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Migrating Minds and Bodies: The Transnational Subject and the Cinematic Synecdoches of
“Glocalisation”

In one of his fragments Wittgenstein says that a good piece of architecture, like an expression of thought, “makes one wants to respond with a gesture” (22). The text that follows is such a gesture, prompted by an architectural event, a recent prize-winning project for a skyscraper in Sofia. The author, Nikolai Simeonov, had named it “Four Seasons.” An amazing spatial metaphor, the skyscraper implied the city’s chameleonic four season’s image. The building was designed to change its surface and colour each season, from the naked whiteness of winter to the serene green of spring, to the shimmering palette of summer, to the radiating red-gold of autumn. This metamorphosis of the surface suggested a refusal to stay within the disciplined spatial stability of architectural forms. Apart from the musical associations (Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*), the changing appearance sought to contrast the solid calmness beneath and referred to some immanent aspects of Bulgarian national character—both plastic and stubborn. The project had captured the spirit of the place and the historical moment of transition: a floating identity and the dynamic of a new plurality. In this sense, Simeonov’s project encapsulated an idea I had also thought about recently: to examine the migrating minds and bodies in contemporary Bulgarian cinema and the dynamics between the permanent and the transitional as they are represented in recent films, especially in the cinematic synecdoches of mobility, identity, and virtual connections that proliferate in the cinematic imagery.

The increasing body of films concerned with identity, subjectivity, and concepts of selfhood makes it possible to find recurring tropes in recent Bulgarian films. In the context of an open and globalising world, *transition* becomes a key word. Like the people of Bulgaria, its cinema is busy re-defining a new existential philosophy and alternative modes of

artistic expression. The notions of journey, migration, travel, exile, escape, displacement, departure, and arrival become central in multiple cinematic texts—as much as they do in everyday life. The journey (physical and imaginary) often appears as a master metaphor in individual films, re-interpreting some of the traditional themes in Bulgarian culture and cinema: the “migration cycle” films of the 1970s, the period films reflecting on national history of the 1980s, and the films of “the lost generation” of the early 1990s.

In a number of recent Bulgarian films these thematic lines are put together, extended and/or transfigured in the context of an expanding and globalising world. Two of them—Krassimir Kroumov’s *Under the Same Sky* (*Pod edno nebe*, 2003) and Iglïka Triffonova’s *Letter to America* (*Pismo do Amerika*, 2001)—will be discussed as examples of postmodern articulations of subjectivity in the context of “glocalisation.” An oxymoronic neologism, “glocalisation” refers to the odd combination of the local and the global. As many theorists of globalisation have noted, the dichotomy global/local is not a matter of simple opposition; rather, there is a permanent duality there, a process of increasingly complex modes of interfacing, enveloping, challenging, and mutually revising movements—a dynamics that transforms both parts of the equation. For Jonathan Beller, the “conjunction global/local emerges precisely at the moment when each term is being radically destabilised by the other” (196). Arjun Appadurai envisions a theory that will account for the local/global nexus in terms of disjuncture/conjuncture as two faces of the same process (199).

While capturing these fundamental aspects of the recent conjunction global/local, the synecdoches of “glocalisation” in Bulgarian cinema have a broader referential field and longer history. Their genealogy can be traced several decades back to the stories concerned with internal migration, the formation of national myths of identity, and the exploration of the young generations’ existential angst and the spirit of chaotic resistance anticipating the “velvet revolutions” across Eastern Europe. Concerned mostly with displacement, loss,

rootlessness, and broken subjectivity, these moments of cinematic history prefigured the narrative and stylistic tropes of transnational imagery in films like *Under the Same Sky* and *Letter to America*.

1. Displaced Bodies: The “Migration Cycle”

In one of his essays on national psychology, the poet Konstantin Petkanov characterised the attitude of traditional Bulgarians to the earth as a defining axis of existence. A Bulgarian can spend his/her whole life savings to buy a piece of property; he/she may fight with brothers and neighbors for it, leave family behind in order to cultivate it. Earth becomes a mother substitute and a life companion; Bulgarians tend to develop almost love relations with the earth, sing songs about it, and die for it. Death is seen as a primary re-union; it is “earth claiming the man back to its bosom” (539).

Much of this eroticised mytho-poetic imagery has survived and is reflected in the cycle of films known as “the cinema of migration” of the 1970s. These films refer to a central dichotomy in the cultural history of Bulgaria—rural and urban—and register a colossal social movement: the exodus from village to big city as a result of the process of a fast and at times brutal modernisation and industrialisation. The theme of exile, which emphasises a moral, existential, and cultural tension of displacement, is a central preoccupation in these films. The aggressive invasion of modernity has shattered the primordial stable order of country life and determines a series of binary oppositions within the narrative space. Not surprisingly, the “migration cycle” is dominated by a concept of the split subject, nocturnal mood, nostalgic and utopian feelings, and tragic endings. Separation from the native place and earth is experienced as life’s tragedy. The imagery of rootlessness in *A Tree Without Roots* (*Darvo bez koren*; dir. Christo Christov, 1974) and the disorientation of a life in-between two cultural realms in *A Peasant on a Bicycle* (*Selyaninat s koleloto*; dir.

Lyudmil Kirkov, 1974) resulted in multiple metaphors of a fragmented self, for example in *The Last Summer* (*Posledno lyato*; dir. Christo Christov, 1974). In a struggle to accommodate the modern in a condition of exile, the subject has tragically fallen apart.

In terms of artistic expression, the “migration cycle” is often considered as an aesthetic programme of protest against the unifying, optimistic ideology of socialist realism. The disturbing iconography of these films refers to an existential imbalance, the conflict between tradition and modernity, and the contrasting moral realms associated with each. The village (its life, mentality, and values) implicitly suggests moral superiority in contrast to the negative connotations associated with city culture. Private individual dramas, everyday situations, and the unattractive side of life embody the tragic experience of generations in transition. The tragedies unfold in kitchens, backyards, side roads, or narrow city apartments. The slow rhythm of village life is opposed to the disorienting dynamics of the big city; the arrangement of *mise-en-scène* points to the major terrain of the drama: the self. Locked, suffocated, lacking freedom or choice, the subject is torn apart. There were few happy endings in these stories.

The “migration cycle” prefigured key themes and imagery in recent films of “glocalisation.” While the social and psychological tension it described were typical for any discourse of modernisation, the artistic debate on identity, which it initiated, would occupy a central place in films on exile, migration, and displacement in the first decade of the 21st century. The “migration cycle” mapped a dramatic inner division, signalling the end of the concept of a sovereign, harmonious, natural, and self-determined individual, on the one hand, and the transition to its modern transfigurations, on the other. The quivering, split, postmodern subjectivity of the films of 2000 has its distant genealogy in the “migration cycle’s” key notions: roots and routes, the crisis of identity, the “wandering selves,” and a broken subjectivity.

2. Split Self: The Internalized Other

In contrast to the “migration cycle’s” backyard dramas, the series of period films of the 1980s were big-scale productions, which shifted the focus to general issues of cultural identity. These films were concerned with tragic moments of national history and the formation of the nation. While their explicit ideological purpose was to inspire patriotic sentiments they were not able to suppress the fact that the very notion of an authentic cultural identity was an issue bristling with controversy and paradoxes, similar to those in other Balkan countries sharing analogical historical experience.

Among the blockbusters produced in the 1980s was the box-office hit *Time of Violence* (*Vreme na nasilie*; dir. Lyudmil Staikov, 1987), the most popular film in Bulgarian cinematic history.¹ The film represented episodes of the violent conversion of Bulgarian Christians to Muslims during the lengthy Ottoman period (1389-1878). The story takes place in a 17th century Bulgarian village. The narrative reveals the vulnerability of people who have been forced to renounce their religious and cultural identity. The plot’s palimpsestic structure is a result of an amalgamation of multiple narrative approaches and storytelling techniques combining legendary texts, historical chronicles, and literary and folklore interpretations. The overarching epic form, the emphasis on group characterization, ethnographic details, and the ritualistic style of performance are central to the representation of destruction, reconstruction, and a subsequent re-invention of cultural identity. A powerful discourse about the dramatic split of the nation’s body and the internalized other, the film traces the process of the construction of national identity and defines it as hybrid, plural, inconsistent, and open.

Fig. 1: *Time of Violence*: Yosif Sarchadjiev (Karaibrahim)

The character of Karaibrahim, the film's Ottoman protagonist, is instrumental in foregrounding the key themes in the film—displacement, cultural hybridity, and the concept of a tragically incongruous and fragmented self. The cruelest persecutor among the Ottomans, Karaibrahim is, significantly, of Bulgarian origin.² As an epitome of evil, Karaibrahim's character functions both to designate the evil within the nation's body and to illustrate the extremes of the drama of the internalized other. Its moral, structural, and cultural opposition in the text is the idealized image of shepherd, Manol. While Karaibrahim represents the absolute villain, Manol is set up at the opposite end, each character forming a perfect good/bad dichotomy. Despite their radical antagonism, the narrative insists on their common genealogy by representing them as stepbrothers.³

The identity crisis represented by the pairing of Karaibrahim and Manol is central to *Time of Violence*. While the narrative is explicitly concerned with inter-ethnic conflict (Bulgarians versus Turks), it is focused implicitly on the “return of the repressed” and the crisis of identity, which forces the Bulgarian community to face its own incongruity, alienation, and disintegration. By redirecting the attention from inter-ethnic to intra-ethnic tension, the narrative oscillates between the notions of internalized other and a plural self. It is on Karaibrahim's fragmented, split, and irreconcilable self, that the nation's identity drama is projected.

Fig. 2: *Time of Violence*: Rusi Chanev (the priest Aligorko)

The discourse of the self that *Time of Violence* constructed can be situated at the boundary between the Enlightenment project of a free, autonomous, natural, strong, unified, and rational self (Manol), and Foucault's notion of the anti-subject, a product and invention of power and its discourse, an effect of power's policing technologies of designing the self (Karaibrahim). The two concepts are equally informed by the ongoing debate on cultural identity in the country. *Time of Violence*'s philosophy problematises further the issue of

cultural authenticity by representing an alternative concept of the self, one that relies on cultural determinants and is more attuned to conflicting tendencies in any situation of transition. Those who survive the terror in *Time of Violence* are represented neither by Manol nor Karaibrahim, but by a cultural hybrid, the village priest Aligorko, who becomes the film's dark allegory of life animated by death. He converts to Islam to save his life and at the end of the film appears wearing a Turkish *fez*, but still hiding the crucifix under his cassock while leading his people to a new settlement away from the place of violence. His quivering identity traces the crisis of the self, common for almost every Balkan country with a similar historical experience, and defines the subject as hybrid, open, plural, incomplete, unstable, and performative, rather than spontaneous, natural, and unified.

The film's enormous popularity may be interpreted as a sign of the audiences' super-sensitivity to the issue of cultural authenticity. While questioning the concept of a unique and pure nation (ethnicity), the film implicitly promotes a sense of belonging to the larger Balkan community, which shares similar historical sentiments and concerns. Not surprisingly, the synecdoches of absence and loss—lost home, unknown roots, vanishing starting points, and forefathers who have either disappeared or are unknown or “foreign”—proliferate as much in *Time of Violence* as in Theo Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze* (Greece, France, and Italy; 1995), another film that “reconstructs the history of the Balkans as an ultimate identity quest” (Iordanova 91). The key motifs of an internalised other—cultural “impurity,” loss, absence, displacement, and rootlessness—in *Time of Violence* trace a thematic trajectory of subsequent cross-cultural discourses: the dramatic clash of different cultural paradigms, the process of cultural hybridisation, the quivering identity of the postmodern subject, issues that are central in any recent plot of exodus or conquest.

3. Wandering Self: “The Lost Generation”

The late 1980s and the early 1990s was a time of transformation in Eastern Europe and this transformation extended to the film industry and artistic approaches in Bulgarian cinema as well. A series of film debuts within a few years announced the arrival of a new generation of filmmakers. Ivan Tscherkelov, Lyudmil Todorov, Ilian Simeonov, Hristian Nochev, Dimitar Petkov, Ivan Pavlov, Docho Bodzhakov, and Krassimir Kroumov—all started their filmmaking careers with disturbing existential stories about frustrated, disillusioned, and pessimistic young people and their disordered and joyless lives.⁴ Without being strictly autobiographical, these films outlined a collective biography of what was labeled the “lost generation,” the generation of young people who spent the most active and productive part of their lives under restrictive social conditions without being able to realize their potential on either a social or a personal level.

The deficiency of freedom is a key idea in these film debuts. Authoritarian terror, often embodied by a hostile father-figure in the narratives, is most often articulated in the oedipal trope of father/son rivalry, with the son figure represented as either a helpless victim or silent witness to the father’s crimes. Even when a narrative represents the father-figure as an absent entity, it is, nonetheless, a dominant and powerful source of repression, a vague, non-material, and omniscient threat, its obscurity making it even more horrifying. According to Paul Coates, this aspect of Eastern European cinema is a unique contribution to the iconography of the invisible and omnipresent power, prefiguring most similar representations in Western films (113).⁵

Style in these films is instrumental in the rhetoric of crisis; it emphasizes the state of mind, psychology of frustration, and a passive resistance. The contemplative rhythm and slow-pace editing often imply a suspended or forbidden action on a social level. Slow camera movements, multiple close-ups on indifferent faces, long shots registering an increasing inner tension, and low key lighting schemes work in synergy to create a bleak,

claustrophobic world with no exit. Most film endings represented gestures of self-destruction—ultimate acts of despair and non-acceptance. This (post)-socialist *noir* style, designed to imply inner stagnation, unconscious fear, and incurable existential angst, might be regarded as a gesture of counterculture, an aesthetic formula of revolt against tyranny and a rejection of the existing social order and the normative aesthetics of socialist realism.

The motifs of motion, exodus, and journey are a central shaping force in the narratives. If the “migration cycle” films of the 1970s and the period films of the 1980s define the displacement in tragic terms, “the lost generation” transfigures the same motif in terms of salvation. The dream of travel, escape, leaving, and emigration is often the only dream that drives the characters. However utopian this dream might be, it inscribes the longing for transformation and fulfillment. While the plots do not represent this dream explicitly, the physical movement in space, motion, and travel are recurring motifs. But this is a motion lacking any specific direction, purpose, and meaning—the blind, repetitive, circular, and nervous walk of a caged animal. What the rebel-son dreams of is a Nietzschean absolute freedom; what he has to live with is patriarchal slavery. His overwhelming frustration does not allow even the virtual reality of the dream to make its way into these films’ imagery. The *noir* hero lives with secret nightmares and suppressed dreams.

Krassimir Kroumov examined in depth the crisis-consciousness of the “lost generation” in his dark-mood film trilogy *Exitus* (1989), *Silence* (*Mulchanieto*, 1991), and *The Forbidden Fruit* (*Zabraneniyat plod*, 1994), as well as in his novel *The Drowned Man* (*Udavnikat*, 1989). Referring to no particular place or time, these texts are equally obsessed with crime and the feelings of loss, absence, despair and death. The film trilogy circles around a similar basic plot structure: a confrontation between a dissatisfied young male and a hostile, cruel, authoritarian, or absent father-figure. The son’s figure is one of exile; the image of the “prodigal son,” the ultimate exilic figure, is a recurring trope in Kroumov’s

trilogy. The sons' escapist desires drive the narrative; their split selves are antagonistically structured (a murderer/victim dichotomy) and are often embodied by characters that are twin-brothers. The notions of a (symbolic and physical) border⁶ and road imagery are common leitmotifs. The final scene of *The Forbidden Fruit* brings together all these motifs while implying a radical and anarchic hope; it shows the son leaving the dead body of the father behind and hitting the road with no particular destination—an ultimate gesture of escape, liberation and exile.

Fig. 3: *The Forbidden Fruit*: Erland Josephson (the Landlord as a father figure)

Fig. 4: *The Forbidden Fruit*: Samuel Fintzi and György Cserhalmi (the “prodigal sons”)

Kroumov's peculiar synthesis of *noir*-style, existentialist philosophy, the rebellious imagery of road movies, and postmodern transformations of oedipal narrative signals a number of braking points with local cinematic traditions. The narrative space and visual style are increasingly open to a conceptual and cultural synthesis of different theoretical frameworks. While the transformative impulse is dressed in the symbolic imagery of oedipal tropes, the film eventually makes a remarkable leap beyond the grand (oedipal) narrative. The collapse of traditional societies, their values, and their discursive paradigms is articulated in the metaphor of the Dead Father, a polysemantic figure that implies discontent, emancipation, recognition, awareness, and change. Signalling a transition from patriarchal slavery to Nietzschean free will, the figure of the wanderer, the de-centered and nomadic self introduced in Kroumov's trilogy, embodies a radical escapism of the new generation. Yet, this is an escape with no direction.

The definition of the post-socialist subject as nomadic, fluid, and uprooted culminates in *The Forbidden Fruit*. In a stylistic gesture that replaces *noir*'s iconography with road movie imagery, Kroumov offers a glimpse of the figure of the ultimate stranger of the postmodern era. Like Bauman's “floating and drifting self” (204), Kroumov's individual “splits into a collection of snapshots, each one having to conjure up, carry, and express its

own meaning, more often than not without reference to other snapshots” (207). Living in a Baudrillardian simulacrum—a postmodern entropic imaginary realm—Kroumov’s wanderer signals the emergence of a new figure in the landscape of Bulgarian cinema, one that exemplifies postmodern moral ambiguity and indeterminacy. The alternative model of life associated with this figure is one of constant motion, nomadic rootlessness, random and chaotic relations, and no sense of guilt or sin—all prefiguring the fragmented and quivering self in the transnational narratives of the 2000s. Situated between the traditional and the postmodern, between the local and the global, Kroumov’s son figures simply moves from one ambiguous situation to another. While trying to confront the patriarchal order, they are, at the same time, the victims of its breakdown. In a tragic transition from a Freudian to a Baudrillardian realm—“from the *determinant* sphere of signs to the *indeterminacy* of the code” (Baudrillard 8; emphasis in the original)—the nomadic self faces postmodern freedom without being able to leave behind the burden of the past.

Kroumov’s construction of the self in the trilogy is representative of the conceptual syncretism of Bulgarian intellectual discourse on subjectivity. Freud’s concepts of the split mind and over-determined subject of patriarchy inform fundamentally the representation of the subject in Kroumov’s trilogy. But it is a patriarchy in decline, already open to the subversive models of anti-subjectivity; it accommodates Nietzsche’s anarchic willpower, Foucault’s death of the individual, Heidegger’s disturbing questions of being, and Wittgenstein’s radical doubt in the system of communication. Kroumov’s model of the postmodern subject is one of synthesis—it is reminiscent of these thinkers’ concepts of subjectivity without identifying any one of them as central and without delineating a border between their conceptual discourses.

4. Entropic Self: *Under the Same Sky*

In his next film, *Under the Same Sky*, Kroumov transposes the discussion of subjectivity in the context of transnational imagery without stepping back from the complex conceptual background that he had established as his artistic agenda. Meanwhile, Kroumov published a massive volume titled *Poetics of Cinema* (2000), which explored the ontology of film and offered alternative models of conceptualising the visual medium. A result of decades of practical, theoretical, and pedagogical experience, the book's epistemological horizon is impressive. It includes debates on philosophy, psychology, linguistics, theories of art and religion, all incorporated in a comprehensive theoretical discourse on film.

Kroumov's major point of theoretical interest in *Poetics of Cinema* is film's unique capacity to get beneath "the skin" of reality, beneath the visible façade of objects or individual events and to capture the *process* of evolving. Among the central terms in the book are "cine-hypostasis" and "the spiritual place." For Kroumov, just as for Tarkovskii or Sokurov, the most powerful film images are those that imply—rather than reproduce—reality's most fundamental aspects and refer to moments of "becoming" and the metaphysical realm. Theorising narrative, Kroumov argues that a film's dramatic story should ideally deal with inner transformation and cathartic experience. The function of catharsis is to transport us to a "spiritual place": "to remove a delusion, to de-mask a lie or falsification and eventually to get the character [and the viewer] closer to the true knowledge and experience of something previously unknown or concealed" (351).

Far from being a simple illustration of the director's theoretical agenda, *Under the Same Sky* bears multiple traces of Kroumov's philosophically informed film poetics. While it tells a simple story—a daughter dreaming of joining her father who emigrated to Turkey—the film simultaneously illuminates some of the fundamental ideas discussed in *Poetics of Cinema*: cine-hypostasis, the spiritual place, broken subjectivity, and cathartic transformation. Driven by the singular desire for a family reunion, the narrative ritualistically

enacts the motifs of loss, absence, escape, journey, virtual reunion, and connection across time and space.

Fig. 5: *Under the Same Sky*: Marta Kondova (the daughter Rufie)

In contrast to the heterogeneous stylistics of the trilogy, *Under the Same Sky* develops a more consistent iconography designed to articulate an intensive and ambivalent experience. The shifting color scale refers to the amphibolic structure of feelings, which Hamid Naficy defines as a primary emotional configuration in transnational cinema (27, 291). As in Miklós Jancsó's films, the natural landscape becomes a conceptual map, a metaphor of time-space-mind conflation. If Jancsó transforms the Hungarian *puszta* in an elaborated implication of "power, oppression, violence, cruelty and dehumanization" (Petrie 30), Kroumov's emphasis of the image of the sky becomes a powerful counterpoint to the physicality of exile. In Tarkovskii's footsteps, Kroumov rediscovers the mythic, spiritual, and sacred semantics of the natural elements. His construction of "spiritual places" is often articulated in the Russian director's visual stylistic and editing grammar. Alternating high and low points of view are balanced by a horizontal axis, by the equal dramatic importance of the foreground and the background. Migrating minds—more difficult to map than migrating bodies—oscillate between the tactile physicality of the local and the virtual reality of the global. The daughter's stubborn withdrawal from local life corresponds to the father's stubborn virtual reappearance in the place he has left long ago. His non-physical omnipresence, evoked by the voice-over and the daughter's letters, is often projected on the image of an ever-present sky, whose polysemy and emotional ambivalence gives rise to a series of dichotomies: presence and absence, here and there, now and then, departure and arrival.

Under the Same Sky takes as its conceptual starting point the trilogy's final image of the nomadic self and develops it within the paradigms of a transnational imagery of exile, loss, absence, and the crisis of selfhood. The film's open ending renounces any chance of or

hope for family reunion or for a stabilisation of the notion of the local; by-passing each other closely without being aware of the other's presence, the father and daughter head in opposite directions. Like Angelopolous's *Landscape in the Mist* (France, Greece, and Italy; 1988), the daughter's search for the missing father is a rite-of-passage, a cathartic experience, both tragic and illuminating, which Kroumov interprets in the framework of his overriding theme of broken subjectivity and an ever-emerging selfhood. The trope of the journey—illegal cross-border smuggling of emigrants—does not signify transition, escape, or salvation anymore. Rather, it outlines a trajectory of the permanent crisis-condition of the postmodern nomadic self. The locality is no more shelter for the “floating and drifting self,” which is totally overwhelmed by the ambiguity and entropy of permanent global transitions.

5. Virtual Subject: *Letter to America*

Letter to America is Iglia Triffonova's first fiction film. An established documentary filmmaker, Triffonova claims that she always aspired to a synthesis of documentary and fiction film. The story is about a young writer who travels to remote mountain places in search of a mysterious ancient folk song that is believed to revive the dead. The journey is a ritual of magic, a desperate attempt to help a friend, who recently emigrated and who now, after suffering a car accident, lies in coma in a New York hospital. Shot mostly on location, the film combines the unpredictability of real-life scenes with meticulously staged performances. Legends, folk songs, fiction, and real life events appear in amalgamation. Mountain villagers, some more than ninety years old, act alongside professional actors. As the title suggests, epistolarity intervenes in the already heterogeneous textual field to bring about intimacy and subjective experiences.⁷ The film combines a simple plot structure with a complex conceptual background extending beyond the debate on fiction/documentary dialectics.

Triffonova follows the thematic lines of Kroumov's work by making exile, migration, journey, and the concept of the postmodern subject central issues in her film. Although she never discusses the notion of spiritual place, her film consistently builds the conflation between time, space, and migrating minds that underlies Kroumov's film. As in *Under the Same Sky*, *Letter to America* adopts the road movie's narrative motifs of motion, searching, and transformation, and the implications for the nomadic self. However, Triffonova's project is one of positive action and a successful quest. In contrast to Kroumov's existential angst (in the trilogy) and the crisis of permanent exile (in *Under the Same Sky*), Triffonova examines the possibility of restoring the broken self and of recovering stable coordinates for the individual amidst the endless flux and the entropy of an expanding world.

These concepts are coded in *Letter to America*'s heteromorphic discourse, which accommodates documentary realism, mytho-poetics, magic realism, and the mystery of ancient Orphic cosmology. The style of observational and interactive documentary corresponds to the flexibility of the open mosaic structure; most supporting characters appear in a single episode and never come back again. For Triffonova, like Michael Haneke in *Code Unknown* (*Code inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages*; France, Germany, and Romania, 2000) or Robert Altman in *Short Cuts* (USA, 1993), the fragmentation of narrative is a matter of strategic departure from the very philosophy of linear progression, from its predictability and over-determined space. The "floating" narrative structure with no distinct dramatic parts, the shifting narrative approaches, blurred generic patterns, and diverse cultural contexts are designed to represent the heterogeneity and the plurality of a world in motion.

Letter to America's defining idiom of journey occupies most of the film. The route's determining moments—the episodes foregrounding different personal stories of the people that the young writer Ivan meets during his quest for the ancient song—map the key events in any human biography: birth, childhood, love, family, children, separation, loneliness, old age,

and approaching death. While the details of the journey are narrated in almost documentary stylistics, the whole enterprise of salvation is transposed into mytho-poetic reality. In addition, the American friend is a rather ambiguous figure, never entirely situated in the realm of the physical. Not surprisingly, Julia Jordanova suggests that the very emigration and the indispensable salvation of the American friend might be imaginary events. According to her, the American friend is Ivan's spiritual alter-ego, the second "I" that is able to make true what the first "I" only dreams about: self-realisation and fulfilment (7). This interpretation connects Triffonova to the directors of "the lost generation," although her concept of selfhood signals a significant departure from these directors' eclectic adaptation of existentialist philosophy.

Triffonova's "drifting self" bears some distant traces of Foucault's definition of selfhood as an amorphous and changing field of mutation, where knowledge and experience produce an "incongruous sequence of processes and accidents" (Mansfield 176). Like Kroumov, she refuses to identify her conceptualisation of the self with any single theory. *Letter to America* maps the geography of the self through a difficult balance between the powerful feeling of belonging, on the one hand, and the hybridity of Derrida's "*undecidable*," on the other.

A narrative inversion epitomises Triffonova's compounded concept of the self. The friend who migrated is wounded, immobile, and paralysed; the friend who stayed behind is mobile, active, successful, and on a quest for salvation. In search for a new paradigm of the postmodern traveller, Triffonova represents Ivan's journey as a more or less traditional search for identity—an attempt to trace and secure origins into personal experience, family, kinship, history of the nation, and/or the collective psyche. This search for belonging is never a singular act; as Stuart Hall notes, it is a matter of "'unearthing,' 're-telling,' 'becoming,' 'being,' 'constantly producing and reproducing [...] anew, through transformation and

difference” (17). What makes this search unique in the context of the Bulgarian debate on identity is its ultimate double purpose: it is both about securing roots *and* about opening routes. In Triffonova’s interpretation, physical departure—getting out of the determining environment—does not necessarily mean cutting roots. If it is more difficult to map migrating minds than migrating bodies, it is precisely because of their constant oscillation between roots and routes, the local and the global, here and there, now and then. Undecidable, incomplete, decentred, and increasingly mobile, migrating minds are less susceptible to the control that limits migrating bodies in a unanimous and unavoidable spatiality. In Triffonova’s film, it is song that relates roots and routes, and that becomes another powerful synecdoche of “glocalisation.”

6. Migrating Minds: The Aural Codes

Letter to America is, essentially, a film about a song, an act of resorting to the mythic roots, ritualistic functions, and ancient semantics of the act of singing. Evoking the musically informed universe of ancient Thracian Orphism, the song and the act of singing merge universal and human life, death, sexuality, creativity, magic, and poetry. The film form is a deliberate replica of the musical form. In the song-like structure of the narrative, Triffonova links and coordinates the narrative fragments in a rhythm that homologises the rhythmic repetitiveness of song architectonics. Yet, *Letter to America* is not exactly a case of musical analogy, which, according to David Bordwell, is an attempt to stress films’ non-representational and abstract qualities (18). Despite the film documentary mode of representation, Triffonova tends to use an open-ended and motif-based construction to signal a departure from the semiotic regime of the verbal and an adoption of the ambiguous semantics of music. This approach explores the synergic capacity of music to re-organise semantically the whole narrative space and simultaneously prepares the ground for the

climactic scene when the reviving melody is heard for the first time. Music here “puts us in felt relation of experienced immediacy with the abstractly and verbally inexpressible but whole palpable, primary fact of being” (Steiner 196). The metrics of dialect speech, the surprising intonations, gaps, and pauses in the dialogue, and the increasing moments of silence—the more Ivan ascends the mountain the more reluctantly he speaks—refer to an aural principle of shaping the finest levels of the narrative, which aims at attuning the audiences’ perception to the most refined registers of meaning.

As a synecdoche of “glocalisation,” the song has a double function: it traces back the origins and outlines the trajectory of global motion. A site of convergence of the two, the song brings the roots and the routes together in the same whirlpool of unified motion; its distant magic brings back the vital energy of life in the distant wounded body. The ritual of singing acts globally; it returns the voice to the writer, the love to the desperate, the dream to the dreamer, the life to the dying one, the memory to the nation. In the climactic scene, Sofia and New York breath in the same rhythm, connected through parallel editing that synchronises incompatible realms: Ivan’s ritualistic singing on the top of the mountain in Bulgaria and his friend’s revival in New York, ancient Orphic cosmology and postmodern shattered selves, lovemaking and the archaic folklore rituals of salvation. In a mystic flight, the migrating mind is re-connected to its roots and finds its grounded half while it keeps living in constant motion. The orchestration of the melody in the final part of the film⁸ re-structures and intensifies the aural realm, emphasising the process of revitalisation as an effect of multiple physical and non-physical ritualistic actions. At this point the film leaves open the possibility of constructing a spiritual place that would defy time, space, separation, and death. For Triffonova, the music becomes the fundamental device that generates “becoming,” a process of evolving, and that illuminates “the continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and spirit, between man and ‘the other’” (Steiner 227).

Most Bulgarian critics found themselves unprepared to interpret *Letter to America*'s complex conceptual programme. Writings on the film ranged from more or less enthusiastic approval of the fiction/documentary approach to disappointment with the “missed opportunities for a good culmination,” to accusations of “too much ethnography and lack of proper dramatic structure” (iv). Paradoxically, what disappointed Bulgarian critics is precisely what enchanted audiences, international distributors, and international film festivals' selection committees.⁹ The film's success at home, especially among young audiences, is not accidental in the context of the revived interest in authentic Bulgarian arts, including musical and verbal folklore. Young audiences praised the film's non-didactic tone and, perhaps even more, its energy of revival, hope, and promise of fulfilment.

7. Roots and Routes: Syncretism and Transition

Both *Letter to America* and *Under the Same Sky* are indicative of the remarkable departure from traditional conceptual frameworks of defining modern subjectivity in recent Bulgarian cinema. The syncretism of “glocalisation” involves both a broadening of the intellectual debate on subjectivity and a shift of the discursive and stylistic patterns in film. The fluctuating dynamics of the premodern/modern/postmodern is associated with the ongoing re-working of the cinematic imagery of travelling, migration, displacement, and the concept of the self. Increasingly reconfigured in broader frameworks—of the Balkans and of the world—Bulgarian identity is being reformulated as double, multiple, broken, quivering, shattered, virtual, primordial, performed, open, incomplete. While distant, exotic, and unfamiliar places shelter the new nomads' bodies, syncretic cultural configurations define their broken selves. The site of a dramatic “clash of cultures,” subjectivity is also a terrain where roots and routes come together; time, space, and mind overlap; different cultural idioms meet, confront, translate, amalgamate, and evolve as new syntheses.

Signalling a new and increasing interest in the *process*, rather than in the *phenomena*, *Letter to America* and *Under the Same Sky* bear traces of some of the dominant narrative and visual tropes in this national cinema at the same time that they transfigure them in the framework of transnational imagery. The synecdoches of “glocalisation” intervene in and re-shape the dichotomy local/global in a way that transforms the traditional narrative techniques and existing stylistic models. Recent Bulgarian films increasingly refuse to close the textual space in conventional narrative, stylistic, or conceptual frameworks: migrating minds and bodies find their discursive equivalents in the figures of cinematic heteromorphism. The heteromorphic and polysemic cinematic vocabulary corresponds to shifting narrative, stylistic, generic, cultural, and conceptual patterns, designed to represent a world in permanent transition.

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¹ While the film is an adaptation of Donchev's novel *Time of Parting, Time of Violence* also relies on additional historical and folklore sources.

² According to the plot of the novel, the child Karaibrahim had been taken as "blood debt" by the Ottoman debt collectors and was trained to join the special Ottoman military units called *yanitchari*, extremely cruel and merciless soldiers, fanatically faithful to the Sultan. The training included brainwashing and erasing the boys' ethnic, cultural, and individual memory, which normally defines subjectivity and shapes the foundation of the self.

³ The fact that Karaibrahim is the son of the peasant Galushko is revealed at a certain point in the narrative. Galushko has adopted Manol in order to replace his missing son.

⁴ Films made by this group of filmmakers include Krassimir Kroumov's *Exitus* (1989), Petar Popzlatev's *I, the Countess (Az, grafinyata)*, 1989), Ivan Tscherkelov's *Pieces of Love (Parcheta lyubov)*, 1989), Lyudmil Todorov's *Running Dogs (Byagashti kucheta)*, 1989), Docho Bodzhakov's *The Well (Kladenetsat)*, 1991), Krassimir Kroumov's *Silence (Mulchanieto)*, 1991), Ilian Simeonov's and Hristian Nochev's *Border (Granitsa)*, 1994), and others.

⁵ According to Coates: "[T]his sense that power lies elsewhere [...] renders East European cinema so bewitchingly accurate a mirror of our era."

⁶ Simeonov's and Nochev's *Border* is an elaborate metaphor on the notion of border, both a figure of geopolitics and of subjectivity.

⁷ In *An Accented Cinema* Nafici defines epistolarity and epistolary narratives as a major sub-genre of transnational filmmaking; see Chapter 4: "Epistolarity and Epistolary Narratives" (101-146).

⁸ Milcho Leviev, a Bulgarian jazz musician and composer who has lived in the United States since the 1970s, wrote the music for the film. His score is based on the original folksong *Pusta mladost* from the Pirin region. Like the film character, Leviev travelled to the mountain village to hear the singing of two almost 100-year old women who knew an old, more authentic version of the song. His music integrates the original tunes into a melody that involves choir and instrumental improvisations. The soundtrack covers almost 40 minutes of the film.

⁹ The list of international film festivals that have featured the film includes: Munich, Kiev, Manheim, Pusan, Tessaloniki, Mar Del Plata, Rennes, Hong Kong, Washington, Karlovy Vary, Istanbul, Montpellier, and Montreal. The film was nominated for an Oscar in the category of Best Foreign Film. I am very grateful to KLAS FILM, the producer Rossitsa Valkanova, and the director Iglia Trifonova who did their best to provide all the information concerning *Letter to America* that I needed in order to write this text.