or revolutionary programmes of the avant-garde. Dziga Vertov spoke of the "Communist deciphering of reality" with respect to his montage work. Serge Daney often brought up the links between cinema and Communism: "To transcend nationalities and to promise: cinema promised access to an undifferentiated world, the world of men, all men, while Communism promised a gradual liberation of the human species..."⁹ It now seems as though a film can no longer question reality solely as a documentary that recounts an event while putting different points of view in perspective. Here, the critical work specific to the documentary is, on the contrary, invested by the very process of the film. Unmade Film doesn't fall into the category of exhibition cinema (cinema that exposes things), rather it exhibits film as a document. Orlov's project is about documents that have to be activated, hence

the participatory aspect of their production, be it Palestinian children drawing the storyboard (The Storyboard), or people taking part in a theatre workshop inspired by the techniques of Augusto Boal (The Staging). We are not dealing with a reenactment here, strictly speaking, but rather with an abstract or schematic figuration. How should we tell a story? How to put into words what has disappeared? How to bring to life or even revive a memory? I would stress the importance of drawing in the effort to consolidate dispersed lands in Palestinian memory.¹⁰ Are we dealing with performative documents, like the guide that inaugurates the viewer's visit to the exhibition (The Voiceover)? Has the "film to come" become a collection of performative utterances?

In Civilisation and Its Discontents, Freud compares the psychological landscape to a Rome that has kept the totality of its constructions, "in which nothing", he writes, "that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one".¹¹ As if, he says, the imperial palaces of Septimius Severus still stood on the Palatine. In terms of mental life, Freud adds, "what is past ... is not necessarily destroyed". The metaphor of Rome runs throughout the exhibition in a number of ways. Unmade Film explores Deir Yassin as if the village were a palimpsest or a stratified site that has conserved the traces of its history intact, Palestinian and Israeli. Around this village's traumatic episode, the work evokes the psychological suffering of survivors and descendants, but also that of patients in psychiatric hospitals. The landscape is both physical and psychological. Rome can also be seen to figure

10 By way of an example, there is Till Roeskens' beautiful film (*Videomappings: Aida, Palestine*, 2009) in which the artist asks the inhabitants of the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem to draw maps of where they have been.

11 Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1962), pp.17, 18.

12 Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey", *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp.68–74. Originally published in *Artforum* (December, 1967).

in Unmade Film through the imaginary dialogue between Pasolini and Robert Smithson. The Reconnaissance, the first work of Unmade Film, features an imaginary dialogue between the Italian filmmaker and the American artist. Pasolini's words are taken from the soundtrack to his Location Scouting in Palestine (Pasolini expresses both his disappointment at the modernity of the sites and his enthusiasm in terms of spirituality in search of a pre-Christian, pre-capitalist world), while those of Smithson are mostly borrowed from his text "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey", in which the artist wonders, "Has Passaic replaced Rome as The Eternal City?"¹² The circumstances surrounding Smithson's text are well known. The artist describes a visit to this New Jersey suburb, proposing a kind of imaginary archaeology of future life through the architecture of the vernacular and industrial places seen there, what he calls "ruins in reverse". While the archaic landscape of one is devoured by modernity, the industrial suburb of the other shows signs of ruin. The idea of choosing a dialogue between an artist and a filmmaker, at the intersection of a time span, eloquently summarises the work's challenge. Deir Yassin has replaced Rome. But is Freud's metaphor still valid in the case of a post-traumatic situation? Aren't we dealing with a psycho-logical landscape that is incomplete, interrupted and devastated, in which the 'imperial palaces of Septimius Severus' have disappeared? By displaying film as a number of fragments and preliminary studies, disjoining the basic units of the medium, and stressing the effect these gaps and intervals have, Unmade Film works like a conversion or transference agent for an obliterated psychological landscape. It engenders the ghostly anamnesis of a repressed memory. From now on, the panoramic view made possible by the site of Rome and the psycho-logical conservation of its monuments is blocked. The impossible film has become the symptom of a post-traumatic situation.

