

## **Kollektive Identität – Oder: Wer sind wir?**

**Georg Meggle**

"Collective Identity" is – in direct correspondence to "Personal Identity" – a dummy concept covering a whole spectrum of different aspects ranging from "*Who are we? (Who am I?)*" via "How do we (I) differ from the others?" to "Who would we (I) like to be most?". The main aspects of Collective Identity are spelled out in this Opening Speech – by means of a tiny science fiction story of a young Marsian Lady having gone astray on one of her intergalactical journeys, running into this room and asking us "Who are you?". My main point is that this question asking us for some information is to be strictly separated from the same question when we it is being asked by ourselves.

I do not go into any explicit comparison with Milcho's Identity-Philosophy as presented in DUST. But some of the similarities may turn out to be obvious in the papers and discussions to follow.

## **The Kinesthetic of DUST – The End of Drama**

**Andrija Dimitrijevič**

The basic principles of movie, *Dust* (2001), as a work of art, are based on two insufficiently explored forces: the force of arousing of an organized kinesthetic reaction, and the force of overcoming the literary meaning of a frame, i.e. creation of poetic images. The kinesthetic values of a motion picture as a point of departure, that other arts almost do not have, are found in the artistic articulation of visual-dynamic characteristics of poetic moving pictures which are emphasized in relation to the narrative structure! The art of motion pictures is neither in their narrative aspect, nor is it in the symbolistic, iconographic construction of logically opposed symbols (S. M. Eisenstein), that essentially supports the idea of "reading" motion pictures. Instead, the art of film is in the visual nature of the motion picture medium itself. The principle of the DUST kinesthesia continues the tradition of those film structures that are stressing the visual-dynamic effect and that, as a means of expression, amplify the other film components – its context, contents, totality. The kinesthesia is a specifically sensual sensation of the unique phenomenon of movement in film, representing a feeling of movement within us caused by the sensations from the screen. This is a psychological-motor reaction of our bodies caused by the movements on the screen. It is reflected in the neuromuscular reaction of body movements, as well as on the visceral one, i.e. the changes in the operation of our internal organs such as the accelerated pulse, convulsion of the stomach muscles, sweating, heart arrhythmia, the feeling of nausea, vomiting ... By means of the editing orchestrations of various movements, the visual-dynamic sensations intensify the sensory-motor reactions. Manchevski brings back the aesthetic essence of film to the sensual, kinesthetic organization of movement by means of editing.

## **(De)Constructing Balkanism in the film *Dust* by Milcho Manchevski**

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The second feature film of the Macedonian director Milcho Manchevski, *Dust* (2001), overleaping and transgressing historical and imaginary borders of the Far East and the "Farwest", Wild West and "Wild East", Western and "Eastern", provoked a lot of controversial reactions among the cinema critics and spectators, and became the object of a large polemic concerning the representation and imaginary construction of the Balkans. *Dust* will be approached in this study as a kind of contemporary cinematographic paradigm of the representation/construction of the Balkans and of the balkanic narrative, in the sense of the discourse of balkanism (as it's analysed in Maria Todorova's book *Imagining the Balkans*). The Balkans as constructed and confined within the frame of the imaginary balkanic borders of the discourse of balkanism. In *Dust*, Manchevski is playing with this captivating construction/representation by quoting and parodying its balkanising discourse. The object of this study is thus the discourse and the ideological structure of (de)balkanisation that support the balkanic

narration of *Dust*, a film that deconstructs the borders of the balkanising narrations/representations/identifications. The contemporary discussion on post-colonial theory and its applicability on the context of the Balkans will also be taken in consideration in this approach of *Dust* as an answer to the "Western cultural colonialism".

## When A Story Hides The Story On narrative aspects of Dust

Erik Tängerstad

In this paper I will present my own reading of the film. I will try first to say something about *how* the film could be analysed and then *what* such an analysis would lead to.

As a feature film, *Dust* does not comply the standards of conventional Hollywood style movies. More than that, I argue that *Dust* through its composition deliberately challenges standardised film narrative conventions. In this sense, this film is not a movie. Therefore, this film should not be judged according to standardised measures used when conventionally analysing a Hollywood style movie. In the presentation, for this reason alone, I have first to sketch a model according to which *Dust* can be analysed, and then apply that model on *Dust*. When doing this I will at the same time critically revise the standardised measures of film criticism. The aim of this presentation can therefore be said to be dual; on the one hand will try to say something about the narrative aspects of *Dust* and on the other hand use *Dust* as a point of reference when saying something about narrative aspects and film conventions in general.

In order to develop such a model I take my point of departure in David Bordwell's notions of how to analyse film narratives. A film can be analytically divided into the *story*, or "what the film is about", and the *plot*, or "how the film is told/shown". By viewing, reworking and reflecting the plot, the spectator makes up the story. In his model for analysing film, Bordwell has being much inspired by the Russian Formalists of the 1920s and has taken up some of their terminology in order to gain precision. He first suggests a distinction between the film as a whole and the narrative of the film. He then concentrates on the analysis of the narrative. Bordwell calls the meaningful narrative made up by the spectator the *fabula*. In other words, the fabula is the story that the viewer makes up on the basis of the viewed film. The basic element used, when the spectator is constructing the fabula is the plot-line of the narrative, or the *syuzhet*. Or put differently, the syuzhet is the plot that structures and composes the narrative. The shape of the syuzhet can be differently composed according to different modes and means of *style*. Style is therefore the means forming the syuzhet, which in turn is the basic element of the fabula.

The main point here is that the narrative takes place in an ongoing exchange, or interactivity between syuzhet and style. When watching this interactivity or exchange – which makes up the duration of the film – the spectator conceptualises the fabula. However – and this condition I will again underline since Bordwell has a tendency of playing it down – when conceiving the fabula, the viewer uses not only information that is provided by the film, but also personal experiences of different kinds as well as general film conventions that are central to the act of interpretation, although they are not necessarily put forward in the actual film.

According to the "classical Hollywood cinema", as Bordwell and his colleagues have analysed it, a "good" Hollywood style movie should be outlined as follows:

The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the goals. The principle causal agency is thus the character, a discriminated individual endowed with a consistent batch of evident traits, qualities, and behaviours. [...] The most "specified" character is usually the protagonist, who becomes the principal causal agent, the target of any narration restriction, and the chief object of audience identification.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bordwell, David: *Narration in the Fiction Film* Routledge: London, 1997 [1985] p. 157.

According to my reading of *Dust*, that film evades this pattern more or less altogether. The syuzhet of *Dust* only superficially present characters that are psychologically defined and who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. The characters of this film, instead, are rather functions of a critical revision of narrative structures than psychologically defined individuals. Who is Angela? The syuzhet does not provide us spectators with information enough for producing a fabula according to which she becomes a psychologically defined individual. On the contrary, the way for example old photographs in Angela's apartment change appearance during the duration of the film hinder us spectators from turning this character into a psychologically defined individual. Who is Edge? Here we spectators are provided with more information. We can identify him as an individual living in New York around the turn of the century 2000, but we are not provided with enough information to make him psychologically defined as a fully fledged individual. Why, for example, he has chosen Angela's rather shabby apartment in the first place? That we will never know. Neither will we know why he has a fear of flying or why he starts identifying himself with Angela's story. All other characters in the film are either narrative functions of Angela's story or too briefly presented to become psychologically defined individuals, let alone protagonists of the film. The one struggle presented in the film is the one for gold, although the syuzhet is full of references that one should not strive for gold. Hence, the film does not reach any clear-cut decision concerning that struggle. Whether Angela, who says that she wants to be buried where she is born, really is born in Macedonia we will never know, although the syuzhet indicates that Edge thinks that she is. In short, as spectators we cannot identify either a clear-cut protagonist or a clear-cut struggle, let alone psychologically defined individuals or motives for the actions taken in the film. *Dust* is in other words not following the standards of a standardised Hollywood movie.

Does this turn *Dust* into a cinematic failure? Not necessarily. The film could only regarded a failure if it tried to comply the standards of a conventionally Hollywood film. But obviously, it does not. According to these standards a film should try to use mimetic and diegetic means to produce a logically coherent narrative that corresponds with "reality". The narrative of a film should, according to this convention, be "about" something "real", something that corresponds with our conventional notion of reality. When the syuzhet/style interaction produces a narrative, the spectator is enabled not only to produce the fabula but also to create a narrative universe in which the fabula is staged. Such universe is called the *diegesis*, and the elements in the narration that are used when composing this universe are diegetic. Claudia Gorbman has defined the diegesis as the spatial-temporal world of actions and persons that is produced by the narration. According to the norms of realism, the diegesis should correspond and resemble the notion of the (extra-diegetic) "real universe" in order to make the narration realistic. In a "realistic film" the diegesis is supposedly a mimetic depiction of reality. When audiences identify what they see on the screen with what they already possessed as common knowledge, a "reality-effect" is collectively perceived. Since the prevailing belief-structure of the audience is reinforced through this effect, the individual spectators collectively think that they have gained knowledge of real events and of reality as such by watching the film.

According to Bordwell, the story within classical narration embodies the action as a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field so that, by the end of the plot-line, all story events can be fitted into a single pattern of time, space and, causality. Hence, following the rules of classical film narration, a good syuzhet should be composed in such a way that it at the end has uncovered a story, which is held together as a diegesis in which time and space could be integrated into a causal whole by the active audience. This whole would then be the ideal standardised fabula.

*Dust* fulfils none of these requirements. Judging from the composition of the film, it appears as if it was not even intended to fulfil these requirements. Rather, the film seems to be consciously composed as a critical response to the conventional standards of classical Hollywood film aesthetics.

So, when applying on *Dust* the analytical approaches that have here been sketched, what would the outcome be?

According to the syuzhet Edge has broken into Angela's apartment in his hunt for gold. He is desperate since some personas are demanding money from him, money that he does not own. Angela caches him in the apartment and forces him to hear her story. When Angela collapses, Edge takes her to the hospital. He continues to hear her story through, since he hopes that that will render him her hidden gold treasure. Back in the apartment Edge eventually finds the treasure. When he tells Angela

that he has found it, she dies – apparently happy after having been reconciled. Edge takes her ashes to bury it in Macedonia and on the flight he concludes her story in his own manner. *Dust* ends in a scene in which this frame narrative is blended into the story told first by Angela and then by Edge.

The story told by Angela hints that she would be the biological daughter of a turn-of-the-century Macedonian rebel, "the Teacher", who fought the Ottoman empire. She also hints that she was adopted by a man called Elijah and taken to New York where she was brought up. The protagonist of her story is however neither her allegedly biological father nor her stepfather – neither "the Teacher" nor Elijah – but Elijah's brother Luke, who has come to Macedonia as a bounty hunter in order to catch and hand over "the Teacher" to the Ottoman officials. This is somewhat remarkable. Why does Angela put such an emphasis on Luke? And how come that she dies right after having told Edge about the death of Luke? When I have tried to make a fabula out of this syuzhet I have come to the conclusion that Luke should be seen as Angela's alter ego.

How Angela has come in possession of the gold treasure that she has hid in her apartment, we spectators do not know. But we do know that Luke, according to Angela's story, has one sole motive for action, and that is getting hold of the gold. From her story we know also that Luke betrays everyone that is close to him, yes that he also eventually betrays himself – which causes his downfall and death. Luke also lets his pursuit for the gold treasure justify his notorious behaviour. However, according to Angela's tale, when Luke finally gets hold of the gold, he dies alone. It should be noticed that when Angela tells about Luke's death, she lets Elijah be there in the Macedonian wilderness together with his dying brother. Elijah says three things. First he informs his brother that Lilith has committed suicide after Luke's betrayal. Then he wants to know the truth. And finally he says to Luke: "You never were!"

This final line is a clue, I think. Luke never was. He never was, except for being an invention made up by Angela. Angela has then used this invented character as an alter ego when she construed a fiction story with which she could cover up for her own life story – and life failure. If that would be the case, Angela has notoriously betrayed everyone throughout her life. She has got hold of a valuable gold treasure, which she hides as a secret inside her apartment where she is living – and dying – alone. From the syuzhet it is clear that Angela does not hesitate to lie. For example, at the hospital she first tells Edge that she says "nothing but the truth, cross my heart". Then she acts like had she a heart attack. When Edge believes that she is actually dying, she looks calmly at him and then says with a wide grin: "April fool".

From this information provided by the syuzhet one could make up a plausible fabula according to which Angela has made up her entire story. This fiction of hers would then serve the purpose of hiding her own life betrayal and the actual story about how she got hold of the gold in the first place.

What has Angela done? It is not possible to tell from the syuzhet. It is possible, however, to suspect that she accuses herself of having caused the death of her stepfather. In a dream sequence at the middle of the film, Angela dreams that Lilith brings Luke to New York in 1945. In the dream Luke sees Elijah in a room together with Angela, at the time being around forty years of age. When the aging Elijah senses the presence of his long since dead brother, he suffers a heart attack. If Luke is to be regarded Angela's alter ego, this dream sequence could mark the guilt complex that Angela carries. The scene in which Sigmund Freud appears supports this interpretation of the film's syuzhet. Luke glances at Freud's notebook in which he can read "the ego and the id" also emphasises this connection between psychoanalysis, dreams and the film's syuzhet.

Hence, according to this proposed fabula Angela is letting the story that she tells Edge hide her own actual life story. Or in other words, Angela's story is a lie, but that lie is told as were it a kind of cipher or code with which another story than the one told could be sensed, i.e. the story told is thus used to cover up the story that actually should have been told.

Now, of course, Angela is a fictive character and not a physical person. What does that fact imply on the narrative structure of *Dust*? In standardised Hollywood style movies the syuzhet/style interaction is used to visualise the narrative of the film so that spectators can produce their fabula based on the information that is to be seen. In this sense, *Dust* confronts and challenges standard filmmaking conventions by forcing the spectator to do the opposite: the fabula has to be constructed by the narrative information that is *not* presented visually. This narrative aspect of *Dust* would then bring

standardised film-conventions up-side-down. The visual aspects of the film would obscure the story rather than illuminate it.

A consequence of this is that although many of the film's scenes allegedly depicts Macedonia and Macedonian history, as a spectator you would not be informed about Macedonia or Macedonian history since these scenes would be obscuring rather than illuminating the issue of Macedonia or Macedonian history. Seen from that perspective, you would not learn anything about Macedonia or Macedonian history – or for that matter New York or contemporary history – by watching this film. Instead, when reflecting the narrative structure of *Dust*, you would end up experiencing Macedonia and Macedonian history (or New York and contemporary history in general) as enigmas, as open-ended questions.

The motto of the film, which is also a line, pronounced by Angela in the hospital, is: "Where does your voice go when you're no more?" A new element is here brought to the centre of attention: the voice. Even if Angela would be lying when telling her story, there would nevertheless be something in her voice with which this lie could be detected as such. Even if a person would be lying about his or her biography, that person would nevertheless have a life story – i.e. even if that life story would deviate substantially from the biography told.

How would an audience manage to differ the actual life story from the told biography? Of course, audiences would be depending on reliable sources. The voice would be one such source, but one could think of others too. The crucial question put forward by *Dust* is, I think, this about voices, sources, the past, and history. Just as we as contemporary audiences cannot be sure that the told biography is identical with the actual life story, we cannot take for granted that the told history is identical with the past as such. So where does your past go when you are no more? You cannot be too certain that it will go down in history. The difference between the past and history is too complex to guarantee any such connection. In my reading of *Dust*, the lasting importance of this film is its ability to challenge standardised film conventions and thereby putting forward this complex question about the relationship between narratives, the past, and history.

How are we today to critically revise the presented history so that we would be able to grasp the past? For example, how would it be possible to grasp the past of Macedonia, the Wild West, or New York City, etc. through the thick layers of presented history of Macedonia, the Wild West, or New York City, etc? This is, I think, the question that *Dust* provokes. And a film that can provoke such a question could not and should not be regarded a cinematic failure.

## **The Living and the Dead – Masternarrative, Narrative Frames and Collective Identity in Dust**

### **Beatrice Kobow**

The film "Dust" can be seen as opening-speech in a dialogue about a revision of collective cultural identity. My theses, then, are a first response:

Film is always a *momentum mori* – it can bridge the gap of time between us and the dead. In "Dust" this dimension of mortality is important because central themes of the film are memory and history. "Dust" cannot only be likened to cubist painting, but also to music in structure; the composition – consisting here of varying *visual* elements in an unfolding span of time – frees the different sequences from the chronological order of a curriculum vitae or a remembered life, a traditional history. It puts them together anew, thereby creating a new narrative. The unfolding in time is a filmic device which not only aids the narration of a story, but – if used creatively as in "Dust" – reflects on the nature of story-telling.

The mutual knowledge of a collective – history i.e. – can be seen as conventional knowledge. The filmic genre, likewise, is conventional knowledge shared by audience, filmmakers and mainstream cinema culture. In "Dust" there are references to genres, mainly the Western and the Buddy-Buddy-Story. By playing with genre-expectations and breaking genre-schemes there is a new space created for alternative narrative structures. At the same time, "Dust" questions the ruling "paradigm" of the master-narrative: The seeming master narrative with a narrator is cracked open, using visual, but also story-structural tools.

A narrative frame with a dialogue structure replaces the authority of the master narrative. The main purpose of the narration of history is the goal it serves for the narrator in the present. Yet, only when there is a new agreement between audience (Edge) and narrator (Angela), this story can be told and comes to a conclusion.

Historical documents, or so says "Dust", are meaningless without interpretation. And the interpretation in a narration serves the purpose of creating a collective identification with a history (or story) – to build new goals for the future, to revise our old self-image in light of a new we-identity. Then, past and present are visually perfectly merged (as in the last image of "Dust") – they make sense.

The change of narrator-perspective (from Angela to Edge) is crucial: the catharsis and conclusion of the film relies on the identification of Edge with the story to such a degree that it becomes "his" story and can continuously be told.

Whether this identification with the story is good or bad – that is: whether i.e. identifying with Luke's redemption and his fight against the Turkish army – remains a question. "Dust" shows the mechanisms of a process of finding a collective identity, on the one hand, and the complexity of a history which cannot simply be reconstructed by looking at archival materials (photos, films), on the other. It states that telling a story is always the construction of a new "we". How we want to continue to construct this identity in taking into consideration the difficult stories the dead leave as our heritage, is a question to the audience of the film.

## **Mental maps. Constructing identities in space and time**

### **Claudia Weber (Leipzig)**

The paper is intended to connect ideas on space and identity with those on mental mapping. It argues that history as well as the historian's profession need a profound change of paradigm that is caused mainly by two tendencies. The first outgrew in historical theory in the aftermath of postmodernism and its notification of multiple identities, the construction of identity and social behavior. The second tendency that influences our perspective on history and the historical profession was mainly caused by the return of geopolitics after the breaking events of 1989. The new world order as it is currently "under construction" does no longer bother only Eastern and Southeastern Europa. Instead – it demands a change in Western self-perception, it crushes established hierarchies as well as it alters our perception of the past.

Whereas historians over the past century saw history mainly as a product of time, the paper pleads – inspired by the works of Maria Todorova and Karl Schlögel – for a more balanced view on time and space, especially in trying to understand the construction of identity. Identity-building is a result of both: time and space. It is a "mental map" in the same meaning as space itself is made by the perception of "us" and the "other". Concerning the "Balkan" and "Balkan identities" the paper argues for the integration of both within an European history that is no longer based on cartography, political blocks and norms of modernization. Historians should look on Europe as a space of phenomena like nation, violence and war – all of which did not stop on political or geographical borders but shaped the identity of the European people in past and present.

## **The "WILD WEST" of the Balkan**

### **Stilian Yotov (Sofia)**

"Dust" by Manchevski is a movie that strikes into the heart of the 'cultures in conflict' topic. The movie provokes a series of questions about our readings of history and our cultural self-awareness and drives us to re-think our values. In an interval of ninety years in "Dust" the clash of cultures takes place twice. Firstly, persons with a questionable reputation in the American society clash with peoples, living in the backyards of Europe. Secondly, in the heart of American civilization cross the ways of two persons, for whom it seems that there is no place of their own in the whole world. The interpretation of the meeting of two derailed cultures in "Dust" raises the curtain for us to see cultural

conflicts not in the field of hypothesis but in casual everyday contacts. We happen to take part in such kind of contacts all the time without necessarily realizing their conflict nature, mostly because of the determined ideological historical views we are used to hold.

"Dust" offers a new 'Balkan' interpretation of the western genre, that is not just a topological transfer of the Wild West norms and action to the Balkans scene, but sets up a dimension for direct juxtaposition of the Wild West and the Wild East. Manchevski creates a story in which standard 'western' characters freely fit into a completely different geographical region. The capacity of the 'western' genre to hold the continuity of the action and the commensurability of the topoi is beyond doubt. But in this case it turns out to be quite a challenge for Manchevski, because this story is not just a fantasy, but it has happened. The history textbooks give us enough support for the reality of that frame in the historical events in the Balkans that start with armed revolts in Bosnia and Bulgaria in 1876 and ultimately culminate in the Berlin congress in 1878. The European society shall react explicitly against the Ottoman atrocity in bringing under control the uprisings and shall express strong sympathy for the new Balkan nations. At the same time, June 1876, near Little Big Horn, several squads of General Custer's cavalry are destroyed, and later on, in September 1876, the band of Jessie James attacks the National Bank of Northfield, only Jessie James and his brother Frank survive. The European society hardly demonstrates any interest to these events in America. Nevertheless the difference what is significant in the reaction of the civilized world is that from a certain common European point of view both the regions seem similarly wild.

"Dust" combines an easy transition between the wild historical topoi with a kind of tension between the cultural messages from the Wild West of America and the Wild East of the Balkan. This is well demonstrated in a reconstruction of the 'special turn' (topical turn) in the movie. This reconstruction starts with a comparison between America and Macedonia as myths. In an imaginary map-making America comes out with an ambivalent function. On one side, the American national history is construed by the analogy with the Holy Bible that not only gives the name of Clinton's program "New Covenant" but also overflows in Bush's political language. On the other side, the Wild West has an irrevocable reference for the map of America, but it is assumed only as an episode in the American history, as part of the past that doesn't anchor into the future. If we go further to the myth of Macedonia we'll find two interwoven mental projects – the idealization and the trauma. The heart of Macedonia gives shelter to the religious center of Orthodox Church (Ohrid). The legend points at Macedonia as the birthplace of the "slavonic" emperor Justinian who gives the name of the civil code and who builds "St. Sofia" cathedral. At the same time, it is Macedonia that remains under Ottoman rule until 1912 and inflames the passions among the reborn and regenerating Balkan nations – Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania. It turns into a battlefield in which not only peoples but also legends are confronted in a way that not only shakes the foundations but also threatens to blow out the identity of Macedonia. The dream of Macedonia turns into a nightmare.

While the myth of the Wild West in America crystallizes as an age, the Wild East of the Balkans takes the shape of a stigma. In "Dust" the myth of the Wild West perpetuates in the "western" genre but is topographically transformed to convey new cultural meanings in the Balkans. The specifics of the Balkan challenge a number of intellectuals and politicians who are trying to uncover the secret of that "past, which does not pass". They draw the map the "kernel" of the Balkans – Bulgaria, Serbia, Monte Negro, Macedonia, Bosnia, Hertzegovina, and ... Greece. However, these boundaries are incessantly changing because indefiniteness is an intrinsic characteristic of this region that might be localized in many directions. Through a magnifying glass the substance of the Balkan is a Byzantine-orthodox and Ottoman-islamic mix with a slavonic component. And it is remarkable that the West Balkans (especially Yugoslavia) that in the times of the real socialism used to be part of the West for most of the Balkan peoples now could turn out as a Wild West.

That's how we reach the "Wild West" of the Balkan, and after being borrowed the metaphor easily finds its new referent. After part of the myth content of the Balkans and Macedonia has been taken away and the myth itself narrowed stigma shall rule. Auto-stigmatization is the only effective protection mechanism. Self-definitions do not reject the characteristics from outside but even accept and absorb them in order to start hazardous manipulations, the result of which might be fixing or blowing out identities. At the end, the outside definers might find themselves identically defined. On this mechanism exactly is based "Dust" that demonstrates and thematizes the "auto-stigmatization" of the Balkans. This is how I see the strategy employed by Manchevski – instead of making the story

digestible and clarifying, he entangles it even more. *He frees the culture of the Balkans to speak for itself in the way it looks in the standard attitudes and views.* The hope is that this world obsessed by clichés is not completely locked, because self-denial is always a way out. Fetching some tricks from Odysseus, Manchevski, like a hunter, adopts the conduct manner of his opponents, and talks about the Wild West of the Balkans with the language used by the Wild West of America in its self-expression. Thus at the end, it turns out that...the differences are far from big. Without any impediments Manchevski processes the mutual translation of the myths of America and Macedonia, and this blocks the ideological cliché that determines their ways into diametrically opposite sides. It also deprives the myth of the Wild West from its exceptional being. The myth is no longer "made in USA" only.

I interpret "Dust" by Manchevski in the context of the "icon turn" that is quite popular in culture studies today. In 1881-1882, some five years after the Berlin Congress, the United States are no longer what they have been. The real "Wild West" persons have already turned into myths, but almost all of them found themselves used and no longer useful after the Civil War. The Wild West was left in the past and that's how their identity could sustain no more in America. They could be neither gangsters nor pioneers, and they appeared to be step-kids of their time that could no longer differentiate between factual and imaginary reality. In such a situation Lucke and Elijah from "Dust" have no living story of theirs at all, belong to nowhere and inhabit a world of desert. They lack roles and repertoire they could play. They feel without topos and without time. Brotherhood is the only relationship they have, and when it is broken as well, they find in the Balkans what they subconsciously searched for. Hence, it is not just a story about greediness and revenge. It is a story about finding a life scene in Wild West of the Balkans.

"Dust" gives shelter to the heroes of the Wild West in order to demonstrate in the middle of the wild Balkan that their time is past. An intrinsic disbalance tears the characters and the action in the movie. The laughter coming from the people around is marked with a constant ridiculous untimeliness. Once the laughter sinks into rap music to signify a reaction of the one who does not comprehend but "strikes back". In contrast to the untimeliness of the American Wild West, the other (historical) characters – rebels and Turks, fit into the geographical and historical scene. The events in "Dust" take place just before the Balkan wars (1912-13), and from this time onward the fate of Macedonia will be at stake in the politics, rather than in the flames of uprisings. In the light of these historical changes the rebels look like a remnant from the past. However this is "the age of zulum", or the age of tyranny, as remains in the history of the Ottoman empire the rule of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909). Here it is necessary to mention how works the mechanism of resistance – the reaction to cruelty is multiplied cruelty. Being *unmoral* (estimation from aside) is then not only your characteristics but also characteristic of your enemy, and your *message* (by intention) to the enemy echoes in a wider context of interaction, in the whole environment. The problem is that evoking cruelty blurs the limits between aim and means, and the means remains aimless and turns into an end in itself.

In "Dust" people from different cultures either communicate while walking past each other (Lucke in the village), or clash those who have remained without a place of their own (Lucke and the Turks). In the first instance there is no talk at all and the words of the chatters pass each other. In the second instances arms talk.

The sources for Edge's life narratives are the culture of his upbringing, i.e. the westerns, and the clash with reality, i.e. policemen-blackmailers. This explains his own fictitious story that comes to put an end of the one-time history of Macedonia. Hence, the end, seen by the audience, is the end that could be given by Ed, a child of his own mass culture. The final battle in "Dust" is completely built on citation of *The Wild Bunch*: (a) the returning back (here I am tempted to emphasize the stylistics of such decision is well known in the Balkans, and the words of one the greatest ideologists of the liberating movement of Macedonia is author of the phrase: «End in horror is better than horror without end»); (b) the order of shooting the enemies: firstly, the leader, and afterwards- the foreign representative; (c) the gunshots by the woman and the kid. However, the end is different. In *The Wild Bunch* everyone is losing (the friend and the Mexicans); only the headhunters are content. Dust spreads everywhere.

In "Dust", as well as in the "The Magnificent Seven", the values of the local people – the land and the kid – withstand. Moreover, in the movie by Manchevski the history itself gives birth to projections and turns into a source of identity for Edge. In this case, in a paradoxical way the characters without a

place of their own mutually annihilate themselves so that to remain those who were all the time considered of secondary importance.

And while in the "The Magnificent Seven" the wind blows and passes on, in "Dust" the wind will disperse the dust of memories for ever.

## **Dust – On Politics, War and Film**

### **Iris Kronauer**

Even before the film's world premiere in 2001, in Venice, the director Milcho Manchevski was being confronted with questions about the relationship of the fictional, historical content of his film to current politics. Some suggested that Luke, the bounty hunter who suddenly finds himself in the turmoil of the Balkans without any idea as to what is happening, might symbolise NATO and its situation there. Interpretations of films in the light of current events are nothing uncommon, but this approach seldom does justice to the films themselves, which have usually been many years in the making.

In the case of *Dust*, this meant, from the very beginning, that it would be difficult to keep the finished film separate from the current political debate on NATO's 'Balkan' theatre of operations, irrespective of whether this meant Kosovo, Macedonia or another part of the region. A statement on the political situation there was expected of Manchevski, who has lived in the USA for the last twenty years, as a matter of course. In contrast, questions about New York, the city in which *Dust* begins and in which half of the action takes place, were never put to him.

*Dust* had its world premiere in 2001 at the Film Festival in Venice. It was the opening film of the festival and triggered off a furore among film critics and journalists. The majority of leading international film reviewers tore the film apart. Scandal and controversy are nothing unusual at major film festivals.

They were accompanied, however, by defamatory attacks, accusing Manchevski of racism, that are without parallel in the recent history of contemporary film journalism. Moreover, it was insinuated that the director was trying to put across a crude political message, even propaganda. The factual basis of such arguments was seldom drawn from an analysis of the film, but from what their authors knew of the situation in the recent conflict in Macedonia and of Manchevski's public statements. As conveyed by the media – and supported politically by the USA and the EU – attacks by the Macedonian UCK appeared to be a legitimate fight by the Albanian minority against the so-called 'Slav' majority of the Macedonian population. Manchevski's criticism of the UCK's violent behaviour – as put forward in his article 'Just a Moral Obligation', which as published in numerous newspapers (e.g. The Guardian Online, Süddeutsche Zeitung) did not fit into this picture.

The aesthetic debate that *Dust* calls for was denied by the critics in Venice.

Interest centred on relating *Dust* to the current political situation, which was only possible by limiting consideration of the film to its Macedonian elements. For one thing, its director's political activities were used to (mis)interpret the film. However, it also became clear that the critics were not minded to accept a film that did not make a political statement on contemporary events. The creation of a narrative space in the 'Wild East', which turned not just a piece of Macedonian, but also of European history into an epic film, seemed to them politically suspect, culturally unacceptable and artistically misguided.

Much of the Western perception of the creative position of a director from the 'Balkans' is revealed in what an art historian said to me about *Dust*: aesthetically an extremely successful piece – if only the director had not related his story to Macedonian history.

As far as the public are concerned, as long as film distributors rely on reviews such as those from Venice (and with *Dust*, they did so), few films that, like *Dust*, are daring in their aesthetics, form and content will make it into the cinemas.

## **A Shootist for VMRO – Two Redemptions and one Sin**

**Nikos Psarros, Leipzig**

Milcho Manchevski's film tells the story of the salvation of a small-time criminal, Edge, who during a burglary is converted to a caring and loving "grand son" of Angela's, a 95 years old lady, by being half forced by Angela's Colt and half seduced by her promise to reveal him a golden treasure if he listens to her story and fulfils her last wish. The story Angela tells is the story of the salvation of Luke, a would-be head-hunter who in 1900 odd travels from somewhere in Midwestern US to war struck Macedonia in the quest for luck, money and a new life. However, fate arranges Luke's conversion to a freedom fighter and to an avenging angel for the death of his former target and victim: A school teacher who leads a band of Macedonian nationalists against the troops of a fierce Ottoman captain. Luke does not survive the final shoot-down. The material and the spiritual reward of his sacrifice, the golden treasure and teacher's new born daughter, come into the custody of his brother, Elijah, and are brought back to New York where the circle is closed with Edge's burglary 95 year later.

The film has all the ingredients that make out a great piece of cinema that picks up the tradition of the sociocritical Westerns of the Italian school. Nevertheless it is a *bad* piece of cinema, not in terms of the state of the art, but in a moral sense. And this in spite of the fine irony that pervades it. More precisely, it is a piece of cinema that has fallen into sin, because it has missed the sense of the cinematographic tradition it claims to belong: The sociocritical Italo-Western deals namely with the birth and the establishment of the civic society in northern America, namely in the United States and Mexico of the late 19th and early 20th, by telling the stories of "heroes" who oppose more or less successfully the arbitrariness and the power of rich landowners, corrupt and tyrannical governments, and desperate criminals. The world that emerges is, however, a world without any other historical and traditional roots than the ideas of the enlightenment and reformation. The sociocritical Western tells us the story of the "Birth of a Nation" from the social scrap of the Old World cemented solely by the ideals of human rights, root democracy, equality and the denial of any other superindividual power than God.

The situation in the Balkans of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was on the other hand completely different. It was the more or less simultaneous birth of several nations, of the Greek, the Turkish, the Albanian, the Serb, the Bulgarian, the Romanian and last but not least the Macedonian nation. All these particular processes included both the formation of a civic society in each nation and their mutual cultural and territorial demarcation that took place in the territory of an empire that had mixed all those ethnic groups that were the predecessors of the Balkan nations for at least four centuries. Milcho Manchevski's film, however, assigns each nation a single social role: the Ottoman Empire, the pendant of a corrupt and tyrannical *ancien régime*, is represented by the Turks and the Greek orthodox church. The desperados are Albanian and Greek partisans. And finally the honest and upright people are the Macedonians. This view neglects the fact that each ethnic group can tell the same story from the viewpoint of the upright people and assign the roles of the bad and the ugly to the other nations. And it neglects also the fact that peace in the Balkans was achieved only when each nation refrained from telling its story in that manner. Milcho Manchevski's film scratches on wounds that the Balkan nations try to heal. Thus it misses the moral target of its great example, the sociocritical Italo-Western, and missing the moral target is the definition of sin in the common religious tradition of the European nations.