

Individuality, Embodiment and the Female Interpreter in *Woman Times Seven* and *The Interpreter*

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Interpreters, enclosed in the marginalized spaces of their booths, are often perceived as a non-presence in the conference process, mere shadows of the speakers, who have to deliver the other's textual body faithfully and objectively to an unknown audience without any involvement. In this paper, contrary to the above approach, I wish to focus on the gendered physical presence of the interpreter and see how her image has been presented through time with a focus on two films: Vittorio de Sica's *Woman Times Seven* and Sydney Pollack's *The Interpreter*. Through the male gaze of the films, the neutrality and "absence" of the interpreter is reconsidered. Emphasis is rather on the two women interpreters' physicality and different kinds of involvement (emotional, sexual, political) with their male audiences. The image of the interpreter in the films is completely different from the dictates of professional codes of ethics, which call for neutrality and uninvolvedness, in other words, for an absence of the individual interpreter, who has to remain a mediator in the communication chain.

*Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;*

T.S. Eliot¹

The dis-embodiment of the interpreter in the interpreting process has always been an intriguing issue for me. Professional codes of ethics ask of interpreters to remain invisible and absent from the conference

1. T. S. Eliot, "The Long Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" 13.

setting; thus, the interpreter has to be divested of his/her individuality and embrace an absent presence, remaining a mere mediator in the communication chain. Throughout the conference event, the interpreter must remain a shadow of the speakers, re-producing their text, and re-negotiating its meaning, at the same time negating the self, the “I.” Even in forms of liaison interpreting, when the interpreter is physically present, s/he remains a non-presence; s/he is usually not looked at, and uses the first person to denote not the self but an Other, thus losing his/her self in the process. The “I” is not actually an “I,” but a “s/he” or a “you,” a second or third person pronoun which has to be incorporated within the interpreter’s body and become the first person; the other becomes the self, in a self-annihilating process full of paradoxes, as in the case of the beginning of Eliot’s poem, an acknowledgment of fragmentation that disrupts the divisions between “you” and “I,” inner and outward/social self, self and other, subject and object, observer and observed.²

A number of questions can be raised, then, concerning the relationship between interpreter/ speaker or interpreter/ audience. Is the interpreter allowed any individual involvement in the interpreting process? Can s/he retain the neutrality and objectivity demanded by professional codes of ethics while mediating the speakers’ messages? And how is the absence/ presence effect in interpreting negotiated between the different parties involved in the process?

These issues have been approached by a number of scholars, but also by interpreters’ associations, even private companies offering interpreting services, which attempt to deal with them through professional codes of ethics.³

2. A number of critics (Angus Calder, Robert Canary, Denis Donoghue, Manju Jain and others) discuss the beginning of Eliot’s poem. Scofield approaches the lines in the following way: “. . . who is the ‘you’ of the first line? One’s first sense is that it is the person (presumably a woman) to whom Prufrock is addressing his love song; and, secondly, because of the way we generally read poems, that it is (also) the reader, who is put in the place of the recipient of the song, and who is invited . . . to ‘go and make our visit’” (60). But later Scofield introduces “the interpretation that sees Prufrock as addressing himself in his song, addressing a kind of *alter ego*. . . . In the poem, then, Prufrock is talking primarily to his recalcitrant self” (61).

3. Some examples from codes of ethics: “The Code obliges members to: . . . maintain professional detachment, impartiality and objectivity” (“AUSIT Code of Ethics”); “The interpreter strives to maintain impartiality and refrains from counselling, advising or projecting personal biases or belief. The interpreter maintains the boundaries of the professional role, refraining from personal involvement” (“National Code”); “The Language Line Services Interpreter shall limit him/herself to interpreting. While performing his/her professional duties, the Interpreter shall not give advice, express personal

What these codes usually call for is the perfect neutrality of the interpreter, his/her lack of personal involvement in the proceedings and his/her distance from the other parties in the interpreting process. The issue of non-involvement and effacement of individuality, that is, an emotional absence (which is also accompanied by a physical absence in the case of a conference event) is of paramount importance for interpreters. As Rudvin Mette suggests in her paper "Professionalism and Ethics in Community Interpreting," "guidelines for interpreters . . . emphasize the need to distance oneself and one's emotions, feelings, etc. from one's interlocutors in a professional setting" (49). Interpreters, in the Western context, are constantly encouraged and urged during their training to remain as invisible as possible within the setting of the event, to "fit in," a "chameleon-like" presence, changing colours in every setting. However, although these issues are presented as universal values, they are highly culture-specific. Rudvin Mette draws our attention to this culture-boundedness, since for her the "objectivity" and "truth value" related to the principle of "neutrality" in interpreting are "cultural constructions that are based on philosophical and ideological parameters that have evolved through time as a result of historical developments" (58).

It seems, therefore, that these presumably "universal" values prove to be mandates brought forward by a Western view of professionalism that calls for a complete rupture between the private and the public domain of the individual. Interpreters are trapped in this universal discourse which does not allow any margin for personal involvement in their occupation. The impossibility of this call for the effacement of the interpreter's individuality in the professional setting, thus in the public realm, is foregrounded by Angelelli:

. . . interpreters, as persons embedded in a society that possesses its own values, cultural norms, and societal blueprints, also bring their individual social differences to the table. Like any other human being, they perceive reality through their own social lenses. It is therefore problematic to believe that an interpreter, as an individual who brings the self to all interactions, can be truly neutral. (2)

The two films I discuss in this paper, Vittorio de Sica's *Woman Times Seven* (1967) and Sydney Pollack's *The Interpreter* (2005), with their focus on the interpreter's role in the private and public realm, provide a vehicle for a discussion of these issues through the cinematic representations of women

opinions, or engage in any other activity that may be construed to constitute a service other than interpreting" ("Interpreter").

interpreters (mediated images of mediation), whose gender identity further complicates their positioning. Approximately forty years intervene between the two films, which will allow an exploration of any changes in the representation of the woman interpreter through time. How does the image of the interpreter change in these forty years? How do the films handle non-involvement and complete detachment on the part of interpreters, and how do they present women interpreters in the public/ private realms? Where do women stand in this clear division of roles and spaces? *Woman Times Seven* is set in the 1960s, a period of extreme turmoil that led to a number of political, cultural, and social changes;⁴ and in *The Interpreter*, the film unfolds at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the time of what Linda McDowell terms “global localism,”⁵ post-colonial discourse, a time of perpetual renegotiation of the relationship between self/ other, individual/ collective. In both films, the image of the interpreter is completely different from the dictates of professional codes of ethics, which call for neutrality and uninvolvedness. Emphasis is rather on the women interpreters’ physicality and different kinds of involvement (emotional, sexual, political) with their diegetic and non-diegetic male audiences. However, both women are individualized and embodied in very different, historically-contingent ways.

4. As Irwin and Debi Unger put it in their introduction to the work *The Times Were A Changin’*:

Life blueprints were rejected; people struck out on new courses. . . . And beyond the personal, there was the whole society. The Sixties delegitimized all sources of authority—governments, universities, parents, critics, employers, the police, families, the military. In the decade’s wake, all hierarchical structures became more pliant, all judgments and critical evaluations and “canons” less definitive and acceptable. The decade also witnessed the “liberation” of whole categories of people who had previously been penalized for their race, age, physical fitness, gender, or sexual preference. (1)

Moreover, the position of women in society changed dramatically in the same period, due to factors such as “[p]eace, prosperity, and scientific discoveries,” “the student unrest of 1968” and most importantly “the women’s movement, which fervently denounced ‘patriarchy’ and all its icons . . .” (Thébaud 9-10).

5. Linda McDowell defines “global localism” as follows:

the transition into an increasingly interconnected global economy has altered people’s sense of themselves, whether they remain trapped in the same old place or literally have been transported half across the globe. For all people though, whether geographically stable or mobile, most social relations take place locally, in a place, but a place which is open to ideas and messages, to visitors and migrants, to tastes, foods, goods and experiences to a previously unprecedented extent. It is this openness that I have termed “global localism” here. (“Spatializing Feminism” 37-8)

The approach I have chosen is filtered through a feminist perspective, which was imperative due to the female focus of the films, where the two main characters and interpreters are women: Linda (Shirley McLane) in *Woman Times Seven* and Silvia Broome (Nicole Kidman) in *The Interpreter*. This correlation between women and forms of translation has a long history. As Sherry Simon suggests in her work *Gender in Translation*,

[w]hether affirmed or denounced, the femininity of translation is a persistent historical trope. “Woman” and “translator” have been relegated to the same position of discursive inferiority. The hierarchical authority of the original over the reproduction is linked with imagery of masculine and feminine; the original is considered the strong generative male, the translation the weaker and derivative female. (1)

The two films seem to reproduce this long established link; interpreting—a type of oral translation where the dualisms of absence/ presence, mind/ body, public/ private, self/ other are much more at play given the addition of the physical factor and also the simultaneity of the process—is associated with femininity, not only in terms of the woman’s relation to the other sex but also in terms of her own self in her attempt to redefine her identity, relocate herself in the social, cultural and political setting, free herself from patriarchal determinations and restrictions related to feminine embodiment.⁶ Following a cultural studies approach to translation in which “the terms ‘culture,’ ‘identity’ and ‘gender’ are not taken for granted but are themselves the object of inquiry” (Simon ix), in this paper, practices of domination and attempts at subversion will be discussed through the perspective of translation and the translator’s role. Is the interpreter allowed any freedom to redefine herself as a woman and as a translator, or is she forced to move within the enclosed setting of the translator’s role, as Sherry Simon defines it: “. . . translation as we know it today depends on the security of bounded identities: the boundaries of authorship, language and text. At the same time, translation serves historically as a means to fix and consolidate these boundaries” through its role of “legitimizing national vernaculars” (45). The individual is, therefore, placed

6. Linda McDowell in her work *Gender, Identity and Place* attempts a definition of the term “embodiment” in relation to the “body”: “Although the terms body and embodiment tend to be used interchangeably by many writers, I think that the latter term is more useful as it captures the sense of fluidity, of becoming and of performance that is a key element in the recent theoretical approaches that question the relationship between anatomy and social identities” (39).

in the service of the nation or an ambitious collective project. In the two films, the two women interpreters serve the objective of promoting cultural, political, economic, scientific change and progress, as I will show below, and during this process they try or are forced to define and come to terms with their individual identities.

In the case of *Woman Times Seven*, the film is comprised of seven fragments, each telling a story of different female characters at a critical moment in their lives. Out of the seven women, Linda, the interpreter, is the most liberated one, since she is the only woman in the film who is not married and the only one who is seen in her professional environment and perceived through her working life, while the focus on all the others is on their relationship and their position in marriage. All stories deal with a renegotiation of the women's role in marriage and in society, at large, within the radical mood of the mid- and late-sixties. As Linda McDowell argues,

the women's liberation movement . . . emerged in the West in the late 1960s at the same time as student activism around anti-war, anti-racism, anti-consumer and workers' movements, and these movements had certain issues and strategies in common. A woman's right to control her own body . . . was one of the main demands of the movement from its inception in the 1950s. (*Gender, Identity and Place* 42)

In the film, all women, at this critical moment in their lives, are led to a process of self-knowledge, and move on in their lives as different, perhaps more enlightened, beings. The specific episode featuring Linda, entitled "Two Against One," opens with the participants (almost all male) of an international event coming out of the main entrance to the conference hall (the event being "The World Congress of Cybernetics"); from another passage a group of women interpreters emerges, all of whom are dressed in light blue work outfits (jackets buttoned-up to the neck, knee-length skirts, and small hats that keep their hair in perfect order), obviously obeying a work dress code which demands their physicality be constrained and their professional role be promoted. This clear reference to the signification of dress in the work setting is also a clear distinction of gender roles. The interpreters, all dressed in these suits, are all women, while the audience in the congress hall is almost all male. As Efrat Tseëlon suggests, "[d]ress is a form of social control and social categorization. Throughout European history it was a way of defining people's roles, status and gender; a mechanism of inclusion as well as exclusion" (125). In this case, while signifying the interpreter's lack of individuality, the

uniform also signals these women's marginalization from the public domain of politics.

One of the delegates is desperately looking for someone in the crowd, looks at a woman dressed in one of these light blue outfits, and, unsatisfied, continues looking, until he stops in front of another woman dressed in the same outfit. It soon becomes evident that this woman is the interpreter he had been listening to while in the congress hall:

Delegate: I'm sure you're the young lady who has been speaking such beautiful English into my earphones. Am I right?

[Interpreter nods in agreement.]

Delegate: I knew that voice could come from someone looking like you. I wanted to thank you.

Interpreter: You're welcome.

Delegate: I mean you don't just translate. Your voice sings, like music.

The way the scene unfolds seems to imply a process of creation; the interpreter has been created by the delegate; the auditory singing has given rise to the mental image in the male delegate's imagination, which has now come to life. From the very beginning of the episode, then, the woman is created by the man to serve his needs and match his dreams and expectations. Very conveniently, she is not seen at work during her simultaneous interpreting,⁷ because then this process of male creation would not have been possible. The auditory stage of the process is only suggested by the man looking for this auditory presence/ absence. However, it is after the auditory sign that she is perceived, when vision sets in, when she materializes as a physical presence. Having constructed a visual image for these auditory signs, the man in the crowd tries to locate it.⁸ Linda becomes the object of the gaze rather than the

7. Another well known early case of a woman interpreter, at work this time, is Audrey Hepburn playing the role of Regina Lampert in the film *Charade* (1963). The only scene in the film where the interpreter is seen at work is while she is interpreting simultaneously for an all-male audience. In this particular scene, there is no other interpreter in the booth with her; instead, she has Cary Grant with her, who keeps kissing her while she is on the job. At one point, she realizes something vital in relation to the plot, she gets up and leaves the room, while the male delegates all turn and look at the interpreter in the booth, wondering why she is no longer interpreting. In this case, the image of the interpreter is a very unprofessional one; her professional life is completely undermined in relation to her position as a sexual object.

8. Interpreting always offers a fragmented sensuous perception; it gives an auditory perception of space. The two men from the audience are trying to establish the whole; by desperately looking for the body, they attempt to give back to the interpreter her com-

subject of the voice for the film audience. This reduction to a sexual object demeans her professionalism and her role in the public realm. She is never taken seriously as an interpreter, which diminishes her role as a working woman.

In *The Interpreter*, Silvia does not stand for a sexual object; her sexuality is a lurking absence that does not really materialize. In this case, the woman interpreter is identified with the institution of the United Nations. As we repeatedly hear in the film “She [Silvia Broome] *is* the UN.”⁹ Indeed, Silvia is identified with the institution of the United Nations in more ways than one; her slender image, like a visual allusion to the tall slender UN building, her approach to the political and social reality (in favour of quiet diplomacy, against violence), and her fluency in many languages, all tie her to the UN. Her attempt to remain unbiased, despite her deeply involved past, and the perfect, unmoving mask she has adopted, again identify her with the UN since they reflect the institution’s alleged neutrality. Silvia’s face, as presented to us almost throughout the film, seems to epitomize apathy and non-involvement since it rarely manages to express any kind of emotion until quite late in the film, even when she declares that she is scared because her life is under threat. It is as though she has put on a mask, very much like the African masks that decorate the walls of her home, which she refuses to drop even during her most difficult moments.¹⁰

Her lack of individual involvement is reinforced by her appearance, which stresses her shadow-like existence, her absence. She is an all-black figure, apart from her fair hair and white skin which are foregrounded by the blackness of her clothes; her slender figure appears dressed in a black shirt, black sweater, black jacket, black trousers and black shoes, with her hair

pletteness. For a discussion of the traditional perception of reality as a *whole*, see Rodaway (8-11).

9. The UN security officer uses this phrase when asked by the state agent, Tobin Keller, to give information about Silvia Broome. But this identification is implied from the beginning of the film, after the security alert that forces the interpreters out of the building; when Silvia states that she knows a shortcut, her colleague from the English booth asks her: “What did you do, design the building?” Later, one of the Matoban leaders of the opposition tells her: “[You are] So like the UN. Layers of languages signifying nothing.” And finally, Keller again hints at her identification with the UN after the bus explosion that killed the opposition leader and almost killed Silvia when he terms it a “monstrous act of terrorism aimed at you and at the heart of the United Nations.”
10. The state agent notes her apathy at their first meeting, when Silvia reveals that she feels scared while remaining perfectly calm: ““You don’t look scared.’ ‘People handle fear in different ways, Mr Keller.””

drawn back in a ponytail, and half her face hidden by her fringe. In other words, Silvia Broome dis/appears in her dark clothes, with her hair drawn back, thus reinforcing her non-existence, her desire to remain unnoticed. Moreover, this masculinized code of dressing adopted by Silvia and the character of the female agent—both dressed in dark suits throughout the film—serves to reinforce the association between masculinity and the public/professional sphere.

In the beginning of both films, therefore, the interpreters are presented as very distant and very “professional,” that is de-individualized. They are enclosed within this professional identity that forces upon them a particular attitude toward their audience. For instance, when Linda is asked by a member of the audience, Dr. MacCormack, who is evidently trying to find a way to approach her, to do some liaison interpreting for him with an Arab delegate as a pretext for his sexual interest, her neutrality becomes manifest. Her face seems like a perfect mask that refuses to show any signs of emotion, despite the awkward situation in which she is involved, and her delivery is humorously deadpan and non-expressive as she faithfully translates the Arab delegate’s words back to Dr. MacCormack: “The words of my colleague are of exquisite beauty, especially as it is from *your* lips that they fall, *that is to say my lips*. It would give me the greatest pleasure if you would spend the evening with me, and possibly all night too.” Linda’s interpreting brings a look of utter bafflement on Dr. MacCormack’s face. The second person pronoun “you” addressed to Dr. MacCormack creates a sense of confusion; to whom is it addressed? With whom does the Arab delegate want to spend the night? Dr. MacCormack? Of course not. This piece of communication, or should we say mis-communication, exposes the entire process. The change between the first- and second-person pronouns in Linda’s reproduction of the Arab delegate’s speech, underlines the interpreter’s liminal position: she is neither a “you” nor an “I,” or both a “you” and an “I” for herself and for all the others involved in this mediation process. The self is both Self and Other, both here and there. Moreover, from the male perspective, the woman interpreter is there not as a labouring absence facilitating communication, but as a full physical and sexual presence. It seems that we are faced with an all-encompassing male gaze that knows no national, ethnic, class or other divisions, which turns the female body into the sexual object of desire. Nevertheless, by mediating male discourse as a non-party, refusing to get involved or become its object, Linda manages to keep her “professional” identity intact, whereas the two parties of this communication are ridiculed for their obsession.

It seems, then, that the profession of the interpreter is the perfect site to discuss the confusions faced by the woman of the sixties, her attempt to re-define herself, her identity, her relation to men and to her body, her position in the public/ private domains. Linda seems torn between the multiple constraints that are forced upon her by capitalism (through her professional life), by patriarchy (through her relationship with the male sex—both her boyfriend and the two delegates),¹¹ by the New Feminist movement, which perceives Western society as a patriarchal society “dominated by males, whose values, attitudes, aesthetics, and morals pervaded every aspect of culture and created norms that diminished the lives of girls and women” (Unger 7), and the counterculture of the hippies which strives for a liberation and an escape from the conservative social norms of the 1950s. All these forces working on her can be identified and located in her relationship with her body.

The tensions caused by these forces can be seen in the way this particular episode of the film fragments the interpreter’s body. The episode itself is divided into three sections: the first, already discussed here, is located in the conference setting, the second in a club during an outing, probably part of the congress events, and the third in the interpreter’s home. There is, in other words, a gradual shift from the public (congress) to the private (home), which is also related to gender distinctions as they are perceived in the film; the public is seen as the male domain, while the private is the female domain, where the woman is more at ease. The film thus reproduces the well-known gender dualisms of body/ mind, private/ public, home/ work, inside/ outside, nature/ culture, even as the figure of the working woman—the only one in the film, as I pointed out above—disrupts these distinctions, hence the need to reaffirm them in the plot, in particular, in narrative closure.

This gradual shift of realms (from public to private) is accompanied by a parallel change of dress and attitude on the part of the interpreter only. From the divestment of individuality evident in the woman dressed in her work uniform, we move to a partial revelation (both in dress and inner thoughts) at the club, and to the final nudity (literal and metaphorical) in the interpreter’s home. In the conference setting, her work outfit sets clearly defined body limits. At the club, things are slightly looser, with the black dress that leaves her

11. Linda’s boyfriend remains an absence throughout the episode; he is only referred to by her and later, when she is at home with the two men, we can see a photograph showing Marlon Brando looking down on us with an austere look on his face. The two delegates, one Scottish and the other Italian, are referred to by their surnames only—MacCormack and Cenci—while Linda is never given a surname.

arms bare, and the promising small opening below the neck. When at home, the interpreter has rid herself of all her clothes; her work outfit can be seen hanging in the corner, while she reads T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the nude to the two men who sit facing her, still dressed in their evening suits. The naked body is now almost fully visible (apart from the breasts that are covered by her falling hair, alluding to the image of Botticelli's Venus as she emerges from the sea) and open to the touch, but Linda has created a barrier between the two men and herself, since it is a platonic relationship that she is after; what she wants, as she puts it, is to make "her bed a sacred place of thought," "the Arcade of Athens."¹² The individual woman here stands as an allegory of the feminist movement that wishes to assign new roles to women outside the narrow limits of the family and the established image of woman as the object of sexual pleasure. The naked female body is used by Linda to stress her complete rupture from its link to her sexuality; instead, it serves as the vehicle of an intellectual discussion on philosophy, art and culture.

The whole fragment of this episode located in Linda's home is a long process of mediation, reflecting the interpreting process, here in a different context, as Franz Poehhacker and Miriam Shlesinger define it: "interlingual, intercultural oral or signed mediation, enabling communication between individuals or groups who do not share, or do not choose to use, the same language(s)" (3). Linda tries to communicate to the two men of science the new spirit of the era, contemporary art, modern poetry, the problematics of contemporary life. But, as in the previous two fragments, at the congress venue and at the club, this attempt fails. Communication is blocked, because the two parties of the communication, Linda and the two delegates, are speaking different languages. The two men speak the language of patriarchy which sees and encloses women within the male discourse of desire, while Linda, a young and beautiful professional living in the developed world, is trying to articulate or rather mediate the new discourses of female subjectivity and counterculture that try to break from conventional divides. The two men are frustrated because the object of their desire is present but absent at

12. This reference to the Arcade of Athens is, I believe, suggestive of the superficial knowledge of the interpreter. In ancient Athens there were a number of arcades (*stoai*) that served as promenades, sheltered from the heat of summer and the cold of winter, as judicial and shopping centers and as boundary markers. She just touches upon bits and pieces of knowledge, without deep understanding. She parrots without actually understanding what she is saying, merely reproducing words like an interpreter, without actually understanding them.

the same time, there but not there, talking in a language they cannot understand.

The same divisions between public and private apply in the case of Silvia in Pollack's film. As long as no information is known about her, she retains her neutrality. It is at the moment when she goes into the sound room after hours and overhears whispering voices coming through the headset from the darkened General Assembly Hall discussing the plot to assassinate the leader of her African homeland that the illusion of invisibility and non-involvement begins to collapse. This act of eavesdropping is an act of individual will; she hears whispers and picks up the earphones to find out what is being said. The reversal of roles and situations is manifest in many ways: the usually floodlit Hall of the General Assembly is dark, with nothing but whispers coming through the earphones, as the speakers are divested of their physical presence; in contrast, the booth is lighted and the interpreter rendered visible, regaining and re-instating her physicality. Quite significantly, this sudden reversal is marked by a short explosive sound when the light is turned on in the booth (even for a fraction of a second), thus underlining the contrast between the darkened Assembly Hall and the illuminated booth. At this moment the interpreter embraces her power in this cross-cultural communication, as the invisible turns visible and vice versa. Even if Silvia immediately turns off the light and clings to the wall to hide in the shadows of the room, her invisibility is not restored; her appearance is irreversible, and her life is under threat.

Suddenly, the anonymous, unknown, invisible shadow becomes known, socially and culturally visible, with specific information gradually mounting about her background, origins, class, family, etc. In a very revealing dialogue between the federal agent, Tobin Keller (Sean Penn) and the UN security officer, Keller asks: "Tell me about the interpreter," but the information he is given is confined to her origin, her ethnicity, her studies and her parents. As he is not satisfied with this absence of information, which reflects the anonymity and neutrality of interpreters, he wants to know more: "What else do we know since the initial clearance. Is she married? Does she have a child? Does she belong to any clubs? Is she registered to vote? Democrat? Republican? What religion is she? *Who is she?*" (emphasis added). From his last question, which sums up all his previous inquiries, it is evident that he is seeking to establish an identity for her, a personal life, a social and cultural role that will deprive her of her anonymity. All this is very personal information that will gradually divest her of her neutral façade.

Silvia Broome is metamorphosed from the well-educated, multilingual

interpreter into the former girlfriend of the socialist leader of the opposition in Matobo (whose relationship broke down because of her whiteness, what she terms the “politics of skin”), and into a woman with a blatantly militant past. The invisible, neutral, apolitical woman in black is turned into the highly politicized, militant, aggressive woman that appears in a photograph that the secret services unearth from her past, depicting her dressed in guerilla fatigues and toting a machine gun, walking aggressively toward the camera. The impossibility of the interpreters divesting themselves of individuality and their own personal and social identity is personified by this transformation of Sylvia in the film. From the moment the interpreter in the film loses her invisibility and her false neutrality, from the moment she leaves the dark enclosure and protection of the booth and enters the domain of the Other (UN Lobby, General Assembly Hall), her accuracy and credibility are called into question, culminating with her being forced to submit to a Lie Detector Test. Her rendition of the discussion she overheard meets with the skepticism of Keller, who keeps digging into her past to unearth the hidden secret of her political and militant background that will give her a tangible physicality and strident individuality.

And it is not only the secret services but also the interpreter herself who suddenly realizes her deep personal involvement in the proceedings (we should not forget that her whole family was killed in a landmine, and that her ex-lover and her brother—the last relative she has—are the two people who are shot dead in the pre-credits sequence as part of the ethnic cleansing in her homeland). It is at this juncture that she decides to embrace her visibility and play an active part in developments. The first instance of Broome’s negation of her neutrality occurs in a bus, when she confronts one of the prospective leaders of her homeland, a sequence which ends with the interpreter leaving the scene and the bus exploding in the air, killing all passengers.

Now, how do the two women appear at the end of the films? Where does the move away from a “professional” and public identity and towards a private embodiment lead them?

At the end of the episode Linda is presented as a fully sexual and physical presence. After going through a process of a virtual “sparagmos,” a tearing apart of the poetess by the two men, who like male maenads embark on an imaginary destruction and devouring of the female body, Linda’s sexuality is foregrounded. The two men, while still in bed in their shirts and boxer shorts, slap each other on the face in a fit of violence, declaring what they fantasize having done to the female body:

MacCormack: Then I jumped on her. I kissed her. I kissed her a hundred times. I drove her out of her mind with kisses.

[Cenci slaps him hard on the face]

Cenci: But I wrapped myself around her like a python. I cracked every bone in her body. I bit her here [showing his left breast]. Do forgive me Linda!

[MacCormack slaps him hard on the face]

MacCormack: I adored her. I feasted on her. I devoured her. I drank her. I scratched her. I ripped her.

[Cenci slaps him hard on the face]

Cenci: I hit her. I insulted her. I exalted her. I thrilled her. I manhandled her. I tied her in knots. And other things I can't even start to talk about.

As they slap each other hard a number of times and stop to look at Linda, who has started a strange type of tearless wail, the camera zooms on her face that is distorted by this tearless pain. After what appears to be a cathartic process, Linda stops, goes over to the photograph of her boyfriend (Marlon Brando), throws it out of the window, throws her hair back, and with eyes half-closed, lips half-open heads toward the bed, while soft music starts playing in the background. The fragmented and desecrated female body returns safely to its original role, that of the sexual object of male desire and satisfaction.

Linda is again confined, through the male gaze both of her audience and the film director, within the traditional conception of womanhood. Her individualized effort to mediate this counterculture and her new role to this audience fails, with disastrous consequences, since she is trapped in the very patriarchal regime she tries to redefine. Moreover, this patriarchal regime underlines in the most profound manner the role of male violence against women. The two men fantasize about the violent handling of the female body that remains docile and obedient. Linda has been perceived from the beginning as an object of sexual pleasure; the fact that the frustration of their desires by her attitude and her resistance to female stereotypes led the two men to these fantasies, seems to represent collective male fears about the movement of feminism. The woman's role is that of a mediator who can only receive and reproduce the messages of others passively, messages that presumably touched her only superficially, like the words she is called upon to interpret in a conference, where she is merely an empty vessel containing the texts of others. Rather than assimilating and later forming any new messages, any new ideas that may lead her to self-fulfillment and self-determination, Linda is there to promote the idea of Eliot's poem, the inadequacy of language to mediate our messages.

The woman, like the interpreter, has no control over the messages that define her; she will always remain confined by this master discourse that she has to reproduce faithfully and communicate without any personal involvement.

The question is do things change after forty years? What happens to the interpreter in the second film? Silvia's decision to deviate from codes of ethics, and violate the prescribed professional attitude, points to her female weakness and is the result of a continuous displacement; wherever Silvia goes, she will always be the liminal Other: in Africa, she was rejected because she was the very epitome of the colonizing subject; in political activism she failed because she was unable to cope with violence; in the US, she is also perceived as the threat of the dark continent, in which she was born and brought up. Her home, as she implies, is the UN, this no man's land, an artificial construct of Western politics. However, what does the UN stand for, other than an ou-topos (u-topia), a non-place? And Silvia is also displaced from that non-place. In this film it may not be sexuality that is underlined (although a lurking, latent force throughout), but it is again female passion that displaces the woman; Keller is there to protect the weak interpreter both from external forces that threaten her life, but also, more importantly, from the internal forces of her feminine nature, which poses a threat to her professional identity and society at large. The culmination of the film comes when, after being informed of her brother's murder, Silvia disappears, leaving a message that she is going "home," only to reappear like a ghost in the UN and pursue her speaker, the Matoban leader. With her shadow suddenly appearing behind the curtain like that of a ghost (all in black again) in the "safe room" for diplomats just a few steps from the General Assembly podium, she addresses the head of state directly, as he sits in perfect calm with his eyes closed, and pointing a gun at his head, accuses him of not fulfilling his promises, and of killing her family and friends. Like the Shadow in Andersen's fairytale, the interpreter as the speaker's "shadow" has come to challenge her "master" and lead him to his destruction. The role reversal is evident in the positioning of the participants: Silvia is standing while the speaker is sitting, she holds a gun and forces him to read, she shouts at him and sets the rules. Silvia grabs Dr. Zuwanie's gun, points it at his head, and makes him read the "Dedication" to his book *A Liberator's Life: An Autobiography by Edmond Zuwanie*: "The gunfire around us makes it hard to hear. But the human voice is different from other sounds. It can be heard over noises that bury everything else. Even when it's not shouting. Even if it's just a whisper. Even the lowest whisper can be heard over armies, . . . when it's telling the truth." Again a reference to the human voice and its power, which, however, seems to have been shattered to

pieces through the reality of the Matobo situation and the reality of this particular sequence, where the voice performs only at the threat of the gun.

The “speaker” is suddenly confronted with the ghosts of his past as they come to chase him through the appearance of his long-forgotten and dead text. His dead Other, hidden in the pages of this old book, seems to be reincarnated in the face of his interpreter, another double that comes to claim her rights over the speaker, and her active involvement in the developments. Silvia is again the mediator of the speaker’s text, the one who connects him to this part of his-story. The speaker and the interpreter read the Dedication alternately, Silvia at times drowning out the speaker’s voice, the two voices overlapping, reading about the power of the voice to change destinies in a reproduction of the interpreting event. There are no dividing lines any more, no boundaries; the glass between the two spaces has been shattered to pieces, thus allowing the free contact between interpreter and speaker. And although the two read the same lines in the same language, the viewer receives it as two different texts, in a celebration of Barthes’ “death of the author” idea. For the Matoban leader this delivery brings him face to face with the proclaimed utopia of his youth, which he himself has shattered, and at the same time it signals his gradual demise; for the interpreter it is also a moment of mourning for her lost innocence and a coming-to-terms with the ghosts of her past. From the moment the text leaves its “owner,” it ceases to be his own, and can be loaded with hundreds of other readings and meanings.

Similarly to Linda, at this moment, Silvia undergoes a complete physical transformation: her hair is now loose, her face is torn with pain and covered in scratch marks from the bombing, her voice is barely audible because of emotional involvement, and her whole body shakes out of control. Her face is distorted by the pain that she had been hiding all this time behind the interpreter’s mask, and emphasis is now on her physicality, proximity and individuality. We should note here that Silvia is not sexualized in the way Linda was in the first film. There is a marked difference here in the way each film represents the professional woman in the public and private realm; in *Woman Times Seven*, woman tries to mediate a new role in society but remains imprisoned in the stereotypical image of the sexual object, whereas in *The Interpreter* there is no allusion to woman’s sexuality, and Silvia’s code of dressing underlines woman’s rupture from a sexualized object. Nevertheless, the film again, as we see later, presents a woman who cannot fit anywhere, who is always and everywhere an outcast, an outsider.

However, evidently, the escape of the interpreter from her clearly demarcated role as the speaker’s shadow cannot be the last word of a conventional

film, which seems to form a perfect circle, starting from the absolute neutrality of the interpreter, gradually moving to a greater degree of involvement, and ending with a celebration of neutrality and a denunciation of its loss. After the climactic moment of confrontation between speaker and interpreter, the UN values are celebrated; the Matoban leader faces the International Court and all's well that ends well, even if nobody knows what the day-after in the African State will bring. Diplomacy has prevailed over violence, and once the interpreter has escaped her neutrality and apolitical absence, and embraced a long-forbidden physicality, she is forced into a disappearance again, thrown back into the Dark Continent from where she came, since she is forced to return to Africa. She has violated the rule of absence and non-involvement, so she has to be expelled, since she is considered a "danger to the community" as the film puts it. Whether in the dark chamber of the interpreting booth or the dark continent of an unknown land, the threat disappears, and interpreting can return back to its long-sought-for neutrality and absence.

Thus, both examples underline a close correlation between woman and interpreter, both presented as a mediating absence that poses an ever-present threat and should be kept under control; this absence should always occupy the space of between-ness, a u-topos of liminality, and never trespass her clearly demarcated limits. She can faithfully and accurately reproduce an already given Western patriarchal discourse, while remaining an absence.

The forty years that have elapsed between the two films bring a change in the representation of professional women in the public realm. Vittorio de Sica's film of the 1960s contains the individual woman within the stereotype of the object for sexual pleasure. Linda tries to mediate a different role for the professional woman who rejects traditional images of femininity, but proves to be very superficial in her wish for change; at the end, she is brought back to the mainstream image of womanhood. Pollack's film of the beginning of the twenty-first century does not focus on female sexuality; the individual woman in the film is presented as highly skilled, qualified, very professional. However, she does not fit anywhere; she remains an outsider in the public realm, always expelled from a public community that does not tolerate difference in any form.

In one way or another, woman can mediate the discourse of the other but can never produce her own discourse. She remains perpetually contained within a public realm that refuses her any autonomy and deviation from established stereotypes.

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