

# **Otherness and Difference(s)**

**On M and Some  
Necessary  
Detours of  
Contemporary  
Cinema**

## I t-told you darling; I don't have any past. "Marilyn" was born yesterday.<sup>1</sup>

There's only one thing that cinema can do today, reasonably. To reinvent its relationship not with the real – which is precisely the misunderstanding that hampers any reflection on cinema – but with the images that determine this so-called 'real'. Film is based on the construction of consensus, like any other art: an aesthetic, formal, political, economic, and cultural consensus. You join a community of speakers attempting to

(continue to) speak the language of those who established the perimeter of its circulation and usage value. Therefore, to engage in a dialectical conflict with existing images does not mean to confirm their value, but to try and discontinue the image of the real that they convey. Cinema can continue to exist only as vertigo of a reinvention of the real and, therefore, of our relationship with the images.

Film – based on the ontological relationship between the thing seen and the filming device, with the latter confirming that the former existed – inevitably creates proof of its own existence. Film exists because it sees; and by seeing, it is in turn seen.

The really interesting cinema, today, is one that is aware of the existing images and (tries to) reinvent(s) itself in relation to itself: forgetting the images of film in order to rediscover itself in terms of gesture of filming and thinking cinema.

*"A woman whose body is desired while she herself – her real past, her ambitions, her fears, her ideas – is ignored, develops a deeply ambivalent relationship with that body. It does not quite belong to her, but rather to those who value it beyond her, and all she seems to have to offer them is the same body."*<sup>2</sup>

*M* – Anna Eriksson's debut film, presented in competition at the 33rd Venice International Film Critics' Week – is precisely the type of cinema that becomes possible when, with bravery and contempt for the dominant conformism, thought and the filming gaze question themselves. In Anna Eriksson's film, there is nothing that can reassuringly refer to already seen images, even though the film director proves to be an extremely attentive viewer (and cinephile). As she wanted to make her debut behind the camera at the height of a luminous and exemplary career as a musician, the artist – rather than playing the card of ostentatious cinephilia – adopted cinema

as a tool to probe the nature of her gaze and her body.

It is difficult to give an account of the surprise elicited on the first viewing of her film. *M* belongs to that very thin group of works that have the power to – almost – erase earlier images from the spectator's memory.

Over the past few years, only Bertrand Mandico with his *Wild Boys* managed to elicit the same feeling of violent bewilderment in front of pictures.

Anna Eriksson belongs in the group of filmmakers who do not restrict themselves to directing films, but dare to strive for the creation of autonomous, self-sufficient universes. *M* is a journey into the deepest and most hidden regions of the night.

By signing the film in the first person – a film in which the neo-director is in charge of almost all art departments (script, editing, music, sound, set design, and costumes) – and giving it the burning image of her body, that overlaps with that of the ghost of Marilyn Monroe's memory, the neo-director created an actual brain-film.

In one fell swoop, and with an unflappable carelessness, *M* manages to wipe out the so-called rules of 'well-made' cinema, thus creating a work of extreme modernity that, at the same time, refuses to be fashionable. On the contrary: *M* seems to surface from the darkest dungeons of the cinema forgotten by the guardians of taste and trends.

*"Lorsque tu seras dans ton lit, que tu entendas les aboiements des chiens dans la campagne, cache-toi dans ta couverture, ne tourne pas en dérision ce qu'ils font: ils ont soif insatiable de l'infini, comme toi, comme moi, comme le reste des humains, à la figure pâle et longue. Même, je te permets de te mettre devant la fenêtre pour contempler ce spectacle qui est assez sublime"*<sup>3</sup>

Literally embodying a labyrinth whose keys she's the sole owner – i.e., the Anna Eriksson film director and the Anna Eriksson body and image – the film director creates a centreless world; a universe in which time is re-thought as space. Constructed as a mourning song over Marilyn Monroe's last months, the film creates a surprising – and never seen before – short-circuit between Kenneth Anger's *magick* cinema (with the references to Horus and Ancient Egypt's death mythology, for example) and the libertarian and purposely low practices of Jean Rollin's most visionary work. All this is swathed in a noir dimension – *Out of the Past* – that cannot not evoke the memory of Jacques Tourneur and the space-time *Detours* of Edgar G. Ulmer.

The linguistic and political proposal formulated by Anna Eriksson is a radical swerve off our thinking and viewing habits. In this otherworldly voyage, beyond the thresholds of the known and practiced visible, the possibility of an 'other' cinema begins to gleam.

And in a double movement, where *M* and her image do not manage to escape the traps laid by the male gaze, cinema – i.e., the same machine that allowed for *M*'s trap of images – proves to be a new possibility to resurface to life. It is the political and philosophical precision with which Anna Eriksson breaks down and exposes the ideology of the gaze and image that makes her film one of the most sensuous objects currently to be found.

In *M*, cinema comes back as potential and danger. *M* is not a ghostly biopic on the icon of the Hollywood film industry, nor is it a *mise en abyme* of her image. *M* plunges into the deepest, most fertile, and darkest regions of creativity – a dangerous, free creativity without instructions for use, that puts itself on the line giving up all safety nets.

Anna Eriksson restores into cinema its documentary radicalness, the principal characteristic of Méliès, wizard and inventor of forms who would often use his own body to test the limits and possibilities of the device. In her sensuous, menacing Sabbath, a mobile and mysterious, motionless and elusive, oneiric and material one, the film-maker offers the image of a freedom that is not banally anchored in statements of principle but in gestures that are signs of a free, powerful creation.

The film *M* plunges into such depths that separating the flesh from the gaze, or matter from dream, is almost impossible. The high and noble stake of Anna Eriksson's film lies in its total opening to the risk of getting lost as long as cinema regains the right of filming what cannot be seen and what is not matter is given substance.

In the end, what is the purpose of a film if not to restore our freedom, and the danger, and the risk that should be inexorably, inevitably associated to itself?

*M* is a film that dares to exist outside all the enclosures of acknowledged cinema and beyond all beaten paths – a declaration of resistance that rejects sheltering into any identity-based perimeter. *M* is the dawning of a radical gesture and of a wild thought.





**'Between the desire  
And the spasm  
Between the potency  
And the existence  
Between the essence  
And the descent  
Falls the Shad'<sup>4</sup>**

The huge quantity of cultural material (Marilyn Monroe, film, images, mythology, etc...) is put on the line reviving the synchronic use of cultural and formal, political, and linguistic models. Breaking the illusion of teleology, Anna Eriksson offers herself as a dangerous film-maker for the conservatives of all latitudes and ideologies, but an absolutely necessary one for all those who, on the contrary, keep on pinning their hopes in a cinema that is capable of contributing to the debate on the redefinition of the status of the image.

Thus, the film, *M*, and the Anna Eriksson image become an utterly new form that inevitably mirrors the layered image that blessed the blonde star whose shadow looms benignly over its own pictures. *"The real person overlapping with the role is functional to the fulfilment of the tragedy; however, regardless of Monroe's tragic and mysterious end, hers could be just the story of a very pretty girl (the existing literature insists on the 'ordinariness' of Marilyn Monroe/Norma Jeane) victimized by fate, if the immense emotional scope and media impact exerted by cinema on the collective imaginary did not also come into play".<sup>5</sup>*

For this reason – for the disturbing pleasure that *M* gives an audience that is consciously detached from established routes – the arrival of Anna Eriksson to the scene of cinema is an occasion that deserves to be celebrated.

Cinema should regain its nature as adventure and sensuality; mystery and perdition; risk, danger. To reconquer its rightful role, cinema should find again the spot in which the gaze intercepts the body and desire. Only out of this triangulation can another, fresh seduction be born, free from a lazy, terminal exploitation of nostalgia for the past. Only in this way can cinema regain its rightful place.

*M* is a giant leap toward this direction.

**'Miss Monroe?  
You forgot this.'<sup>6</sup>**

1 JOYCE CAROL OATES, *BONDE*,  
FOURTH ESTATE LONDON, P. 403

2 MARGE PIERCY, *LOOKING GOOD IN ALL THE  
AVAILABLE LIGHT: A MARILYN MONROE READER*  
(EDITED BY YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH),  
TOUCHSTONE, P.106

3 *LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR* – CHANT PREMIER

4 T.S. ELIOT, *THE HOLLOW MEN*

5 C. SCURA, "MITI POP: MARILYN MONROE", IN C.  
RICCIARDI – S. VELLUCCI (ED.BY), *MITI AMERICANI*  
OGGI, EDIZIONI DIABASIS, 2005

6 JOYCE CAROL OATES, *CIT.*, P. 508