

ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to conceptualize “accented” as a reading practice and hermeneutic. Building on Hamid Naficy’s concept of an “accented” cinema, this theory of accented reading practices is a conceptualization of a reading practice that accounts for situatedness, through the theoretical frame of the accent. Working on the sensorial and affective aspects of the accent, a conceptualization of reading as a relational and situational practice allows for a greater range, depth for interpretation, as well as possibilities for building affiliations between a variety of aesthetic practices. Accented cinema is rooted in a discomfort with notions of belonging, home, nationality, and citizenship. This paper examines three texts, *Dictée* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Paddington*, the 2014 film directed by Paul King, and *Flee* the 2021 animated documentary directed by Jonas Rasmussen. Each of these texts work to expand Naficy’s theory aided by the work of Gayatri Gopinath, the critiques of Asuman Suner, and Jose Muñoz. The first text conceptualizes accented reading away from cinema towards literature, to truly first encounter it as a reading practice. The next chapter turns back towards cinema, but conceptualizes accented reading practice as finding affiliations within popular culture. Finally, the final chapter turns towards documentary and testimony as well as queer subjectivity. In finding affiliations between three vastly different texts, this paper conceptualizes accented reading practices as a site of connection, affiliation, and alternative hermeneutics.

Towards An “Accented” Approach: A Queer Hermeneutic of Listening and Intimacy

by

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¹ Han, Byung-Chul. *The Agony of Eros*. Untimely Meditations 1. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017.

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“Becoming-human-in-the-world is a question neither of birth nor of origin or race.

It is a matter of journeying, of movement, and of transfiguration.”

- Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

PREFACE:

To be truthful, I cannot entirely place where the writing for this project began. My research during my undergraduate years has been haphazard and covered topics that seemingly have very little, if not nothing to do with each other. From the university, to technology, to eros, to philosophies of love, and now, to what might be called, World Cinema. In part, this project began when I took Professor Day’s class, “Beyond Geishas.” The readings in that class greatly affected me and the way I thought. The influence of that course is evident in the various citations in this paper. After taking that class, I aimed to make my thesis about diasporic film focusing on the influx of Asian American films released in the past few years. I began reading a great deal about diasporic film, and one day, while roaming the stacks, I found *An “Accented” Cinema* by Hamid Naficy. Naficy’s usage of the term “accented” was so alluring because of its immediate edge that caught my attention. The title alone was full of possibilities.

An accent is such a visceral, tactile, and intimate detail of speech. Accents can be adored, desired, racialized, and fetishized. The political implications of an accent always seems to be changing. When I was growing up, a “French accent” when speaking English was sexy. Oozing with high culture and the allure of Europeaness. Today, everyone makes fun of French accents. They’re considered by many to be a sign of European pretentiousness. In recent years, they’ve become indicative of increasing cultural conflicts between Europeans and Americans.

Vacillating public opinion on accents has always been a reflection of deeper conflicts. Accents can be a reflection of one's socioeconomic status, formal education, sexuality, gender, or region. Accents are typically met with a plethora of assumptions that are intertwined with a network of various narratives about "otherness" and belonging. The assumptions can be rooted in the dominant ideology, national narratives, or regionally specific perceptions of "outsiders."

An accent varies from a dialect and from slang, but its implications are wide and varied. Accents can be subtle, like that of a Canadian in the US whose northern "sorry" tends to give it all away. They can be something one is ashamed of or proudly emphasized. I think of my Malaysian friend whose parents tell her she sounds too "American" when she returns home. It can be community-specific and incredibly hard to notice for others, like an "Asian American" accent, which is a common phrase uttered, especially for East Asian communities in California. It can be confined to a city, like that of the "Miami" accent, which tends to be associated with the Latin American influence. In cities with long histories of succeeding waves of immigrants, accents have a neighborhood association within a single city. For example, borough specific accents in New York City (Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island) have long been discernable in their differences to an experienced ear.

Accents that result from speaking a second language are usually termed by the name of the mother tongue. Accents can be easily confused for one another given one's unfamiliarity, such as the Turkish accent in the United States being regularly mistaken for European ones. Equally, they are often a projection of assumptions based on class, race, and social factors in the region. The examples I outline are locally and regionally specific to me, given my own background. The ways in which I encounter and interact with others is defined essentially by the assumptions I make when first hearing their speech. Generally, the study of accents and dialects

has largely remained the field of linguistics or sociolinguistics. However, Naficy's work is what catalyzed my desire to re-examine accent as a realm of theoretical possibility. Stuart Hall's "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?", the articulation of the musicality and orality did not escape me:

In its expressivity, its musicality, its orality, in its rich, deep, and varied attention to speech, in its inflections toward the vernacular and the local, in its rich production of counternarratives, and above all, in its metaphorical use of the musical vocabulary, black popular culture has enabled the surfacing, inside the mixed and contradictory modes even of some mainstream popular culture, of elements of a discourse that is different - other forms of life, other traditions of representation.²

I do not mean to confuse the particularities of black popular culture with other forms of popular expression, but rather that the expressivity, musicality, orality, and attention to speech have largely been neglected in the studies of cultural forms.

The focus on accent offers a fascinating point of departure for this essay. It invites a hearer or reader to pay closer, more intentional attention, to listen not only for the content of the speech but also its musicality. It invites one to actively understand one's presumptions as a listener.

What is true for speech acts has a direct applicability for film. The methods which arrive from *An "Accented" Cinema* do not ask you to take the film as an autonomous or independent work, but instead informed by the particular situatedness of the creators of the film. Naficy's conceptualization of accented cinema was based not necessarily on the implications of the accent, but describing a type of film and the work of filmmakers who have been overlooked and not given critical attention. I appropriate his language of the accent towards a greater emphasis on the nature of the accent itself. In other words, by focusing not only on the content of the speech (the text/media), but a listening practice engaged with the orality, musicality, and

²Hall, Stuart. "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Social Justice* 20, no. 1/2 (51-52) (1993): 109.

specificity that accents the speech, a different collection of moments appear. The accent, as mentioned earlier, situates a person as contingent to the impressions of speech and reference of those who influenced them. Like the impact of touch, the ways in which one's tongue wraps around various words was once taught to them. That particular expressivity both places the text or cultural form in a particular place, with particular people, and becomes a part of a body. Equally, the text or cultural form can become a part of, touch, and make available a new horizon for those who encounter it.

The accent as a point of departure is charming due to the intimacy of voice, and the closeness to listen and locate someone's utterances. The conceptual framework of the accent invites intimacy and affiliation. It brings attention not to differences, but the fact that everyone is inhabited by an accent. At a time when displacement is at all time highs, and is only expected to grow, the focus must not be on a singular idea of home and belonging, but of adaptation and change. The accent's frame of reference does not begin with the arrival to a Western country, rather it begins with an utterance, the shape of the utterance, and the impression that utterance makes upon the listener.

In the age of phenomena like Poe's Law³, not only is it difficult to place the views of a particular piece of culture nearly impossible, it is confusing. The contemporary culture of remixing, streaming, and content-management allows one to forget the processes of production. The erasure of production and performance is what drew people to YouTube, a phenomenon which has informed my entire adolescence. I imagine, with the erasure of the local towards the international, globalizing force of the internet, accented approaches will become more important.

³ A popular saying which states that without an indicator of the author's intent, parodic, sarcastic, or ironic expressions of extreme views can be taken as sincere.

I imagine that the care required of an accented practice will be vital as displacement grows and media becomes even more transnational.

INTRODUCTION:

Over the last 15 years, the film industry has undergone major changes. From streaming services and platforms (such as Netflix and YouTube), to newer production companies such as A24 taking over mass popularity, the film industry has adapted to an entirely different interaction with the medium. Franchise films have also grown and died, such as the Marvel series or the revival of Star Wars. Remakes and adaptations have never flooded theaters as they do today. Alongside this change in the way that people engage with media, is a change in the ways in which people now think of identity. Identity politics has grown more important and increasingly profitable. Diversity in media and the politics of representation has been washed away with the enforcement of colorblindness. On the opposite end, diversity in media has allowed for the proliferation of various stories to be told in major motion pictures. From films that depict the horrors of US enslavement, such as *12 Years a Slave*, to films and televisions which re-imagine the experiences of blackness in America towards horror or surreal, like *Get Out* or *Atlanta*, to positive and profitable fantastic affirmations of blackness, like that of *Black Panther* or *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*. The last five years has seen an explosion of diversity and multiculturalism in the media. Minorities previously seldom imagined as storytellers rather than the objects of a story, have also grown into this new age of American multicultural film. *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) became inexplicably popular, alongside the production of other positive films representing (East) Asian Americans, such as *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (2018) and *Always Be My Maybe* (2018). Films depicting the “immigrant” experience have also proliferated including *Minari*, *The Farewell*, *Tigertail*, and the explosive *Everything, Everywhere, All At*

Once. Colorblind media has also proliferated, such as teen series *Bridgerton*, *Emily In Paris*, and *Sex Education*. Diversity in mainstream film and television has become popular in the last few years in America. However, this diversity has extended to the consumption of “other” film, especially through streaming. “International” films or World Cinema has also exploded in popularity exemplified as pieces of fine art, like the popularization of *Roma* or *Parasite*. The rise of diversity and cheering on of multiculturalism in the United States is hard to describe, let alone historicize. But it is undeniable that things have irrevocably changed in the film industry.

The politics of representation has never been quite so hard to grasp, yet so urgent and necessary. In this paper, I argue that American neoliberal multiculturalism⁴ has obscured racism through methods of inclusion that champion ahistorical, anachronistic understandings of race, migration, and oppression. The open arms of the film industry have certainly led to important changes and the creation of extremely valuable cultural forms, however, at the same time those arms seem to be the same ones that restrict, repress, and suffocate those forms. At a time when an unprecedented amount of media is being produced, what counts as a film as worth seeing, tends to be the press and awards ceremonies.

Hamid Naficy began his project at the outset of the 21st century, in response to the international, transnational rise of what might be termed “world cinema.” Attending film festivals in the United States and Western Europe, Naficy saw what he considered the

⁴ In “The Spirit of Neoliberalism,” Jodi Melamed tracks the progression of racial liberalism and eventual neoliberal multiculturalism in the United States. Melamed connects racial liberalism to a history of transnational capitalism. Racial liberalism is primarily “an ideology and race regime” that contributes to the meaning of race and “contributes to U.S. global hegemony.” Racial liberalism is borne out of the United States' need to gain control after the decolonization and antiracist movements which gained power and visibility during the Cold War. Neoliberal multiculturalism revises racial liberalism to further justify neoliberal capitalist values. As an American ideology, neoliberal multiculturalism privileges the “multicultural American citizen” as more valuable than even a “multicultural world citizen.” This privileging of the multicultural is also weaponized to critique the “monocultural” as lesser. This phenomenon can be found in the rhetoric used by the United States military, painting themselves as diverse and multicultural and their enemies to be monocultural terrorists. In doing so, the US furthers their dominance over the world, justifies the free market as fair and equal, and erases any notion of race and racial history. See: Melamed, Jodi. “The Spirit of Neoliberalism.” *Social Text* 24, no. 4 (2006): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2006-009>.

marginalization of particular films and filmmakers through classification.⁵ Films that address certain political matters, such as racism or postcolonial struggles, are judged and classified in ways that make those films either as either a political or aesthetic project. Films that are categorized under “foreign” become representative of a particular culture and are viewed as local or national films. Films that depict colonial struggle, ethnic minority tensions, or minority identity are deemed purely political projects. They are often labeled “postcolonial” or “ethnic” films. Films that engage with topics and themes of journeying, identity but employ experimental style are considered purely aesthetic experimentation. Often, these films will be judged under labels of “uncategorizability” such as avant-garde categories like the Un Certain Regard Prize in the Cannes Film Festival. These frames of reference at festivals and award shows fix these films and filmmakers as particular.

These classifications and labels are perceived to be neutral, both by the film industry and the general public, but they are ideological constructs. When accented films are forced into established categories, the cultural and political foundations that constitute them are lost.⁶ Once labeled and categorized, these films and filmmakers are defined by those same labels even after they have moved on. Naficy’s project in *An “Accented” Cinema* is to identify and develop an appropriate theory to “account for the complexities, regularities, and inconsistencies of the films made in exile and diaspora, as well as for the impact that the liminal and interstitial location of the filmmakers has on their work.”⁷

Naficy surveys an ambitious range of regions from South American films of the 1980s such as Fernando Solanas’s *Tangos: Exile of Gardel*, to Turkish Atom Egoyan’s early 90s films,

⁵ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001: 3-16.

⁶ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 19.

⁷ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 20.

to feminist production collectives in the United States *Women Make Movies*, to Gregory Nava's *El Norte* (1983), or to Iranian Amir Naderi's *The Runner* (1985). Naficy's recategorization of these films away from exilic, diasporic, and post-colonial/ethnic film towards a theory of "accented" cinema provides a framework for imagining these films anew. Naficy's theory is an extension of authorship theory, in the sense that he views 'accented' film as being informed by the director's lives, leaving their particular stylistic signature on the work.

Naficy's extension of authorship theory means his definition of accented also relied on defining three particular types of filmmakers which generally fall under his theory. First, according to Naficy, are exilic filmmakers, primarily referring to external exiles. Exilic filmmakers are defined by their "ambivalent relationship with their previous and current places and cultures."⁸ Their desire to return to their homeland results in memorializations of home through fetishizing in the form of sounds, images, and chronotopes. For external exiles, their relationship with the homeland and new host country is continually contested. This creates feelings of fragmentation or hybridity which is expressed through their films.

The second are diasporic filmmakers. Although diaspora and exiles share similar beginnings, such as rupture or trauma, diaspora is necessarily collective.⁹ Diaspora usually idealizes their homeland and keeps a strong sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness. If exilic films are accented by "binarism and subtraction" then diasporic films are accented by "multiplicity and addition."¹⁰

The third are postcolonial ethnic and identity films. Postcolonial ethnic and identity films are concerned with what Naficy terms the "politics of the hyphen."¹¹ The hyphen can signify

⁸ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 12.

⁹ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 14.

¹⁰ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 14-15.

¹¹ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 15.

multiple things, from lack and split identities to descent relations, inheritance, or stability. The multiplicity of the hyphen, hybridized, multiple, or constructed, offers liberating possibilities for signification. It is important to note that these categories are not stable ones. As Naficy notes, “they are fluid processes that under certain circumstances may transform into one another and beyond.”¹² In other words, the situatedness¹³ of the director is essential to what counts as “accented” cinema. In terms of style, Naficy highlights the elements which make up the accented style:

open-form and closed-form visual style; fragmented, multilingual, epistolary, self-reflexive, and critically juxtaposed narrative structure; amphibolic, doubled, crossed, and lost characters; subject matter and themes that involve journeying, historicity, identity, and politicizes structures of feeling; interstitial and collective modes of production; and inscription of the biographical, social, and cinematic (dis)location of the filmmakers¹⁴

These stylistic qualities are informed by the situatedness of the filmmakers themselves. The accented cinema which Naficy refers to is a theorization of style as linked to the contexts of the filmmakers themselves.

Naficy’s re-reading of film categorization as “accented” has not gone without challenge. Among them is Asuman Suner, Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in Istanbul Technical University offers a critique of Naficy’s theory. Observing that the stylistic qualities that Naficy highlights are consistently present in cinema that are classified under ‘world’ cinema, further classified as ‘national cinemas.’¹⁵ Using three films, *A Time For*

¹² Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 17.

¹³ “The dependence of meaning (and/or identity) on the specifics of particular sociohistorical, geographical, and cultural contexts, social and power relations, and philosophical and ideological frameworks, within which the multiple perspectives of social actors are dynamically constructed, negotiated, and contested. Such approaches are often perceived by realists as radical relativism.” Chandler, Daniel, and Rod Munday. “Situating.” In *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*. Oxford University Press, 2011. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758-e-2501>.

¹⁴ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 4

¹⁵ Suner, Asuman. “Outside in: ‘Accented Cinema’ at Large.” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7, no. 3 (September 2006): 364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370600849223>.

Drunken Horses (1999), *Happy Together* (1997), and *Distant* (2002), Suner offers critical reading of films by filmmakers who can not possibly be considered exilic, diasporic, or postcolonial ethnic. These films exemplify the accented through themes that involve journeying, open, closed and third-space chronotopes, self-reflexivity, self-inscription, asynchronous sound, multilinguality, accented speech and epistolarity. By reading these films as accented, Suner's critique demonstrates the critical limits of Naficy's theory. First, Naficy's focus on transnational displacement to the west leaves out the experiences of displacement, de-territorialisation, and migration within the non-Western world. Second, the focus of Naficy's analysis on exilic filmmakers glorifies their positionality as being the only critical and oppositional position towards identity.¹⁶ Third, the particular restrictions on who and who is not accented through situatedness has harmful implications for what it includes and what it excludes. Accented cinema reserves for itself the right to speak "universally."¹⁷ This implies that other cinemas, such as "world" cinema, can only speak for their local contexts. Suner proposes that what is needed is a dialectical understanding between 'national' and 'exilic/diasporic' cinemas. She proposes the term "accented cinema at large" putting emphasis on "critical positioning in the face of the questions of belonging and identity."¹⁸

Rather than rejecting Naficy, Suner builds on his notion of accented cinema. I aim to expand Suner's claim, as she mentions in the beginning, Naficy's work has big implications for not only film studies, but also cultural studies. My project aims to expand the realm of the accented towards the cultural, including hybrid and mixed media projects. These not only through style but through medium reflect an accented style. I would like to abandon Suner's claim towards "accented cinema at large" as I believe that the dialectical understanding between

¹⁶ Suner, "Outside In": 378.

¹⁷ Suner, "Outside In": 378.

¹⁸ Suner, "Outside In": 379.

national and exilic/diasporic should be crucial to a theory of the accented. Instead, I appropriate Naficy's term of accented to propose a conceptualization of a particular aesthetic practice that applies to film, literature, hybrid genre, and mixed media work. In being an aesthetic practice, it is also a practice of reading, as Naficy originally intended it to be, which captures moments that are obscured when read under certain classifications.¹⁹

Gayatri Gopinath, in her work, *Unruly Visions*, theorizes aesthetic practices of queer diaspora. As a spatial and temporal category, queer diaspora are of a unique positionality which allows for new forms of seeing, reading, and creating. Unlike the notion of diaspora and exile Naficy notes, the category of queer diaspora challenges "heteronormative and patrilineal underpinnings of conventional articulations of diaspora and nation" and temporally reorients the "traditionally backward glance of conventional articulations of diaspora."²⁰ The chronotopes of imagined homelands and idealized homelands for the queer diaspora are more ambivalent spaces. They are not only disoriented by deterritorialization which is characteristic of the exilic and diasporic experience, but they are doubly disoriented by their queerness in the landscape of heteronormativity. Characteristics of an accented style are abundant in Gopinath's work, from autobiography, self-reflexivity, lost characters, themes of journeying, historicity, and identity. While Naficy focuses on articulating an intelligible style called "accented", what is essential to Gopinath's project is the disruption of normative ways of seeing and knowing. For Gopinath, the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora is an epistemology as well as a mode of reading. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora:

¹⁹ I would like to emphasize a point Suner makes about Naficy's argument which I think is essential in understanding accented cinema. The situatedness is particular because it allows for the recognition of material lack in the creation of cinema. Exilic creators have a particularly difficult time in their aesthetic practice as they are censored and through exile are of little means to make a film. Films as opposed to mediums such as poetry, require advanced technology and technological expertise. These are often not accessible in precarity. Naficy's objective was to bring to the fore these directors and offer a framework which might account for that.

²⁰ Gopinath, Gayatri. *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*. Perverse Modernities. Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2018: 6.

disrupt the normative ways of seeing and knowing that have been so central to the production, containment and disciplining of sexual, racial, and gendered bodies; they do so, crucially, through a particular deployment of queer desire and identification that renders apparent the promiscuous intimacies of our past histories as they continue to structure our everyday present, and determine our futures.²¹

This disruption of normative seeing and knowing is what Gopinath deems an unruly or deviant vision. The emphasis on vision is not just a product of Gopinath's writing, but an observation of the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora. The visual field is central to the workings of colonial modernity, from the insistence of truth from the colonial ethnographic photograph, to the insistence of the boundaries of beauty and idyllic landscapes in the modern postcard. Queer diaspora work within that field to exceed the visual towards the sensorial. In other words:

the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora enact an intimate relation between the visual, the affective, and the sensorial: the visual serves as a portal to other senses and affects, and the alternative modes of knowing and accessing the past they make available. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora thereby open the way to a different apprehension of time and space, history and memory, that counters those instantiated by colonial modernity and its legacies.²²

This sort of queer optic creates new cartographies, such as region-to-region or region-to-diaspora, which challenge disciplinary and colonial rubrics. The queer optic also offers a mode of reading which catches moments that a strictly postcolonial, racial melancholic, or disciplinary reading would offer. Gopinath discusses the oppositional situatedness of the terms diaspora and indigeneity. Indigeneity often represents belonging, authenticity, and rootedness while diaspora is seen as being defined by mobility, hybridity, and uprootedness. These terms are also temporally oppositional, as diaspora is seen to be the product of postcolonial migration

²¹ Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*: 7.

²² Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*: 12.

while indigeneity is seen as ongoing or past colonial dispossession.²³ For Gopinath, the queer diasporic aesthetic is not only a mode of artistic practice, a mode of reading, and an epistemology, it is also a critical model of engagement with difference.²⁴ Queer diasporic aesthetics do not think past differences but in and through it, requiring an understanding of “conjoined pasts, presents and futures.” In this model of engagement, what arises is a possibility of “affiliation.”²⁵ Addressing Suner’s objection to the idea of a limited national cinema as opposed to a universal accented or world cinema, Gopinath proposes a displacement of the nation state as a formation by which we can understand diasporic movement. Similar to Suner, who understands the national and the universal as being discursive, the diasporic and the indigenous are affiliated modes of dispossession and diasporic movement. The queer lens creates a queer reading model of affiliation.

Supplementing Naficy’s theory of the accent as rooted in the filmmaker’s situatedness with Suner’s insights and Gopinath’s conceptualization (aesthetic practice as a practice of reading), I hope to theorize a new theory towards an accented aesthetic. Naficy’s theory of the accented, which is an extension of authorship theory, I extend towards a theory of situatedness. I interpret situatedness as a mode of understanding a cultural form from a variety of relationalities and contingencies which created the text. Naficy’s limits on his theory of the accent, such as his emphasis on transnational displacement to the west, are examined by Suner in her critique of Naficy. Rather than emphasizing the universality of accented texts, as opposed to “local” or “national” texts, texts that employ elements of accented style reveal a locality and situatedness about them. Instead of universality, accented texts find affiliations. The language of affiliations arrives from Gopinath’s work in *Unruly Visions*. By reading accented cinema as a type of unruly

²³ Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*: 87.

²⁴ Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*: 88.

²⁵ Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*: 88.

vision, I root accented practices in queer diasporic conceptualizations. Gopinath's reading which places emphasis on the practices of queer diaspora led me towards an understanding of cultural form's situatedness as a result of the various practices of the displaced. Gopinath's emphasis on the sensorial is also vital, as a theory of the accent relies on the sensorial aspect of hearing and listening. Gopinath's work also leads me towards reading a variety of texts, popular and unpopular as holding unruliness. The accented aesthetic is categorized by the stylistic elements that Naficy outlines as being accented, as well as Gopinath's definition of queer diasporic practice as being a mode of reading, an epistemology, and critical model of engagement. I also appropriate Gopinath's affiliation definition of diaspora which rejects and displaces understandings and articulations of diaspora solely through the nation-state and hetero-patriarchal underpinnings. In this way the "accented" is neither local or universal, but instead a discursive reading practice which accounts for difference. What is required for a cultural form to be considered "accented" is a disorientation or queer relation with home. This is articulated through the various stylistic elements which Naficy highlights in his work.

The insistence I pursue accented theory is due to the various inadequacies of Naficy, Suner and Gopinath. Naficy's limited focus leaves his theory bound to a focus on displacement towards the west. While Suner points this out, her proposal of "accented cinema at large" limits accented theory towards a problem of categorization. Equally, the terminology leaves a great deal to be desired and in some ways splits "accented cinema" from "accented cinema at large." Gopinath's conceptualization of aesthetic practices of the queer diaspora, while noting the false opposition between diaspora and indigenous, lacks an interest in using the practice towards unruly visions rooted in text that are not a product of queer diasporic practices. To some extent, Gopinath's usage of the term diaspora leaves a lot to be desired, and focuses on formal forms of

diasporic existence through the deployment of the term. In focusing on the sensorial practice of listening to an accent, accented theory offers new avenues for thinking about displacement, indigeneity, situatedness, and cultural forms.

Accented reading, or hermeneutics, is an inherently queer practice. Accented's uncomfotability with nationalistic or dominant hegemonic understandings of home and belonging remain inadequate for the displaced. However, due to the unruliness and problematics of the term "accented" it can never truly be an awards category or "official" classification. Instead, this project extends Suner's critique and combines it with Gopinath's insights towards a mode of interpretation and reading which raises moments and readings in flux. An accented approach is a mode that accounts for situatedness, for mode of production, and the film itself.

CHAPTER 1 :

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha: Avant-Garde Diasporic Poetics

This chapter provides an accented reading of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*. Engaging with previous readings of *Dictee*, including Anne Anlin Cheng's reading in *The Melancholy of Race*, this chapter aims to show a reading that challenges strictly melancholic reading of Cha's work, while also opening up wider avenues for interpretation. Cheng's reading of the text is pivotal to my own understanding of the text and guides many of the conclusions drawn in this chapter. While Cheng's purpose in reading *Dictee* with a focus on the inception of racial fantasy is key to the mission of the larger work, *The Melancholy of Race*, I see in her work potential readings which can be explored through an accented lens. Assisting this reading of *Dictee*, is a theory of the accented, the approach by which I will come to read *Dictee* and challenge strict reading.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha is an avant-garde artist and author whose work has become cherished through a process of rediscovery and rereading. Most notable of her works is the "novel" *Dictee*, but it is hard to say that it is a novel in any traditional sense. Cha's *Dictee* was published in 1982 by Tanam Press, a small press founded in 1980.²⁶ The press was known for publishing experimental work, of which *Dictee* was one. The challenge that reading *Dictee* presented and the small size of the press, the book soon fell out of print. *Dictee* came into view

²⁶ Printed Matter. "NFS and Tanam Press: 1970s - 80s." Accessed April 30, 2024. <https://www.printedmatter.org/programs/events/32>.

through a collection *Writing Self, Writing Nation* (1994) where it began to receive critical attention. With the rise of Third Wave feminism and Asian American studies, the book was brought back into print and continual critical attention.

Dictee is accented in terms of its fragmented, multilingual, epistolary, self-reflexive stylistic elements. It also hosts themes of journeying, historicity, and identity. The mode of production for the first edition was interstitial and later on, when revived by Asian American scholars, collective. In Naficy's terms, *Dictee* is undeniably accented text. However, an accented reading not only involves a recognition of various stylistic elements and the situatedness of the text and author, but also involves employing earlier insights from Suner and Gopinath. An accented reading reveals affiliatory possibilities and challenges to colonial and disciplinary rubrics.

Dictee has been given a great deal of critical attention. Throughout this chapter, I hope to pull on Cheng's reading, particularly the moments in which the accent becomes particularly visible. Readings of Cha's life, and her most read text, *Dictee* center around a few key readings. The first is one which centers Cha's fate over her life and work, haunting and permeating readings of both *Dictee* and Cha's own life. The second is a reading which essentializes race and identity as inherent to the text, which Cheng both does and does not.

R.O. Kwon's article in the *New Yorker* begins with Cha's fate. Kwon encounters Cha through the legacy of her fate, as do many other Korean Americans. For Kwon, the legacy of Cha is passed down as "a patron saint or ancestor."²⁷ Cathy Park Hong in her book, *Minor Feelings*, also writes about Cha. Hong continues the legacy of Cha, beginning the section about Cha with Hong's reimagining of the moments preceding Cha's fate.²⁸ For Hong, it is Cha's death

²⁷ Kwon, R. O. "Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Radical Refusal to Explain Herself." *The New Yorker*, November 9, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/theresa-hak-kyung-chas-radical-refusal-to-explain-herself>

²⁸ Hong, Cathy Park. *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*. New York: One World, 2020: 153.

which permeates the work. Hong's complication of the narrative begins with not revealing, at first, the violent way in which Cha's life ended. Similarly, my own knowledge of Cha was through a queer Korean tutor, who had studied English literature for her Bachelors. She also told me at the end of the session, what happened to Cha. I re-encountered Cha's work when I registered for Korean American Feminist Poetry, a class taught by a Professor Anna Maria Hong, in which I first read and discussed *Dictee* at a college level. It was in college I began to first form analysis of Cha's work, and be shaped by it in more significant ways. The reading of *Dictee* which centers her death has been one which tends to shadow the text itself. An accented reading takes account of the ways in which Cha's death informs the work, and yet also pays attention to both the content and rich orality already present in the work. The work is a product of Cha's life and her death informs several important readings of her work and accents the text in new ways, although they do not entirely define her life or text. To fail to mention the end of Cha's life is to ignore the life and death stakes of womanhood, Asian Americanness, of writing, and of speaking. However, to overshadow her life with her death is to forget the stakes entirely, to forget that creativity is expressed in life.

Kwon and Hong also, to some extent, essentialize Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Korean American identity. The narrative of the mythical, generational, and racialized way in which the text travels from Korean to Korean, binds the text to a particular Korean American identity. The work, *Minor Feelings*, is dedicated to articulating the Asian American experience. The subtitle of the book is: "An Asian American Reckoning."²⁹ Hong's articulation is important to voicing a particular experience, yet simultaneously binds together a shifting Asian America to a more stagnant identitarian term. In binding race to language, and moreover to Cha, there arrives an essentialism, a solidification of category which blocks affiliation. I am not claiming that Hong's

²⁹ Hong, *Minor Feelings*.

work had a negative impact, rather I am saying her reading of Cha in particular leads the text towards readings that limit the text to postcolonial/ethnic readings.

In Anne Anlin Cheng's seminal work, *The Melancholy of Race*, she dedicates a chapter to a reading of Cha's work. Cheng hits on a key point that Kwon and Hong do not, that Cha is writing about identification, not about identities. In articulating how to record a fragmented history, Cha creates an "anti-documentary document."³⁰ At the same time, Cheng is employing Cha's work to exemplify a discussion of racial melancholia. *Dictee* read through racial melancholia is a work that explores the impossibility of performing race and the melancholic impossibility of having a "documentary history."

This chapter centers a critique that Cheng mentions: disidentificatory moments. Moreover, I would like to read *Dictee* as a work of accented literature that highlights moments that Kwon, Hong, and Cheng do not. In being a re-reading, I do not claim Cha or her work, *Dictee*, as a patron saint or ancestor, or claim her in a fit of documentary desire. Instead, I imagine Cha's work in a larger body of work in the 21st century that articulates not only the production of race and racial identities, but the production of diaspora, exile, and refugeetude as a contemporary phenomenon. This chapter first engages with a primary accented section of the text, that has long been read as a moment centered on speaking, rather than the accent. Then, I engage Cheng's reading towards building a reading of *Dictee* that works towards an accented reading. In this section, I focus on two concepts: the anti-documentary document and second, disidentification. Appropriating these racial melancholic concepts towards accented subjectivities, I aim to look at moments of intimacy *and* distance, of affiliations and intimacy.

Accented: The Difficulty of Speaking

³⁰ Cheng, Anne Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race*. Race and American Culture. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 145.

The first prose piece, “DISEUSE” is a well-read and discussed part of *Dictee*. These few pages of prose depict a haunting, slow and painful performance of speaking. For the unnamed female speaker/performer, speaking is intentional, conscious, aware of each and every step towards and utterance. The description evokes a level of body horror, an unfamiliarity and awareness of the parts of our bodies we neglect from conscious recognition.

DISEUSE

She mimicks the speaking. That might resemble speech. (Anything at all.) Bared noise, groan, bits torn from words. Since she hesitates to measure the accuracy, she resorts to mimicking gestures with the mouth. The entire lower lip would lift upwards then sink back to its original place. She would then gather both lips and protrude them in a pout taking in the breath that might utter some thing. (One thing. Just one.) But the breath falls away. With a slight tilting of her head backwards, she would gather the strength in her shoulders and remain in this position.

It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger still. Greater than is the pain not to say. To not say. Says nothing against the pain to speak. It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break. Must void.

From the back of her neck she releases her shoulders free. She swallows once more. (Once more. One more time would do.) In preparation. It augments. To such a pitch. Endless drone, refueling itself. Autonomous. Self-generating. Swallows with last efforts last wills against the pain that wishes it to speak.

Figure 1. DISEUSE Cha, Theresa Hak-Kyung, *Dictee*: 3.

From her mouth, her lips, even her breath, the desire to speak is both desperate and painful. As Sara Ahmed writes, “I become aware of bodily limits as my bodily dwelling or dwelling place when I am in pain.”³¹ In other words, pain shows us the limits of our bodies, the ways in which we become aware of our skin, our mortality, and our precarity. The struggle to speak but the arrival at imperfect utterances can also be seen as what produces a perceived accent.

³¹ Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. NED-New edition, 2. Edinburgh University Press, 2014: 27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09x4q>.

Begins imperceptibly, near-perceptible. (Just once. Just one time and it will take.) She takes. She takes the pause. Slowly. From the thick. The thickness. From weighted motion upwards. Slowed. To deliberation even when it passed upward through her mouth again. The delivery. She takes it. Slow. The invoking. All the time now. All the time there is. Always. And all times. The pause. Uttering. Hers now. Hers bare. The utter.

Figure 2. Begins imperceptibly: Cha, Theresa Hak-Kyung, *Dictee*: 5.

The slow, painful and therefore conscious arrival at the intentional utterance introduces the text. The term “disease”, means “a woman who is a skilled and usually professional reciter.”³² *Dictee* is reframed as a performance piece, and the text becomes the utterance. *Dictee* is a text that requires an accented reading, one that not only pays attention to the content of the words, of interpretation in a literary sense, but also visual or oral interpretation.

Re-reading DISEUSE for the accent, the passage can be interpreted not only as the difficulty of speaking, but the difficulty of speaking “properly.” Using this frame to interpret the whole text, *Dictee* is not necessarily in “another language” as Hong interprets the text in *Minor Feelings*. Rather, it is about learning to listen to speech in a language and world of signs and symbols one already knows, but has been bent towards another realm of orality, musicality, reference, and embodiment.

The Accent and Post-Colonialism

Using the frame of the accent to read the text, the context of the post-colonial becomes core to understanding the text. When reading *Dictee*, I was particularly reminded of the myth of the R-eating man from Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. It is a myth that the colonized are aware of and desire not to fall into. As Fanon describes:

He will become aware of it, and he will really go to war against it. He will practice not only rolling his R but embroidering it. Furtively observing the slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech, suspicious of his own tongue - a wretchedly lazy organ - he will lock himself into his room and read aloud for hours - desperately determined to learn *diction*.³³

³² Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “disease,” accessed April 29, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disease>.

³³ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1st ed., new Ed. New York : [Berkeley, Calif.]: Grove Press ; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008: 21.

The scrutiny does not end within the metropole, he is also scrutinized when he returns to his mother country, as “mastery” of the language also denotes a certain genealogy of education.³⁴

The focus on “correct” speech puts him into a position where he is not only paranoid for himself, but suspicious of his compatriots who he feels also represents him. In learning how to speak, one also takes on a psychological experience of paranoia and suspicion.

The painful and desperate attempts at speech as depicted in *DISEUSE* mimic the language that describes the tongue in Fanon’s text. What Cha and Fanon pull together is that the learning of diction is not just physical training of a tongue, but in picking up a language, an undertaking of a particular epistemology, a psychological state of suspicion and paranoia. Cheng’s reading of dictation provides the link. Dictation, as seen in the post-colonial context, is a tool of violence and discipline. It is through practice that one shapes their tongue to the unusual and difficult act of speaking “correctly” and to be recognized by those in the metropolises as acceptable and tolerable. As Cheng notes, “the language lesson is the sign of colonization.”³⁵ Dictation is a “mode of conversion that transfers the individual into a subject of discourse through the repetition of form, a regulated reproduction.”³⁶

By listening for the accent, or the desire to squash one, the process of dictation and normalization of the accent of the metropole as neutral becomes apparent. The establishment of “proper” languages and the institutionalization of that process in the language school or lesson, becomes the area of focus for an accented reading. In reading *Dictée* for the punishment of the accent, the pain of disciplining one’s own organs to a new order, a different focus arrives. Pulling from Ahmed’s definition of pain, what is revealed is the borders of our organs and the performances of our bodies that create difference.

³⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*: 23.

³⁵ Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*: 158.

³⁶ Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*: 160.

In English and in French, the language lesson appears throughout the first section of *Dictee*. The form usually follows a structure in which the first line asks the reader to translate the following numbered phrases into French. The convention of the language lesson is broken through the phrases being overtly political, nationalistic, poetic, or laden with ambiguous meaning. The lines of the text are meant to be separated by being separate questions, but when read together they inevitably create a certain picture.

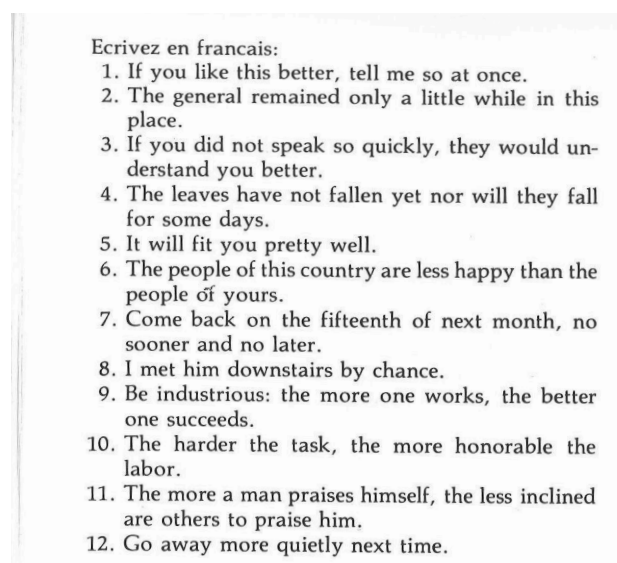


Figure 3. List of Questions. Cha, Theresa Hak-Kyung, *Dictee*: 8.

In recreating the form, but employing the language of military occupation, such as the figure of the general, or comparative language common to occupation and colonization, *Dictee* shows what the language lesson instructs. The knowledge of a particular accent, dialect, or language as “proper” not only invites pain, paranoia, and suspicion in trying to imitate it, but in being disciplined one undertakes whole epistemologies.

In reproducing the form to reveal what is present in the language lesson, Cha participates in disidentification. In employing the language lesson in the languages of the colonizer or imperialist, such as English or French, but producing sentences that when read together betray a history of violence and oppression, Cha’s obedience reveals disobedience. As Cheng writes,

these moments of seemingly complete compliance bespeak resistance as well. Perhaps resistance needs to be located not outside of a cultural relay but rather *within* that relay, that dictaphonic structure... One might say that the narrator of *Dictee* makes a poor scribe by being, in fact, too literal, too faithful. If authority calls for assimilation (to and of itself), then *Dictee* repeatedly exposes the necessary *im*perfection (incompletion) of that call- necessary because, as we have just seen, perfect identification with the Law can in fact only parody and expose that Big Other as an empty signifier, infinitely reproducible.³⁷

Dictee, in its faithfulness and reproduction, cracks open the dominant forms of identification that have been placed on minority subjectivities. A great myth that Cheng sees Cha crack open in *Dictee* is that myth of a myth called racial identity.

Disidentifications:

In *Disidentifications*, Jose Muñoz defines disidentification as a third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, “one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology.”³⁸ Moreover, “disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.”³⁹ To read Cha’s work with Muñoz and Cheng in mind is a text that calls out the impossibility of perfect identification, and in doing so is creative, producing fugitive positionalities and affiliations that were unthinkable.

Disidentification does not only happen through the performance of obedience, it also appears in the notion of the anti-documentary document which Cheng notes in her reading. Cheng reads *Dictee* as a critique of the “desire for documentation.”⁴⁰ Both academics and writers

³⁷ Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*: 159.

³⁸ Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Cultural Studies of the Americas, v. 2. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999: 11.

³⁹ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*: 31.

⁴⁰ Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*: 142.

in minority literature desire history or documentary truth. *Dictee* is bound up with the history of Korea, but is suspicious of the documentary desire depicted and resuscitated in the creation of modern Korea.⁴¹ Cheng reads this suspicion is the image of protest which is both uncited and of a quality that makes discernment impossible. *Dictee* records traumatic history, noting it as urgent and impossible.⁴² In this reading, the image of the protest is homeless, a story lost in the publicity that surrounds it. Cheng, through *Dictee*, reads that “modern Korea only exists as a history of found images- even, of dead images.”⁴³ The challenge of the documentary impulse, of documentary desire is done through the usage of images and the disidentity of the text.

The stories which follow, that of Yu Guan Soon and the speaker’s mother, perform and reproduce stories of nationalism and diaspora. The desire for clean and unmistakable stories of revolution and resistance, such as the perfect martyr in Yu Guan Soon and later, The Joan of Arc, betray in their obedient telling, the falsity of that documentary desire common to scholars, historians, and writers. *Dictee* reproduces nationalistic myths from Yu Guan Soon to the Joan of Arc, but in documenting these figures through anti-documentary means, not only is the documentary desire questioned but new affiliations are formed. *Dictee* produces Yu Guan Soon, the Joan of Arc, and even the nine muses, not as of their context or history but as *Dictee*’s own context and history. The documentary work of *Dictee*, participates in disidentification by looking at the performances of these often invoked identifications: of modern Korea, of nationalism, of womanhood, of saintly-ness, of creativity, and western exceptionalism, toward affiliation. They become a part of understanding identification, and in some way the myths which structure the nature of modern identities. They structure *Dictee* and become one accented document.

⁴¹ Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*: 144.

⁴² Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*: 144.

⁴³ Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*: 144.

A testimony to *Dictee*'s disidentificatory power is the way the text is invoked by other Korean American and Asian American scholars and creatives. Within the text, authors such as Cathy Park Hong, Emily Jungmin Yoon, Elaine H. Kim, Lisa Lowe, and Shelley Wong have found some sort of refuge. As Hong puts it,

Cha spoke my language by indicating that English was not her language, that English could never be a true reflection of her consciousness, that it was as much an imposition on her consciousness as it was a form of expression. And because of that, *Dictee* felt true.⁴⁴

While I do not see *Dictee* as being in another language, I understood this feeling, and I imagine other diasporic readers must have felt the same way. Ironically enough, the term *dictée* in French, means dictation. To perhaps misinterpret Hong for a moment, it is Cha's *dictation* that felt true. As dictation means to read something aloud, in some sense, *Dictee* is a spoken piece, whose orality, musicality, and world of reference might be unfamiliar to us. But like a disidentificatory language lesson, *Dictee* teaches us to listen to a different kind of text, to understand a different kind of document, and to get to the core of the language lesson itself. Sometimes *Dictee* is in a different language, but the text is in latin letters, and most of the time, in English words.

This shorter chapter covered the text *Dictee* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Building on the readings of Cheng in *The Melancholy of Race*, I highlighted a reading of the text which interprets it as accented. Through an exploration of *Dictee* as disidentificatory and an anti-documentary document, this chapter re-reads the text as melancholic *and* towards affiliations. By taking the title somewhat literally, this chapter has read *Dictee* as an accented utterance that requires a different kind of listening and interpretation. As an introductory document and reading, this chapter has set up some of the groundwork which appears throughout the rest of the paper.

⁴⁴ Hong, *Minor Feelings*: 155.

CHAPTER 2:

Paddington: Assimilation and Commodification of Exile

The 2014 film, *Paddington* directed by Paul King, is a major studio production which gained major popular and critical attention. This chapter aspires towards an accented reading practice which instead of claiming various films and artists as accented, shows a practice of accented reading which highlights various moments of the film and produces unruly visions. Both a critical and affirmative practice, accented reading is closely associated with the work of disidentification as Jose Muñoz imagined it. *Paddington* is another film which is a part of a larger trend in major studio films to remake, reboot, or adapt previously popular books or movies. Paddington Bear is an incredibly popular character in Britain, popularized by the children's books created by Michael Bond. The 2014 film revives Paddington in a live action world, covering his move from Peru to London. The conditions of the production of the film, being a major studio production and rallying for neoliberal multiculturalism, produces readings of race, migration, and inequality through "colorblind" lens. However, through Paddington's performance, the animality of his animation offers openings from which unruly visions that negate and critique a neoliberal London emerges.

To address the position of the film in its context, a greater understanding of the contemporary refugee is required. The first section addresses the history of Paddington Bear as well as the evolving political category of refugee. The second section examines the role of

refugees in the film, pulling from the history of Paddington Bear as well as contemporary understandings of refugees. This section looks at the role of multicultural neoliberalism in the film. The third section introduces Jack Halberstam's conceptualization of transbiology as explored in contemporary 3D animation. The fourth section, using insights from Halberstam's work, articulates the disidentificatory possibilities in the film. This chapter concludes with the resonance of Paddington Bear today. This chapter extends the possibilities of accented reading further than Naficy and Suner intended, refusing categorization and looking towards interpretive possibilities.

Paddington: A Brief History

Paddington Bear is a beloved character who is considered a classic in children's literature. Created in 1957, Michael Bond was inspired to create Paddington during World War II. Paddington is known for his old red hat, a singular suitcase, a blue duffle coat, and a love for marmalade. The character himself is incredibly polite, addressing people with honorifics and always treating others with the utmost respect. His innocence and naivete get him into trouble, but Paddington is always trying to do his best. While a wholesome children's character, his origins have made him an important symbol in political discourse in the UK.

Michael Bond was deeply influenced by his experiences during the Second World War. Upon seeing Jewish refugees fleeing WWII and his own experience seeing abandoned children on London's platforms, he was inspired to write the story of Paddington Bear.⁴⁵ The aesthetics of Paddington's most iconic items, a suitcase and the tag around his neck, mimic the real-life child refugees themselves. Even during publication, the arrival of Hungarian refugees during the Cold

⁴⁵ Pauli, Michelle. "Michael Bond: 'Paddington Stands up for Things, He's Not Afraid of Going to the Top and Giving Them a Hard Stare.'" *The Guardian*, November 28, 2014, sec. Books. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/michael-bond-author-paddington-bear-interview-books-television-film.>; Mead, Rebecca. "Paddington Bear, Refugee." *The New Yorker*, June 28, 2017. [https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/paddington-bear-refugee.](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/paddington-bear-refugee)

War loomed over Paddington Bear's creation. Since his inception, Paddington has been linked with modern imperialism and capitalism. Although it is not mentioned by Bond in interviews, the Windrush immigrants and other patterns of migration in the 1950s brought about a London that was more multicultural than ever before. The racial tensions following this mass influx of refugees and immigrants resulted in the worst race riots Britain had ever seen. The Notting Hill riots of 1958 are considered a watershed moment in Britain's racial history.⁴⁶ Interestingly, Bond specifically places the first Paddington book in Notting Hill.

Paddington's origins were originally to be "Darkest Africa." However, due to a lack of bears in Africa, Bond changed Paddington's home to "Darkest Peru."⁴⁷ The usage of the descriptor "darkest" is directly linked to a history of colonialism during the peak of the British Empire. Accordingly, in the 1960s, Paddington Bear became more associated with Commonwealth immigration as opposed to WWII.⁴⁸ Like the immigrants from the Commonwealth, Paddington came from a mysterious, "barbaric" country. In contemporary politics, Paddington Bear has appeared as an important figure. He was invoked in 2009 when former refugees from Albania took up a petition to Prime Minister Gordon Brown's residence to end the detention of migrant children. The organizers and Labour Parliament member, Jeremy Corbyn, held up a Paddington Bear.⁴⁹ Since 2008, graffiti stencils depicting Paddington with the words "Migration is not a crime" have appeared on hundreds of buildings throughout Europe.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Smith, Angela. "Paddington Bear: A Case Study of Immigration and Otherness." *Children's Literature in Education* 37, no. 1 (March 2006): 35–50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-005-9453-3>.

⁴⁷ Seitz, David K. "'Migration Is Not a Crime': Migrant Justice and the Creative Uses of Paddington Bear." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 112, no. 3 (April 3, 2022): 861. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2021.1960475>

⁴⁸ Laš, Matej. "The Theme of Migration in the Paddington Bear Book Series and Its Intersemiotic Translation." *Ostrava Journal of English Philology*, 2018, 58.

⁴⁹ Seitz, "'Migration Is Not a Crime': Migrant Justice and the Creative Uses of Paddington Bear," 859.

⁵⁰ Seitz, "'Migration Is Not a Crime': Migrant Justice and the Creative Uses of Paddington Bear," 864.

Paddington's symbolism as an undocumented refugee loved by Britain holds within it a tension that can be used for advocating for refugees and arguing for neoliberal multiculturalism.

The “Refugee Crisis”

Naficy's theory towards an accented cinema did not quite account for the experiences of refugees. While at the time of writing for Naficy, refugees were already a large portion of immigrant populations in the US and Europe, he did not include refugees as a type of dispossession or relation to home significantly different enough from exiles and diaspora to be included. However, given the category of refugee, legally and politically holds great significance it is important to understand how the contingencies of refugee situatedness is essential to any accented reading. To understand this, what is required is a brief history to understand what exactly is meant by “refugee.”

Rebecca Hamlin, in her work *Crossings*, offers a legal, social, and political analysis of the binaries used to describe “people who cross.”⁵¹ One of the most pervasive and powerful of these binaries is that of the migrant/refugee binary. In law, the “refugee” first appears in international law with the League of Nations.⁵² In 1921, the collaboration between the International Red Cross and the League of Nations founded the first international refugee organization.⁵³ The early conceptions of refugees were focused more on the consequences, rather than the cause of displacement. The main concern was that of economic participation, which resulted in the international community in the 1920s making no clear distinction between “political refugee” and “impoverished migrant.”⁵⁴ The individualization of refugee law began in 1938 with the creation of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (ICR), which was later renamed the

⁵¹ Hamlin, Rebecca. *Crossing: How We Label and React to People on the Move*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2021: 1.

⁵² Hamlin, *Crossing*: 37.

⁵³ Hamlin, *Crossing*: 37.

⁵⁴ Hamlin, *Crossing*: 38.

International Refugee Organization (IRO) in 1946.⁵⁵ The ICR was formed at the Evian Conference to help with the emigration of Jewish refugees leading up to the Second World War.⁵⁶ For the first time, international law considered *why* people were being displaced. The IRO built on this legacy, cementing a new definition at the 1951 Refugee Convention.⁵⁷ The Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who

As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 an owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of this nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (Article 1, Section A[2])⁵⁸

The Refugee Convention was a landmark moment in which refugees were to be granted refuge in times of danger. The concept of non-refoulement asserts that refugees should “not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom” and is considered customary international law.⁵⁹ However, the specificity of the document was not unintentional. The particular reference to “events occurring before 1 January 1951” explicitly frames eligible refugees as confined to the Cold War. The language of “well-founded fear” creates notions of eligibility and a need to legally assess the deservingness of legal protection from various harm. The continually increasing enforcement of the border violates the right to non-refoulement

⁵⁵ “Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees,” UNHCR.org, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/document-sources/intergovernmental-committee-refugees>.

⁵⁶ Hamlin, *Crossing*: 40.

⁵⁷ UN General Assembly, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137, 28 July 1951, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/1951/en/39821> [accessed 31 March 2024]

⁵⁸ UN General Assembly, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137, 28 July 1951, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/1951/en/39821>

⁵⁹ “The 1951 Refugee Convention and Key International Conventions,” UNHCR Israel, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/il/en/1951-refugee-convention-and-international-conventions>.

everyday.⁶⁰ Strategies such as interdiction at sea⁶¹ and manufacturing difficulties to legal access for detained individuals seeking asylums are other ways states seek to bypass human rights law.⁶² Today, the primary document still referenced in international refugee law is the Refugee Convention, whose definition is limited and has struggled to provide protection for non-european refugees.

The number of refugees has increased over the years and at the end of June 2023, the UN reported 110 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced.⁶³ The reasons for displacement vary, but many are displaced due to war, political violence, environmental damage, or poverty. The rise in the amount of people displaced has led to what some call the “refugee crisis.” Gaining major media attention in 2015, news media all over the United States and Western Europe reported on record breaking numbers of refugees. The European refugee crisis began when the flow of refugees increased from 153,000 in 2008 to 1 million in 2015.⁶⁴ The refugees came primarily from the Middle East and North Africa, with the majority fleeing from Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan. The term “crisis” and the temporal assumption of the term refugee are limiting and obfuscate the prolonged conditions of conflict and struggle which have been taking place in these countries. In each of these countries, the effects of colonialism, imperialism, and continual involvement and interventions within these states has created the perfect

⁶⁰ Hamlin, *Crossing*: 46.

⁶¹ Nicole Groll, “Operation Vigilant Sentry: Stopping Illegal Migration at Sea,” United States Coast Guard News, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/3280774/operation-vigilant-sentry-stopping-illegal-migration-at-sea/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.news.uscg.mil%2FPress-Releases%2FArticle%2F3280774%2Foperation-vigilant-sentry-stopping-illegal-migration-at-sea%2F>.

⁶² Lindskoog, Carl. *Detain and Punish: Haitian Refugees and the Rise of the World's Largest Immigration Detention System*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018.

⁶³ United Nations, “Refugees,” United Nations (United Nations), accessed March 31, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/refugees>.

⁶⁴ Peters, L., Engelen, P. J., & Cassimon, D. (2023). Explaining refugee flows. Understanding the 2015 European refugee crisis through a real options lens. *PloS one*, 18(4), e0284390. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0284390>

conditions for political and economic instability.⁶⁵ The “refugee crisis” then, is a term which refers to the consequences of continual bombardment and dispossession of various regions which is often deemed the “Global South.”

Films on the experiences of refugees have since been focused on traumatic experiences. Depicting flight as necessarily connected to destruction, precarity, dispossession, and misery, they often plea for humanitarian aid. Popular documentaries such as *Born in Syria* and *Born in Gaza* reflect a popular notion of the modern refugee experience. The image of a refugee today is a person of color, generally from the Middle East, South America, or South Asia. The displaced are traumatized, damaged, and impoverished individuals whose dreams and desires have been dashed by war and destruction. Their lives are marked by death and tragedy, and they have little else to do other than figure out how to survive. Appeals to human emotion are made by depicting violence, interviews conducted in the rubble, and depictions of miserable children. The common understanding of refugees today is one of extreme impoverishment, grief, loss, and tragedy. This particular image and narrative associated with the refugee is what I believe distinguishes it from exile as Naficy might have categorized. In other words, there is a particular racial, class, and ethnic association with the term refugee which Naficy did not account for in his work.

The term, “refugee” is quite contentious due to its reinforcement of the binary but also its political significance in demanding urgency and immediate critical attention. While the current discourse surrounding the term is out of scope for the purposes of this paper, it is important to note when the terms that one uses to identify various forms of dislocation create within themselves various hierarchies. The purpose of curating an accented reading practice is being

⁶⁵ This is not to discount centuries of struggle and resistance to rule and intervention by the west within these states. Colonialism and imperialism are not simply enforced upon a population or region, but rather comprised of complex interactions which can never quite be neatly categorized into a unidirectional forced and oppression of a region. Omar Dewachi, *Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Medicine and Statecraft in Iraq* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017). Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

attentive to the sounds and pronunciation that various words hold, as well as how they can be “misspoken.” In a time when internally displaced persons and refugees reach 200 million, it is imperative to develop an attentiveness towards dispossession rather than on “legal fiction”⁶⁶ of refugees in particular⁶⁷

The refugee experience encompasses a variety of different experiences, which includes but is not limited to loss, grief, dispossession and violence. The breadth and depth of the experience of migration creates new forms of consciousness. In *The Migrant Image*, T.J. Demos proposes that migration produces a sort of “double consciousness” and

bicultural knowledge produced by living in a foreign environment, generating in its positive expression a sensitivity toward difference, and a newfound appreciation of the cultural character of one’s origin when looking back from the migrant’s awry vantage.⁶⁸

Dislocation is a transformative experience that inspires critical and creative energies and complicates the vulnerability and material dispossession it brings. Forced migration or refugeetude overlap with other ways of being in the world which produce slanted relations to home, the world, history, and the self.

Towards Assimilation: A “Multicultural” London

Within Paddington are the depictions of multiple generations of refugees. Mr. Gruber and the calypso band Tobago and D’Lime represent the forced migration of European refugees due to the Second World War and the Windrush generation of the 1950s, respectively. Mr. Gruber is a Hungarian refugee fleeing the Cold War as a child. In the scene in which we meet the magical Mr. Gruber, who runs a beautiful antique shop in Notting Hill, he tells us the story of his arrival

⁶⁶ Hamlin, *Crossing*.

⁶⁷ “Internally Displaced People,” UNHCR, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/internally-displaced-people>. United Nations, “Refugees,” United Nations (United Nations), accessed March 31, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/refugees>.

⁶⁸ Demos, T. J. *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*. (Durham, N.C. London: Duke University Press, 2013), 3.

in miniature. As he begins to speak about his arrival, we see a tiny representation of Mr. Gruber appear by the toy train which delivers his breakfast.



Figure 4. Mr. Gruber as a Child Refugee (*Paddington*. StudioCanal, 2014).

Like Paddington, he arrives with a tag around his neck and a singular suitcase. The film equates Gruber with Paddington in this scene, and in doing so, highlights a continual history of flight. However, it also erases their differences. Paddington is a spectacled bear from Peru, who arrived on a boat, not a train. It would be more fitting to equate him with the Caribbean migrants from the Commonwealth who were migrating around the exact same time. The push to equate Paddington with more nationally accepted white refugees speaks to the real-life implications of the Refugee Convention. Paddington's origins and reason for his forced movement to London reflect the conditions of Caribbean migrants, but the visual history invoked by his accessories appeal to an understanding of refugees which treats both migrations as deserving of refuge.

In the film, a band appears throughout the film to punctuate Paddington's experiences in London. The calypso band Tobago and D'Lime are intimately linked with the Windrush generation. Paul King, director of *Paddington*, mentions the implications of using calypso music in the film. For King, "the music being made in the place where these books were written, by

people who arrived on these shores. It felt like such a glorious gift - they are really upbeat positive songs - for the most part - all about that experience.”⁶⁹



Figure 5. Tobago and D’Lime Playing Music on the Streets of London (*Paddington*. StudioCanal, 2014).

While it seems that King is aware of the political and racial implications of Paddington, the incorporation of the band is, surprisingly, rather ambiguous. While they appear from time to time, they are not an important character in the film and work towards creating an image of a ‘multicultural’ London. In the same interview, King continues:

There's something special about London. Without trying to be political about it, big cities can feel like safe places for people who feel a little bit different... If you have unusual tastes in music or fashion, or you're from a different group of people, big cities - certainly when I was growing up - felt like an exciting place to go because you could find like-minded people.⁷⁰

King shies away from having to talk politically about the film, perhaps due to his leanings or perhaps because he has made a children’s film (which are usually under immense scrutiny). King’s feelings about London as an ideal neoliberal multicultural city are worthy of questioning and critique. For King, the appearance of Tobago and D’Lime is ‘unusual’ and ‘different.’ They represent London’s multicultural nature by being essentially other. King’s view of Paddington is

⁶⁹ Masters, Tim. “The Story behind Paddington’s Calypso Songs.” *BBC News*, November 28, 2014, sec. Entertainment & Arts. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-30196290>.

⁷⁰ Masters, “The Story behind Paddington’s Calypso Songs.”

rooted in difference, culture as a consumable object, and supported by neoliberal capitalist ideals. On the other hand, there are other issues with equating Paddington to black and brown refugees. Paddington can easily be read as a regurgitated version of an age-old racism that associates savagery and animality with people of color. However, the existence of Mr. Gruber and Paddington's visual iconography defies this reading. On one hand, there is a sense of erasure of the difficulties faced between black, brown and muslim refugees being equated with white, European, and Jewish refugees. Yet, Paddington also acts as a bridge, an allegory for the struggles of all diasporic populations in a London that claims a perfect multiculturalism. Although the film does not touch on the real-life historical ethnic and racial struggles of diasporic populations within London, by their presence, they evoke a history that is more complicated.

This is not to say that Paddington himself does not experience xenophobia during his time in Windsor Gardens. The very first interaction the Browns have with Paddington is particularly on the nose. Upon seeing Paddington at the train station, Mr. Brown loaded statements that mirror the classism, xenophobia, and racism perpetrated by modern society. As he first notices Paddington, he says:

MR. BROWN: Oh, stranger danger.

MRS. BROWN: What?

MR. BROWN: Keep your eyes down. There's some sort of bear over there. Probably selling something.

PADDINGTON: Good evening.

MR. BROWN: No thank you.⁷¹

This interaction is particularly reminiscent of how modern day cities treat the houseless.

Paddington's attempts at being properly English are met by hostility and an assumption that

⁷¹ *Paddington*. StudioCanal, 2014.

because he is a bear and on the street, that he is of a dubious nature. However, Mrs. Brown gives Paddington a chance, approaching him and willing to help. As Paddington tells Mrs. Brown of why he is without guardians and how he arrived, Mr. Brown watches from afar doubting Paddington's story of dislocation. Mr. Brown is apathetic, criticizing Paddington and believing him to be malicious. In scenes such as this, Paddington is coded as being other and faces the sort of racism and classism that migrants of color are most likely to experience.

As the film progresses, the Browns accept Paddington into the family. However, this is only achieved through a great deal on Paddington's part toward assimilation. Paddington is aware throughout the film that he must be a respectable character. Even as a young bear, he is deeply aware that he must be perceived as non-threatening. This is demonstrated in the scene where Paddington first meet the Browns. His perfect Queen's English is an essential characteristic that makes him non-threatening and endearing to a British audience. In terms of language, he literally speaks the colonizer's tongue. His guardians, Aunt Lucy and Uncle Pastuzo, learned English from a British explorer. However, he himself is unfamiliar with the customs and practices of English society. While he struggles in this aspect, quite a large portion of the film is Paddington learning how to fit in. It is through acting *more English* that Paddington is accepted into the traditional white British family. In doing so, *Paddington* reinforces what it means *to be English*. At the same time, what is most lovable about the character is not his proximity to Britishness but rather, his animality.

Any strict reading of *Paddington* reveals inconsistencies and refusals from the text itself. While on the surface, the film can easily be read as a tale championing assimilation, it simultaneously refutes this very idea. King himself seems to believe in a perfectly multicultural London, a city that allows for difference, and yet the film represents a London that is cold,

xenophobic, racist, and classist. It is Paddington's intervention that heals the small neighborhood, the Browns family, and in some sense, London as a whole. It is Paddington's animality, animatedness, and creative possibility that imagines a London of community and care. It is equally his failed attempts at Britishness which produce a bicultural form of knowledge which reveals quite a lot of British social behavior to be ridiculous. Perhaps, there is more to *Paddington* than Paul King ever intended to evoke.

Transbiology, Identification, Assimilation

In the *Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam theorizes the inherent queerness in childhood. Childhood is a "long lesson in humility, awkwardness, [and] limitation."⁷² Childhood is an inherently queer experience because if we were already normative, we would not need all the teaching, training, and discipline that guide us towards our reproduction of hetero-patriarchal families. Animated films address the child, who "sees his or her family and parents as the problem, the child who knows there is a bigger world out there beyond the family, if only he or she could reach it."⁷³

Halberstam coins the term "Pixarvolt," a new age of 3D animation that explores ideas of revolution through antihumanism, socialist values, failure, and queer sociality.⁷⁴ These concepts are embedded in the medium of animation, which imagines other beings and things as lively as humans. Halberstam suggests that by using the notion of transbiology, we can better understand the "animal" in animation. Transbiology, or new conceptions of the human within new technologies, "conjures hybrid entities or in-between states of being that represent subtle or even glaring shifts in our understandings of the body and bodily transformation."⁷⁵ This shifts our

⁷² Halberstam, Judith. *The Queer Art of Failure*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 27.

⁷³ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 27.

⁷⁴ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 29

⁷⁵ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 33

understanding of the human in relation to the “artificial boundaries between humans, animals, machines, states of life and death, animation and reanimation, living, evolving, becoming, and transforming.”⁷⁶ Transbiology refuses human exceptionalism and places the human not as *the* mode of being, but rather *a* mode of being.

In the frame of transbiology, the medium of mixed animation and live-action film further complicate and confuse the artificial boundaries between modes of life and death. For the child viewer, Paddington allows for an allegorical exploration of difficulties of assimilation into human society. One is always too loud, too messy, too clumsy, or too small. For the child who is disciplined towards specific cultural norms of humanity, these traits are controlled and restrained. For Paddington, these “quirks” are his strengths. The animality of Paddington, such as his claws, ability to climb, and physical size as a cub allow him to fit into tight spaces, climb into various grates, and survive. However, Paddington is not a “real bear” and he works as a whimsical element of animation. He is easily carried by the wind, allowing him to fly with just an umbrella or holding onto the legs of a bird. Paddington’s animality as an allegory for wildness, and his animality in animation as whimsical places him as a character which curates a sense of identification with children. One relates to Paddington in his wildness and whimsy, but also aspires to be him through his politeness, empathy, and kindness.

Paddington however, offers an alternative identification for the diasporic viewer. Paddington’s animality for the diasporic viewer becomes allegorical for the failed moments of assimilation one has in being uprooted and transplanted into new cultural and social norms. Paddington embodies what is desired out of assimilation. A perfect grasp on the language (so proper in fact, that Paddington speaks the Queen’s English); acceptance by the new country by learning the cultural norms (although not perfectly); and a family or community. Assimilation is

⁷⁶ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 33

always aspirational, and it is in the whimsical world of animation that allows one to experience that aspirational universe. It is in the dissonance between the aspired action and the reality that inspire racial melancholia, double-consciousness, and modes of being that reproduce colonial/imperial ideas within the colonial/imperial body. However, Paddington is not quite the poster child for assimilation into the multicultural metropole.

Paddington's relationship with home is complex. Paddington loves Peru and loves the home he has made in London. He is proud of his heritage and is never ashamed of being a bear. In a particularly emotional scene, Paddington watches a film reel he stole from the Geographer's Guild archives. The black and white film is complete with all its colonial insignia. The language of "darkest" which describes Peru, the dated black and white footage, and the images of the explorer. However, in the shots of landscape, Paddington is mesmerized. The sounds of the colonial past disappear, Paddington is making his own image as he "enters" the image. Swelling orchestral music drowns out the petty noise of British narration. Entering the black and white film, Paddington enters his vibrant, color-filled jungle, complete with Aunt Lucy and his late Uncle Pastuzo waving in the treeline. He is left with a small smile on his face as he is pulled back to the present moment.



Figure 6. Paddington Enters the Film (*Paddington*. StudioCanal, 2014).



Figure 7. Uncle Pastuzo and Aunt Lucy in the Distance (*Paddington*. StudioCanal, 2014).

Paddington's messaging about assimilation is ambiguous. He acts as a model minority in performing Britishness to the best of his ability. His grasp of the language is extremely proper, he is polite, and knows what is expected of him as a bear. Like the seemingly apolitical language of assimilation which involves itself in meritocracy, Paddington too, seems to support the idea that one can always be accepted given they try to adopt the culture and norms of the country.

Simultaneously, Paddington is not the ideal minority, he is unruly and is not afraid to question certain norms and traditions. Moreover, his interactions with the modern Britain around him are deeply political, intertwined with a colonial past and in experiencing xenophobia. His animality embodies both a reading which can continue to perpetuate orientalist stereotypes, and a reading which sees his animality as a creative force.

The text of *Paddington* is an ambiguous representation, and can hold readings of racial melancholia. The aspirational acts of his too proper speech, his extreme politeness, and steadfastness do not erase his identity as a bear. *Paddington* can be seen as depicting racial melancholia which is even more ghostly, more pervasive in a time of neoliberal multiculturalism. The film depicts Paddington's journey, his experiences of racial identification as a refugee. However, this is not a complete picture of what *Paddington* could be. Instead, like *Dictee*, Paddington's total obedience to Britishness perhaps reveals the particular fictions of that very

conception of self. Instead, Paddington, throughout the film and throughout his own history, invokes affiliation moods between other refugees, migrants, and histories of movements and imperialism.

Disidentification: Bears and Brits

Disidentification is a third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, as outlined in the previous chapter, but Muñoz conceptualizes it as a “hermeneutic, a process of production, and a mode of performance.” Disidentification is not meant to be an “apolitical middle ground”, a “picking and choosing”, or evacuating “the politically dubious or shameful components within an identificatory locus.”⁷⁷ Rather, it is a “reworking of those energies that do not elide the ‘harmful’ or contradictory components of any identity.”⁷⁸ Disidentification is a creative process, imbuing and investing objects with new life. Moreover, disidentification is a strategy of resistance, adapting and shifting between counterdiscourses and discourse to address the ways in which power shifts within discourse.⁷⁹

Paddington can be read through disidentification, as his obedient performance creates openings in which the fictions of Britishness are revealed in the discourses against migrants and refugees. His signifiatory power of utilizing imagery of a widely accepted form of refugee, the European Jew fleeing the Holocaust, with more marginalized forms of refugees which include not only the Windrush generation but those fleeing war and authoritarian rule in the Middle East and North Africa. Paddington bridges colonial histories with imperial ones, and reveals the fictions of identification not only of Britishness, but the legal fictions of the category of refugee.

The fictions of Britishness first become present in his strict adherence to the records he once listened to with his guardians Aunt Lucy and Uncle Pastuzo to learn the norms of British

⁷⁷ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*: 12-18.

⁷⁸ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*. 12.

⁷⁹ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*. 19.

society as preparation for their visit. Lesson three of “friendly advice for the foreigner in London” teaches the bears the norms of greeting as well as the various ways Londoners will refer to the rain. The humor is dual, as the London described in the records is not only antiquated but also quite ridiculous. The relationship the bears have developed with this record is extended, as they respond to each prompt of the record without much thought.

NARRATOR ON MICROPHONE: *Friendly advice for the foreigner in London. Lesson three. It's dusk and you pass a stranger on the street. Greet them politely.*

BOTH:⁸⁰Good evening.

NARRATOR ON MICROPHONE: *To take the conversation further, talk about the weather.*

LUCY: Real broolly-buster, isn't it?

NARRATOR ON MICROPHONE: *Fact: Londoners have a hundred and seven ways to say that it is raining.*

...

NARRATOR ON MICROPHONE: *Follow these simple rules and you will always feel at home in London.*

The lesson is dated through its analog form and the texture of the transatlantic accent of the narrator. The bears wholly believe in the language lesson, and Paddington's strict compliance with this colonial tool reveals the fictions of Britishness not only produced during colonialism, but also in the present moment. The absurdity of Britishness is lightly poked fun at here, in the fact of the hundred and seven ways in which Londoners say that it is raining. Alternatively, this lesson creates the dream of a London that is warm and inviting to strangers/foreigners is not only the fantasy of the bears, it is also an official fantasy that Britain has espoused.⁸¹ In repeating and

⁸⁰ Aunt Lucy and Uncle Pastuzo

⁸¹ In the case of the Windrush Generation, Caribbean and West Indian migrants were invited to Britain to help with a labor shortage in the country. Citizens in the Commonwealth were granted full British citizenship by the 1948 British Nationality Act, giving those in the British colonies full right to settlement in the United Kingdom. Newspapers which ‘welcomed home’ these migrants ignored the outright racism and anti-blackness these migrants faced. The 1958 Notting Hill Race Riots were a result of this inability to address and outright ignorance of the struggles of the Windrush Generation following their relocation to Britain. In 2018, the Windrush Scandal revealed that migrants who resided in the UK since before 1973 were being illegally detained, denied legal rights, threatened with deportation and in 83 cases, were illegally deported. See: Kevin Rawlinson, “Windrush: 11 People Wrongly

reproducing official narratives, the fallacy of London's multicultural fantasy becomes clear. Simultaneously, the sincere desire for care, belonging, and family reveal a crisis of care in London. Paddington, when he arrives at Paddington Station, attempts to employ his language lessons in the bustling crowds. Adults in suits, dressed in long dark coats, with briefcases do not offer Paddington the time of day as he attempts to greet people in a sincere search for a home.



Figure 8. Paddington Lost in the Crowd (*Paddington*. StudioCanal, 2014).

Paddington's disidentificatory performance of the Londoner reveals a London in a deep crisis of care. However, this performance does not end with the noting of British coldness, but rather continual aspirational acts towards care, kindness, and politeness. These values can be read as being a call towards assimilation, to continually face neglect and abuse without complaint, and yet they can also be creative. It is Paddington's sincerity and steadfastness which offer openings for the creation of home, as well as the healing of the Brown family.

The Brown family is quintessentially English, an upper-middle class family consisting of a single heteropatriarchal household with two children. However, the family is plagued by

Deported from UK Have Died – Javid,” *The Guardian*, November 12, 2018, sec. UK news, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/nov/12/windrush-11-people-wrongly-deported-from-uk-have-died-sajid-javid>. Almaz Teffera, “The Windrush Scandal 5 Years On – What Needs to Change? | Human Rights Watch,” June 23, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/23/windrush-scandal-5-years-what-needs-change>. Colin Grant, “The Story of Windrush,” English Heritage, accessed April 6, 2024, <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/inspire-me/the-story-of-windrush/>.

various issues. Judy, the older child struggles with what Paddington terms “embarrassment” which is described as an illness. Judy, more accurately, is struggling with her adolescence, navigating both her teen desires towards romance, a desire to not be so bound to her family, and her career interests which are expressed in her learning business Chinese. Jonathan, the younger brother, aspires to be an astronaut. He is highly intelligent and creative, but has been relegated to “safe” toys which inhibit his exploration. Mrs. Bird also lives with the Browns and although her relationship is not specifically known she is extended family and takes care of the home. Mr and Mrs. Brown are disconnected, with Mr. Brown’s desire towards traditionally providing and taking care of the household conflict with the creative energy of Mrs. Brown. In other words, the family is dysfunctional, splintered by the inability to understand one another. Interestingly, this is only plainly laid out when Paddington writes about it to Aunt Lucy.

It is Paddington’s sincerity and adherence to care which “fix” the Brown family. Paddington brings out the creative energy of care which Mrs. Brown first expresses. However, Paddington does not “fix” the family by adhering to heteropatriarchal norms, being a magical source of wisdom, or being a source of reason and logic. Rather, Paddington’s animality, his sincerity, his adherence to kindness, and continual expressions of care towards all others results in adventure and various hijinks which bond the family through the choice to care, provide, and believe in Paddington. Paddington pushes others through his performance to act creatively towards caring for others. It is his disidentity through perfect obedience that not only reveals the cracks, absurdities, and impossibility of Englishness, but also openings which require creativity, imbuing archaic values with new life.

Conclusion: Paddington and Queen Elizabeth

Disidentification is always an ambiguous process, one which still allows space for harmful reading. The reception of *Paddington* and *Paddington 2* was and continues to be overwhelmingly positive. *Paddington 2* (2018), became particularly notable for its 100% Tomatometer score with over 100 reviews on RottenTomatoes, a review aggregation website. It lost its perfect score due to a single review, which was mostly reacting to *Paddington 2* being rated over *Citizen Kane*.⁸² To some degree, Paddington's reception is a joke in itself, an absurd question over taste, as a sequel to a family film surpasses *Citizen Kane* in ratings. The life Paddington has outside of the film seems to inspire a performance which picks at the absurdities of reviews, of taste, of high and low culture. Simultaneously, the love for the Paddington films is genuine, bringing sincerity back into popularity during a time of postmodernism. This sincerity, Paddington's serious adherence to rules, his obedience, and his inability to complain provides not only opportunities to see Paddington as another revival, remake, or adaptation to capitalize on nostalgia. Paddington's unargumentative, model minority stance places him precariously in a position to uphold Englishness, and even innocently support it.

On June 6th of 2020, Paddington had tea with the late Queen Elizabeth. Given Paul King's comments, it is not completely unexpected that Paddington might be employed this way. Paddington, for the monarchy, represents a popular children's book icon, no different from other animated or illustrated characters. The representation of Paddington in Buckingham Palace is a complete disavowal of Paddington's history and disidentificatory possibility. For Paul King, perhaps even Michael Bond, Paddington has never quite solidly been able to represent resistance,

⁸² Bryan Alexander, "'Paddington 2' Loses Rotten Tomatoes Perfect Review Score after One (Very Late) Critical Roasting," USA TODAY, accessed April 6, 2024, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2021/05/31/paddington-2-loses-perfect-rotten-tomatoes-score-late-review/5287256001/>.

because of King and Bond’s close attachments to British nationalism as guided by their situatedness in the world. For them, Paddington only acts as a bridge, an ideal of a multicultural London, an ahistorical vision of a city that believes in diversity.



Figure 9. Paddington Pours Tea for Queen Elizabeth (🍞👛 *Ma'amalade Sandwich Your Majesty?*, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UfiCa244XE>).

In a quite hilarious article published in Dazed, titled “Paddington Bear’s Journey from Latinx Icon to Tory Mascot”, Darshita Goyal discusses the political debate that attempts to capture Paddington as either left or right. For the left, he acts as an advocate for refugees and for the right he acts as the “Good Immigrant” narrative that reproduces stories of respectability and deservingness. As Goyal points out,

At this point, he’s less of a bear, and more of a political battleground – we’re in agreement that he represents ‘British values’, but what those values are is more contentious. Is he the kind of Brit who thinks our diversity is our greatest strength, who advocates for ‘multiculturalism’? Or is he the kind who thinks ‘knowing your place’ and respecting your social superiors are the most important virtues a person (or bear) can have? Well – that’s the beauty of a fictional character. He’s both, and neither. Maybe, with their innate political ambiguity and a shared “never explain, never complain” attitude, he and the Queen have more in common after all.⁸³

⁸³ Goyal, Darshita. “Paddington Bear’s Journey from Latinx Icon to Tory Mascot.” Dazed, September 16, 2022. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/56980/1/is-paddington-bear-a-royalist-queen-elizabeth-death>.

In a time of crisis, Paddington's ambiguity leaves a great deal to be desired. The openings towards reworking the troubled bear lie in the unruly visions of those who desire to participate in disidentificatory readings of the film.

This chapter approaches the 2014 film, *Paddington* with an accented practice of reading. Incorporating the situatedness of the authors, production process, and the context of the film's creation, the film breathes new life. Supplementing this practice with disidentificatory processes as illustrated by Muñoz, one can understand a film whose production, creators, and narrative practices obediently conform to larger hegemonic practices, and appropriate it for more unruly means. *Paddington* is by no means a film which deserves more attention, however, different interpretive frameworks rework this troubled popular symbol, allegory, and figure towards affiliation across various forms of flight and dispossession. At a time when crossing is a crisis, affiliatory frameworks are greatly needed to better understand flight as one of a series of flows that stem from various economic, political, social, and transnational oppressions and failures.

“How are we to judge historical documentaries if they call themselves dreams?”
Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented*.

CHAPTER 3:

Flee: Towards an “Accented” Documentary Style

Flee (2021)⁸⁴, directed by Jonas Poher Rasmussen, is the story of Amin Nawabi as he begins to articulate for the first time the story of his flight to Denmark from Afghanistan. The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and won the Grand Jury Prize in the World Cinema Documentary. Its categorization of World Cinema *and* Documentary allow for the film a greater range of interpretation in the festival cycles, but seemingly mainstream reviews struggle to understand the film through any other lens than one based on identity politics. Benjamin Lee for the Guardian deems it a “remarkable refugee story told with heart and audacity.” A.O. Scott for the New York Times describes the film as “a refugee’s tale of flight and eventual settling, it’s also a coming-out story, and as such a complex reflection on different forms of outsiderhood.” Jen Yamato for the Los Angeles Times calls it “a moving portrait of one refugee’s journey to confront the past.” These published reviews capture *Flee* as a refugee story, a coming out story, and a reflection of what identity classifications such as queer and refugee look like. The narrow

⁸⁴ I will be referring to the original version of the film with Danish audio and English subtitles. I believe that there is a whole another set of complications when watching the film in the dubbed version which removes the texture of Amin’s actual voice. Instead, translations are acted out by Riz Ahmed and Nikolaj Coster-Waldau. The complexity of talking about voice performances and the politics of dubbing and subtitles are outside of the scope of this paper but worthy of further study.

field of interpretation these reviews uphold echo Naficy's reflections at the outset of what might be called world cinema today.

Reviews of *Flee* are predisposed towards determining it as a narrative of identity, enclosing it within the definition of a "refugee" film. The film echoes this coverage through the usage of archival footage throughout the documentary. In *Flee*, the term "refugee" is not used by Amin, Rasmussen, or any of Amin's family in his articulation of his flight. Rather, "refugee" only appears in moments when his life coincides with larger narratives, such as the news media or when he finally reaches the European border. The desire to squarely place the film as a documentary inline with depictions of the refugee as miserable, melancholic, traumatized, and stateless. These films, as mentioned earlier, reinforce particular narratives of deservingness that require experiences of extreme violence to be considered a refugee. The desire of a valid refugee subject redefines a story of flight as a "refugee" story.

Although the film quite explicitly refutes documentary desire through the medium of animation, the anonymity of the narrator, and the self-reflexive presence of a director, the film is still being placed squarely in the context of post-modern obsessions over difference. It is clear in these moments that the frustrations once voiced by Naficy are still unresolved today. *Flee* as a "refugee" film that explores the melancholia of the refugee is interpreted as a narrative of success and perseverance. Amin's melancholia is a byproduct of hardship and a refusal to "confront the past." This reading of the film helps to further bolster neoliberal multicultural claims towards individuality and representations of recognizable identity classifications, but skims over the openings imbued by Amin's expressions of desire. In defining the film through the theme of fleeing or journeying, the problems of labeling and classification come back into fore. Just as Naficy denies these films locked in and rigid categories of identity films, the title of

Flee itself denies its categorization as a “refugee” film. Instead, the film aims to document the story of flight, a type of movement that is not always so legally sanctioned and accepted. To flee is to enter a state of precarity, and it is this moment of precarity in Amin’s childhood and adolescence which he returns to and continues to haunt him in the present day.

Documentary Style

To discuss documentary film, we must consider the conventions of the documentary style. In *They Must Be Represented*, Paula Rabinowitz offers a political study of the documentary film. Rabinowitz definition of the traditional documentary style is essential in my own understanding of the nature and political implications of documentary film. The traditional documentary “is meant to instruct through evidence; it poses truth as a moral imperative.”⁸⁵ Rabinowitz makes a few distinctions between types of documentaries including historical documentary, traditional documentary and deconstructionist documentaries. The historical documentary is the documentary “that seeks to intervene in history- mobilizes a subject of agency.”⁸⁶ The historical documentary calls on the spectator as it “not only tells us about the past, but asks us to do something about it as well.”⁸⁷ The spectator is hailed by the documentary through appeal to feeling. The traditional documentary and the deconstructionist documentary are distinguished by Rabinowitz as such:

In the traditional documentary, the response to the film is usually confined to whether the viewer agrees or disagrees with the content. On rare occasions the ‘protagonist’ of the film succeeds in convincing the viewer to follow its position... but the construction of the cinematic argument is left unexamined. In deconstructionist documentaries such as *Shoah* and *Far From Poland*, the object of the film is to produce a new and disturbing knowledge of history and of its rhetoric - of both its content and its form.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Rabinowitz, Paula. *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*. London ; New York: Verso, 1994: 18.

⁸⁶ Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented*: 24.

⁸⁷ Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented*: 26.

⁸⁸ Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented*: 32.

The documentary hinges on its relation to history, desire for truth, hailing spectators, and cinematic fulfillment. However, the documentary has changed and transformed since the time of Rabinowitz's writing. In the last 25 years, documentaries have become less about reaching historical truth and more towards that appeal to feeling. True crime documentaries and the advent of reality television are extremely popular in forms of documentary. The traditional documentary is still an immensely popular form, from critically acclaimed films like *Icarus* (2017) and *Blackfish* (2013), but are influenced by the rise in popularity of true crime and reality television. The "docu-series" has risen in popularity along with streaming services. Netflix is a large producer of the "docu-series" such as the infamous series *Making a Murderer* (2015) and *Tiger King* (2020).

In the age of streaming, the documentary still desires for truth, appeals to feeling, and satisfies narrative desires. At a time when watching a film can be an extremely intimate experience⁸⁹, these films do not ask the spectator to spur into action. These documentaries do not desire to intervene in history, but rather to depict a version of 'reality' that gives the spectator the distance to consume the documentary as entertainment. At a time when one is overwhelmed with media, there is little time to question, process, and even less time to dedicate towards uncomfortability. The documentary is not entirely uninterested in history, especially when looking at examples like Ava DuVernay's *13th* (2016).

It is hard to pinpoint the origins of the animated documentary. In some sense, it seems to stem from graphic novels, beginning with *Maus*. First serialized in 1980, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

⁸⁹ Streaming services have fundamentally changed the nature of the viewing experience. From the theatre, to the movie theater, to the home television, to your personal laptop, the viewing experience has grown more and more individual. This 'private' viewing experience allows one to grow extreme parasocial relationships and have unadulterated emotional reactions. In some sense, while streaming services are making "television", they also must understand that this "content" is being consumed privately.

is the story of his father who was a Polish Jew during the Holocaust. As the title connotes, it depicts Jews as mice, Germans as cats, and Poles as pigs. In 1992, *Maus* was the first graphic novel to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize. *Maus* was the first to make the graphic novel a widely recognized genre, and one deserving of acclaim, attention, and study. *Persepolis* was the first widely recognized and critically acclaimed graphic novel by a woman, and tells the story of Iran that Marjane Satrapi grows up in and must flee. A film was produced in the same style of the original graphic novel and adapted into the animated form in 2007. *Maus* and *Persepolis* follow a peculiar biographical style to the graphic novel. While *Maus* is both a biography of Spiegelman and his father, like *Persepolis* they are interested in the act of uncovering and developing a personal relation to the globally public history of their origins. They are “adult” not in terms of violence or sexuality, like many ‘comics’ are, but in terms of the political content and sensitivity with which they tackle themes of war, death, home, and belonging. Depictions of violence in both *Maus* and *Persepolis* are both quite visually metaphorical or expressionist. Because of their illustrative style, the emphasis is less on the graphic, or shocking nature of the violence, but rather the effects of that violence on the narrator’s psyche and personhood.

Contrary to *Flee*, is *Waltz With Bashir*, which is “adult” in both depictions of violence, but also in terms of political content most commonly compared with *Waltz with Bashir* a 2008 animated Israeli documentary, which follows Ari Folman’s journey as he begins to access his lost memories of the 1982 Lebanon War. The animation, unlike that of the highly stylized *Persepolis*, is graphically realistic, inspired more heavily by the masculine tradition of the superhero comic. The depictions of violence are bloody, but Folman’s narration includes states of dreaming, and sequences in his retelling which are more poetic than realistic. In some sense, the film attempts

to do realism in animation, while also taking advantage of the animated medium to depict the absurd realities of war.

Waltz with Bashir is extremely “masculine” in its depictions of war and violence, the setting, and feeling in narration. Conversations in the present day are set in smoky veterans bars, with drinks and men with raspy smoke-filled voices. The soldier experience is, as in real life, masculine and is felt through the banter about war stories. The coloring reflects this too, along with the harsh black outlines and square stubbled jaw of our narrator. The film depicts the genuine horrors of war and the toll it takes on soldiers. In some sense, the missions of *Waltz with Bashir*, *Maus*, *Persepolis* and *Flee* are similar, contending with their experiences of modern war and dispossession, the human and psychological toll which takes hold of people for generations, and using the graphic medium to represent the absurdity and impossibility of taking hold of these experiences through traditional narrative forms. They also reject the documentary desire of the camera, while taking hold of it as a language, depicting zooms, pans, and the feeling of a camera as a convention of film rather than a technical byproduct organic to lived human experiences of seeing. The medium of the animated documentary (or graphic biography) puts testimony at its core, but continually puts these testimonies side by side with the fictional, phantasmical, and the dreaming.

Flee comes into the frame at a strange time for the documentary. Animation is typically understood as the world of fantasy, dreams, and children’s entertainment. Documentary is seen as serious, historical, and truthful. But part of the originality of this animated documentary is its ability to self-reflexively examine its depicted or constructed desire for truth. *Flee* consists mostly of animated sequences, which document the filmmaker’s interviews with Amin, his friend from highschool and, throughout the film, his interlocutor.

The film occasionally implements archival footage, particularly towards the beginning of the film when Amin speaks about his earliest memories. *Flee* is not, however, a film which necessarily subverts or denies filmic or narrative desires. The film collaborates with Amin to tell his story, or really, a “refugee story.” The telling of Amin’s “refugee story” is affected by the scenes where he is living his life as an adult, struggling to settle with his long-term partner in Copenhagen. The “refugee story” which is set as the central narrative of the film is interrupted by, contingent to, and affected by Amin’s life in the present. The “story” exists in both past and present, a continuous condition, mirroring the experience of memory. Amin is melancholy, and his desire for home is afflicted with his forced dislocation. *Flee*, in other words, expresses accented moments through the inability to fulfill a desire for home.

Flee is a film that is challenging to categorize as accented, but rather than categorization, the aim of this project is offer a practice of reading that accounts for situatedness, the modes of production, and the film as a text itself. The filmmaker here is not Amin, but it is made in collaboration with and in affiliation with Amin. The representation of any kind of “truth” hinges on what Rasmussen chooses to represent, but it is also contingent on what Amin chooses to say. The filming of the film is interspersed, a series of interviews in which Amin returns to after long or short periods of time. The mode of collaborative and consensual filmmaking is integral in understanding the film, and an accented mode of reading provides a sensitivity to this choice.

Flee: Amin

The testimony which *Flee* is based on is Amin’s, whose present-day face is depicted with a buzz cut, thick eyebrows and a longer, masculine face. The shadow of his beard frames his face, and blocky eyebrows, as well as a singular, prominent wrinkle on his forehead. His eyes are rendered simply, but the slightly downturned brown eyes convey a great deal of sensitivity and

softness. As opposed to the illustrative style of *Persepolis*, *Flee* is realistic. Unlike the dark comic book style of *Waltz With Bashir*, *Flee* is softer and more illustrative, as illustrated by the bold, brash colors and stark neither which is dampened by the warmth of ambient lighting, or the sunshine. Unlike the oppressive, almost fluorescent sun in *Waltz With Bashir*, *Flee*'s setting is kinder to the characters, offering warm naturalistic lighting. The film becomes approachable, softer to the eyes. It paints a picture of Amin based not on hardship or gritty reality, but a picture of him Rasmussen has painted in the light of friendship. *Flee* is invested in beauty and softness. Being invested in such aesthetic qualities creates a film that is imbued with sensitivity.



Figure 10. Amin (Jonas Rasmussen, *Flee*. Neon: 2021). Figure 11. Folman as a Soldier (Ari Folman, *Waltz with Bashir*. Sony: 2008)

The film rests on its acknowledgement of itself as a film, one that doesn't depict Amin's testimony as a talking head to provide evidence or expertise, but as a story itself. The film also shows the processes of production, adjusting Amin's body to appear properly in the camera, opening with a clapboard, as well as the sighs and rustling sounds of movement. In the case of a documentary film that is not animated, these shots might be overlooked. However, in animation, each of these shots are painstakingly drawn and animated. In other words, the inclusion of what production looks like makes it clear to the audience that they are involved in viewing a production. The viewer is given distance as a kind of framing device, from which to view the film. While these details do not necessarily inhibit eventual catharsis in the viewer, they do work to make that emotional engagement a critical one.

Flee seems to believe in narrative convention, in sentimentality, in moments of catharsis, as important tools towards empathy and modes of affiliation. The sensitivity, softness, almost downright corniness, gives *Flee* a sentimental and sincere edge from which Amin's testimony is given. Rather than postmodern skepticism, *Flee* chooses sincerity. Rasmussen utilizes sincerity and sentimentality with various tools of cinematic postmodern distance, in an effort to uphold both narrative desire and the privacy and humanity of the individuals who flee.

Rasmussen shows the setup for Amin's testimony, the table he lies on which is covered by a simple rug with rich patterns. Rasmussen sits next to him, often wearing glasses, holding a sheet of paper, or checking the monitor. Sometimes they are in Amin's office, sometimes drinking a glass of wine, giving the testimony a feeling of conversation rather than an interrogation. These shots are brief, but they illustrate the process not just of filmmaking, but of gathering testimony. Amin's surroundings and life become important to his testimony, as it does not exist in a vacuum. The story unravels slowly, in relation to the events of his life, his conflicting desires as he begins to commit to building a home with his partner. These shots inform the viewer of the production required behind giving testimony, and the natural ways that the telling of the story is impacted by life as well as the ways life is impacted by the act of testimony. These scenes also outline the relationship that Rasmussen personally has with Amin.

Flee is a result of 4 years worth of interviews and 15 hours of conversation between Rasmussen and Amin.⁹⁰ In total, the film took 8 years of labor, from conception to release. The focus and sensitivity to sound is reminiscent of the original conception of the project as a radio story. The final product is one that feels intimate as a reflection of Rasmussen's relationship with Amin, and yet retains a respectful distance between audience and subject. The result is a viewing

⁹⁰ "Flee" Director Jonas Poher Rasmussen on How Animation Made It Easier to Revive the Past in His Film, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6R6N_vTjaY.

experience that invites emotional and sentimental reaction, while at the same time recognizing the distance between performer and audience. Reflections of distance and privacy in the age of transparency⁹¹, offer opportunities for real connection and reflection.

The usage of mixed audio-visual media continues themes of self-reflexivity, skepticism of documentary desire, and historical truth. On small 3:2 screens centered in a black frame are textured videos with analog grain that give snapshots and political context in which Amin's memories begin. The archival footage, or the politics of Afghanistan in the 80s and early 90s is not the subject of the film, rather it works to supplement giving body to Amin's story. Giving Afghanistan color and life, where politics intervenes in childhood. They also appear when his life intersects with larger news stories, often offering "realistic" texture in a film that seeks to document memories. These pieces of archival footage are at times violent, but rather than trying to depict a faraway reality for the audience to enjoy, these pieces of footage work to build up a context of political instability in Afghanistan. However, other horrors such as that of the 'disappearance' of his father or his sisters' traumatic journey, are animated abstractly. His sisters who made it to Denmark in a shipping container, are depicted in more abstract animation, obscuring the faces and the scenery. The color is extracted from these particularly horrible moments, leaving silhouettes of those who suffered. The white outlines in black, and the quick shifting camera emphasizes feelings of claustrophobia and despair. The soundscape is equally important in these moments, the coughing, the banging on the steel, babies crying, and the distressed sounds of those inside of the container. These scenes refuse to subject people to an experience of spectatorship, careful not to tell anyone else's story. However, they retain a sense of horror which allows the viewer to experience emotion while never fulfilling documentary

⁹¹ Han, Byung-Chul, and Erik Butler. *The Transparency Society*. Stanford, California: Stanford Briefs, an imprint of Stanford University Press, 2015.

desire. Simultaneously, they retain the humanity of those who are trapped within, respecting their privacy in their most precarious moment. *Flee* entertains the conventions of the documentary style while refuting voyeuristic, truth-seeking desires, privileging the subject of the documentary over the desires of the audience. The film is more interested in articulating a story while maintaining Amin's privacy, rather than allowing the film to fulfill narrative and aesthetic expectations of the fiction of the refugee. Equally, the film is deeply political, and it is Rasmussen who works to involve larger themes within Amin's testimony.

When Rasmussen introduces the film at various awards ceremonies, festivals, and Q&A's he will often say that the film is an animated documentary about his "good friend."⁹² However, his most direct and clear speech is the one he gave when accepting the Nordic Council Film Prize. In this speech, he connects Amin's story with that of his own grandparents, and outlines more clearly what he means when he says refugee. Rasmussen's usage of the term refugee is intentional and careful:

Being a refugee is not an identity, but something that can happen to all of us. My own grandmother was born as a refugee. Here in Copenhagen. As the daughter of a Jewish family on the run from persecution in Russia- she was born in a hotel next to the railway station... Both of my grandparents were affected by the traumas throughout their lives. But that was not their identity. When I did the first interview with Amin he said it was important for him - not to feel like a victim. What he has experienced will mark him forever- but he has come through it and created a good life for himself and his family. When Amin arrived in Denmark in the 90s, after 5 years of fleeing - he was told he was safe here. This gave him the opportunity to build a new life for himself. Get an education, connect with the country and the people who live here. That's why Amin's story and the story of FLEE is a very Nordic story. Because it is about trust as a fundamental Nordic value. Trust in the system, trust in each other, trust between friends and trust in an unaccompanied minor refugee. We trust each other and believe when we give something away it will come back. These are the values that have given Amin the opportunity to go from being a refugee to being a human being. Those values are under pressure these

⁹² Instagram. "FLEE - The Movie on Instagram: 'Thanks @gilliana for a Wonderful Conversation 🙏,'" January 29, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CZU92jyqINd/>.

years. When people talk about refugees, it becomes a discussion about who is for and against refugees. But no one is really for refugees. Least of all the refugees themselves. It's important we continue to turn towards each other. It's very much in the way we talk and the stories we tell. As a film director, as a journalist, as a politician. Based on our Nordic history and tradition, we must show the world how trust in our fellow human beings generates value.⁹³

Rasmussen's speech is flawed in his entertainment of neoliberal beliefs. Rasmussen engages in a particularly European flavor of colorblindness. His patriotism and desire to engage in a national Nordic identity that supports liberal ideas of equality and freedom blind him to the particular axis of multiple forms of oppressions and exclusion.⁹⁴ Although Rasmussen engages in arguments that erase the particular histories that differentiate Amin's flight from his grandmother's, there are key insights about how he conceptualizes the notion of the refugee, particularly as a negation of being human. For Rasmussen, refugee is not an identity, rather it is a state of flight which debases human beings and strips them of agency, personhood. Refugee is a type of dehumanizing trauma, and when people or masses of people are identified as refugees, they become solely through their trauma rather than their personhood. Moreover, the trauma is not something to get over, it is something that Amin "comes through" or lives with as he rebuilds in Denmark.

For Rasmussen, what is important in Amin's story is important because it clarifies the misdirected debates about being "for or against" refugees. Instead, Rasmussen recontextualizes refugee-status as a state of flight and trauma. The crisis then, is not a refugee crisis, it is a crisis of trust. Rasmussen critiques the response that Nordic countries have had to the influx of

⁹³ Instagram. "FLEE - The Movie on Instagram: 'A Little Late, but Here Is the Speech from When FLEE Received to Nordic Council Film Price Back in November. Thank You to the Jury and Everyone Involved in Making the Film!! 🙏❤️❤️❤️,'" January 30, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CZXaCM5qa-G/>.

⁹⁴ The same logic which allows Rasmussen to argue for Nordic values of trust, are remarkably similar to the values of equality which have allowed the Nordic countries to continually target Muslims. Denmark banned the wearing of the niqab and burka in 2018. While Norway and Sweden have not banned the wearing of any head covering, there continues to be political debates on the wearing of head coverings in the Nordic countries. In these debates, values such as liberty, equality, and secularism are used to target Muslims legally.

refugees as being not in line with the liberal national values he grew up believing in. Instead, he argues for a humanitarian approach to life that asks that systems and interpersonal networks engage in a project of creating greater networks of trust in those we do not necessarily know. In other words, Rasmussen engages in both a systemic and interpersonal crisis of care and trust which has allowed for those asking for help to fall in between the cracks. When Rasmussen makes the dubious claim that being a refugee is “something that can happen to all of us” he points out a relationship to precarity which every being is engaged in. In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler defines precariousness as a “shared condition of human life.”⁹⁵ Butler writes:

Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all. Reciprocally, it implies being impinged upon by the exposure and dependency of others, most of whom remain anonymous. These are not necessarily relations of love or even of care, but constitute obligations toward others, most of whom we cannot name and do not know, and who may or may not bear traits of familiarity to an established sense of who “we” are.⁹⁶

Rasmussen’s speech echoes Butler’s reflections on precariousness. However, for Rasmussen, precariousness demands trust. Rasmussen’s interpretation of precariousness is a liberal humanitarian one, that hinges on the reinforcement of a nation that once gave aid and trust to those who asked for help. Moreover, Rasmussen’s interpretation of his own film and Amin’s story is an appeal to Nordic and more generally, Western liberal ideals of the good life as the definition for dignified human life. Rather than a refugee crisis, Rasmussen’s larger story is a crisis of Nordic liberalism. Rather than being “for refugees”, Rasmussen is “for” building networks of trust and a taking in of precariousness.

A recognition of Rasmussen’s role in examining a “larger story” highlights the roles that “Amin” plays in Rasmussen’s aesthetic and political mission. In countless interviews,

⁹⁵ Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Radical Thinkers. London New York: Verso, 2016: 13.

⁹⁶ Butler, *Frames of War*: 14.

Rasmussen is asked about the authenticity of *Flee*.⁹⁷ Echoing the reviews of the film, these interviewers focus largely on the idea that the film depicts an authentic refugee experience. They approach interviews with Rasmussen as though the film is a traditional documentary, most likely viewed the film through such a lens. The missing part in these interviews and reviews is that Amin does not exist. For Rasmussen, there is a man behind the name Amin, whose life he is intimately involved in. For the rest of the world, Amin does not exist beyond the film. Amin becomes an interrogation of the desire for documentary truth through animation. This effect is an unruly vision, which comes as a byproduct of Rasmussen's duty to protect Amin's identity. In a somewhat similar strain to transbiology, rather than questioning human exceptionalism by exploring different modes of being (like that of animality), animation in *Flee* questions the exceptionalism of evidence. Amin's ghostly presence in the film, a voice with a malleable image, becomes concrete through a relationship of trust between the audience and the film. "Being" in this context, is about modes of "being real" which solidifies animation and the graphic novel of "being real" representations of truth, history, and evidence. Rasmussen acts more as an intermediary between the audience and Amin, whose voice guides the viewer through a story whose evidence only exists through faith. The name Amin itself means "honest" or "trustworthy."⁹⁸

In this light, *Flee* works as a documentary that requires complete trust from those who watch it. By placing emphasis on the slow process of telling, the film also refutes the ideas of deservingness that plague debates on migration and refugees in Europe and the United States.

⁹⁷ Jake Cunningham, "Jonas Poher Rasmussen on *Flee*," February 16, 2022, <https://www.curzon.com/journal/jonas-poher-rasmussen-on-flee/>. Marshall Shaffer, Hugh Hart, "'Flee' Director Jonas Rasmussen on His Historic Triple Oscar-Nominated Doc," *Motion Picture Association*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.motionpictures.org/2022/03/flee-director-jonas-rasmussen-on-his-historic-triple-oscar-nominated-doc/>. "Jonas Poher Rasmussen on Animating Authenticity in *Flee*," *Slant Magazine*, December 3, 2021, <https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/jonas-poher-rasmussen-interview-flee/>.

⁹⁸ Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardcastle, and Flavia Hodges, "Amin," in *Dictionary of First Names*, Oxford Paperback Reference (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

Giving adequate evidence of threat is an important and draining process of applying for asylum. In fact, when Amin arrives at the border he is told to lie by his smuggler. It is through illegal means that he obtains legal stay in the country. To identify Amin as a refugee is legally false, but somehow when converted to narrative form, unequivocally true. *Flee* is a piece of anti-evidentiary evidence. Echoing *Dictée* as an anti-documentary document, *Flee* simultaneously refutes the need for evidence to be granted refuge and is a piece of that evidence itself. Rather than responding to a history of literature that has been seeking to historicize the fragmented, *Flee* responds to a inter-textual fiction of the narrative in international law, immigration law, political discourse, and representations in various forms of media. *Flee* is in conversation with narrative feature films, news reports, and documentaries. *Flee* refutes the necessity of evidence of violence and instead, builds a relationship of trust through the intimate experience of listening to one's story and being involved in one's life. In other words, *Flee* attempts to recognize precariousness through building a relationship of trust between the viewer and Amin. Amin's ghostly existence allows for a transference of this trust beyond the film towards others. In viewing an anonymous piece of evidence, viewing anonymous bodies labeled "refugee" must become more unstable. Amin's story becomes one of many stories, which all require the care, time, and respect that it took Amin to tell his story. *Flee* does not just ask the viewer to believe Amin, it also asks one to respect, care for, and listen to Amin.

When Amin arrives at the border in Copenhagen, he is interrogated for hours. As he begins to tell the story he was told to tell by the smuggler, the animation begins to come undone. From his silhouette, the screen turns gritty grey and white, revealing outlines of dozens of people running. We can hear a younger Amin telling the officers in Danish, how his sisters and mother were killed. A silhouette of a gun appears in the left hand corner, but the camera is quick to move

away and track the others. The buildings in back begin to collapse in the background. The older Amin tells us he began to cry, and he is surprised to be crying over a story that is not true. He tells us that he was uncontrollably sobbing. The younger Amin tells the officers his father was killed after they hid in the desert. He says he has no one, and that he is all alone. The older Amin admits this is the one story he has told everyone, until now. When the past and present testimony end, we return to the room where he gets up from lying on the rug. Amin tells Rasmussen about what fleeing did to his relationships with others.

The fear of getting caught and sent back was so strong that I couldn't tell the truth. There were lots of consequences: I couldn't be myself. It was really painful. Most people can't even begin to imagine how fleeing like that affects you. What it means for your relationships with other people, how much it destroys you. There were things I couldn't say about my family... There were always constraints. Things that had to be adjusted, retained, and suppressed.⁹⁹

Amin's fictional testimony is not the truth, but it is true. He gives the officers what they need to continue reinforcing the legal fiction that separates refugees from migrants. He upholds the law, and in doing so not only locks himself away, but tells a story he does not know. Amin performs as a refugee to be granted amnesty, and in doing so, continues to perform it until Rasmussen begins to interview him.

The following set of scenes is about Amin's relationship with his family and his queerness. When he realizes as an adolescent that liking men is not something that can be cured with a pill, and realizes it is something that he needs to live with. Amin laughs at himself for thinking of this desire in that way. A montage appears depicting his queerness. Amin's queerness is juxtaposed and linked to all the moments that, in retrospect, expressed queer desire. From running through the streets of Kabul in a dress, to the various men he found beautiful throughout his life, and to the kite he flies with his brother in the sky. Queerness in this montage, through

⁹⁹ *Flee*. 1:13:01 - 1:14:05

Rasmussen's interpretation and Amin's narration of his experience, is not necessarily about sexual orientation but an orientation towards the world.¹⁰⁰ The moment in which he accepts that queerness has always informed his life, is a moment from which the world opens up for him. Over it, Amin tells us that he fears how his family will react.

Rasmussen, by juxtaposing Amin's fear of getting caught and sent back with his fear of not being accepted by his family, forms a strange relationship between being a refugee and being queer. He accidentally tells his uncle and sisters in Stockholm that he does not like women, and his uncle asks Amin to follow him. This scene provokes anxiety in the queer viewer as the paternal figure is often a site of violence for queer bodies. Instead, his uncle drives him to a door with a neon rose over it. Amin and his uncle stand in silence for a moment in front of the mysterious door. He is given some money, and told to have fun. His uncle gives him a hug and tells him they always knew. "Veridis Quo" by Daft Punk begins to play. As the camera pans over the various expressions of queerness in the bar, Amin says, "There I was, my first time at a gay club, all by myself. And I didn't go home -" he is cut off by his own laughter which explodes as he speaks.

In the film, Amin's queerness is somewhat like his experience of flight. They do not necessarily define him, but something he has learned to live with. They are experiences that inform his life and the choices he makes. Being a refugee is not his identity, and neither really, is being gay. Fleeing changed Amin, and his queerness helped him learn how to build a home. As Amin himself says, it is not a 'coming out' story but a story of what he has "come through." Rather than being an identity film, such as the queer film, or the refugee film, or even the queer refugee film, *Flee* instead questions the conceptualizations of those identities themselves. Amin's orientation in the world relies on both his experience of flight and his queerness.

¹⁰⁰ See: Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Veridis Quo, Quo Vadis?

Amin's queerness and his story of flight have an inverse relationship in the film. Amin rarely laughs in his interviews. Most of the time his tone is melancholy, or distant. He is a great storyteller, knowing when to add various character details or tell it straight. Yet, when he laughs, he usually laughs about the moments in his adolescence he felt attraction or desire. The first story Amin tells us is running through the streets of his Kabul, wearing a dress. A-ha's "Take On Me" plays loudly in Amin's headphones and over archival footage of Kabul in the mid-80s. Amin laughs as he recalls himself as "always having a tendency to be different."¹⁰¹ Although the film is about Amin's traumatic story of losing his home and being on the run for five years, it is also about a boy in his adolescence getting to know himself. Amin simultaneously experiences deep instability and danger in his life, and yet at the same time, experiences moments of desire for beautiful men. In being a narrative that tells the story of a refugee whose story would not have counted him as such, *Flee* refutes an archive of evidence which has long claimed refugees as more deserving, more precarious, and more vulnerable than other forms of displacement. At the same time, in doing so, Amin is given the freedom to testify to the moments of boyish desire and moments of joy which punctuate the story of his journey. Those expressions of desire, joy, and laughter also refute the common narratives of refugees in fiction which determine their lives as being defined by misery. *Flee* engages a full and rich expression of crossing and queerness as a transformative experience. That transformation is manifested in Amin's deep awareness of his precarity, his fear, his hesitancy to trust others, and skepticism of Danish society. That transformation also encompasses finding safety in a partner, learning to build home, re-learning how to express desire, and telling a beautiful story. The unruly vision that Amin's story tells at times disobeys Rasmussen, who believes in a Nordic sensibility. Amin settles in Denmark, but

¹⁰¹ *Flee*. 00:04:42.

Amin's tale is not about some Nordic value of trust. Amin's story is about how he learns to live an unruly life.

The film almost ends when Amin returns to Denmark from Princeton after finishing his postdoc. Amin finds that in pursuing a better career out of guilt, he was miserable. He describes as he walks through the familiar airport speaking about how difficult it is to believe in safety after fleeing at such a young age. He stands, after exiting customs, looking at Kasper. He does not run, only stares at Kasper for a couple of minutes as he waits. They embrace and the screen goes to black. In small white, sans-serif font the film tells us it is 4 months later. Amin and Kasper unload a large cactus and a pet crate from a small red car in front of a beautiful, albeit very Scandinavian house. They speak to each other, joking as we watch a cat playing by the window. In the next shot, we watch Amin and Kasper as they stand in the garden, in between bright pieces of shrubbery. They kiss and hold each other, looking out at the scenery. Kasper begins to talk about a raspberry bush, and as they walk down towards it, out of frame, the shot goes from being animated to being real. We can see darkness in the shrubbery where they walk in the bottom left corner. The film ends.

The film refuses to end with Amin's worldview heavy with the melancholic effects of dispossession, arrival, and attempts to settle in Denmark. The film ends with Amin finding himself choosing to build a home with Kasper. Amin's unruly vision is a domestic one, and while that might seem to be quite conforming, queer homebuilding has always meant something different. When domestic labor is not enforced through heteropatriarchal norms, domestic labor becomes a key component of homebuilding. Homebuilding is a skill which is invaluable. It is to create a physical place of safety when the world is hostile, it is to furnish a physical space with aesthetics of one's own, it is to build whole economies, it is a labor which make something out of

nothing, it is a safe and private place to express one's desires and vulnerabilities. Domestic labor for queer folks can be seen as a necessary labor taken up alongside a desire to love and care, and a grasp on the meaning of precariousness. When Amin and Kasper look out at the garden, they look out full of dreams and aspirations for what grows and what is to grow.

Amin's unruly vision is a humble one. It is not one which seeks to remake the world, or to save the world. His choice can be interpreted as selfish, as conforming to normative standards of family. At the same time, it is hard not to feel a great sense of pride in Amin. It is hard not to feel the meaning of his transformation. Amin's story is an aspirational one. It is a story and a vision of life and refuge, of dispossession and healing that entrusts the world with Amin's story. Instead of asking the audience to believe in being "for refugees" because of what they have been through, or what they have lost, *Flee* asks the audience to understand being a refugee as a transitory state, one which deeply ruptures people. *Flee* asks us to imagine what kind of home Amin and Kasper might build. *Flee* asks us to imagine what home we could build given the chance.

Conclusion:

This chapter explored the various themes that arise when reading the film *Flee* using an accented practice. While reviews of the film typically categorize the film as being a "refugee story" or a "coming-out" movie, reading the film more closely, alongside the director's own leanings, provide a reading of the film which expands the possibilities for interpretation beyond being a film constrained to that of contemporary notions of difference and identity. Instead, *Flee* acts not as another definitive account of suffering, but a rich life which outlines the transformative experiences of fleeing. Rasmussen's mission to portray Amin's full humanity comes with his respect for his privacy. In doing so, Rasmussen has created a piece of

anti-evidentiary evidence. Amin's absence results in a ghostly presence which simulates connection and intimacy without ever invading Amin's right to privacy and control over his story. Amin's story is rich and detailed, and his living with flight coincides with moments in which he expresses boyish desire. An audience's narrative desire is fulfilled with a conclusion which shows the beginnings of Amin's home with Kasper. Yet the yielding to emotional desire is also a moment in which Amin's unruly vision is passed to the audience as well. In imagining what Amin's home might be like with them, we might imagine what home we desire, as well as the importance of that sacred space.

IN CONCLUSION:

This paper looked closely at three cultural texts to expand Naficy's theory of accented cinema towards a practice of accented reading. The first chapter examined the text *Dictee*, a hybrid genre novel. The accented reading produced an attention towards the disidentificatory possibilities of text. The second chapter is an accented reading of *Paddington*, a popular family movie which revives the children's book character Paddington. An accented reading of *Paddington* examines the possibilities of the text alongside a reading of the situatedness of the filmmakers. The film is unruly, rife with possibilities that Paul King most likely did not believe the film to have. The final chapter examined the animated documentary, *Flee* which has been labeled and categorized as a "refugee" movie. Paying attention to Rasmussen's positionality, as well as the construction of Amin, is important to the film. In offering accented readings of these texts, I hope to have offered an expansion of the theoretical possibilities of the accented.

The future of "accented" practice is likely to become more complicated. The expansion of cultural forms, including guerrilla forms, have been growing and proliferating for the last 25 years. In the last 5 years however, these virtual platforms and spaces have changed. Spaces like Twitter, have now become "X", bought out by Elon Musk. YouTube continually engages in increasingly intrusive data collection and ceaseless ads. The film industry has been fundamentally changed by streaming, and the livelihood of writers has been continually

devalued, resulting in the Writers Strike last year. In traditional media forms, authors and journalists continually grow more and more out of touch with the younger generations, separated by years of rapidly quickening cycles of popular culture.

The ways in which films are read and become popular are already changing. Social platforms like Letterboxd have replaced review aggregate websites for film buffs. Here, categorization is completely subjective. Like playlists on Spotify, various users make lists based on specific “vibes.” There is humor to classification, especially in the ways in which those lists change the meaning of the films themselves. Like playlists on Spotify, Letterboxd listmakers are very aware of the ways in which classification change what one notices about the film, and this is often the source of humor. In some sense, this too is an accented approach, paying attention to the way that classification changes which parts of the film become enunciated. Lists such as “Movies Where the Director Cast Themselves as Evil Incarnate” and “Cocaine Budget” have a kind of ‘fun fact’ energy to them. Seeing just how many films fit these categories is fascinating, and it brings a simple entertainment. Simultaneously, these lists bring an awareness to the director’s situatedness towards themselves in the film or the production’s situatedness at a time when having a drug budget was socially acceptable. By creating a list, the films can be read in a slightly different light, without changing the content or meaning of the film.

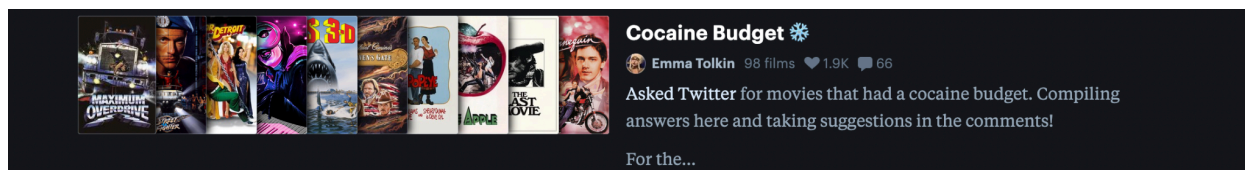


Figure 12. Cocaine Budget (letterboxd.com)

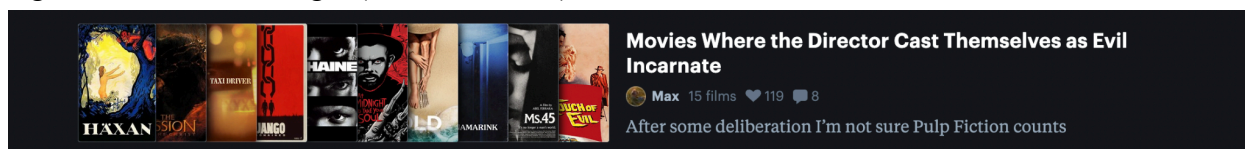


Figure 13. Movies Where the Director... (letterboxd.com)

Other lists echo more closely the Spotify playlist format in which the language specifically references common internet lingo. The “POV” format is a joke which has a rather long internet history, but it generally signs that the reader takes on a role in a particular situation. These hypothetical situations are usually based on real life, and the humor is often in the accuracy of mimicking a particularly uncomfortable, unusual, mundane, or annoying interaction. At times the humor is in pointing out the absurdity of a particular social situation we take for granted, or by exaggerating a particular aspect of the situation that otherwise we would perceive as completely mundane. “POV: you ask a mentally unstable person what their favorite movie is” engages in the discourse of the internet that generally takes mental illness lightly, but also is a self-deprecating joke. In a more general interpretation, one might think that this list informs future situations or recontextualizes past situations in which someone picked out a film from this list as being their favorite. However, the list really is an inside joke, one that requires having seen and enjoyed these films. The mentally unstable person is the person who understands not only the internet reference, but the content of the films.

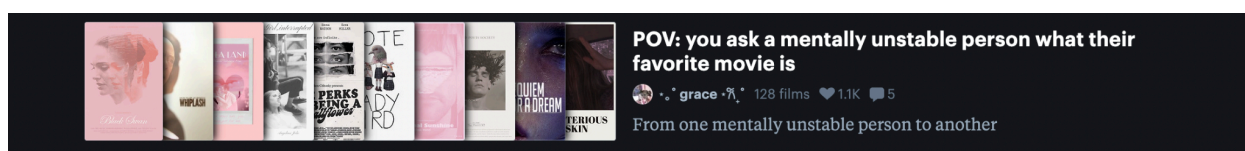


Figure 14. POV: you ask a mentally unstable person... (letterboxd.com)

Lists like, “for when you want to feel something” are more sentimental but gather and classify films by pure feeling. It recognizes its own subjectivity, but is more sincere than “POV: you ask a mentally unstable person what their favorite movie is” as it harbors no jokes or self deprecation. Rather it is a response to desiring sentimentality and sincerity. The list’s popularity, boasting 137 thousand likes, reflects a common desire towards that feeling.



Figure 15. for when you want to feel something (letterboxd.com)

Lists like “horror movies that have actually shaken me to my core” are jokes in the sense that the title does not really reflect the content having watched it. This list is made up of *La La Land*, *Juno*, *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island*, *500 Days of Summer*, and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. None of these films are literally horror films, but instead the user emphasizes other aspects of these films that make them subjectively horrifying to them. For example, *La La Land* is a romance film, with exciting, sentimental music. However, the “horror” is the ending of the film which subversively ends with the two leads not satisfying the conventions of the genre through a happy ending. The horror is the end of a relationship which was full of love. The film ends with a montage of the couple, long after their separation, watching a film of themselves in which they do live out that happy ending. It is beautiful, sentimental, and it is not real.

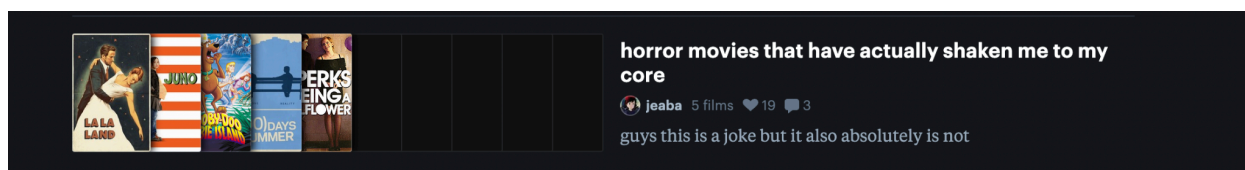


Figure 16. horror movies... (letterboxd.com)

This is, of course, not to say that people on letterboxd have broken open classification already. Users of letterboxd, most likely, believe in hegemonic understandings of “good taste” more than anyone. Rather, the creation of these lists on a platform created by and for people who particularly appreciate film, show an appreciation for the subjective aspects of categorization, classification, and labeling. It is done out of a boredom with awards categories, and publicizes subjective appreciations of film through humor.

The Future of “Accented” Practice

Everyone has an accent. In a time where displacement, external and internal, are at all time highs, it is vital to understand stories beyond individuality and definitions of identity. When I speak Korean, not only do I carry an American accent with my words, but I also speak like my grandmother. My grandmother, who I speak the most Korean with, has informed me of the ways in which I speak. When I speak to other Korean women my age, within an hour they can not only recognize that I speak Korean with an American accent but use words, expressions, and sounds that they locate in their grandmother. My Korean is painful, attempts at utterances that never quite express what I know. I inhabit an improvisational language, using the Korean of my grandmother to express a queer, Korean American body. An accent arrives from improvisation, from play, from particular histories of language, from the food we eat, the media we consume, and who we speak to.

This paper has by no means touched on the true potential of the accent as a practice of reading. While I hope to continue exploring accents in my future study, I also believe it is worth mentioning the future of accented theory in English. First is the usage of stereotyped accents in both film and contemporary user-generated media like YouTube videos. Growing up with videos by YouTubers like Lilly Singh, whose skits performed exaggerated stereotypes of her Indian parents, it might be worth looking into the realm of comedy through stereotyped accents. This is also true in British media when Scottish characters speak pure grunty gibberish, or subservient Asian characters in American and European media whose R's take the shape of L's. Second, is that of literature in which accents or dialects are purposefully used to create a particular orality of the text. My favorite examples are *Trainspotting* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Third, is the influence transnational media is currently having on children. I feel children are often not taken seriously in both literary theory and transnational studies, and it is worth considering their

experience. Parents online, and in my own life, have expressed concern as their American or British children speak with an Australian accent due to the popularity of shows like *Bluey*. This was also an issue with *Peppa Pig* as American children adopted British accents. The infectiousness of accented speech, and the displacement of orality itself in relation to the global atmosphere of digital media may also be worth looking further into. Fourth, is the quickly spinning doors of internet slang. Internet slang is not only pervasive, infecting particular age groups in extremely definitive ways, but the rate of change is extremely quick. Slang or references in usage only a couple of years ago can be seen as outdated, as old, and even as something to parody. Locating the origins of slang which circulates online is almost impossible, although informal reference sites like urbandictionary.com and KnowYourMeme.com have dutifully been attempting to account for them. The slang and realm of reference is also often from a variety of contexts, but most frequently from African American Vernacular English. The newfound accents developing online are of serious concern and worthy of further study.

This paper has only scraped the surface of what is possible realms of analysis using a theoretical focus on the accented, and will only grow more important in the age of extreme displacement, growing global media, and increased consumption of audio-visual media around the world.

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