

Manthia Diawara's Waves and the Problem of the "Authentic"

Kenneth W. Harrow

Abstract: This article begins by tracking how the delineation of "New Cinema" in the recent work of Manthia Diawara differs significantly from the approaches that had been dominant when he published his initial study on African cinema in 1992. The changes lead us to position current filmmaking practices vis-à-vis Nollywood film, and to ask how the formation of the cinematic subject functions in contemporary "new waves" of cinema.

Résumé: Cet article commence en repérant, dans le travail récent de Manthia Diawara, comment la démarcation du "nouveau cinéma" diffère considérablement des approches qui avaient été dominantes lorsque son étude initiale sur le cinéma africain a été publiée en 1992. Les changements nous mènent à positionner les pratiques cinématographiques actuelles vis-à-vis le cinéma Nollywood, et à se demander comment la formation des sujets cinématographiques fonctionne dans les "nouvelles vagues" contemporaines de cinéma.

Keywords: Cinema; subject; authenticity; Nollywood; Diawara; Butler; Sembène

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In Manthia Diawara's recent study of African cinema, *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (2010), he sets about the task of presenting the "new" in a manner that is totally different from his first, programmatic study, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (1992), written twenty years ago. The latter has had a significant impact on African film studies, as did Frank Ukadike's *Black African Cinema* (1994), written two years later. Both works set out to present the broad features of African cinema and to illustrate its qualities by exploring a range of key films, always asking what made African cinema authentic, different from European or Hollywood film, and true to the principles of struggle in an age of national liberation. In the last chapter of Diawara's study in particular, he utilizes a few key categories, like "Return to the Sources," "Colonial Confrontation," and "Social Realist," which have been repeatedly cited over the years, and in a sense have had a detrimental effect on the level of critical commentary by enabling reductive readings of films. In his current study his work has matured—the former was, after all, a revision of his dissertation—and his readings of Sembène and others are superb, subtle, complex, and most of all, productive for our thinking about African cinema in general, especially the changes that have been wrought since those early years marked so heavily by revolutionary fervor and rhetoric.

What's new, then, entails the kinds of films that are now emerging: Nollywood of course, and especially its amorphous, latest iteration dubbed "New Nollywood," as well as innovations in conventional African cinema.¹ In the period following the heyday of what has been called "oppositional cinema," the line between the older celluloid films—at times called "FESPACO" films because of their prioritization of political commitment, encased within an established understanding of African cinematic language—and the newer forms of New Nollywood have become increasingly difficult to sustain. "Video films" had typically been associated with greater commercial cinematic values, but they now have begun to include "transnational films," typically associated with greater postproduction values, and "experimental" or "innovative" New Nollywood styles and genres, as might be seen in Andy Amadi's dark neo-noir *Relentless* (2010), Djo Munga's dystopic *Viva Riva* (2011), or Kenneth Gyang's *Confusion Na Wa* (2014). The conventional framing of African cinema is increasingly shifting, as now seen with Biyi Bandele's epic adaptation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half a Yellow Sun* (2014) or Wanuri Kahiu's sci-fi feminist short *Pumzi* (2013). In other areas, too, like the most conventionalized of genres such as genocide films, a totally new approach has been taken, as seen in Kivu Ruhorahoza's psychologically troubled drama *Grey Matter* (2011). No longer is it just FESPACO that is defining what is to be admitted to the competitive ranks of "African film," with festivals in Zanzibar, South Africa, and Nigeria now rising to compete for the status of award-givers.

Second, we have new kinds of critical approaches, with a new generation of critical writings beginning with those introduced by Jonathan Haynes, seen initially in his *Cinema and Social Change in West Africa* (1995, co-edited with Onookome Okome), in which Haynes published his important essay

"Nigerian Cinema: Structural Adjustments." His groundbreaking work on Nollywood, "Evolving Popular Media: Nigerian Video Films" (also co-authored with Okome, 1997), appeared in his edited volume *Nigerian Video Films* (1997), in which he called for new work on popular genres and socio-political studies. Haynes has this to say about how his thinking evolved from this important initial point:

My argument about shifting paradigms developed in stages. In 1995 I made and stressed the contrast between Nigerian and other African film production but my concern was describing this new thing that was happening in a stretch of Nigeria's film history rather than pushing a theoretical argument. The 1997 essay was a lot about importing [Karin] Barber and [Christopher] Waterman's model of the African popular arts, which is at once sociological and aesthetic, into the study of film, which I don't believe had been done before. This was designed to provide a paradigm that could open up a field of study, but I wasn't especially concerned with alternatives. The 2000 "Introduction" to the American edition of *Nigerian Video Films*, which was written to mediate between an American academic audience and what had begun as a Nigerian book, was where I mounted a full-scale argument about how the existing paradigms for studying African film didn't fit the Nigerian videos. (Personal communication)

In his latest work, Haynes (2014) has carried forward the project of treating genre in Nollywood films to examine how Nollywood has been received in the Nigerian expatriate communities abroad, and how it is managing the financial crises engendered in distribution models like television. The emphasis on material readings and new global configurations has necessitated revisions of theoretical frames, as seen in Akin Adesokan's *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics* (2011), in which the critiques of commodity culture and neoliberalism have changed the contours of postcolonial preoccupations with national and neocolonial paradigms. In Adesokan's work institutional structures, aesthetic values, and genre formation have come to lend new complexity to notions of "context," redefining what constitutes committed critique in an age of globalization.

I would say that the critics who have taken up this baton and carried the work forward in the most interesting and significant ways are Moradewun Adejunmobi, especially in her groundbreaking essay in *Postcolonial Text* on Nollywood as minor transnational cinema, "Nigerian Video Film as Minor Transnational Practice" (2007), and Carmela Garritano, whose work on Ghannywood (*African Video Movies and Global Desires: A Ghanaian History*, 2013) is important not only because of her careful historicizing and political contextualizing of the cinema of Ghana, but especially because of her appreciation of the ways video films are being conceptualized and received on both the local and transnational level. The combination of Adejunmobi's and Garritano's work leads us to ask: what is the distinction between films directed at local audiences and those seeking to connect to audiences across wider, even global, spheres of marketing? To be concrete, when Socrate

Safo made films in Twi, with local settings, familiar Accra neighborhoods, and culturally indigenous languages, he was trying to reach a niche audience that would not automatically turn to those Anglophone Nollywood films with much higher production values that he could not compete with. The audiences in Accra that saw Shirley Frimpong-Manso's films—more expensive than the usual, quickly turned out video films, less local in their address, and more professional in their postproduction qualities—compared them to Hollywood productions, and, according to Garritano, placed them in that category of “professional,” as opposed to the local, presumably more amateurishly filmed ones.²

For Brian Larkin (2008), local postproduction imperfections generated their own scratchy style, which cultivated the audience's aesthetic tastes in Kannywood cinema grounded in the material effects created by piracy and copying.³ This new cinema is enormously distant from the highly ideological notion of “Imperfect Cinema” which was developed in Latin America in the 1970s by Garcia Espinosa and was joined to the work of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino in the formulation of Third Cinema.⁴

African film never quite became Third Cinema, with its more programmatically Marxist agenda. There was never a *Hora de los Hornos* (1968), although the most didactically committed films of Haile Gerima and Med Hondo could be seen as working parallel veins of anticolonialism. Gerima's role in the L. A. Rebellion remained within the domain of diaspora film, black film in a pan-African sense, and not so much African cinema, in the proper sense, as is evident in his important early work like *Bush Mama* (1979), and this remained the case until *Harvest 3000* (1976) appeared. Hondo's work was also, like Gerima's, that of a certain African diaspora cinema, again until *Sarraouina* (1986).

Neither of these two receive much attention from Diawara in his latest treatment of African cinema, undoubtedly because the new work of the older generation of filmmakers such as Hondo and Gerima is not in tune with any new trends. These filmmakers cannot be compared, for example, with directors like Wanuri Kahiu, Judy Kibinge, and Anne Mungai, or with Fanto Nacro, whom Diawara also doesn't mention, although he apologizes at one point for scanting the work of African women filmmakers. His apology is striking. He writes:

As artists and critics, we could blame African leaders for corruption and we could demand democracy and transparency. [Note that he doesn't say “justice”—a more leftist demand.] We could blame European leaders for corrupting Africans with their money, materialism, and paternalistic attitudes. We could even preach equal rights for women in our films, books, and songs. Finally, we could defend ourselves, by stating that patriarchy and sexism, like corruption and nepotism, are by no means problems only for Africans; they are alive and well in Germany and exist in the rest of Europe, in America, and everywhere else.

But now, all these answers seemed too easy and sounded like excuses. (2010:161)

The same could be said about the films and the criticism of the period of the first generation of African filmmakers. Married to grand narratives, they found it difficult to formulate perspectives freed from pedagogical or didactic imperatives, perspectives grounded in well-defined ideologies that sought to be distinguished from *Nouvelle Vague*, *Cahiers du Cinema* approaches. Third Cinema was the counterpart to Third World militant action.

By the 1970s V. Y. Mudimbe had developed the Foucauldian perspective that made it seem impossible for the systems of knowledge acquired for the disciplines of philosophy and theory to find a language outside the Western episteme. The need arose for a perspective that saw itself as located in an African standpoint, be it pan-African or one derived from *négritude*—what Diawara unapologetically calls authentic, even if he once used that term with scare quotes when dismissing as “calabash cinema” films created to serve French interests and tastes (2010:130). Diawara’s approach forges the bridge between the panegyrics for “Blackness” from the past and the tensions engendered in the present conjuncture by the rhetoric of postracialism. His new formulations have nothing to do with the pigeonholing approaches that delimited the value of past criticism, and yet he aspires to a systemization that could create more clarity than the theorizing that results from the espousal of postmodern rhizomes or uncertainties. He thus separates the aesthetics of Nollywood, a cinema he sees as dominated by the tropes of movement and change, from the new waves of cinema that enable us to retain a sense of connectedness to past trends.

The three new waves of cinema that Diawara identifies, then, are “Arte,” “La Guilde des Cinéastes,” and the “New Popular African Cinema.” Unlike his earlier categories—“Return to the Sources,” “Social Realist,” and “Colonial Confrontation,” which are defined in well-recognized genre or thematic terms—these three are nebulous, potentially encompassing any genre or theme. What marks them, rather, are the conditions of production, reception, and exhibition: what accounts for their production of films, who sees them, and where they are shown. We are always tiptoeing around Nollywood in the discussion that follows.⁵

“Arte” films are described by Diawara as those one would expect from the French–German production company that sponsors Europe’s dominant television network devoted to culture. The films in question are auteuristic but now inflected by African sensibilities, influenced by African approaches from the past, and addressing key African issues like immigration in the present. Diawara emphasizes “language” in his study, so he contrasts the “poetic” language of Abderrahmane Sissako with the “linear and realist language” of Sembène, that is, their film language. The discussion comparing Sembène’s shots, editing, and visual choices with those of Sissako is among the best film criticism of African film. Gone are the broad, overly didactic generalizations of Teshome Gabriel (2011) about what is African in a long take or in a long shot, or the ills of European individualism as seen in the utilization of close-up shots. At times Diawara asks us to accept the trite formulation that an African subject is somehow more communal than

a Western subject, an assertion grounded in popular sociologism rather than in the psychology of the subject. But when he describes, for instance, the shots in Sissako's *La vie sur terre* (2000), he opens up the possibilities of reading the grammar in ways that make visible an artist's grappling with the desire to embrace "a certain Africa" whose rhythms of life he had heard echoed in the work of Aimé Césaire. In describing the long shot that sets before us the open square in the town of Sokolo, Diawara writes, "As the donkeys come into the frame and move away from the camera, we realize that everything in the shot has been choreographed and directed to reveal the inscription of time on that particular space" (2010:102). Then he goes on to show, with precision, how "human beings and animals are put on the same level and in a relation of equality by the way they occupy the space as described by the movement of time," how they each become objects of the *mise-en-scène* in such a way as to generate the "rhythm and architecture of time in space" (2010:102). In calling attention to the *mise-en-scène* and the movement within the frame, he is able to suggest the relationship between Sissako's artistic sensibility and the camera's attentiveness to the visual components of the space. The cinematography establishes a peaceful ordering within the visual space, which differs from the "chaotic reality outside the frame" (2010:102) toward which Sissako gestures in his opening establishing shots of the supermarket, and in the frenetic sound of the French radio broadcasts heard in Mali announcing the new millennium in Paris. All this new pleasure that Sissako affords us differs from "Sembènian realism," according to Diawara, in its poeticization, but also its self-conscious manner of evoking an African presence that is distinct from what Diawara calls the "imperfect" cinema of Sembène.

"Imperfect Cinema," a term coined by Espinosa, was intended to generate a new approach to the cinematic experience that would encourage the audience to remain aware of the act of viewing, which he understood to be in opposition to the guiding philosophy of Hollywood to generate soporific dreams that impede critical reflection.⁶ Espinosa wanted to raise people's consciousness by making them continually aware of the constructedness of what they were viewing, to relate it to their lives and the realities of society, to reflect on the causes of the social inequalities they were experiencing and witnessing on the screen, and ultimately to discuss those causes following each showing. In fact, Sembène's work differed from this model in ways that Diawara doesn't mention. First, Sembène articulated more straightforward pedagogical goals, as when he called cinema "the night school of Africa." He imagined an African cinema that differed from the prevailing forms of European art cinema and dominant American Hollywood cinema, one that would connect directly with the as yet unrepresented real lives of Africans. Simultaneously, Sembène's practice was so markedly performative and distinctively Wolof or Serer in its emphases—on speechifying, on body language and gesticulation, on the presentation of the physical shapes, colors, and clothing, on the movements of "le peuple" as opposed to the bourgeoisie—that a new African subject took center stage. This emphasis

on real lives was not Espinosa's primary concern, but it always was Sembène's, and it marked his way of setting out basically a new agenda differing from that of most Latin American cinema. For instance, it is not seen, except in rare moments, in most ICAIC (Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos) Cuban cinema, in the Argentinian Third Cinema *Hour of the Furnaces* (*La Hora de los Hornos*, 1968), or in the new waves of Brazilian film and its Cinema Novo. Whereas "Brazilian" identity markers emerged in the latter, it was Serer and Wolof identities that Sembène emphasized in *Emitai* (1971) and *Xala* (1974). His films were only partially Third Cinema in the rigorous Latin American sense of revolutionary cinema, and they definitely marked a departure from Espinosa's strict understanding of Imperfect Cinema.

The sophistication and ideological subtleties of Arte film are markedly different from what is found in the politicized cinemas of the past, and especially the content of its debates. This is so much the case that one has the impression that the trial speeches in Sissako's *Bamako* (2006) are a throwback to the earlier period, although in fact the lawyers' formal speechifying there—at times verging on pontification—is not particularly African in style or language, in contrast with the griot's magnificent performance. And as the griot's words are not subtitled or translated directly on screen, but rather summarized later by Madame Fall, the speech functions as an "in-house" admonition intended for the closed circle of African interlocutors who understand and are seen closely attending to his words while the European characters, and the implied audience of the Arte film, are left on the outside. There is no comparable moment in Sembène's corpus.

Diawara's second wave, "La Guilde," has no clear formulation, but its contours emerge with his careful choice of examples. What is La Guilde, after all, except those for whom filmmaking is an art learned from the masters, with the new apprentices now free to experiment on their own? Jean-Pierre Bekolo is the choice example, and it is clear that his *Aristotle's Plot* (1996) works much better in this regard than his latest, more programmatic, less innovative film *Le Président* (2013), or than the second half of *Les Saignantes* (2005) in which the parody of the Minister, and by association Biya's government, like Mbembe's autocratic rulers, comes to replace the stupendous story of Mevoundou and her acolytes, the Saignantes.

La Guilde seems to consist of the younger generation of the 1990s, and it lumps together those like Bekolo and Jean-Marie Teno, whose styles and approaches could not be more different but who both desired to articulate a new ideology of cinematic language and what can be called cinematic politics. What joins them is clearly their ironic perspective—especially in the addresses to the camera—placed in the service of similar notions of modernism and progressivism. However, differences are significant. Bekolo is more avant-gardist and often turns to jump cuts and disjunctive, jazzy rhythms of editing and movement. Teno has retained a more linear style that is closer at times to classical documentary work (as in *Le malentendu colonial* [2004]), while heavily marking his cine-essays with a signature

subjective voice-over whose deep irony is grounded not in postmodern aesthetics but in the very opposite—one that is distant from the pastiche that Fredric Jameson (1991) described as the marker of postmodernism. Teno consistently has maintained a commitment to foundational values rather than to the politics of indeterminacy.⁷

Teno is anything but anxious about his subjectivity, as the voice-over's assurances of basic values conveys. In this regard, he is closer to other Guilde filmmakers like Danny Kouyaté, and especially to important figures like John Akomfrah and the Black Audio Film Collective (now transmogrified into Smoking Dogs Film) with whom Diawara says they are in conversation, or their progenitors like Haile Gerima or Teshome Gabriel, who played central roles in creating the L. A. Rebellion in the 1960s.

Very few African filmmakers can be totally disassociated from one form of black consciousness or another, even when explicitly distancing themselves from the militancy or overtly didactic terms of the revolution. In his most recent film, *Teza* (2008), Gerima now questions the assumptions that led his generation to militate for revolutionary change without anticipating the authoritarian turn that led to such governments as the Ethiopian Derg. Similarly, past dictators like Idi Amin, Mobutu Sese Seko, or Amadou Ahidjo cynically expropriated the rhetoric of *négritude* or Black Power discourses. It is not surprising that the second generation of filmmakers, so well represented by Flora Gomes and his *Blue Eyes of Yonta* (1992), would create a new rhetoric that would lecture its revolutionary predecessors, like Vincente, the beneficiary of revolutionary change, with no longer being in a position to understand them, much less speak for them.⁸ Yet even the title "Blue Eyes" indicates the film's mockery of an unreflective adaptation of European aesthetic values of beauty, ridiculed as well in Bekolo's *Quartier Mozart* (1992) and Teno's *Afrique, je te plumerai* (1992). After all, one cannot find any way of asserting a claim of being African in the world without occupying some position of critique of the Western imaginary that has been so deeply marked by past and present racisms. Identity claims inevitably are positioned in relationship to their Others.

Thus it is all the more understandable, while still questionable, that Diawara both mocks a certain position of overly defensive Africanness—which he associates, perhaps unjustly, with those working on the continent—while at the same time asserting the need for African voices to remain "authentic." He writes of the Guild cineastes, who are in general diasporic, that they have

done more questioning of Western stereotypes of Africa than those directors residing in Africa who believe that simply telling "authentic" African stories is enough. African diaspora directors, such as Gerima and Akomfrah, are strongly convinced that the image of Africa and that of its diaspora are inextricably intertwined and that fixing one without the other is like trying to save water by pouring it in the same. (2010:130)

He continues, “The image must therefore be continually worked on; it must be imbued with connotations that resist negative signifiers of the African in Western media and with an imaginary that is both ageless and new.” This image, he claims, “refuses colonization and absolutist definitions” (2010:130). This certainly describes Diawara’s own work, which conceives of itself as faithful to a black identity and its imperatives but not restricted to old school notions of revolutionary art and ideology.

If the first wave is the most auteurist, and the second most marked by diaspora sensibilities, the third wave, vaguely termed “New Popular African Cinema,” is at once the most diffuse and at the same time African—a notion, in this context, charged with authenticity. After praising Senghor’s call for an African specificity associated with qualities like rhythm—qualities that return in a more positive frame in cinematic terms than in the lexicon of affect, which degrades *négritude* into a cheap essentialism—Diawara looks to films like Souleymane Cissé’s *Finyé* (1982) or Moustapha Alasanne’s *Le retour d’un aventurier* (1966) or Kwah Ansah’s *Love Brewed in an African Pot* (1981) for the use of “African ingredients” to combat the “recognized genres of the West.” While they employ familiar genres like romance or melodrama, they take new popular forms, deploying “African ingredients and spices within old genres” (2010:142–43). Here I am in total agreement when he claims that these directions, so commonly associated with Nollywood, also mark the important work of Mansour Wade, Moussa Sene Absa, Zola Maseko, Zézé Gamboa, and others who employ techniques of melodrama and deploy narratives and mises-en-scène associated with musicals, action films, and even Westerns. (An important recent example, also not part of the Nollywood scene, would be the story of Chaka and Mele in Sissako’s *Bamako* [2006].) “Popular” is the term Diawara uses to distinguish this body of work from the first two waves, which he associates more loosely with “art” cinema (2010:144). In these popular narrative structures he finds “the motifs and emotional expectations [that] they borrow from African popular culture.” He continues, “The films rely on popular religious beliefs and superstitions, folklore and the common sense of everyday life, unlike the consciousness-raising narratives of Sembène or the metafilmic and intellectualized films of Bekolo and [Balufu] Bakupa-Kanyinda” (2010:144). Here Diawara might be describing Nollywood pretty directly, were it not that the distance these filmmakers take is not from the commercial norms of Hollywood, but from “Africa cinema” itself in the forms of the above two waves and in its Sembènian influenced past.

The “Popular” is measured in the relationship of this cinema to its audience, for whom, he says, the films have served to “constitute the first beginning of African cinema for Africans” (2010:145). How these films—still not readily exhibited in Africa, and certainly not in theaters that are almost nonexistent—might constitute a first beginning of an African cinema for Africans (as opposed, for example, to video films from Ghana and Nollywood), is a mystery to me. But the aspiration, if not the fulfillment, of this claim does much in terms of defining its essential traits. The “real culture,” the

“real people,” to whom this cinema relates is, strangely enough in an age of globalization, defined broadly in national terms. Thus Diawara finds the film language informed by the national elements of dance, language, oral traditions, and so on, like Mouridism and the Sabar, Senegalese religious and dance forms. For the cosmopolitan and global scholar, these might be termed local rather than national cultural formulations, and the circulation of these filmmakers’ work—like Joseph Gaï Ramaka’s *Karmen Geï* (2001) or Mansour Sora Wade’s *Le Prix du pardon* (2002)—cannot be separated from the international festival circuit and transnational commercial venues, such as are found on the websites dedicated to African films. These films cannot be defined simply as a body of work targeting national audiences, even if “the colors of the national flag and the dress style of the Baye Fall” are deployed in what Diawara calls the “new Senegalese cinema” (2010:146).

For Diawara to Africanize this cinema, it is necessary for him to account for the work of subject formation, of subjectification, that it performs. Diawara wants to accomplish this by returning to an African specificity—in cultural, aesthetic, and cinematographic terms. In other words, he has to go back to a past constructed largely around Sembène, and secondarily others like Jean Rouch or Moustapha Allasane, and account for the new generations. He does this brilliantly when working through Sembène’s filmic innovations and qualities. But he skirts the hard work of accounting for Africanness and African subjectivity when evoking its authenticity in terms of such content as music and dance, national colors, traditional sayings, and so on. And in this, he is no more successful than Teshome Gabriel (1982) in his earlier efforts to apply formulae, like the claim that mid- or long shots are appropriate for communal identities rather than individualism and a subjectivity associated with the West and evoked with close-ups. After all, we can’t get any closer to Dieng in the shot in *Mandabi* (1968) in which we see the inside of his nose being cleaned out with a razor.

Diawara turns us back to Senghor for an account of this African subject, retracing familiar lines but in new ways opened up by cinema. The mask, for example, becomes the image imprinted onto the eye with the close-up shot of the face. Senghor leans on what feels like early Father Tempels’s vitalism, which Diawara transfers to the close-up: “It shows the quantity of life force the filmmaker may invest in the shot to endow it with the same possessive powers as the mask during the performance of a ritual . . .” (2010:150). The significance of this shot, originally disparaged by Gabriel, is that it is “the site of our relation to the Other” (2010:150).⁹ There is no account of subjectivity that cannot begin with the relation to the Other.

Diawara wants a relationship with the Other that will allow him to present this formation of the African subject in terms of an African language, if not an African cinematic language. For that he deploys the Senghorian Other as the vitalist spiritual force that undergirds blackness, and ultimately humanity. He thus calls the site of the relation with the Other “the place of the emergence of the life force of the ancestor,” and further connects this to the culturally specific location of the nation (“the soul of the nation”)

and to spiritual wholeness (“his/her moral cleansing”) (2010:150). The struggle that marks the Senegalese films he considers in the section on popular cinema—films like *Karmen Gëi* (2001) and Moussa Sene Absa’s *Teranga Blues* (2007)—turns on a moral struggle involving “main characters struggling with the guilt of having betrayed the core primeval values that bring harmony into the world” (2010:150).

The relation with the Other, in African, Senghorian terms, is not to be mediated by the eye, but by what one feels or senses—a sensing of the presence of “something like us, like the trace of the ancestor, like a totem, like a life force.” Thus it is sensed not as an alien being, but as a part of Being to which we belong: “we also contain a part of the Other in us,” he says, the Other as a being that “is capable of increasing or diminishing our life force, connecting us with the world of the ancestors” and also, incredible as it might have seemed to Senghor, “relating us to the world of the film” (2010:151). Diawara wants to contrast this relationship with the one conventionally evoked in postcolonial studies as an absolute difference—between colonizer and colonized. Rather, he says, in this Other, for Senghor as for himself, “there is a part of the Other in us, and part of us in the Other; more like mirrors that reflect and [are] reflected” (2010:151).

It is no coincidence that this figure of the mirror reflecting the self and the other is central to the notion of subject formation, both in Jacques Lacan’s “mirror stage” and in Judith Butler’s (1997) own elaboration on subject formation. I will tie this shortly to Diawara’s claims by posing the question of who is the Other for African cinema. For that we need to return, with Diawara, to *négritude*. Senghor would have approved of Diawara’s claim to find his authentic African subject by reconstituting the Other as African, even though Diawara also cites the work of Bakupa-Kanyinda in *Le Damier* (1996) as exemplary, since it leads the way to recover “an authentic African image” by the “deconstruction of the Western iconography of Africa” (2010:127). Bekolo and Bakupa-Kanyinda are cited as examples of those who felt the need to respond to Western conventions that are dependent on “primitivist images of their tradition that are comforting to the West” (2010:127). The question that is central here, for all the work he attributes to the New African cinema, is, what, or who, is the Other on which the work of establishing the African subject depends. The answer to this can be seen in the same way one responds to the question of authenticity.

Why does Diawara embrace a criterion of authenticity, or something he feels comfortable calling “African,” but not from a perspective that Ama Ata Aidoo (1979) calls “squint-eyed” or from the hybrid perspective that Robert Stam (1998) identifies with Third World cinema and the “aesthetics of garbage.”¹⁰ This is close to what I call the position of trash that is “from below” (Harrow 2013), as Georges Bataille (1989) or John Waters (1988) would also call it. Stam’s aesthetics of garbage runs counter to claims of authenticity, but they function as a key marker of Brazilian, and by extension, Latin American and Caribbean culture.¹¹ He identifies “three related aspects of these aesthetics, namely: (1) their constitutive hybridity; (2) their chronotopic

multiplicity; and (3) their common motif of the redemption of detritus.” His claims are no less valid for African cinematic aesthetics, those Sembène identified in his work as “mégotage” or that mark first generation Nollywood video films.¹²

Authenticity for Diawara is not grounded in a notion of absolute value, but is relative to location and perspective centered on subjectivity. Arguments grounded in authenticity claims are based on notions of purity that cannot be sustained by theories of the subject as formed in relation to the Other: that is, the psychic subject formed through historical interactions.

Diawara’s embrace of authenticity is troubled by Butler’s notion of subjectivity. In *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), Butler borrows the Hegelian and Nietzschean notion of the Other for her conception of *assujétissement*, or subject formation. The basis of her argument is that it is in negotiating one’s relationship with the Other that the subject is formed. Although there are multiple ways to imagine this negotiation, essentially the philosophical formulations are grounded in the psychology of the individual coming to a consciousness of him or herself, and, in Lacanian terms, entering into language and the symbolic order. The subject is formed by a double relationship to the Other, to the one who imposes threatening words and at times actions, as in the parent’s chastisement of the small child who feels intimidated and fearful, if not cowed.¹³

Butler develops this notion along with the Nietzschean notion of the bad conscience, which derives from the relation to the Other, who is incorporated and internalized, and, in Lacanian terms, becomes the one whose language is speaking as the subject comes to form itself through the use of language. It is the language one imitates without knowing it; the voice of the Law of the Father and that of the Mother as Other, which are heard when one chastises oneself and which one rails against in helpless cries of frustration, hurt, and despair. It is the authority that one struggles against and yet also assumes in taking the place of that figure of oppression. The posture is double: rebellion and hatred of the master; identification with and assumption of the authority and position of the Other. In short, to be a subject (*sujet*), one must assume one’s submission (accept *assujétissement*); being a subject, in other words, is accomplished by both submitting to and revolting against the Other.

In each of Diawara’s moves to establish an African authenticity independent of the European dominant, the question becomes, what is the Other against which an African authenticity is being established? On the one hand, it would seem to be Hollywood, or dominant Western cinema, or now, another transnational cultural scape called World Cinema. But, on the other hand, there is a third Other, which is African cinema itself.

To put the Butler test to Diawara’s three New Waves, we can see where Diawara distances himself from her notion of *assujétissement*, or of subjecting oneself in order to assume a subject position. If being authentically African means not subjecting oneself to the European cinematic Other, or to the critical standards located in the European, dominant Western critical

establishment, then in all three cases Diawara rejects, as calabash cinema, a simple “return to the sources” as a condition for African subjectivity. This, in fact, he attributes to what French producers found as their comforting image of Africans. Yet he also signals at every turn the need to achieve an independence from the “Western iconography of Africa” (2010:127). If this iconography, and its accompanying ideology, is the Other against which the African authentic has to establish its independence, then independence itself is marked by the West in the very move to be independent of it: it is the frame that determines the scope and shape of independence (see Spivak 1999; Mudimbe 1988). And this would seem all the more true when we are talking about directors whose training—and this includes Sissako, Bekolo, Ramaka—was abroad, in Europe, and in one fashion or another deeply marked by such central figures as Godard, Truffaut, or French New Wave cinema, Russian Social Realism, Italian neorealism, and to a lesser degree international versions of film noir. Even Teno’s *Clando Clandestine* (2008) borrows heavily from the vocabulary of the latter, despite Teno’s great insistence on cultural independence from the French. Other sites of Otherness can be identified, as Larkin (2008) has shown, with the ascent of video films in the Nigerian north that are indebted to Indian Bollywood cinema. Yet in all cases the relationship is not one that can simply be described in terms of influence.

It isn’t that Europe or Hollywood is necessarily dominant in this interplay of the subject and power, but rather that Western cinema—its languages of the camera and its forms of the story—are so insistently present within any cinematic culture. For Diawara the authentic African subject still is in revolt, but he or she doesn’t make the double move of also identifying with, assuming the power of, the Other against which he or she revolts. The Other of his three categories is not as reductive as the concept of the West implies. For wave one (Arte cinema) and wave two (the Guild) it is not just or simply Western or world cinema, or Hollywood—that is, the Other—but African cinema itself. If the third category (of the Popular) tropes on Western popular genres, it is closer to identifying with that Other that is the target of revolt of the first two waves. But all three generate the cinematic African subject; and for all three, in varying degrees, there is the double move of *assujétissement*.

What, then, would be the Other of Nollywood? Here it is a cinema virtually freed of its own African cinematic antecedents. Yoruba traveling theater and telenovelas are at a considerable remove from the “Fathers” of African cinema. Rather, Nollywood’s pursuit of an ideal of professionalism is modeled after Hollywood, and not African cinema, whose ideologies leave it indifferent, and whose production values are dismissed (see Garritano 2013; Haynes 2014). The Nollywoodian films are blithely unaware of and indifferent to African cinema, but very aware of mainstream Hollywood, dominant cinema, and even more, telenovelas and the like.

For Diawara’s three tendencies, it is primarily African cinema whose voice speaks in or through the new waves, as the Other to be embraced and

rejected. Between the twin poles of submission and revolt, the emphasis in wave one Arte film and wave two Guilde film is on revolt against its cinematic Other, while the third Popular Wave emphasizes submission, although all three are also marked by their opposing Other. We might well name this African cinematic Other “the Specter of Sembène.” Sembène haunts the premises of Diawara’s hotel in Ouaga, which he used to frequent during FESPACO festivals.¹⁴ He laughs, pipe clenched in his teeth, at those who mock his program and night school, and at those who aspire to become the New Father of African Cinema, knowing that there can be only one Father, and that in each new generation it will also become necessary for the New African Cinema to discover that it is time to give recognition to the marginalized Mothers, once again, while repeating the sins of the sons. They imagine themselves as being in mortal combat with the Father even as his Name is slowly passing under erasure, and as Faat Kine moves from her position in front of the lens to one that is behind the camera. Within a generation this has been accomplished in African literature. Now, in the time of the Hyenas, it is her turn to take hold of the camera and redirect African cinema, as it will have to renegotiate the terms of the loan by which World Cinema has sought to keep African cinema in its place.

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Notes

1. Often the term "New Nollywood" refers to films with higher production values than the films of "Old Nollywood," and thus they are "new" by virtue of distancing themselves from the appearance of quickly written and cheaply produced films containing scenes with single takes, betraying errors in continuity or diction, etc. These films are sometimes dubbed "local," in contrast to the "professional" productions of films thought to be destined for wider distribution networks (Garritano 2013). But "New" can also refer to generic independence from what has become a conventional set of genres, including romances, occult films, Christian redemptive films, melodramas, etc. Haynes (2014) has begun to delineate some of the features of newer genres, like those dealing with the Nigerian expatriate experience. The category, then, is amorphous, as any delineation of a cinematic distinction grounded in production values or the changing sands of genre is likely to be.
2. The term Garritano evokes, "professional," refers to film that can speak to audiences anywhere and be recognizable in its references, emotions, and film language, not to say its actual vehicular language. It especially refers to its narratives of gender, race, and class, which are so familiar that the music that accompanies these narrative tropes can be preselected from the familiar store locations labeled "world music."

3. "In addition to generating new economic networks, piracy, like all infrastructural modes, has distinct material qualities that influence the media that travel under its regime of reproduction. Piracy imposes particular conditions on the recording, transmission, and retrieval of data. Constant copying erodes data storage, degrading image and sound, overwhelming the signal of media content with the noise produced by the means of reproduction. Pirate videos are marked by blurred images and distorted sound, creating a material screen that filters audiences' engagement with media technologies and their senses of time, speed, space, and contemporaneity. In this way, piracy creates an aesthetic, a set of formal qualities that generates a particular sensorial experience of media marked by poor transmission, interference, and noise" (Larkin 2004:290).
4. The reference to "Third Cinema" first appeared in the manifesto by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino published in 1969 in the cinema journal *Tricontinental* by the OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America). It has been republished as "Some Notes on the Concept of a 'Third Cinema'" in Martin (1997). It is also available on this website: <http://documentaryisneverneutral.com>.
5. Each of the three Waves, in their own way, earn the right to be seen as African representations that are not compromised by European pressures to market the films internationally (though they are seen, predominately on an international stage) or to conform to tastes and styles that mark World Cinema, currently defined generally as non-Hollywoodian transnational major cinemas. The "transnational" refers more generally to tastes and exhibition sites that accommodate films from most of the global North, with token examples from the global South. Those examples still do not include Nollywood, where the tastes and exhibition sites are African and African diaspora, even if the critical attention is now much broader than that.
6. In his famous essay on "imperfect cinema" (1979), Espinosa argues for a technique that would undercut the ideological work of mainstream Hollywood cinema. He begins with these words: "Nowadays, perfect cinema—technically and artistically masterful—is almost always reactionary cinema. The major temptation facing Cuban cinema at this time—when it is achieving its objective of becoming a cinema of quality, one which is culturally meaningful within the revolutionary process—is precisely that of transforming itself into a perfect cinema" (www.ejumpcut.org).
7. See Shahar Fisher's "Cultural Reader" blog entry on Frederic Jameson: "The existence of an autonomous subject was an essential part of artistic as cultural production in the modern times, Jameson argues. It allowed for the artist as subject to the address his consumer as subject and thus to affect him. But with the waning of affect the artist's unique individuality, once a founding principle, has been reduced in the postmodern age to a neutral and objectifying form of communication. With the fragmentation of subjectivity and subjectivity in a sense coming to a gloomy end, it is no longer clear what postmodern artists and authors are supposed to do beside appealing to the past, to the imitation of dead styles, an 'empty parody' without any deep or hidden meanings, a parody that Jameson calls pastiche."
8. In that regard Sembène could be said to have been a specter of himself, even when alive, by taking a similar turn in *Faat Kine* (2000), in which the "fathers" of the past struggle are now seen as emasculated, corrupt, ineffective, and parasitical.

9. According to Gabriel (2011), the close-up shot, “a device so much in use in the study of individual psychology in Western filmmaking practice[,] is less used in Third World films. Third World films serve more of an informational purpose than as a study in ‘psychological realism.’ The isolation of an individual, in tight close-up shots, seems unnatural to the Third World filmmaker because (I) it calls attention to itself; (II) it eliminates social considerations; and (III) it diminishes spatial integrity.”
10. Stam (1998) identifies what he refers to as the “redemption of detritus” in Brazilian “Cinema da Boca do Lixo,” the genre associated with the Boca do Lixo (Mouth of Garbage) area of São Paulo.
11. In *Trash: African Cinema from Below*, I wrote this of Bataille’s relevance: “‘Below’ is one location for trash. Its value shapes the ways in which one might view the world and speak. Bataille’s rigorous adherence to this site and all the ramifications he finds there for enabling revolutionary, disruptive acts to be performed, for subversive speech to be articulated, provides a valuable approach to thinking through trash in its various permutations in the African context” (2013:8). See Steve Yeager’s tribute film to Waters, *Divine Trash* (1998). Waters is identified with “Trash Cinema” and “trashy women” in his most famous work, *Pink Flamingos*, *Female Trouble*, and *Desperate Living*, which he labeled the *Trash Trilogy*. See Waters (1988).
12. In an interview with Guy Hennebelle (1978:125), Sembène defined *mégotage* as follows: “The word *mégot* means cigarette butt; therefore, the concept means to make a film by the painful process of putting bits and pieces together. It means waiting—as one waits for a cigarette butt—for European remains such as film stock left over by rich producers. This is why it takes five to ten years to finish a film such as *Samory* by Sembène, *Saraouine* by Med Hondo, or *Yelen* [Yeelen] by Souleymane Cissé.”
13. Freud identified the boy’s fear as fear of castration; Melanie Klein wrote of the fear of sexual abuse in the girl who perceives the adult, the Other, as both the one who frustrates and also the one who gratifies.
14. Diawara provides unforgettable scenes of this presence in his recollections of time shared with Sembène at FESPACO’s past (2010).