Shadows (John Cassavetes, USA 1959)

John Cassavetes' debut film Shadows (USA 1959) was realized as a low-budget independent production in a largely improvised form: with a total amount of approximately $40,000, the film was shot almost exclusively with amateur actors and a largely inexperienced camera crew.[1] The film's modest framework of production was nevertheless not detrimental to its success, on the contrary: the fragmentary film style drew attention, endorsement, and acclaim and put its director in the limelight as a promising independent talent. The film premiered on November 11, 1959 in New York. After another showing as part of the Beat, Square and Cool Festival in July 1960, there was also international interest in Shadows: in August 1960, the film was non-competitively shown during the Venice Film Festival and awarded the FIPRESCI Award by the International Federation of Film Critics; in September, there was a special screening at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris; in October, the film was first shown at the London Film Festival and was later included in the London Academy Cinema's program. Both audiences and critics enthusiastically received the film, as the numerous discussions of it in newspapers and journals like *The Times*, *The Observer* and *Sight and Sound* show.[2] Critics especially praised the lifelike immediacy and authenticity that characterized Cassavetes' film: they celebrated a new film aesthetic that was able to realistically portray the big-city life of New York and therefore pose a significant challenge to classical Hollywood cinema. This impression was mainly due to the insert that accompanies the film's final image: "The film you have just seen was an improvisation."

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1   Apart from the film actor John Cassavetes, the German cinematographer Erich Kollmar was the only other person present who had experience on professional film sets.

2   See Ray Carney, *Shadows* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), 7-8.

Already in November 1958, however, Cassavetes had presented a first version of his film at New York's Paris Theater. At this point, the film was already met with approval, in particular for key players in the newly forming American independent film scene. The foremost of these was the filmmaker Jonas Mekas, who awarded SHADOWS the first Independent Film Award in 1959. In his review praising the film that appeared in the journal *Film Culture* shortly thereafter, Mekas declared: "Cassavetes in *Shadows* was able to break out of conventional moulds and traps and retain original freshness. The improvisation, spontaneity, and free inspiration that are almost entirely lost in most films from an excess of professionalism are fully used in this film."[3] In the following months, Mekas led a committed advertising campaign for the film, which was discussed in several issues of *Film Culture* and *The Village Voice* as well as lauded in lectures and radio discussions as the beginning of a new era of cinema. Many critics and filmmakers joined in this spirit of optimism: the New York avant-garde art scene had found its new champion.

John Cassavetes, however, did not seem to be satisfied with the success of his directorial debut and thoroughly revised the film. He found almost half of the first version (that is, approximately 10,000 meters of film), re-shot eight additional scenes, and worked on the editing for three months: the 60-minute 16mm film ultimately became a 35mm blow-up with an 81-minute runtime. After the second version was shown for the first time in November 1959, there was an intense dispute between Mekas and Cassavetes, carried out as a debate on fundamental principles in *The Village Voice*. Mekas felt deceived and called the revised version "a bad commercial film, with everything that I was praising absolutely destroyed."[4] Cassavetes, on the other hand, fought against being pigeon-holed into a specific cinematic and artistic position and defended his second edition as a necessary aesthetic decision.

In this early phase of reception, one can already see how difficult it is to classify Cassavetes' cinematography within established categories of classification. As a Hollywood actor,[5] Cassavetes was familiar with the practices and

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3   Jonas Mekas, quoted in Stephanie Watson, "Spontaneous Cinema? In the Shadows with John Cassavetes«," in *The Naked Lens: An Illustrated History of Beat Cinema*, ed. Jack Sargeant (London: Creation Books, 2001), 55.

4   Mekas, quoted in Ray Carney, *American Dreaming: The Films of John Cassavetes and the American Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 35.

5   After a small role in TAXI (Gregory Ratoff, USA 1953), Cassavetes had his first larger role in THE NIGHT HOLDS TERROR (Andrew L. Stone, USA 1955). Cassavetes was then tapped for films in which he would embody the figure of the young rebel made pop-

conditions of producing a film at a major studio. He had never made a secret of his negative attitude toward these cinematic practices, which he rejected based on their thematic superficiality and commercial orientation. He was especially critical of the dominant influence of the producer, who did not allow any room for artistic freedom, such as a 1959 article from *Film Culture* entitled "What's Wrong with Hollywood" describes: "In Hollywood, the producer intimidates the artist's new thought with great sums of money and with his own ego that clings to past references of box office triumphs and valueless experience. The average artist, therefore is forced to compromise. And the cost of compromise is the betrayal of basic beliefs."[6] Cassavetes was not the only one who had this attitude in the late 1950s. Nevertheless, he did not want to unconditionally join the call for more artistic autonomy, for rebellious and independently produced films, which the New York avant-garde around Jonas Mekas represented. This is why Mekas established the "New American Cinema" in 1960 without John Cassavetes, one of the most prominent representatives of the then-forming independent movement – not in the least, therefore, because Mekas' venture was seen as a direct reaction to Cassavetes' new version of his film Shadows. Although the agenda of the group, made up of independent producers, actors, and directors, aligned with Cassavetes' own positions in several ways, he did not participate in publishing their manifesto in *Film Culture* in 1961. Even more: despite his skepticism about the Hollywood's rigid system of rules, which he made known several times, he maintained his connections to the major studios. Thus, in the subsequent years, he finished two studio productions, Too Late Blues (USA 1961, for Paramount) and A Child Is Waiting (USA 1963, for United Artists), which had little in common with the principles of independent underground film.

Cassavetes' filmic approach, his cinematic way of expressing himself, is difficult to classify. Some critics have tried to avoid the problem of defini-

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ular by James Dean and Marlon Brando, such as in Crime in the Streets (Don Siegel, USA 1956) or Edge of the City (Martin Ritt, USA 1957). The success of these films secured Cassavetes' status as a promising up-and-coming talent and got him further roles in films such as Affair in Havana (Laslo Benedek, USA 1957), Saddle in the Wind (Robert Parrish, USA 1958), and Virgin Island (Pat Jackson, UK 1958). In addition, Cassavetes was involved in approximately 80-100 TV productions from 1954 to 1959.

6   John Cassavetes, "What's Wrong with Hollywood," in *John Cassavetes: Interviews*, ed. Gabriella Oldham (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016 [1959]), 8.

tion by characterizing Cassavetes as an "auteur,"[7] but even this classification seems vague and insufficient as an attempt at placing him. In this context, it would be just as imprecise to speak of a coherent "style" that distinguishes the director's entire oeuvre: thus, one may agree with Andrea Lang, who explains: "His aesthetic concept is built on the rule of not having any rules and not on repeatedly implemented techniques, which, all together, would result in an aesthetic, a very specific, thorough 'Cassavetes' style."[8]

It is obviously impossible to locate the director and his oeuvre within the established array of definitions, as his individual films seem to particularly resist interpretation. This primarily has to do with Cassavetes' narrative gestures, which elude established narrative techniques and fixed dramaturgical structures. Cassavetes' films develop a loose network of individual observations with several jumps, gaps, and discontinuities. The narrative interrupts its own legibility due to the fact that the plethora of plot situations do not add up to a coherent unity: images remain that are difficult to relate to one another. What Ute Holl says about Faces (John Cassavetes, USA 1968) could essentially be said about every Cassavetes film: "Ascribing a story to it means positing structure, purpose, and meaning, whereas the film is actually testing out how tenable each component is: a meticulous evaluation, whose standard is presented as the filmic itself."[9] Cassavetes' films are not coherent stories but arrangements of images whose consistency and meaning have to be constantly re-developed. What the films have to say is not located within a plot-oriented set of rules but result from the communication of movements and gestures that question filmic limits themselves.

Cassavetes describes how he understands himself as a filmmaker as follows: "The fact is that filmmaking, although unquestionably predicated on profit and loss like any other industry, cannot survive without individual expression."[10] But what kind of filmic expression does "individual expression" have in Cassavetes' cinema, how does it find its way into images, and how is it able to form them and steer them? Cassavetes' films arise from the faces,

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7   Jacob Levich, "John Cassavetes: An American Maverick," *Cineaste* 29, no. 2 (1993), 51.

8   Andrea Lang, "Das Privattheater des John Cassavetes: Logos Hollywood und hysterische Form," in *John Cassavetes: DirActor*, eds. Andrea Lang and Bernhard Seiter (Vienna: PVS Verleger, 1993), 22.

9   Ute Holl, "Ein Gesicht ist ein Gesicht ist kein Gesicht: Anmerkungen zur Geschichtlichkeit der Physiognomie im Film," *ÖZG* 14, no. 3 (2003), 50.

10   Cassavetes, "What's Wrong with Hollywood," 7.

voices, and bodies of his actors. His oeuvre has often been described as "acting cinema", as a kind of film that places the actors' expressive abilities above technically elaborate arrangements, as a cinema that focuses on the expressive individual and shifts the artificial to the periphery. This creates the impression of an authentic immediacy in the scenic play, an irritating experience of nearness, that arises from Cassavetes' particular sensibility to acting performances which is able to capture the fleeting nature of small gestures and reflexes. But how exactly is it possible that the smallest movements of the body and the voice operate affectively? Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros suggest a concept that focuses on physical presence as a central aspect of filmic expression, "an understanding of performance in which the focus is on the way energy is deployed and transmitted by and through the body rather than privileging psychological or mimetic principles."[11] With regard to Cassavetes' cinema, it is necessary to clarify where and how these energies move between the poles of acting and camera, how the body's mobility interacts with the affects and effects of film.

In the context of physical movements, Gilles Deleuze speaks both of modes of behavior as well as of the *Gestus* – a term that he takes from Bertolt Brecht, who describes it as follows:

> "We can also speak of a *Gestus*. This is understood to mean a whole complex of individual gestures of the most diverse kinds, together with utterances, that forms the basis of a singular human process and that applies to the overall attitude of all of those who take part in this process (the condemnation of one human being by another, a consultation, an altercation, etc.) or a complex of gestures and utterances that, when it occurs in a single person, triggers certain processes (the hesitant attitude of Hamlet, the confessionalism of Galilei, etc.), or also simply the basic attitude of a person (such as satisfaction or waiting). A *Gestus* illustrates the relations of human beings to each other."[12]

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11   Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros, "Introduction: Descriptive Acts," in *Falling for You: Essays on Cinema and Performance*, eds. Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros (Sydney: Power Publications, 1999), 26.

12   Bertolt Brecht, "Gestik," in *Bertolt Brecht. Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* Band 23, Schriften 3, ed. Werner Hecht et al. (Berlin/Weimar: Aufbau Verlag; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 188.

Like Bertolt Brecht, Gilles Deleuze understands the gesture as a complex of utterances but particularly stresses the connection to the body:

> "What we call gest [*gestus*] in general is the link or knot of attitudes between themselves, their co-ordination with each other, in so far as they do not depend on a previous story, a pre-existing plot or an action-image. On the contrary, the gest is a development of attitudes themselves, and, as such, carries out a direct theatricalization of bodies, often very discreet, because it takes place independently of any role."[13]

Deleuze's interest in the "theatricalization of bodies" is not oriented toward an ostentatious depiction alongside the restraints of the narration. He is not concerned with a representational body as the bearer of symbolic expression but with the elaboration of types of behavior that operate beyond the pre-constructed narration and that leave it behind or transcend it. In this context, he sees Cassavetes' particular achievement as cinematography in the sense of the "cinema of bodies":

> "When Cassavetes says that characters must not come from a story or plot, but that the story should be secreted by the characters, he sums up the requirement of the cinema of bodies: the character is reduced to his own bodily attitudes, and what ought to result is the gest, that is, a 'spectacle', a theatricalization or dramatization which is valid for all plots."[14]

The story does not produce the characters; the characters produce the story. In the context of Cassavetes' aesthetic, this primarily effects the notion of space: "As a general rule, Cassavetes keeps only the parts of space connected to bodies; he composes space with disconnected bits solely linked by a gest. This is association of images being replaced by formal linkage of attitudes."[15] In doing so, the body, along with its positions and behaviors, becomes an aesthetic element that is capable of arranging the film's visual space: it becomes the central location of coordinating movements. The cinema of the body, however, models not only the spatial but also the temporal dimension of the film, so that a type of image emerges whose fulcrum is formed by the body's gestural stances.

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13   Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 192.

14   Ibid.

15   Ibid., 249.

The body movements and the energies that discharge between the characters are presented in Cassavetes as untreated raw material, so to speak. Neither the image detail nor the editing gives any indication of the direction of the play of gestures, so that the viewer does not receive any stable interpretive instructions but is constrained to navigate between various expressive surfaces. In this sense, the acting cannot have a coherent meaning; rather, the source of meaning feeds on the dynamics of indistinct body movements, on gesticulations, postures, and vocal modulations, on the sum of the individual characters' body language and facial expressions. George Kouvaros speaks of a limiting point that exerts a corrosive, but also simultaneously opening, effect on the film:

> "This limit point involves a conception of cinematic performance driven by expenditures of energy and emotion that surge unpredictably and are generated by the particular force and temporality of the performative engagement. Understood in this way, the activity of performance has a corrosive effect on the film, eating away at its structures, but at the same time, it also opens up the film to a range of different readings, sensations, and temporal configurations."[16]

According to Kouvaros, the act of performance blurs the limits of the film. This has to do with the fact that the gestural movements within the representation neither conform to a stable code nor construct such a code: they transcend conventional systems of meaning. Accordingly, Kouvaros understands the cinematographic performance as a bundle of un-organizable energies that provide their own dimension of expression and thus expand the filmic space of possibility. The capacity for performative expression frays the film at its edges and thereby opens it up for a whole series of different interpretations. Gestural representation thus expands its own frame of reference in an incoherent chain of drafts and formations. In this respect, gestures can be understood as directional vectors of a sequence of movements that is played out within a performatively developed visual space and keeps it in motion.

The visual space of the cinema of the body requires the viewer to pay particular attention because the unpredictability of the body is opposed to the rules of dramaturgy: it forms its own organization; it opposes the directed gaze. The processual movement of dramatic performance is transferred to

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16   George Kouvaros, *Where Does It Happen? John Cassavetes and Cinema at the Breaking Point.* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 34.

the dynamics of the visual space, which is presented to the viewer in multiple layers. This imbalance is deliberately held in suspense in Cassavetes' film, as Anja Streiter explains:

> "The camera and editing hold the viewer in the same field of ignorance into which the actor is placed. The shots never give an overview; they always show things too close, too little, too much, too bright, too dark. The editing trims everything that is explanatory, abbreviates the beginnings and endings of scenes, ends a shot when it seems to arrive at an unambiguity, and, in this way, constitutes the image together with the other elements of staging: unknown, fragmented states of behavior, non-encoded moments, an unknown body in lieu of a well-known form. Everything hinders comprehension, everything forces seeing."[17]

What the actors offer in their play of gestures is a balancing out of possibilities; what the viewer perceives is a confusing simultaneity of these possibilities that can neither be abridged nor organized by Cassavetes' filmic language. In the cinema of the body, the resistance of the irreconcilable takes the place of the unifying goal-directedness in the cinema of action. Gilles Deleuze notes: "The obstacle does not, as in the action-image, allow itself to be determined in relation to goals and means which would unify the set, but is dispersed in 'a plurality of ways of being present in the world,' of belonging to sets, all incompatible and yet coexistent."[18]

Deleuze's concept of cinema of the body focuses on the translation and mediation processes inherent in the capability of gestural expression within the filmic image. Here, particular attention is paid to a body's postures and movements; articulations that are especially relevant in the context of John Cassavetes' films. The body is then, on the one hand, the medium of various behaviors that it sets in motion, and, on the other hand, these movements themselves are media operations. This understanding of the body has a particular effect on the character conception of every Cassavetes film. No clearly defined roles are presented, but rather designs that do not conform to any fixed scheme, but rather allow their own genesis to become apparent. In the context of Cassavetes' characters, Robert Buschwenter notes:

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17   Anja Streiter, *Das Unmögliche Leben: Filme von John Cassavetes* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 1995), 26.

18   Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 203.

"They don't bring a story with them, rather, they bring it forth: broken, contradictory, and nurtured by their own life. They do not explain themselves with speeches but with the waxing and waning of moods that their bodies and their faces, their gesticulations and their facial expressions, inscribe into the events. Their words are sparks created by the frictions of the gestural, arcs of energy released by the characters, whose accumulator is their bodily existence."[19]

The field of energy that Buschwenter describes, which is diffused between the body's movements, marks the space in which affective correspondences circulate. Here it should be noted that the ephemeral aspect of the gestures cannot randomly vanish, since it is exposed to the intervention of the camera. As fleeting as the body's movements and positionings may seem: the image that captures them always remains. George Kouvaros states: "There is something paradoxical here: the outbursts and gestures that move across the scene and destabilize our reading suggest a one-time-only status. Yet in the cinema, provoked into being and caught by the camera, they are there to be viewed over and over again."[20] It is therefore important to consider the filmic gaze's perspectivizing gesture, which structures the performative act of staging corporeal ambiguity. It involves the apparent immediacy of affect on the one hand and the simultaneously executed reflection of the gesture in the filmic image on the other hand – both are integrative mediums of design in Cassavetes' cinema.

Ivone Margulies argues that the gestural movements enter into a dialogue that overlaps, indeed exceeds, the function and meaning of the characters' verbal form of speech. She classifies this type of communication as "alternate, nonrational language" and explains: "Twitches, mimicry, and noise signals introduce a preverbal, more truthful form of dialogue."[21] According to Margulies, the play of physical gestures can be understood as a preverbal system in the sense that it attains the complexity of an autonomous language. Brian Massumi goes one step further and, unlike Margulies, does not conceive of the effect of the physical affect as "more true" in comparison to verbal

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19   Robert Buschwenter, "Das Schauspiel oder die Vermittlung des Scheins durch Wahrheit," in *John Cassavetes: DirActor*, eds. Andrea Lang and Bernhard Seiter (Vienna: PVS Verleger, 1993), 59.

20   Kouvaros, *Where Does It Happen?*, 35.

21   Ivone Margulies, "John Cassavetes: Amateur Director," in *The New American Cinema*, ed. John Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 294.

language but fundamentally as a more direct and thus faster form of communication and defines this more finely in the following formulation: "The skin is faster than the word."[22] In the process, skin is understood as the central boundary between the body and the outside world, as a significant layer bearing affective intensity, as Massumi describes as follows: "Intensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin – at the surface of the body, at its interface with things."[23]

In his theory of the "skin-ego," Didier Anzieu formulates the distinctiveness of skin as a switch point of experiencing the Self and the Other.[24] His central idea is to shift ego-genesis from a purely imaginary scenario into the realm of the somatic because, unlike Lacan, Anzieu does not understand the (mirror-) image as a determined site of subject constitution but ascribes physical self-perception the primary role of creator of the ego-function. In doing so, skin is assigned the position of mediator, since, as a tactile sense organ, it organizes data from the external world and transports them into the inner world in the form of pain and temperature sensations, where they are mentally processed further, for example in the form of emotional assent or defense mechanisms. As a channel of information, skin thus represents an important through-point for both the physical and the mental constitution of the subject. Furthermore, skin is also assigned a significant containment function, since, as a medium of visual representation, it offers a surface structure onto which types of identificatory subjectivity are inscribed: "The Skin Ego is the original parchment which preserves, like a palimpsest, the erased, scratched-out, written-over first outlines of an 'original' pre-verbal writing made up of traces upon the skin."[25] Marie-Luise Angerer expands on this approach to the effect that she understands skin not only as a rigid signifier that carries various indications of self-construction within itself but that it is also able to make the smallest body movements perceptible on its surface. What Angerer designates an "impossibility," that is, the missing perception of gestural movement in a static image, can be experienced through the unique sense modality of skin: "This impossibility – this specific slippage, this only before-and-after of movement as those disposable moments – corresponds to the

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22   Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 219.

23   Ibid., 219.

24   See Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Naomi Segal (New York: Routledge, 2018 [1985]).

25   Ibid., 105.

affect's autonomy in the sense that the movement inscribes itself into and across the skin."[26]

Therefore, if the skin is faster than the word – if it represents the medium of communication through which nonverbal body language can be transported outwardly, then, with this capability, it offers a predestined space of negotiation for the question of subject constitution. In principle, this applies to each identificatory process, but, in particular, to the question of racial identity. For the expressive power of skin is articulated not only in relation to a tactile stimulus-reaction schema but is also revealed as a visual sign of racial differentiation. Homi Bhabha has succinctly emphasized this function in relation to colonialism. He argues that "'skin' in racist discourse is…a prime signifier of the body and its social and cultural correlates."[27] In turn, its color forms various signs that externalize skin as a guaranteed identity: "The difference of the object of discrimination is at once visible and natural – colour as the cultural/political *sign* of inferiority or degeneracy, skin as its natural '*identity*.'"[28] This type of visibility represents a unique criterion for the articulation of colonial identity. According to Bhabha, it is manifested in an obsession that is comparable to sexual fetishization, but it also differs from this insomuch as the racial fetish, in contrast to the sexual, is no secret but is openly circulated: "Skin (…) is the most visible of fetishes, recognized as 'common knowledge' in a range of cultural, political, and historical discourses, and plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted every day in colonial societies."[29] Both the sexual and the racial fetish are characterized by the overdetermination of their functions – however, the fetish of skin color, in its obviousness, differs from the hidden, denied replacement object of a sexually motivated fetishization. It thus becomes a signifier that is inexorably inscribed into the body's surface.

The visibility of skin represents a special switchboard for the articulation of self-design because, on the one hand, it forms the visually perceptible interface between the internal and external world of the physical continuum and, on the other hand, the surface system of racial identification, through

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26   Marie-Luise Angerer, "Wo trifft der Körper sein Bild?" in *Ohne Spiegel leben: Sichtbarkeiten und posthumane Menschenbilder*, ed. Manfred Fassler (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2000), 306.

27   Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 117.

28   Ibid., 114.

29   Ibid., 112.

which racist discourse is kept in motion. As a medium of physical expressive-
ness, skin is additionally the source and destination of gestural sign language,
which is revealed as something legible along the line of the skin. The combi-
nation of these different functional determinants represents a predestined
space of negotiation for the restless search for the Self, which is the core of
the film SHADOWS. Cassavetes' cinema concerns the bundling of all that which
escapes a fleeting look – the formation of an energy field, which Gilles Deleuze
describes as cinema of the body. The shift of the gestural from the periphery
to the center of physical expression unfolds as a movement that can be traced
along the surface structure of the skin as a bodily boundary. Ultimately, skin's
spectrum of color, as a potential mark of identity, reveals a significant space
for staging ambivalences and insecurities as they relate to the theme of self-
design – and this all the more urgently when it stands in close relation to the
previously mentioned ability of affective articulation.

In 1956, John Cassavetes founded the Cassavetes-Lane Drama Workshop
along with his colleague, Burt Lane. The Variety Arts Studio in Manhattan was
chosen as their location, which at that time was frequented by various am-
bitious, up-and-coming directors and actors (among them, for example, Bob
Fosse and Frank Sinatra). During irregular business meetings, Cassavetes led
theater exercises as well as rehearsed shorter improvised scenes. This included
a situation in which a group of ten actors were supposed to depict different
reactions to the problem of a mixed-race couple. As basic narrative design,
the theme of rehearsal founds its way into the film SHADOWS, which narrates
the problem of identity for three African-American siblings, among them the
light-skinned Lelia and Ben. According to Cassavetes himself, the focus on
racial subject matter was not supposed to be in the foreground of the film;
rather, it was not to be centered around "racial but human problems."[30]

In their analyses of SHADOWS, several scholars have taken Cassavetes at
his word. Thus, for example, Ray Carney states: "And what the film makes
abundantly clear is that although Ben and Lelia would undoubtedly blame
their problems on racism or others, their only real problems are themselves.
Their racial confusions pale in comparison with (and in fact are only as a kind
of metaphor for) emotional confusions that have nothing to do with race."[31]
Carney disregards the fact that the everyday behavior of Lelia and Ben – as
ambiguously they may articulate their own notions of identity – is clearly

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30   Quoted in Carney, *Shadows*, 58.
31   Ibid.

characterized by confrontations that unfold along the binary ascriptions of a society based on racism. Carney is not the only one who assumes that racial subject matter does not play a prominent role but, at most, can be considered a secondary aspect. For example, Anja Streiter explains: "Even if the problem of finding identity under the pressure of racism was the initial idea, the film is characterized less by the concrete racial conflict than by a more fundamental problem developed around it: the fragility of self-design, identity as a never-ending problem."[32]

Undoubtedly, "the fragility of self-design" makes up the central fulcrum of the film Shadows – but this still does not explain why Cassavetes chose a clearly racially contoured perspective for depicting this subject matter and preferred it against other possible variations of identity confusion. The possible objection that it could have simply been an accidental, not intended, decision, can be refuted in several ways, since Cassavetes had already shown a sensibility for racial themes during the preparation phase for Shadows. Already a few days after the first improvisation rehearsals, Cassavetes contacted the *New York Times* to search for donors. In a press release written by Cassavetes himself, he described the film's central conflict as a "Negro-white problem" – to which the *New York Times* then published a short article on January 20, 1957. In turn, the article did not go unnoticed: along with a few interested parties from the motion picture industry, the NAACP also offered its support for the film project – albeit with the stipulation that it would have access to the (not yet existing) script, which Cassavetes declined.[33] The fact that Cassavetes was decidedly aware of the cinematic representation of racial themes becomes further apparent in the film work immediately preceding Shadows: namely, Cassavetes' starring role in Martin Ritt's Edge of the City (USA 1957). In it, Cassavetes embodies the character of the young military deserter Axel, who becomes friends with the black rail worker Tommy, played by Sidney Poitier.[34] The story of two men's friendship beyond racial borders was consistently well received and thus appeared to point to a new sensibility to the question of race relations and integration. Considered ex post facto,

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32   Streiter, *Das Unmögliche Leben*, 30.

33   See Carney, *Shadows*, 21.

34   Edge of the City is an adaptation of the TV drama *A Man Is Ten Feet Tall*, in which Cassavetes and Poitier had also previously appeared together. The successful collaboration of John Cassavetes and Sidney Poitier was continued a year later with the film Virgin Island (Pat Jackson, UK 1958).

it calls for a more critical evaluation, since the series of "race dramas" of the 1950s worked with highly cookie-cutter depictions of black and white characters.[35] Therefore, their narrative dynamic almost always resulted from the confrontation of a noble black man with a malicious racist, whereby none of the characters are given a more polished character development. The lacking diversity is additionally evinced in the fact that the starring roles were given almost exclusively to *one* black actor: the star Sidney Poitier. Poitier's acting talent is still convincing today, but the concentration of his roles in depictions of a noble, altruistic black man must be seen critically as a one-sided typecast. Donald Bogle, for example, sees Poitier's embodiment of the sacrificial hero in EDGE OF THE CITY as continuing an old, well-known, highly discriminatory tradition:

> "Oddly, when viewed today, the incongruities and disparities ignored by the audience of 1957 are blatantly apparent. Poitier's character falls into the tradition of the dying slave content that he has well served the massa. His loyalty to the white Cassavetes destroys him as much as the old slave's steadfastness kept him in shackles."[36]

Bogle is referring to the ambivalent attitude of liberal Hollywood cinema of the 1950s. Poitier's star appeal led to more black characters being shown onscreen, and not just as eye-rolling comedians but as cultivated, middle-class citizens. Nevertheless, the repeatedly depicted stoicism with which Poitier's characters patiently bear the injustice directed toward them led more to a reproduction than a revision of old stereotypes. Thus, 1950s Hollywood cinema proved to be essentially more open to questions of integration, but the politics of representation that it chose was not significantly different from already established modes of narration.

Through his work on the social drama EDGE OF THE CITY, Cassavetes was familiar with the conventional Hollywood dramaturgy of race relations. He saliently formulated his skepticism about this dramaturgy's significance in a situation that was actually planned as a promotional event. On February 13, 1957, Cassavetes was a guest on the WOR radio talk show *Jean Shepherd's Night People* to introduce the then showing film EDGE OF THE CITY. In fact, however, Cassavetes reported more about his own improvisation rehearsals with

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35   Further examples are NO WAY OUT (Joseph Mankiewicz, USA 1950), THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE (Richard Brooks, USA 1955), and THE DEFIANT ONES (Stanley Kramer, USA 1958).

36   Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 181.

unknown actors than about the grand Hollywood production. While EDGE OF THE CITY only scratches the surface of its racial subject matter, Cassavetes said that he was looking for a deeper examination of the problems of black and white people, pointing out that he was in the process of working on a form of representation that was less constructed and more immediate and closer to its viewers. Mentioning the financial difficulties of the project, Cassavetes ended his self-promotion with the call that anyone who wanted to see a "real film" with "real people" may support the project with a dollar or two. The reactions to his appearance surprised both the radio station and Cassavetes: within one week, over $2,000 of donations came in from individuals, mostly smaller contributions of $1 to $2.[37] This kind of reassurance provided for a new dynamic for the project. Cassavetes had publicly announced a rejection of Hollywood as well as his aspirations for a new type of film – and was ready to creatively implement this ambition with his first directing role. It is no small detail that the topic of racial identity was to be the film's focus: for a long time, it was the only information about the film that Cassavetes disseminated. Ray Carney's claim that "Cassavetes' understanding of life was colour-blind, class-blind and individualistic"[38] is therefore simply false – since SHADOWS exhibits a considerable awareness of the relevance of racial differentiation as well as a particular sensibility for its filmic mediation.

SHADOWS begins with an energetic outburst: a mixture of bodies, movement, music, changing incidences of light, a confusing tangle of various acoustic and visual sensations. The first scene shows a boisterous crowd of young people, both white and black, who are dancing, shouting, and clapping to live music from a jazz combo.

The first shots appear strangely disordered in that they show only fragments – single body parts, cutouts of faces, fragments of space. In addition, the overcrowding of the interior causes an unbalanced image effect. The figures constantly move around next to and across each other, push each other to the side, and are in turn covered up by others: before one can make out a form, another one is shifted to the fore. Moreover, the images themselves begin to move around because they do not consist of static shots but hand camera shots whose unstable perspective additionally complicates the orientation. After a few moments, a figure becomes recognizable, which is notably different from the others: a young man wearing sunglasses pushes himself

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37   Tom Charity, *John Cassavetes: Lifeworks* (London: Omnibus Press, 2001).
38   Carney, *Shadows*, 58.

Figure 16: Opening Sequence

through the crowd to the fore, ducks out of the way of the jerking white and black bodies and ultimately forces himself into a corner of the room. In the middle of the dancing, jeering crowd, he is the only figure who is mute and still. If the disinterested face behind the sunglasses comes off as cool and confident at first, this impression is revised in the next moment. Now, the man is not wearing sunglasses, and his facial expressions point more to in-security than to superiority: his eyes move to and fro anxiously, he twists his lower lip and bashfully moves further and further into the background. The combination of these physical behaviors with the spatial positioning of the figure refers to an uneasiness that can be understood as an uncertain mis-placement, as an exclusion in inclusion. In this way, the topic of searching for oneself, even without explanatory dialogue, is already present in the film's first moments: as a nexus of physical movement, noise, and situation.

The figure from the opening titles is later introduced as Ben, who, together with his brother Hugh and his sister Lelia, lives in a small apartment in New York. Externally, the three figures are not discernible as siblings at first sight: unlike Hugh's very dark complexion, Ben and Lelia are so light-skinned that they are identified as white when outside their family unit. All three dabble in the art world, where none of them seems to be particularly successful: Hugh performs as a singer or announcer in third-rate clubs; Ben is a self-proclaimed

jazz musician but is never shown at a rehearsal or a gig; Lelia writes short stories. What connects all three characters is their constantly repeated attempts to make something of themselves in public and to assert their positions as personalities. The confrontation between self-design and external attribution is problematic for all three siblings, and this repeatedly causes uncertainty: Hugh experiences setbacks to his desire to be taken seriously as a singer when he receives offers that are artistically unambitious; Ben's jazz ambitions get lost in aimless nighttime excursions; although Lelia's attempts at writing are advised by her mentor David, her writing does not end up being profitable. Moreover, each one's appearances in the public sphere entail mostly painful experiences: during one of his appearances, Hugh is ridiculed and has to cut off his performance early; Ben repeatedly gets into fights; Lelia's grandstanding as an up-and-coming author becomes a farce at a literature party.

The strained search for a place in society does not only apply to the self-formed image as an artist but also to the construction of racial identity, which is nevertheless presented in a much more subtle way. Compared to the stylizations of each one's performance as an artist, posing as a singer, a musician, or a literary figure, the self-design of the racial subject turns out to be much more inconspicuous. The first two-thirds of the film run without explicit mention of any racial subject matter – Lelia's and Ben's status as light-skinned African-Americans is neither pointedly commented on nor openly problematized. While the films of D.W. Griffith and Oscar Micheaux introduce the mulatto as an uncanny crosser of boundaries from the very beginning, and while Douglas Sirk already develops the ambivalence of mixed-race identity as a basic narrative constant in the first images of his film, Cassavetes seems to give little attention to this theme at first. Even more eruptive is the outburst of a racially conditioned conflict whose subliminal presence reaches the surface of the filmic plot relatively late.

The first open controversy: during a literature party organized by David, Lelia meets his friend, Tony. They flirt with each other and plan to take a walk in Central Park the next day. Following their meeting, Tony invites Lelia to his apartment for a drink, where they spontaneously sleep with each other. A short time later, they are in Lelia's apartment, and a romantic relationship seems to be developing. However, when Hugh comes home and Lelia introduces him as her brother, Tony turns away and declares: "I have to go." Lelia seems to be confused about the cause of his sudden insecurity, as her helpless reaction shows: flustered, she dashes behind Tony to stop him at the doorway. Tony subsequently stammers a few evasive sentences until Hugh comes

up and asks him to leave the apartment. His inflection escalates from an initially calm pitch to a sharp cry to not bother his sister in the future – to which Tony reacts aggressively and grabs Hugh by the shoulders. Before the conflict escalates, Tony hurries down the stairs while Hugh tries to calm his agitated sister.

Figure 17: Lelia, Hugh, Tony

The abruptly erupting tension of this scene has an immediate and unprepared effect. Contrary to conventional narrative patterns, the mixed-raced character's identity dilemma is not depicted as a narrative sensation, whose conflict escalates up to a dramatic climax. What is striking is the fact that Cassavetes presents the motif of passing not as an intentional strategy but as an indiscriminate effect of an outer appearance. Whereas Douglas Sirk presents Sarah Jane's deception as an elaborate plan, the fact that Lelia is identified as white seems almost incidental. In actuality, Lelia does not evince any pronounced awareness of the problem of her mixed-race identity: instead of denying her lineage, as Sarah Jane does, Lelia acknowledges her dark-skinned brother and thus her black heritage – without seeing any risk or challenges in it. Her white love interest's reaction of rejection occurs just as inconspicuously. While Sirk stages Sarah Jane's rejection by her friend Frankie as violent abuse, Tony at first remains calm. Unlike Frankie, who expresses his irritation in the question, "Is your mother a nigger?", Tony at first does not say a

thing that could be a commentary on his emotional state. The scene's escalating tension is unequivocal – however, it is not revealed by the dramaturgy of dialogue but by the actors' body language. Tom Charity compares Cassavetes' form of subtle staging to production techniques at Hollywood studios and notes:

> "In *Shadows*, you can sense the tension between the liberal race drama Hollywood might have made out of it, and the more slippery character piece Cassavetes came up with. The crucial revelation of Tony's racism is conveyed entirely through looks and glances; there's none of the pontification which marks analogous works of the period, like *Edge of the City* or *The Defiant Ones*."[39]

Thus, no pretentious speeches, no dramaturgically elaborate spectacle makes up the scene's effect – instead, sudden movements are presented that give the events their own structure precisely because of their unpredictability. George Kouvaros explains:

> "Already a formal method can be gleaned from these brief, yet telling, early scenes, one in which key moments of emotional transformation occur suddenly – so suddenly, in fact, that the narrative itself seems to have been caught by surprise. And, as a result, the emotion is drawn less from the fictionalized story line than from the physical engagements of the actors. Throughout *Shadows* and the films that follow, the simplest, yet most complicated, acts of everyday social engagement are illuminated through an explicit engagement with performance."[40]

One would have to add that Cassavetes does not present the eruption of a racial conflict as extemporaneous. Although the scenes that precede the emotional outburst in Lelia's apartment do not offer any clearly articulated indices of the budding controversy at the level of dialogue, nevertheless, the performative instances mentioned by Kouvaros shed light, in a subtle way, on the racial dilemma that lies at the heart of the film.

Central to this context is the scene that takes place shortly before the aforementioned conflict in Tony's apartment. Directly after their spontaneous sex, the film shows a conversation between Tony and Lelia in bed that is

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39   Charity, *John Cassavetes*, 30.
40   Kouvaros, *Where Does It Happen?*, 8.

not characterized by the lovers' familiarity but by Lelia's painful disappoint-ment. Already here, a conflict begins that Lelia sums up with the statement: "I thought being with you would be so important, meaning so much, and af-terwards two people would be as close as it's possible to get. But instead we're just two strangers." As it turns out, their intercourse is Lelia's first sexual expe-rience – and Tony ascribes her insecurities to the fact that she has just lost her virginity. Unable to comprehend the deeper reason for her feelings of injury, he tries to comfort her: "Don't be so upset, sweetheart… Baby, it will be much easier next time." But Lelia's defensive posture and her hopeless statement, "There isn't going to be a next time," not only illustrate Tony's misjudgment, they also hint at an underlying conflict that goes beyond sexual initiation.
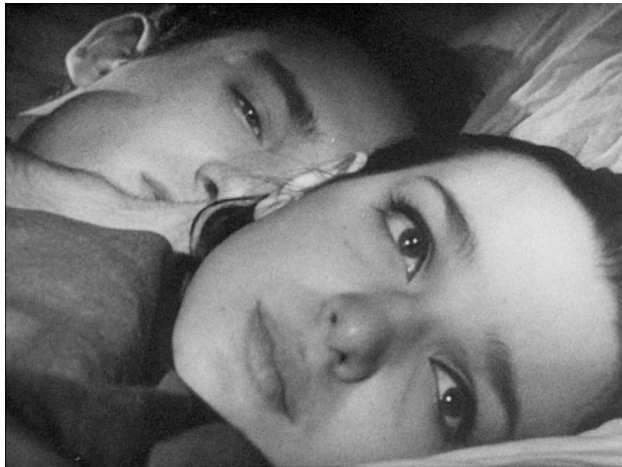

Figure 18: Lelia and Tony

Lelia's discomfort is primarily manifested in physical movements – as something inexpressible that cannot appropriately be articulated in words. Her confusion comes up, for example, in the way she quickly shifts her var-ious physical postures: if, at first, she had snuggled up against Tony's body seeking shelter, shortly after she turns away from him, sits up, takes on a curved sitting posture, moves back and forth, wraps her arms around her body, stretches out only to crouch directly after, fixates her gaze on Tony, only to then stare into an undefined distance. If, at one moment, she seems to be seeking tenderness from Tony, she fends it off in the next instance; if her fa-

cial expression at first seems dreamy, shortly afterwards it seems tense and nervous; if, at first, she tries to verbally explain her emotional state, she then falls into a state of pensive silence. Far from providing a clear, completely interpretable indication of her condition, these moments offer a web of insecurities held together solely by the intensity of the movements she performs. Brian Massumi explains the effect of the affective intensity as follows:

> "Intensity is […] a nonconscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder. It is outside expectation and adaptation, as disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration, as it is from vital function. It is narratively de-localized, spreading over the generalized body surface, like a lateral backwash from the function-meaning interloops travelling the vertical path between head and heart."[41]

Massumi emphasizes the impossibility of localizing the expressive quality of intensity or of inserting it into a clearly outlined frame of reference. Intensity is autonomous in that it is neither expectable, nor malleable, nor narratively tangible. Closely related to this concept is the way the gesture functions. Similar to the intensity of affect described by Massumi, the gestural is also to be understood as an autonomous, unstructured element that manifests itself beyond intentional comprehensibility. Vilém Flusser, in his attempt to locate the gesture phenomenologically, arrives at the following definition: "The gesture is a movement of the body or of a tool connected to it, for which there is no satisfying causal explanation."[42] Giorgio Agamben goes in a similar direction in his "Notes on Gesture": "Gesture is what in each expression remains without expression."[43]

But as volatile as a gestural movement may occur – it is perceptible to the degree that it is presented as a visually accessible body language. Gilles Deleuze points to the fact that Cassavetes' cinema ascribes particular value to the pre-rhetorical aesthetics of the body, to a sign language that unfolds beyond the spoken word and thereby transcends the narrative construction of the diegesis. But the body is in no way speechless, rather, the space is charged by the circulation of instances of physical expression, which is disseminated

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41   Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 219.

42   Vilém Flusser, *Gesten: Versuch einer Phänomenologie.* Düsseldorf/Bensheim: Bollmann, 1991), 10.

43   Giorgio Agamben, "Noten zur Geste," in *Postmoderne und Politik*, ed. Jutta Georg-Lauer (Tübingen: Edition discord, 1992), 105.

across the narrative level as an autonomous system. Brian Massumi argues that this expressive ability is manifested alongside the surface limitation of the body, as a "spreading over the generalized body surface."[44] He designates skin as the substrate of an affective relation that is potentially intangible but nevertheless cutaneously perceptible. Accordingly, the autonomous operation of affective expression, in its lack of direction, cannot be steered but can nevertheless be recognized as a surface manifestation. This means that the immediately operating affect can be observed in the medium of its representation. The processes of the interior – affective movements, moods, postures – are inevitably shifted onto the exterior, onto the skin as a surface of expression. Didier Anzieu describes this relation as follows: "The skin preserves the balance of our inner environment from exogenous disturbances but in its form, texture, colouring, and scars it retains the marks of those disturbances. In turn, however much the skin is said to keep that inner state safe, it is revealed on the surface of the skin for all to see".[45]

It is precisely this internal-external relationship that is developed as an image in the aforementioned sequence. Lelia's postures, superimposed onto her verbal ability to express herself, acquire their own expressive quality on the surface of her skin. The pain that Lelia feels is revealed on her body surface, which is furthermore undressed in this sequence, as a subtle hint at insecurity. In the context of Lelia's first sexual experience, skin represents the site of desire as well as of pain; it is libidinous but also vulnerable. Her nakedness represents both sexual arousal and helplessness. Peter W. Jansen comments on this sensitivity:

> "Pain is the twin of desire; in Cassavetes, they are both experiences of skin. There are not many films that bring up this twinning in such a startling way. In *Shadows*, this succeeds because it is the language of the body, the physical presence of the persons and of images from which emerges the word that only expresses what the skin has already long known."[46]

The few words that Lelia and Tony share only express "what the skin has already long known" – because "the skin is faster than the word". Skin is able to articulate the slightest emotions long before they are commented on by means

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44   Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 219.

45   Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 18.

46   Peter W. Jansen, "Shadows. 1957/59," in *John Cassavetes*, eds. Peter W. Jansen and Wolfram Schütte (Munich/Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1983), 62.

of spoken language. The pithiness of expression is presented by Cassavetes as a visualization of an involuntary affect, a movement that can be traced on the surface of the skin.

Physical gestures become an integral part of Cassavetes' cinematic language – instances that operate autonomously on the one hand but whose fleeting nature, on the other hand, is preserved through cinematic mediation. A conspicuous example in the aforementioned sequence is the combination of body language and lighting. In contrast to other rather unevenly lit scenes, here Cassavetes sets distinct accents of light that make Lelia's skin color appear rather dark at first but then very light in the closeups on her face. Her white face sporadically stands out against the surrounding darkness, while in other shots, shadows repeatedly fall on the bodies moving around on the bed. These alternating uses of contrast and shadows, which are accomplished by various lighting effects, present the characters as a clearly structured contour at one point and as an unclear shape at other points. Ivone Margulies notes: "Bodies, masses and shadows obstruct and reshape the image, abstracting parts of it and commanding an even greater interest for what remains identifiable."[47]

Cassavetes' staging leaves some physical movements and gestures in the realm of the uncertain, while others are depicted as more clearly outlined surfaces of identification. The result is an image space that seems ambivalent but whose ambivalence is nevertheless not without direction, because it can be related both to the precarious situation of postcoital dialogue and to the fractures and discontinuities within racial identity, as Cassavetes illustrates with other visual clues. The sequence begins with a shot that shows an African mask hanging on the wall over the bed. Stephanie Watson sees this as a visual metaphor for Lelia's social masquerade that tricks Tony: "This subtly prefigures Tony's later rejection of her because of his racism. It indicates that Tony can only see the social mask or label of identity and the narratives that surround it, and not Lelia's actual identity which he had not 'seen' because he took it for granted that she was white."[48] Watson, however, does not consider that the mask itself is already presented as being split. Only half of it is brightly illuminated, while the other half cannot be seen in the darkness: there is no easily recognizable frame to the mask, and what appears as black on one side is recognizable as white on the other side. Already here,

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47   Margulies, "John Cassavetes", 298.
48   Watson, "Spontaneous Cinema?", 66.

one can see the fragility of cultural ascriptions, whose supposed coherence is constantly exposed to the process of different possibilities of negotiation.

Crucial here is the processually unfolding movement of the body on the one hand, one which stretches along the gestural, and, on the other hand, the influence of camera and lighting on the physical play of the actors. Here, both the incidence of light on the body as well as its reflecting retroaction onto the camera image play an important role because the formal act of filming and the performatively developing depictions of the actors do not function independent of one another but drive each other mutually. George Kouvaros notes: "The camera is never just a recording device but more like a provocateur or catalyst setting off a performance, scrutinising it, looking for the possibility of something never seen before but which emerges with strikingly clarity through the act of cinema."[49] The movement of shadows has a prominent place among the effects Kouvaros mentions: as aesthetic formations, they bring out the complex interplay of body, image, and movement. Robert Buschwenter states:

> "On the surface, the broken shadows and the shimmering reflection of the illuminated forms are freed from their outlines in the interplay. They reveal their illusoriness and keep the memory of the bodies alive. The surface is the place that recaptures bodies by making their appearance into a visible reality: in the play of movement created by the immersing bodies with the reflected bodies of light."[50]

The characters' self-exploration is just as processual and inconsistent as their physical gestures. It is subject to the same transformative qualities and experiences the same resistance against coherent attempts at interpretation, as Stephanie Watson highlights: "Cassavetes' desire to show identity to consist process and indirection, is the desire to fragment easy interpretations and definitions, to show that a person, or event, cannot be reduced to a single static definition, or meaning, interpreted in the same way by everyone."[51] Cassavetes' protagonists remove themselves from schematized characterization. Their restless search for the self is presented as an interminable movement alongside possible formations.

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49   George Kouvaros, "The Cinematic Life of Emotions: John Cassavetes," *Senses of Cinema Online Journal* 5 (2000), no page number.

50   Buschwenter, "Das Schauspiel", 57.

51   Watson, "Spontaneous Cinema?", 64.

But even if Cassavetes' characters cannot be understood as completely co-herent figures, their actions are still constantly embedded in a cultural context that affects their apparently free-moving expressiveness. Lelia's encounter with Tony does not solely involve the painful experience of sexual initiation but also the problem of a mixed-race sexual relationship. Frantz Fanon makes this relationship the central focus of his work *Black Skin, White Masks* and pays special attention to the analysis of sexual relationships between the races. In doing so, he does not solely examine the perspective of the dominant, white position but also attempts to comprehend the motives of black sexual part-ners. With regard to the female subject, he makes the following inventory: "First of all, there are two such women: the Negress and the mulatto. The first has only one possibility and one concern: to turn white. The second wants not only to turn white but also to avoid slipping back. What indeed could be more illogical than a mulatto woman's acceptance of a Negro husband?"[52] Fanon in-terprets black desire as an attempt to lighten one's skin through sexual con-tact with white people, an assimilatory desire that he calls "lactification."[53] In Fanon, the possibility of a self-aware counter-project that could oppose the racist symbolism of colonialism with something other than well-known forms of discrimination seems to be, at best, a vague promise. Rather, the no-tion in the foreground is the fact that "authentic love will remain unattainable before one has purged oneself of that feeling of inferiority […], that overcom-pensation, which seem to be the indices of the black *Weltanschauung*."[54] The prospect of demythologizing thought patterns that degrade black people to inferior objects seems further and further away. Instead, Fanon emphasizes that not only the white person, but also the black person, remains trapped in colonial fantasies that require a clear model of dominance and subordination. Thus, he asks the foundational question of

> "whether it is possible for the black man to overcome his feeling of insignifi-cance, to rid his life of the compulsive quality that makes it so like the behav-ior of the phobic. Affect is exacerbated in the Negro, he is full of rage because he feels small, he suffers from an inadequacy in all human communication, and all these factors chain him with an unbearable insularity."[55]

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52 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 54.
53 Ibid., 47.
54 Ibid., 42.
55 Ibid., 50.

Consequently, this means that a stable, unencumbered form of sexual relationship between the races is basically impossible – too often, it is determined by the inferiority complexes of black people on the one hand and white people's fantasies of superiority on the other hand. The inability of the black person to form such a relationship for which Fanon argues can thus be traced back to an insurmountable self-hatred that corresponds to the desire for self-dissolution.

Therefore, based on Frantz Fanon's analysis, can Lelia's anxiety about her sexual experience with a white lover be understood as the expression of a structure of desire conditioned by racism, which must necessarily result in the painful effacement of the Self? Perhaps SHADOWS is not so much about interracial desire as such as it is about insecurities conditioned by racism, to which all of those in such relationships are subjected. In any case, it is not only Lelia's obvious discomfort and anxiety that is palpable but also Tony's embarrassment, as well as his inability to appropriately react to the situation. Tony's motivations are just as unclear as Lelia's actions and reactions; just as little as one could characterize Lelia's driving force as a striving for assimilation à la Fanon, Tony's insecurity can be assigned to a clearly defined position. Cassavetes' staging of a mixed-race sexual relationship is outside of the normative politics of representation in the classical Hollywood system: it is expressed neither as a cliché-laden scenario of danger, in the tradition of D.W. Griffith, nor is it expressed as a sublimated transfiguration, like in the integration dramas of the 1960s.[56] Rather, a constellation of problems is presented whose potential for conflict, although palpable, is nevertheless not obvious. Lelia's anxious, constantly changing body postures, Tony's nervous helplessness, the uneven image composition: all of this hints at a seething dilemma that finally erupts in the subsequent sequence in Lelia's apartment.

It must be emphasized, however, that although Cassavetes holds the situation in suspense, he does not leave out the determinants that structure the conflict. This is not only hinted at by the shot of the African mask that opens the sequence but also by Lelia's thrice-repeated statement: "I want to go home." Within the cultural history of the *tragic mulatto*, the articulation of

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56   The prime example of this is the depiction of a mixed-race relationship in GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER (Stanley Kramer, USA 1967). Here, the topic of interracial sexuality is pointed to in the marriage of a black doctor (Sidney Poitier) and a white daughter from a well-to-do family (Katharine Houghton), but their love remains completely nonphysical except for a single brief kiss.

the lack of a home, as well as the painful longing for a clearly determined localization, is a preferred topos. In film history, this motif is closely linked to the genre of melodrama, where it has in turn produced its own line of tradition. In fact, in the evenly lit close-ups of Lelia's face, Cassavetes – contrary to his otherwise rather unstable camera style – seems to borrow from melodrama's staging of a search for identity. In this respect, Lelia's gestures can also come across as melodramatic in their self-dramatizations. Anja Streiter notes:

> "The stylized expression of pain makes the pain inflicted by real life into an artificial pain: it is unclear whether this artificiality is an essential component of Lelia's character or an attempt to reinforce the expression of emotions by melodramatic means and add depth to the character in her emotional drives. Should one see a desperate woman here or a woman who is practicing a posture of desperation?"[57]

Streiter shows that the answer to this question is unclear because Cassavetes is unfurling a terrain that implies both the reflection, if not the critique, of melodramatic staging and the acting out of an excessive type of posturing. As vehemently as Cassavetes tries to distance himself from over-stylized types of cinematic dramaturgy, their influence can still be noticeably felt in his work. Just as Lelia, who at first refuses to recognize her mixed-race identity as a problem, cannot move within a space devoid of politics or color, Cassavetes cannot make a claim to a type of filmmaking devoid of context. Anja Streiter states:

> "Whether or not intended, the use of elements of melodrama has an effect on the film's avant-garde style and makes it transparent as a pose: the melodrama and jazz background stylize the characters' hurt and brokenness into a beautiful gesture that lends itself to being identificatory material."[58]

The result of the aesthetic contouring of Shadows described by Streiter is a noteworthy simultaneity of immediate affect and genre-specific framing. The film's processually developing action cannot be divorced from the variables that generate it, and this includes not only "people" but also, in a quite unique way, "cinema." Every type of authenticity, every depiction of emotional expression on the part of the actors, relies on a type of mediation in film that

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57   Streiter, *Das Unmögliche Leben*, 37.
58   Ibid., 38.

reveals the interplay of affective performance and filming techniques. This includes, on the one hand, the film's own aesthetic stylistics – camera angle and image detail, mise-en-scène and editing – but also, on the other hand, other influential factors that enrich the material. In the sequence in question, for example, this is the complex of aesthetic conventions of the melodrama genre, which is superimposed onto the diegesis as a shaping element and, therefore, produces a mélange in which one can no longer distinguish a model from its image. And Cassavetes emphasizes this relationship in other places, such as in his choice of setting. Large portions of the film (most of the exterior shots) are situated on New York's 42nd Street, an area that itself is closely tied to the medium of film. On the one hand, the district made famous as "Movie Block," with its numerous movie theaters, represents the location of cinema per se, and, on the other hand, this circumstance has itself become a cinematic topos, a popular, frequently chosen setting whose mythos reaches as far as the title of one of the most successful musicals in film history: 42ND STREET (Lloyd Bacon, USA 1933). This is where Cassavetes starts the plot of SHADOWS: in the world of cinema, complete with its inventory that seems to constantly surround the characters like a subtle commentary.

Already in one of the first scenes, which shows Ben on his way to Hugh's workplace, one sees various movie theaters with their neon signs and placards, for example advertisements for the films TEN THOUSAND BEDROOMS and THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.[59] And it is no coincidence that John Cassavetes' single cameo in his film happens in front of the entrance to a movie theater: in one scene, in which Lelia, deep in thought, looks at the advertisement of Brigitte Bardot in THE NIGHT HEAVEN FELL, she is badgered by a young man, whereby the passerby Cassavetes hurries to her aid.[60] Like in

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59   Both films are contemporaneous, large-scale Hollywood productions that therefore represent a significant contrast to SHADOWS.

60   This sequence is also full of references to the cinematic medium. One sees the neon advertisements and poster announcements of the films THE NIGHT HEAVEN FELL (Roger Vadim, F/I 1958), MAN OR GUN (Albert C. Gannaway, USA 1958), DESPERATE JOURNEY (Raoul Walsh, USA 1942), EDGE OF DARKNESS (Lewis Milestone, USA 1943), IMPULSE (Cy Endfield, UK 1954), NAKED PARADISE (Roger Corman, USA 1957), and NAKED AFRICA (Ray Phoenix, USA 1957). Most noticeably, this scene shows Lelia's obvious admiration of the star Brigitte Bardot, whose pictures she pauses a long time to look at. But the titles of the other films are also revealing, as they seem to point to the film's developing situations like cinema-specific mottos: to Lelia's being in love and its resulting insecurity (THE NIGHT HEAVEN FELL), to Tony's superimposed postures of masculinity

the sequence after Tony and Lelia's sexual affair, in which the dividing line between self-dramatization and external stylization is blurred, the relation between filmic text and context is characterized by intersections and blurs. Intradiegetic and extra-fictional elements seem to blend together in the form of cross-fades, where both the interior and the exterior are difficult to define – especially since Cassavetes presents his type of visual contextualization not as a clearly verifiable process of citation but, at the most, integrates them into the images like a subtle type of accompaniment.

Just as polymorphic is the milieu within which the characters of Shadows embark on the journey to find themselves. All too often, the way they represent themselves and want to be perceived ends up in conflict with the influencing factors around them. Especially in these situations it becomes apparent how difficult it is to develop one's own identity politics in the context of predetermined cultural parameters and how limited an effort of self-expression is that would like to leave out this framing. Ray Carney stresses:

> "*Shadows* recognizes the extent to which no cultural, sexual, or social performance is free, and that personal freedom can never simply be willed into existence. As the Times Square movie houses remind us (and the characters), a particular performance is always related to previous performances, and grows out of them, it can never escape their influence."[61]

Even when the characters repeatedly try to escape the framework surrounding them, they are constantly thrown back onto an impenetrable network of

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(Man or Gun), to Ben's aimless nighttime wanderings (Desperate Journey), to the abruptly appearing racial subject matter (Edge of Darkness), to the impulsive behavior of several characters (Impulse), to a first-time sexual experience (Naked Paradise), as well as to the knowledge that the problem with this experience is not only extended to the sexual, but also to the racial constitution of identity (Naked Africa). Regardless of whether Cassavetes intentionally placed these references in the film or not, they can be read as an accompanying commentary that seems to reflect on the various facets of Shadows in a fascinating way. In further sequences, film titles are presented that additionally accent the action: shortly after Tony's and Lelia's sexual affair, Tony can be seen in a telephone booth where an advertisement for the film Top Secret Affair (H.C. Potter, USA 1957) can be seen in the background. Furthermore, Hugh's and Rupert's farewell, where they try to give each other hope for the future, is accompanied by an advertisement for the film A Night to Remember (Roy Ward Baker, UK 1958) – a title that is incidentally not only connected to the single situation shown but to the whole film Shadows.

61   Carney, *American Dreaming*, 45.

models and images that is capable of thwarting any attempt at escape. It is thus striking how often the film questions how its own shots relate to each other: seemingly "false" connections and irritating jumps in axes make the images seem shapeless and stand in the way of the viewer's orientation. The characters are also difficult to grasp visually. Often they are cropped by the cadrage and presented as incomplete forms, and as soon as they become visible, they leave the picture again: they run offscreen and are hidden by objects; they are in constant motion, which the camera can hardly follow. But despite this perplexing jumble, one can also recognize moments in which Cassavetes seems to order the confusion by smoothing it out. One indication of this is, for example, the almost contemplative lingering on the African mask that introduces the postcoital dialogue between Lelia and Tony – an impression that seems all the more sustainable since Cassavetes uses the mask motif several times, such as in the sequence that shows Ben in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art, where he is observing different sculptures and pauses at the sculpture of a head that is similar to the African mask in Tony's apartment and that Ben himself calls a "mask." Thus, on the one hand, Cassavetes forces the liberation from technical constraints but, in any case, simultaneously shows how further grids of meaning are generated which are modelled on top of the structure of the images. The formal structure of Sʜᴀᴅᴏᴡs constantly refers anew to its basic theme of identity constitution, presented as a type of limbo between individual expression and structuring filmic movements. Just as the bodies try to remove themselves from the picture's frame, the characters seem to want to escape the frame of meaning – and both have their limits. Even if Cassavetes advocates the freedom of gestural expression, he does this in a particular formal framework; even if Lelia considers her mixed-race heritage not worth mentioning, she has to learn that it is no trivial matter in the environment of a society structured on racism.

The dilemma of searching for one's identity permeates the entire film. Each character is always trying to uphold his or her outer appearance and maintain his or her own Self as autonomous but are repeatedly confronted by fuzzy nuances that cause the borders of such a self-construction to come to the fore. Therefore, the impartial way that Lelia introduces Hugh as her brother seems to suggest that the initial insecurity about her relationship with Tony has given way to a balanced attitude. But, the deceptive feeling of security and stability gives way to a dramatic confrontation afterwards that again brings the fragility of racial identification to the surface of the action. The next morning, when her brother Ben, who was not present during the

conflict, notices her uneasiness and asks her if she is sick, she can no longer hide her troubled mood. Ben then asks his brother for the reason for Lelia's odd behavior. The latter at first tries to avoid him and finally answers with a statement that outlines the more deep-seated cause of the conflict: "Just a problem with the races, that's all… Nothing you'd be interested in."

Figure 19: "Just a problem with the races"

Hugh's remark is delivered without any kind of dramatic effort; it seems unpretentious, even casual. This is indicated by the claim that Ben is not interested in the conflict, as well as the fact that the problem does not apply to him. Both assumptions prove to be false: Of course Ben, who is just as light-skinned as his sister, has to struggle with the same confusions as Lelia does, and of course the omnipresence of racism, as well as the confrontations that go along with it, cannot be written off as trifles. Even if the level of conversation suggests otherwise, Shadows unswervingly insists on this: the main problem is the problem of skin.

Central in this context is the staging of skin as a physical boundary. As a medium of visibility, as well as of affective expression, it presents a form that makes the passage between interior and exterior perceptible. This function is already noticeable in the sequences that address Lelia's identity dilemma – and it remains palpable in Ben. For example, one noteworthy scene shows a private party in the three siblings' apartment. Similar to the opening se-

quence, Ben observes the action from the periphery and comes off as strangely isolated among the laughing, dancing guests. And like in the opening club scene, the reason for his obvious disgruntlement, his noteworthy uneasiness, remains unclear. Contrary to the opening sequence, however, a surprising outburst of emotions occurs during the private party. At one point in the evening, a black woman speaks to Ben who wants to encourage him to participate more in the party. When she touches him and puts her arm around his shoulder, he rejects her: "Don't touch me!" This first reaction is subsequently heightened to an aggressive attack: Ben hits the woman in the face, fights with his brother Hugh and ultimately leaves the apartment hastily.

Figure 20: "Don't touch me"

Peter W. Jansen describes this scene as a situation "whose intensity is of almost painful precision and in which habitus and body reaction tell a story that is itself the story of the film."[62] In fact, the conflict in this sequence can be characterized as a recurring constant in Shadows. At first, it is striking how sudden and extemporaneous the emotional outburst is. The fact that the process is not adequately explained, neither at the level of the dialogue nor in the subsequent action, leaves it unclear where Ben's irritation comes from, what may have been the reason for his aggression, or where the underlying causes

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62   Jansen, "Shadows", 61.

are to be sought or found. Instead, the film shows how the unpredictability of an impulse unfolds not as a constructed narrative element but as an undulating movement of energy. Furthermore, the sudden mood swing, which hangs over the images like a fleeting irritation, points to an emotional confusion that can be articulated solely affectively, which can therefore not be explained in words. Jansen interprets Ben's behavior as follows: "He pushes her away [...] because he noticeably cannot handle her touch: his reaction is immediately physical; since it is not verbally explained, it is unclear whether Ben reacts to her black skin [...] or to the woman herself."[63] Jansen's interpretation could be supplemented, however, to the extent that the scene encompasses a certain mode of simultaneity: Ben reacts both to the black skin as well as to the woman herself. More precisely: he reacts in the form of a rejecting gesture to that which, as a mediation through a medium, enables physical contact with the Other (the woman/blackness), i.e. the moment of touch. Here, skin acts very clearly as the surface of the identity problem, since it is the medium of tactile physical contact, where the perception of Self and the Other come together in the mode of touch. This results in a multiply duplicated effect: on the one hand, skin makes up a shield to the outside world that surrounds the Self like a protective or constricting shell, and, on the other hand, it is permeable in the sense that it is basically able to transport sensations, both pleasant and unpleasant. And touch is a further ambivalent doubling process because it represents the reciprocity of touching and sensing, which come together in mutual physical contact. Elisabeth Grosz describes this mode of perception as "double sensation" and explains:

> The information provided by the surface of the skin is both endogenous and exogenous, active and passive, receptive and expressive, the only sense able to provide the "double sensation." Double sensations are those in which the subject utilizes one part of the body to touch another, thus exhibiting the interchangeability of active and passive sensations, of those positions of subject and object.[64]

In contrast to the visibility of the skin, which results from the distance of observation, in the moment of touch the skin is contacted as a sensory organ and thus exposed to a confrontation from which it cannot retreat. In

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63   Ibid., 62.
64   Elisabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 35-36.

one sense, tactile contact makes up the intersection between the Self and the Other and thus represents a type of ambivalence that is capable of reflecting the mixed-race person's identity dilemma several times over. Here, skin stands for a medium of conjunction that calls difference itself into question and opens up its own terrain of non-demarcation. Ben's helpless, defensive behavior indicates that the question of racial identification can be seen as being in correspondence with this fundamental function of ambivalent perception of the Self and the Other. For, on the one hand, the ambiguity of his exterior represents a visual equivocation that must be gauged again and again in the public sphere: his skin is a medium of visibility exposed to a general interrogation without being able to defend itself. On the other hand, skin can be reached in a direct way through touch, in a way that confronts the subject with the reciprocity of touch and being touched. During the party, Ben tries to avoid the people around him and thereby tries to escape their gaze directed toward him. However, the moment he is physically touched, there is something inevitable about the encounter with the Other: it occurs in the form of immediate physicality, as a subject-object confrontation that Ben unequivocally perceives as a threat.

If one includes the racial marking of the skin in this process, the physically sensed perception appears all the more painful because the physical shell no longer offers sufficient protection against the outside world; on the one hand because of its tactile penetrability, and on the other hand because of its color permeability. Claudia Benthien has carefully highlighted the different cultural repertoires of meaning of light and dark skin, respectively. She points out that

> "a long physiognomic and literary tradition analogizes lightness and transparency of skin with sensibility and a positive translucency of emotions. Since very dark skin (from a 'white' perspective) is interpreted as impenetrable, changing less visibly and therefore not semiotizable, it is often understood as concealing something – it becomes a *hide* in a literal sense. Also, the fact that *color* originates from the Latin verb *celare* (to hide) hints at such a collective notion, according to which pigments are understood as the substances of the body surface that both cover and conceal."[65]

If one applies this cultural tradition of ascription to the mixed-race person's identity dilemma, Ben's situation seems even more precarious. Since unlike his black counterpart, whose shell offers a protective space to hide, Ben's light

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65   Benthien, *Im Leibe wohnen*, 205.

skin appears as an inadequate limitation, since its transparency perpetually pushes the possible translucency of emotions (such as turning red or pale) up to the skin's surface. Ben experiences this insecurity conveyed by his skin in several ways: as a visual ambiguity whose potential for double signification does not allow a clear selection of the components of meaning, as an ambivalent experience of touch that thwarts his attempts to escape, and as a dangerously permeable transparency that enables unwanted insights into the dynamic processes of emotion. In this complex relationship, the body surface appears as a locus of pain, making the drama of the search for identity perceptible as painful self-experience. Skin acts as the place where the interior and the exterior are transmitted, it refers to the correlation of visual and tactile sensations, and it appears as a surface that can equally enshroud and uncover one's fragile ego.

After the fight and the subsequent getaway from the apartment, Ben is shown alone on a street at night. Right before he enters a bar, he pauses and recites the following verse: "Mary had a little lamb, whose fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go." Shortly afterwards, the film itself seems to pause when it shows Ben's face in a noticeably out-of-place close-up: the shot has a retarding effect but also simultaneously emphasizes what has been said, which thus has a brief echo before Ben hurries down the bar's steps. At first, the formulation "white" can be associated with Ben's self-chosen racial identity: unlike his brother Hugh, whose party guests are overwhelmingly black, Ben's circle of friends consists exclusively of young, white men. Ben is also "white as snow" or at least perceived as such in public. Moreover, Ben cannot simply put on and take off his whiteness at will; it follows him wherever he goes: either as a devoted lamb or as a light shadow. In fact, this shadow seems to take on a life of its own exactly when Ben tries to suppress or deny it. But just as little as he is able to escape the examination of his skin in the public sphere (whether in a visual or tactile way), just as little can he escape the racial contouring that forms and constructs his identity. Therefore, skin appears as an instance of subjective experience as well as of others' perception of it; it can be perceived from a visual distance but can also make itself felt as sensitive proximity. As a shell surrounding the body, it acts as a sign of demarcation. It surrounds the subject but, at the same time, nevertheless reveals it as a contact surface. Ben's desperate attempts to separate the one from the other, to modify the surface in the form of selections, must therefore fail: the shadow cannot be gotten rid of.

At the end of his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon asks "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?"[66] The answer in Cassavetes' Shadows is: because touch is painful, because it has to be and because it will remain so. This is indicated by the aggression that Ben develops after he fails to defend himself from the woman's touch. On the one hand, his pain is articulated as a sorrowful self-perception and, on the other hand, as a type of reciprocity that he wants to ward off but cannot avoid. The inclusion of the Self as the exclusion of the Other becomes fragile at the point where it encounters its permeable boundary: skin.

John Cassavetes' film end at the same place it begins: in the realm of the uncertain, one which offers no definitive message. The shadows that give the film its title structure its images and simultaneously abstract parts of them: they offer possibilities of orientation only to break them apart in the next instance. Cassavetes presents his characters just as ambivalently, characters whose sudden outbursts and changes of direction confront our expectations of coherence with an oscillating variety. This type of fragmentary character development, as well as the corresponding impression of a loose, variable plot structure, has been repeatedly characterized as improvisation. Stephanie Watson notes: "As Cassavetes discovered with the first version of Shadows, which was largely unscripted, life can only be seen as being an experience of process and improvisation in re-presentational/re-produced form, if the filmmaking process is planned out in such a way as to 'appear' to have not taken place."[67] If one applies Watson's interpretation to the actors' performances, it follows that the repeated disruptions and fractures of the types of behavior shown do not spring from a coherent filmic dramaturgy but portray the reproduction of life itself: improvisation is therefore not to be understood as a primarily artificial skill but as the basic existence of each individual. Robert Buschwenter states: "When the actors improvise their roles, they do this primarily because they are portraying persons who are improvising their lives – or, from another perspective: because, as actors, they are tasked with playing out situations that they have learned to improvise from their own lives."[68]

Cassavetes emphasizes this connection by giving his characters the same names as the actors who play them: the character Lelia in Shadows is played

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66   Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 321.

67   Watson, "Spontaneous Cinema?", 61.

68   Buschwenter, "Das Schauspiel", 65.

by Lelia Goldoni, Ben by Ben Carruthers, etc. In this gesture, many authors recognize a type of authenticity that closely resembles the documentary type. Thus, for example, Gilberto Perez states: "No fictional method has more of a documentary flavor than the way of making movies devised by John Cassavetes."[69] It should be noted, however, that although Cassavetes' cinema seeks a proximity to the non-contrived, to immediate experience, it still cannot be prematurely equated with real life. Cassavetes relies on authenticity and verisimilitude on the one hand and cinematic imagery on the other hand – but not in the form of a distinct antagonism but rather as an interwoven network. In this context, it is crucial to recognize that a stable difference between the world and film cannot be discerned at all but that they – in the form of an exchange relationship – connect and complete one another. Already in 1969, Jean-Louis Comolli engages with this relation in *Cahiers du cinéma* and explains:

> "In aesthetic terms it would seem that for a particular (experimental) fringe of contemporary cinema, the traditionally separate and even opposing fields of 'documentary' and 'fictional' films were interpenetrating more and more and intermingling in innumerable ways. It is as if they were involved in, and involved, a vast process of exchange, a reciprocal system where reportage and fiction alternate or conjugate within one and the same film, react upon, break down and modify each other, until finally it is perhaps impossible to choose between them."[70]

Comolli ascribes a potential to this kind of cinema that leads to a lasting break with conventional standards of filmic representation. It is precisely amateurish experimentation, which refuses to be professionalized and does not eliminate the uncertainties and instabilities that arise, but allows them to become an integral part of the image, that is capable of revolutionizing cinema. In this sense, the real is not to be understood as something that precedes film and is represented by it but as something that is produced in the first place through the formative intervention of film: "A new and powerful link binds the cinema to the experienced, binds them and articulates them into one and the same *language.* Life is no longer 'represented' by the cinema. The cinema

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69   Gilberto Perez, "Imperfection," *Senses of Cinema Online* 16 (2001), no page numbers.

70   Jean-Louis Comolli, „The Detour Through the Direct." In: *Realism and the Cinema*, edited by Christopher Williams, London: BFI, 1980, 225. First published in *Cahiers du cinéma* 209 and 211, February and April 1969.

is no longer the image – or the moral – of life. Together they speak to each other and produce each other through and within that speech."[71] The effect of such a re-definition of filmic representation, which Comolli designates *direct cinema*, is a new kind of scrutiny and, therefore, a modification of classical cinema's narrative conventions. At the same time, the "direct" is not to be understood as a self-contained movement in the sense of a clearly definable stylistic direction but rather as a field of the indefinite: "*Direct cinema* is not therefore the place where meanings and forms are fixed, rather that of their greatest *instability*, their ceaseless experimentation, with all that that entails of tentative groping in the dark, reversals, surprises and paradoxes."[72] When applied to the characters in Shadows, this means that their connection to the real, and to the filmic form that fictionalizes it, cannot be categorized in the sense of a hierarchization: one does not come before the other; they are mutually dependent.

In the search for self, the characters are necessarily always border crossers. In Gilles Deleuze, this implicates "that the character has ceased to be real or fictional, in so far as he has ceased to be seen objectively or to see subjectively: it is a character who goes over crossings and frontiers because he invents as a real character and becomes all the more real because he has been better at inventing."[73] With this seemingly paradoxical formulation, Deleuze outlines a change within filmic representation that he locates historically in the 1960s; as examples, he cites John Cassavetes' *cinéma direct* as well Jean Rouch's *cinéma vérité*. In this terrain, the break occurs "not between fiction and reality, but in the new mode of story which affects both of them."[74] The bearers of this new mode of story are the characters, who set in motion a new type of processual identity constitution: "What cinema must grasp is not the identity of a character, whether real *or* fictional, through his objective and subjective aspects. It is the becoming of the real character when he himself starts to 'make fiction,' when he enters into 'the flagrant offence of making up legends.'"[75] Cassavetes' filmmaking does not produce any images that offer stable insights or narrative resolutions. His camera chooses neither a

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71   Ibid., 233.

72   Ibid., 237.

73   Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 151-152.

74   Ibid., 150.

75   Ibid.

subjective nor an objective perspective. Rather, its vanishing point is the borderline between both, which is manifested in relation to the characters in a type of articulation that Deleuze calls "free indirect discourse."[76] Accordingly, the point is not to assign the camera a clearly definable position, or, in other words, to decide between the role of the neutral observer or a subjective perspective on the characters. The characters are not seen from the outside but, rather, incorporate their own vision into the film image. They move within a borderland that no longer connects the subjective and the objective in an oppositional juxtaposition but in a communicative relationship. Both poles are components of the image, but they exist only as markers of a border that is constantly stepped over so that it may be made visible as a border: "What has to be filmed is the frontier, on condition that this is equally crossed by the film director."[77] Deleuze applies this position to Cassavetes' SHADOWS and states:

> "In *Shadows* it is the two white Negroes who constitute the frontier, and its perpetual crossing in a double reality which is no longer distinguishable from the film. The frontier can be grasped only in flight, when we no longer know where it passes, between the white and the black, but also between the film and the non-film; it is characteristic of film to be always outside its marks, breaking with 'the right distance,' always overflowing 'the reserved zone' where we would have liked to hold it in space and time."[78]

Following Deleuze, SHADOWS can be understood as a manifestation of border crossing: as an interrogation and transgression of distinctions, among them, not only the opposition of subjective and objective but also that of real and fictitious as well as of black and white. However, this border itself cannot be determined, it can only be perceived as receding and only under the condition of its own overcoming. In this context, what is especially important is the "in-between" that Deleuze does not so much see as a process of characterization but primarily situates at the film's temporal level. This aspect makes up an important factor for what Deleuze calls the "cinema of bodies." According to Deleuze, Cassavetes' filmmaking distinguishes itself by transporting time onto the body: "The attitude of the body is like a time-image, the one which

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76   Ibid., 148.
77   Ibid., 154.
78   Ibid.

puts the before and the after in the body, the series of time".[79] Here, the "series of time" is not to be understood as a chronological succession but as a moment of simultaneity of various temporal levels, as a paradoxical coexistence of elements that actually contradict each other and that does not just briefly show up but is expanded out to be its main requirement. Deleuze calls this type the third "time-image," which he describes as follows: "The third [time-image] concerns the *series of time*, which brings together the before and the after in a becoming, instead of separating them; its paradox is to introduce an enduring interval in the moment itself."[80] According to Deleuze, there is a period of time that occurs between moments that leads to a break in the empirical passage of time, which is capable of dissolving chronological succession and, therefore, the separation between before and after. "Becoming" is therefore central, not the completion of various developments, but their persistence in the form of a procedural proliferation. One can apply these ideas to Cassavetes' cinema in the sense that it formulates a type of simultaneity that is unique to all Cassavetes characters: they are located both inside and outside the diegesis without being able to be reduced to one of these areas; they are constantly testing the range of one in comparison to the other – as an incessant form of crossing boundaries. In this way, Cassavetes creates a kind of aesthetic unclosability that does not provide any definitive markers but merely loose ends and open breaking points, thus unfolding an independent film terrain beyond rigid drawing of boundaries.

The topic of finding oneself coalesces in an aesthetic mélange in which style and content cannot be divorced but mutually reflect each other in their function. Anja Streiter stresses that "[i]n this space, there can only be an infinite sequence of designs that make it possible to live with the unanswered questions by constantly articulating them anew."[81] The unfinished dominates over prefabricated and thereby creates new leeway for the interaction of the Self and the Other. Here, the filmic staging functions along mise-en-scène and editing as an artificial process of selection, but one whose borders are permeable, one that remains open to resistances that cannot be kept out of the images but create their own conditions. Trinh T. Minh-Ha notes:

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79   Ibid., 195.
80   Ibid., 155.
81   Streiter, *Das Unmögliche Leben*, 23.

"Although each film in itself already represents a type of arranging and fi-
nalizing, every conclusion can resist its own conclusions and open itself up
to other conclusions in order to emphasize the interval between the open-
ings and thereby create a space in which the meaning remains fascinated by
that which escapes and transcends it."[82]

Cassavetes' cinema accumulates fragments of reality and impressions of fic-
tion into a multilayer filmic web: the result is vacillating images that remain
open to decisions and meanings, whose sole message is the missing message.
The existential dilemma of the mixed-race character thus comments on, as it
were, the search for a connection between life and form, between content and
style. Matthias Kraus emphasizes:

"Therefore, self-reflection in Cassavetes can be understood as an interac-
tional and procedural relationship at various levels: as the self-constitution
of a physical ego in the demarcation of space, as a reflection of this identity
construction through the form and as a staging practice of communicative
acts between the characters."[83]

The incompleteness of the characters and the principal openness of the filmic
staging cannot be divorced from each other: both denote a process of self-ex-
ploration that Cassavetes outlines as a field of the possible, as a layer that con-
sists of alternating voices, expressions, and roles, among which none is more
veritable or more central than the other. Being fundamentally interminable,
this mode cannot be understood as a form of "being" but, as Deleuze argues,
as one of "becoming," as a state that can only be perceived as processually
unfolding. In the same way, the camera in Cassavetes' films does not act as
an instrument of reproduction but as one of formation, as Matthias Kraus
stresses: "The camera in Cassavetes is not tasked with discovering or con-
structing identities but with provoking a fiction that processes identities."[84]
In this way, every single filmic image carries the potential of a transmutation
within itself: it is capable of forming and deforming, it opens up diverse pos-
sibilities and eversions that carry the interior to the exterior and can cause

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82   Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Die verabsolutierende Suche nach Bedeutung," in *Bilder des Wirk-
      lichen: Texte zur Theorie des Dokumentarfilms*, ed. Eva Hohenberger (Berlin: Vorwerk 8,
      1998), 322-323.

83   Matthias Kraus, "American Ways of Life: Reflexiver Pragmatismus bei John Cassavetes,"
      Augen-Blick 31 (2000), 51.

84   Ibid., 53.

this process to turn in the opposite direction in the next moment. The film displays itself as a site of physical affects and thus remains open to all those sudden movements and gestures that go beyond the script.

The importance Cassavetes attaches to the integration of the unplannable as a prerequisite for his own cinematic expression can already be seen in the production history of the film SHADOWS, a production history which itself tells a story of hesitation, revisions, and fractures. What many of his colleagues and a number of film critics have interpreted as weakness and lack of balance is the real strength of Cassavetes' cinema: a bundling of transformative qualities that spreads as a texture of disorientation both in and beyond the film images. Perhaps the difficulty of this continuous shifting of boundaries lies precisely in the fact that it does not take place solely as a painful experience of the film characters, but is also transferred to the viewer in a painful manner. Trinh T. Minh-Ha states:

> "A subject that refers to him/her/itself as processual, a work that reveals its own formal characteristics or its own nature as a work, must therefore upset our sense of identity – that is, the familiar distinction between one's own and the other, because the latter is now no longer in a recognizable relationship of dependence, derivation, or appropriation. In the process of ego construction, the ego also loses its security and begins to falter. The paradox of this process is its fundamental instability; an instability that brings to light the disorder intrinsic to every order."[85]

In the face of the impossibility of a rigid drawing of boundaries, there is nothing left for both Lelia and Ben, as well as for the viewer, to do than to try to endure the permeability of their (film) roles and, in the process, to not repress the disorder of their constantly re-invented subjectivity, but to permit it as a multiform play of shadows.

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85   Minh-ha, "Die verabsolutierende Suche," 322.