

A character's filmography

« Here is an empty character, low-profile, has it any chance to take life? »¹
Philippe Parreno

Nowadays, our lives look like an actress filmography. They are a discontinuous and irregular path, made of various periods (blond, brown hair), punctuated with seeming metamorphoses, changings of heart, rejuvenating face-lifts – as if one had edited various situations like many episodes and sequence shots in which we play different parts, one after the other. Just like Catherine Deneuve, Nicole Kidman, Faye Dunaway, Delphine Seyrig, unraveling a tortuous filmography, successively embodying different characters, different lives – with death on the way. Our lives nowadays do not follow the straight line of a biography but the ethereal curve of a miscellaneous but consistent personality.

As a basic tool used within the cinema circles to mark steps and follow an actor, an actress or a director's career, the filmography here will be understood astray : it now appears as the most appropriate form and aesthetics to fit the ethereal outlines, the diachronic configurations of our actual lives. To a linear series of dates, the chronological curriculum vitae, and above all, the ID which all state the immutability of the name and the person, the filmography opposes the more dynamic idea of tracking someone.

According to this, the entire works of Cindy Sherman appear to me as an extended filmography. As far as she acted her own parts, the American actress has scattered her identity in a myriad of female characters, from the smart librarian to the aging movie star, from the blond Hitchcock icon to the abused woman, from the androgynous teenager to the crying lover waiting by her telephone in the middle of the night. But what makes Cindy Sherman's metamorphoses look even more like a filmography is obviously the special medium of her work : the *still-movie*, some remote by-product of the movie, though the real, almost ontological meeting point between the photographic and the filmic. French critic Barthes, fascinated by movie snapshots hang on the theatres walls or published by *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, somehow considered the photogram the real space for a cinema-lover daydreaming. Not only does it takes us « into the fragment », but it also gives the audience a mental alternative cast, like for another movie, another text overwriting the experienced movie.

1 « Can we live without producing narrative ? », interview of Philippe Parreno by Jean-Max Colard, *Revue 02*, n°37, printemps 2006, Zoo Galerie, Nantes, p. 16-17.

The filmography asserted itself as the real contemporary paradigm to the life story because of its discontinuous way of telling the story, and also because cinema has widely deconstructed and re-built narrative art throughout the 20th century. This process came across the psychoanalysis schizes and the deconstruction of a literary character which Alain Robbe-Grillet or Nathalie Sarraute saw as an « outdated notion ». Having come to a crisis with Faulkner or Beckett, taken down to a mere initial by Kafka, the character becomes, with writers of the Nouveau Roman, a floating entity. Therefore, we are the witnesses of a destabilization, almost a bare « genocide » of the characters, whom Antonioni made the « ghosts of modern subjectivity »². Scattered, incomplete and dissolved, a being with a blurred and discontinuous identity, the character is, by the end of this methodic deconstruction, but its own shadow.

But, as well as being the finishing point of the desintegration, this scattered status of the character is also nowadays its new starting point. Or, to put it differently : it all happens as if contemporary artists would find out the character in the desperate state psychoanalysis, *auteur cinema* and literature of the 20th century left it. Videogames especially taught us a double gesture in use within a number of contemporary art works : unloading the memory card and then uploading it again so as to reset the character, to give it new lives, new identities, to give back again some potential to these creatures emptied from their interiority, and now up for new adventures, new novels.

One character highly embodies this new status of the character : Annlee. « *No ghost, just a shell* »³. Brought by Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huygue from the Japanese manga industry which had left it behind, and released into the art scene through videos, installations or animated movies, the collective project around Annlee is the epitome of the dialectic which rules the resetting of a character nowadays. As if she awoke from a lasting amnesia through the successive steps of a « process » during which she remembers and goes deeper into her own story, Annlee finds herself being, one after the other, the narrator, actress and character of her own biopic, alternatively speaking English and Japanese, even granted with a twin sister in Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's version (*Annlee in Anzen Zone*, 2000). Eventually, though she was left for dead and placed in a coffin by American artist Joe Scanlan, Annlee goes on her filmographic adventures. Thus, the filmography is Annlee's means to exist. Therefore, she is not a ghost, but the empty shell of a manga filling up with stories, psychologies which complexifies the following of her various remakes. She is not the ghostly shadow writers of the Nouveau Roman left us, but she is indeed a « character to be reset ». In Pierre Huygue's video « Two minutes of time », Annlee is moving within a space she creates by her own voice and speech : it is a significant work in the way the character takes over its own story, in a lifetime which cannot but last the length of the movie itself.

Thus, the filmography breaks the substantial linearity of the traditional life story.

2 Roland Barthes, « Dear Antonioni », *Cahiers du Cinéma*, May 1980, in *Complete works*, tome 5, Editions du Seuil, p. 905.

3 Quoted in English in the original version.

It contributes to make the character floating, changing, discontinuous. Biography, in today's meaning has therefore nothing to do with yesterday's. The *graphic* means to talk about one's existence have changed as much as the existence itself.

Jean-Max Colard

Published at first in Revue 02, printemps 2006.
