21

Towards Alternative Histories and Herstories of African Filmmaking

From Bricolage to the "Curatorial Turn" in African Film Scholarship

Lindiwe Dovey

Introduction

Within African film studies, it has become commonplace to draw a distinction between the radical political agenda of the first African filmmakers, in the 1960s, and the more diffuse, less ideological interests of more contemporary filmmakers. Despite attempts by certain film scholars to challenge this rigid history (for example, Tcheuyap, 2011), its dominance looms over the field and has prevented more nuanced characterizations of the origins of African filmmaking, and of contemporary African filmmaking, from emerging. This chapter aims to reveal the potential for alternative histories and herstories of African filmmaking to emerge, through the incorporation of new methodologies that draw together the overlapping activities of theory and practice – revisiting archives, using film festivals and curatorial practices as heuristic devices, and attending to the work of *bricoleurs* and scholar-curators who complicate linear histories and neat boundaries and categories. At the same time, however, it emphasizes the continued importance of conventional film criticism to our methodology as African film scholars.

I take inspiration, in the first instance, from Jyoti Mistry and Antje Schuhmann's use of *bricolage* in attempting to summon herstories of African filmmaking. In their edited collection *Gaze Regimes: Film and Feminisms in Africa* (2015a), Mistry and Schuhmann aim "to collect, archive and document the very disparate stories that emerged from a unique gathering of women all working in and with film" in Johannesburg in 2010 (Mistry and Schuhmann 2015b, p. ix). Mistry and Schuhmann deliberately avoid

A Companion to African Cinema, First Edition. Edited by Kenneth W. Harrow and Carmela Garritano.

reifying a linear history of African filmmaking, which would inevitably create "the illusion of a universal, objective representation of facts and truth" (2015b, p. xiii); rather, they bring together diverse forms of knowledge from different voices to "create a heterodox practice" (2015b, p. xiv), one that they liken to *bricolage* (2015b, p. xv). Crucial to this attempt to open African film studies to more colorful rewritings is the play between theory and practice, criticism and creativity, and they ask: "What does it mean for academics to be in conversation with creative practitioners, and how do practitioners involved in reading films as texts interpret the curatorial strategies that frame films at film festivals?" (2015b, p. xi). Adopting more fluid definitions of what constitutes theory and practice, they argue, will also help to challenge "knowledge paradigms from within patriarchal and colonial legacies" (2015b, p. xii), thereby making an approach of *bricolage* intrinsic to contemporary feminist, womanist and decolonization movements.[1]

It is important to note, however, that Mistry and Schuhmann's work as *bricoleurs* is not new; in fact, many of the pioneering figures in African film studies can be seen as *bricoleurs*. It is towards one of these pioneering *bricoleurs* – Paulin Soumanou Vieyra – that I turn first, in an attempt to revisit the archives of African film studies to provide a more nuanced and less politicized account of its origins. Thereafter I attempt to trace the influence of African film scholarship's early engagement with *bricolage* on certain key figures across African film studies up to the present day. Ultimately, I argue that through charting this lineage of *bricolage* we can better understand, contextualize, and historicize what I want to identify and call the "curatorial turn" in contemporary (African) film scholarship. This "curatorial turn" has seen many African film scholars play dual roles as academics and curators for film festivals and other live cinema events. In some cases, as I will show, African film scholars are not engaged in *literal* curation but rather adopt a curatorial voice in their scholarship, either explicitly encouraging others to screen particular films in concert, or – through vivid, performative criticism (Jayamanne, 2001) – imaginatively conjuring a film program for the reader. The "curatorial turn" could be read, somewhat cynically, as a result of the pressure on academics to create quantitative "impact" through making their research available to non-academic audiences. However, it can also be interpreted, more positively, as part of a movement towards a deeper and more diverse engagement with the object of study itself – indeed, with African films themselves. As I will argue, however, this curatorial engagement cannot be at the expense of conventional critical engagement with the films.

Rethinking the Origins of African Film Scholarship: A Glance at the Work of Paulin Soumanou Vieyra

Paulin Soumanou Vieyra is often cited as one of the collective of African filmmakers living in Paris (the African Filmmakers Group) who made *Afrique sur Seine* (1955), one of the first films by sub-Saharan Africans.[2] He is also often invoked as

one of the founders of FEPACI, the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers, an organization that was founded in 1969 and that initially had a strong political vision about what African filmmaking should and should not be.[3] However, Vieyra also deserves to be acknowledged as the "father" of African film studies, for authoring the first books about African filmmaking (see Vieyra 1969, 1972, 1983). These books are rarely engaged with in African film studies, meaning that Vieyra's fascinating early reflections are lost on contemporary African film scholars. Perhaps this has to do with the relative inaccessibility of Vieyra's books. Perhaps it is partly due to the Anglophone bias in our field, which tends to ignore key texts in French and other languages. And perhaps, finally, it has something to do with the fact that we have overlooked the true extent of Vieyra's approach of *bricolage* to his work. His filmmaking and political work have been valorized over his scholarship, which was, nevertheless, groundbreaking in the ways that it documented, archived, and reflected on the early days of African filmmaking but also drew on Vieyra's intimate practical engagements with film.

Vieyra's *Le cinéma et l'Afrique* (1969) is, in my view, the book with which any conversation about the history of African filmmaking should begin. Notably, the essays within it were not written to be assembled into a book; rather, Vieyra says, they are "a testimony to [his] reflections about cinema and Africa from 1955 to 1965" (1969, p. 7).[4] The reflections are rich and nuanced and contradict the assumption that all the founding FEPACI figures made political liberation their key criterion for African filmmaking. It is also noteworthy that Vieyra does *not* use the phrase "African Cinema," thereby assuming a category that does not, and cannot, possibly exist, but rather explores the varied relationships between "cinema" and "Africa." Vieyra also reminds us, lest we overlook the imaginative dimensions of films in lieu only of their contexts of production and circulation, that "the cinema should be able to participate in its function in the creation of a new African humanism" (1969, p. 9), by which he seems to mean that African filmmaking should confidently claim its place in global history and not see itself purely as an oppositional or marginalized practice. This is a profound statement to have made in 1969, but it is also an important invitation to contemporary (African) film scholars, in a context in which African film studies continues to be marginalized within the global academy (Tsika, 2016; Dovey 2016). For Film Studies to become international will require a post-humanist perspective that is, as Chambers says, "*more human* in recognizing its own specific limits and location" (2002, p. 173); in other words, Film Studies scholars need to reckon with the insights of African film scholars to humanize their practice, and African film studies scholars need to labor to mainstream their work within Film Studies and refuse to be relegated to the margins of the discipline.

Given my interest not only in the methodological importance of using archives, but also in the possibilities of using film festivals and curatorial practices as a heuristic device (Dovey, 2015a), it is revelatory that some of Vieyra's most fascinating writing about cinema appears in two essays in *Le cinéma et l'Afrique* that concern

festivals: "Notes and Reflections on the First International Conference of Cinéma d'Outre-Mer [in Lille, France]" (pp. 67–73) and "Cinema at the 6th World Festival of Youth and Students at Moscow" (pp. 74–89). Collectively these essays show how greatly these festivals, held in October 1957 and July and August 1957 respectively, shaped Vieyra's ideas – as a filmmaker, jury member, spectator, and scholar – about what cinema could and might be in diverse global contexts, from France to the Soviet Union to Africa. He speaks in euphoric terms about the Moscow festival and its impact on him, as well as on the other Africans in attendance, who were representing many different countries, such as Togo, Cameroon, Angola, and Sudan (1969, pp. 84–87).[5] Sparked by "Khruschchev's Thaw," which involved a loosening of Soviet Union policy that meant that foreigners were allowed to visit and to meet locals (although only in supervised groups), the festival was attended by a staggering 34,000 people from 130 countries. In spite of the wealth of sports and arts featured at the festival, Vieyra opens the essay by quoting Lenin that "Of all the arts, cinema is the most important" (1969, p. 74), taking inspiration herein for the development of his own passion. The film component of the festival consisted of a five-day debate amongst cinema students on the subject of "Heroes in Film" and an 11-day festival of 230 films (p. 75).[6]

Interestingly, the films that particularly impressed Vieyra, and helped him to develop his own idea of a quality cinema, were films from what was then Czechoslovakia. He praises these films for their "human qualities: youth, freshness, spontaneity" (p. 77), for the "singular power of their images" and their "psychological and emotional density" (p. 78). These criteria of judgment could not be more contradictory of assumptions that the early FEPACI members were only interested in film as a form of political liberation. It is also revealing here to make links between the nourishment and direction Vieyra found from Czechoslovakian cinema and the reflections of the current Artistic Director of the Toronto International Film Festival, Cameron Bailey, one of the most important contemporary commentators on and tastemakers of African (as well as international) filmmaking. Bailey says that he shifts "between wild optimism and utter despair when it comes to African cinema," and that what he sees as most urgent for the development of contemporary African cinema is an engagement on the part of African filmmakers with diverse global cinemas. He says:

> I think it's important if you are a filmmaker that you see other films, that you don't simply repeat tired formulas or lowest common denominator approaches to whatever film you're making. That you actually are aware of what is around you, true to the history of cinema and what's going on presently within cinema … I think in places where there is access to cinema, where people can actually see films and see the full range of what world cinema is, then I think you're going to get better films. … [F]ilmmakers such as Djo Munga [the Congolese director of *Viva Riva*], he went to Europe and trained there and he had access to seeing all of what was current in world cinema then. … I think film schools are a big part of it and I think cinematheques and cine-clubs and those kinds of environments where people can actually

> sit down and watch the latest Dardenne brothers' film or watch what is coming out of China right now … I think those are the films that African filmmakers have to see more of. (personal communication, 2011)

This view coheres with academic accounts of what is required of scholarship in African cultural studies in a context of globalization and internationalization. Eileen Julien summarizes this eloquently when she urges Africanist scholars to put "literary, film, and visual arts by Africans in dialogue with the work of artists from Asia, Europe, and the Americas"; as she goes on: "Such comparative study will require more – not less – "local" knowledge of these multiple places and will recognize both African specificities and Africa's presence in the world" (Julien 2015, p. 26).

Vieyra's pioneering openness to diverse cinemas and criteria of judgment does not mean, however, that his ability to judge the socio-political dynamics surrounding filmmaking at this time was blunted. Vieyra clearly draws on his experience of the "Soviet kindness, the Soviet hospitality, the magnificence of this extraordinary festival" (p. 89) in assessing the Lille festival several months later. For while this festival claimed – like the Moscow festival – to be "aiding the mutual understanding of civilizations, of customs, of fraternity between people" (p. 67), Vieyra notes the irony of such a claim within a context in which first, only French overseas territories (d'Outre-Mer) were allowed to participate (p. 68), and second, in which these territories were viewed as inherently in need of "education" and "elevation" by the French (p. 67). The fact that the main organizer of the festival was a priest and that the entire festival took place within a Christian humanist discourse does not escape Vieyra's sharp analysis (p. 69), nor does the fact that the organizers essentially banned any kind of political discussion (p. 68). However, Vieyra also critiques some of his countrymen (of whom there were 30 present) for whom art and especially the cinema is seen to have no value except as a weapon of liberation, and says: "One needs to remember that it is first through the spirit that a man liberates himself" (p. 70). Even when he comes to praising a handful of films for their "technical and artistic quality," he faults those that do not have enough "human warmth" (pp. 72–73), thereby making humanism his central criterion for quality aesthetics in cinema, and contradicting the long-held assumption in African film studies that the founding FEPACI members saw cinema and political liberation as a *pas de deux*.

Paulin Soumanou Vieyra was a filmmaker, a film scholar, and a member of FEPACI. He was a pre-eminent pioneer of African film, then, but what kind of pioneer was he? I would like to argue here that Vieyra's most important contribution to African film studies was a methodological one, through approaching the object of analysis from diverse angles and perspectives so as to summon it in a more intimate and nuanced way. And his contributions to African filmmaking and African film studies has had an enduring effect on the ways in which several important subsequent scholars – such as Manthia Diawara, Samba Gadjigo, and Betti Ellerson – have approached African filmmaking in their work. We can thus trace

an alternative intellectual heritage and history across this work, one that has not been sufficiently highlighted in African film studies.

Old and New Intellectual Trajectories for African Film Studies: From Bricolage to the "Curatorial Turn"

Paulin Soumanou Vieyra's influence can clearly be identified in the routes that African filmmaker,[7] scholar, and curator, Manthia Diawara, has taken in his work, from producing the first major scholarly monograph on African film in English – *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (1992) – to his most recent book, *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (2010), which adopts a poetic yet conversational style and reflects as much on his experiences of curating an African Cinema programme for the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, Germany as it does on particular African films. Ken Harrow describes the evolution of Diawara's scholarly work as follows:

> In the last chapter of Diawara's [1992] study in particular, he utilizes a few key categories, like "Return to the Sources," "Colonial Confrontation," and "Social Realist," which have been repeatedly cited over the years, and in a sense have had a detrimental effect on the level of critical commentary by enabling reductive readings of films. In his current [2010] study his work has matured … And his readings of Sembène and others are superb, subtle, complex … (2015, p. 14)

Indeed, Diawara's criticism is at its best when it is poetic, drawing on his filmmaker's and curator's eye, carefully following and describing the contours of particular African films rather than attempting to create rigid categories for them. Because Diawara's most recent book was published to complement the film program he curated, it is also framed quite differently from a conventional academic publication, with an attractive format and an accompanying DVD with interviews. The book is a pleasure to read, in this material sense, and also because we feel, while reading it, that we are on a curatorial voyage with Diawara, starting in Ouagadougou and ending in Lagos.

Taken as a whole, Diawara's 2010 book presents a fine example of Oscar Wilde's concept of "criticism as creation" (1993), Laleen Jayamanne's notion of "performative criticism" (2001), and Christian Keathley's evocation of the cinephile as a *flâneur* (a wanderer) (2006). In his essay "The Critic as Artist" (1890), Wilde argues: "The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticizes as the artist does to the visible world of form and color, or the unseen world of passion and of thought" (1993, p. 1623). Acknowledging that aesthetic interpretations will differ from person to person, and from critic to critic, Wilde says:

> Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin's views on Turner are sound or not? What does it matter? That mighty and majestic prose of his, so fervid and so fiery-colored in its noble eloquence, so rich in its elaborate symphonic music, so sure and certain, at its

> best, in subtle choice of word and epithet, *is at least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot in their corrupted canvases in England's Gallery …* (1993, p. 1624, my emphasis)

Wilde inspires us to believe that, without having to substitute our keyboards for film cameras, we as film scholars are also capable of being artists and creators, of making things that others will decide are or are not of beauty and resonance to them. The question is not so much whether our interpretations are *correct* ("What does it matter?"); indeed, *(dis)sensus communis* will reign wherever there are diverse human beings in attendance (Dovey, 2015a). The question rather is one of form, of feeling free to express oneself through different modes.

In his 2010 book, Diawara appears to free himself from academic conventions about how films should be discussed and analyzed and allows readers to experience in a more immediate sense his passion for African films. This approach coheres with recent calls in Film Studies for a greater cinephilia in film criticism:

> Christian Keathley (2006) sees the contemporary cinephile as a kind of *flâneur*. … He would like to return to the astonishment of the early film viewers. … In his view, most of the academic film histories lack the signs of passion for their object of study. … His strategy is to choose an arbitrary fragment, a detail of a film which is not generally noted as important. (Bosma 2015, p. 25)

Greater creativity and cinephilia in criticism is also one of the inspirations for Sri-Lankan-Australian filmmaker and film critic Laleen Jayamanne's concept of performative criticism, which she describes as

> an impulsive move toward whatever draws one to something in the object – a color, a gesture, a phrase, an edit point, a glance, a rhythm … Enter the film through this and describe exactly what is heard and seen, and then begin to describe the film in any order whatever rather than in the order in which it unravels itself. Soon one's own description begins not only to mimic the object, as a preliminary move, but also *to redraw the object* … (2001, p. xi, my emphasis)

In his films and curatorial work, but also in those moments when his critical work begins to redraw African films through words, Diawara brings African filmmaking to life in breathtakingly beautiful and enduring ways, continuing Vieyra's legacy of *bricolage* but also giving rise to what I will go on to theorize later as the "curatorial turn" in (African) film scholarship.

Another veteran African film scholar who, like Vieyra and Diawara, has drawn on an approach of *bricolage*, moving between the overlapping activities of theory and practice, is Samba Gadjigo. Complementing his academic research on the filmmaking of Ousmane Sembène, Gadjigo also worked as Sembène's biographer and agent for many years, and can be seen as his posthumous curator, since it is Gadjigo's archives on Sembène that will no doubt define how

Sembène's work is remembered long into the future. The image that will always remain with me from Gadjigo and co-director Jason Silverman's documentary *Sembène!* (2015) is the one of rusting film canisters encasing Sembène's films, on the rooftop of Galle Ceddo (Sembène's home), the deep blue Atlantic in the backdrop a striking symbol of how impotent humans are in the face of natural forces. That image powerfully reminds one of the symbiotic relationship between artist and scholar-curator, and of the need for scholar-curators who are also custodians, who work to keep alive what they care about. The original meaning of the word "curate" is to care (*cura*, in Latin). In my view, this involves caring not simply for the films themselves but also for the people who made them (Dovey 2015a). This is what Gadjigo has done – he has cared for the films and the person who made them, not simply written about them in scholarly publications.

The French film critic, Serge Daney, once said that the curator is the person who sets up the goal for the one who scores (Salti 2011, personal communication). Indeed, Gadjigo continues to work hard to ensure that audiences around the world see Sembène's films, and he and Silverman are currently engaged in a project to bring *Sembène!* to audiences across Africa. No artist works in a vacuum or emerges out of nowhere; artists rely on other people to recognize, value, and preserve their work. And, even once established, artists need continued and diverse forms of support. An approach of *bricolage* is displayed through the deeply collaborative nature of Gadjigo's work on Sembène, as evidenced through his documentary with Silverman, and through his co-edited volume *Ousmane Sembène: Dialogues with Critics and Writers* (1993) which brings many voices into conversation. But, like Diawara, Gadjigo has also been foundational to initiating a "curatorial turn" in (African) film scholarship, since it is difficult to isolate his curating of, and scholarship on, Sembène's work from one another.

All the scholars mentioned above have been "fathers" within African film studies in some sense. However, there are also important "mother" figures who have too often been curated out of our histories and anthologies. Betti Ellerson's approach has been nothing if not curatorial; she has produced pioneering materials that have completely transformed our field. Her book of interviews *Sisters of the Screen: Women of Africa on Film, Video and Television* (2000) with its accompanying film of the same name, her highly informative blog "African Women in Cinema" (initiated in 2009), and her two-part essay "Teaching African Women in Cinema" (*Black Camera* 7.1, Fall 2015, and 7.2, Spring 2016) are all works that make available invaluable resources about African women's filmmaking to scholars and curators. If, as I have previously argued, we need to see pedagogy itself as a form of curation subject to debate (Dovey, 2014), then Ellerson's (2015 and 2016) essay "Teaching African Women in Cinema" becomes a revolutionary call to return to our syllabi, to the ways in which we recount the history of African filmmaking, and to ensure

that we do justice therein to the contributions of African women filmmakers. Indeed, it encourages us to open ourselves to alternative histories *and* herstories of African filmmaking.

I certainly have drawn on Ellerson's work while rewriting the syllabi for my African film courses at SOAS University of London, including films by pioneering African women filmmakers – such as *Saikati* (1992) by Kenyan filmmaker Anne Mungai – and using these films to motion towards previously hidden herstories of African filmmaking. I have also been inspired by Ellerson's work to attempt to put the male-dominated history of "African Cinema" into conversation with important work by African women writers and theorists, such as Obioma Nnaemeka (2004) and Montré Aza Missouri (2015). Although Nnaemeka does not write about African filmmaking, her theory of "nego-feminism" – that is, a feminism of negotiation, rather than competition, between men and women – offers an incisive way of understanding the predominance of womanist perspectives in the work of African male filmmakers (see Dovey, 2012), as well as of understanding some of the complexities of the work of African women filmmakers (Mistry and Schuhmann, 2015a). Missouri's work is crucial to fortifying the lines of analysis between the African continent and its diasporas, and reminds us of the importance, for example, of including Julie Dash's seminal film *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) in discussions of African filmmaking.[8]

The patriarchal conception of "African Cinema" as one forged by "father" figures has, in fact, been thrown into relief by the alternative narratives Ellerson has made available to us and invites further approaches of *bricolage* in which the intention is "to provide an *interruption*, to rupture classic and too often androcentric or supposedly gender-neutral approaches to academic knowledge production and publication politics" (Mistry and Schuhmann 2015b, p. xvi). Visual bricolage is also explicitly used towards such goals in *Aristotle's Plot* (1996) – one of the key films by male Cameroonian filmmaker, Jean-Pierre Bekolo (2009) – and claimed here as an intrinsically African practice. Towards the end of the film, a group of avid film fans who model themselves on their gangster heroes, build a cinema from whatever they can find. As their leader, Cinema, says: "We'll take what we can get. If it's old and it's good, fine. If it's new and it fits, excellent. … *This* is the real Africa." It seems no accident, then, that within the same film, Bekolo's narrator raises questions about why African filmmakers are always positioned either as young and emerging, or as fatherly or grandfatherly figures. The paternalism that goes hand in hand with gender bias is, in this way, revealed and critiqued by Bekolo. As Nnaemeka insists, "nego-feminism" is a mode of feminism that relies on the participation of men in order to be successful. Bekolo is one such man – and *bricoleur* – who is contributing to creating alternative ways of thinking about the histories and herstories of African filmmaking.[9]

Film Criticism, Film Curation and Contemporary Scholarship: Contextualizing and Critiquing the "Curatorial Turn" in (African) Film Studies

As I have suggested earlier in this chapter, contemporary approaches of *bricolage* have to be situated within what I want to identify and name here as "a curatorial turn" in (African) Film Studies over the past decade. Instead of simply writing about and interpreting films, many scholars have become aware of their power as gatekeepers and tastemakers and have started to explicitly foreground their curatorial aims within their scholarship – namely, their investment in helping important yet little-known (African) films to reach audiences around the world. Within African film studies, this curatorial turn is evident in recent books such as *Africa's Lost Classics* (2014), co-edited by David Murphy and Lizelle Bisschoff (one of the leading curators of African cinema, and the founder of the Africa in Motion film festival in Scotland, as well as an African film scholar), which Mark Cousins describes as follows in the Foreword:

> *Africa's Lost Classics* isn't only writing, it's a manifesto, a plea, and a call to arms. It reads like curation, as if its editors and authors have made a list of films to update and challenge our understanding of African film, and are urging cinemas, festivals, and TV stations to show the films on the list. The book's chapters are like screening notes. (Cousins 2014, p. xvi)

One has a similar feeling of curatorial intervention in Noah Tsika's introduction to his edited dossier "Teaching African Media in the Global Academy" in *Black Camera* 7.2 (2016), which is inspiring in the way that it provides a blueprint for how we might better curate Nollywood films. Just as Dina Iordanova (2013) argues that more rather than less curatorial work is needed now that the Internet has become saturated with freely available films, Tsika suggests that the fact that Nollywood films are now more "You Tube-able" than ever before (2016, p. 95) means that we need to be more creative in how we work with, teach, and present them to others – in essence, how we curate them. Tsika encourages us to pair films such as *Lady Gaga* (2012) with *Mulholland Drive* (2001) (2016, p. 99), and *Domitilla* (1997) with *The Prostitute* (2001, 2016, pp. 110–111), and also to put Nollywood films into conversation with Latin American soap operas (2016, p. 110). At this exciting moment of much greater availability not simply of Nollywood films, but all kinds of African films – for example, through video-on-demand platforms and mobile phone apps such as iROKO, AfricaFilms.tv, and Kanopy – the possibilities for using scholarship to extend curatorial practice (and vice versa) seem infinite rather than limited.

At the same time, this "curatorial turn" is also manifesting itself in less literal and more associative ways – in, for example, the tone and voice that (African) film

scholars adopt in their writing. Alongside Manthia Diawara's most recent book one can situate MaryEllen Higgins' article "The Winds of African Cinema," which is exemplary for its curatorial approach and poetic tone. Higgins' article can also be seen, however, as a challenge to the logocentrism of patriarchal approaches to classifying (African) cinema movements in terms of "waves" – something that even Diawara replicates in his book (2010). Instead, Higgins argues, following Ngũgĩ's method of globalectics (2012), "for a windy decentering … for a shifting away from habitual ways of seeing and recognizing world cinema, a wind of change in ways of speaking and writing about African cinema" (2015, p. 79). As a love letter to the many African films Higgins has watched, she reveals the cinephilia that Keathley calls for in contemporary film scholarship and she also enacts a curatorial approach through which she conjures a series of sounds and images of winds in African films that one can almost imagine playing across physical screens. Furthermore, through the poetic, performative way she invokes the films – "The wind is there in Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993), rustling through cane fields, sharing the screen with the rhythms of Sankofa the Divine Drummer …" – she breathes new life into them, bringing them to readers afresh. Her article makes one want to return to the films and watch them again and there is perhaps no better way to define a curatorial voice in scholarship than that.

The curatorial turn in African film studies is not unique but part of a global shift. We are living in a moment in which, on a global scale, the traditional role of critics is increasingly being overtaken by curators. As Jessica Morgan writes:

> Since the 1990s, the curatorial voice has to a large extent merged [with] or surpassed the critical one. No longer can we imagine a time when a critic such as Clement Greenberg might weigh heavily on the development of art. In part a result of curatorial involvement in the critical and theoretical discourse of the 1980s, the critic/curator has merged into one double-headed beast … (2013, p. 26)

Similarly, on the important canon-making work performed by film festivals and film curators, Cameron Bailey says: "Festivals have multiplied and spread to become the single most important arbiter of taste in cinema – more important than scholars, or critics, more important even than film schools" (cited in Ruoff 2012a, p. iv). In one of the first books specifically addressing film programming as a field, Jeffrey Ruoff (2012b) points out that film curators – at their best – *become* film critics (helping us to see films in new ways), but also film historians (redefining historical narratives about cinema), film editors (bringing together and juxtaposing films in audiovisual ways), and storytellers. The merging of critical and curatorial work is also evident in another recent book which offers theoretical reflection as well as practical advice on film curating – Peter Bosma's *Film Programming: Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives* (2015). It is no accident that Bosma himself is both a scholar and a curator.

The energy in contemporary African art studies has certainly emerged from scholar-curators such as Okwui Enwezor, whose multi-genre shows incorporate everything from live poetry and performance art to film and photography. As art curator and scholar Chika Okeke-Agulu points out in a curators' roundtable organized and published by *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*:

> … in the field of art, especially contemporary art, curators are arguably the most powerful shapers of art's discursive horizons with their exhibitions (which can make or break artists' careers, influence values of artwork and their movement into museums) and catalogs (that have increasingly become referenced texts competing for scholarly attention with the autonomous monograph). (2008, p. 160)

Within the field of African film studies, in turn, I have attempted to explore the crucial role that curatorial practices – particularly through film festivals – have played in the very definition of African cinemas (Dovey, 2015a), building on Diawara's pioneering work on this topic (1993, 1994). In these African cinematic contexts, many prominent African filmmakers (for example, Ousmane Sembène, Pedro Pimenta, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Martin Mhando) have *also* been film festival founders, organizers, and curators. There are also many people contributing to the circulation and redefinition of African films through regular "live cinema" events (Atkinson and Kennedy, 2016) across the continent (for example, AfricAvenir in Windhoek, Namibia; the First Wednesday Film Club in Johannesburg, South Africa; and the "Starry Nights Screenings" run by DocuBox in Nairobi, Kenya) which, because of their regularity, arguably play a more important role than rare, annual festivals, which have sometimes been accused of wasting public funds (Gibbs, 2012). These film curators allow African films to meet broad, diverse publics beyond the elite classrooms and abstruse discussions that sometimes characterize academia. Festivals and "live cinema" programmes also help to facilitate and stimulate important public debates that can impact society, although – as Litheko Modisane (2012) has shown – liveness is not a prerequisite in the creation of "publicness" through and around films, which can also develop "critical public potency" through textual forms, such as through the printed press and online social media.

The dramatic increase in online forms of criticism *and* curation has been identified as one of the key reasons behind the contemporary crisis in traditional film criticism, made abundantly clear in a new edited volume, *Film Criticism in the Digital Age* (2015). One of the editors notes that

> judging by the many journalistic articles, regular symposia and conferences, and the increasing scholarly output on the subject – which bemoan a "crisis of criticism" or mourn the "death of the critic" – it might seem safe to claim that the aims, status, and institution of arts and culture criticism in general, and film criticism in particular, are, indeed, facing possible extinction. (Frey 2015, p. 1)

This proclamation is not just a critical flight of fancy; 55 American film critics lost their jobs between 2006 and 2009 (ibid.). This crisis in criticism – most relevant to the practice of journalistic film criticism in newspapers and magazines, but also reflected through the swingeing cuts to arts and humanities funding at universities across the world – is worth dwelling on as a way of tempering any overly optimistic celebration of the "curatorial turn" in (African) film scholarship. Indeed, in the final part of this chapter I would like to reflect briefly on what might be lost through a curatorial approach without an attendant critical distance.

As Jessica Morgan warns us, the risk of a curatorial voice completely overtaking a critical one is "the loss of a critical platform, given the codependence of the curatorial world and the consequent lack of publicly voiced dissent" (2013, p. 26). Similarly, as the editors of *Cineaste* note, "In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams's classic work of cultural criticism … [he] makes clear that the term [criticism] is often synonymous with 'fault-finding'" (2016, p. 1). While curatorial work *can* offer critique, at its worst it becomes glossy and utopian, revolving around the imparting of favors, mutual backscratching, marketing, and the fear of upsetting those in power. As *Sight & Sound* editor Nick James has noted, the "culture prefers, it seems, the sponsored slogan to judicious assessment" (ibid.). The centrality of critique to academic scholarship – and, vitally, the space and prerogative to be critical – can perhaps be harnessed to ensure the necessary balance between intimacy with the object of study and distance from it. In other words, in its ideal form criticism offers us a way of not simply promoting or consuming texts, but reflecting on what is difficult or problematic about them and, thus, how we can contribute, ultimately, to a more just (re)imagining of the world.

Valuing critique as central to democratic practice can provide an antidote to those who would seek to deny the importance of academic criticism altogether, particularly in a contemporary context that is hostile to the humanities and other modes of qualitative rather than quantitative engagement. While the "passion" and "cinephilia" Keathley calls for in contemporary film scholarship is important, clearly a balance is needed between love and "fault-finding." Certain artists and scholars emphasize love at the expense of other emotions in our grappling with cultural texts. In *Letters to a Young Poet*, for example, Rilke urges the writer to

> Read as little as possible of aesthetic criticism – such things are either partisan views, petrified and grown senseless in their lifeless induration, or they are clever quibblings in which today one view wins and tomorrow the opposite. Works of art are of an infinite loneliness and with nothing so little to be reached as with criticism. Only love can grasp and hold and be just toward them. (1954, p. 29)

Similarly, the Malian filmmaker Souleymane Cissé – known for his dislike of film critics – berates African film scholar Frank Ukadike in an interview, saying "A film does not need to be commented on or you take away its universal aspects. You cannot pluck away at a film like a chicken" (Cissé cited in Ukadike 2002, p. 24). But why can filmmaking, film curation, and film criticism not co-exist?

Another statement exalting love over other emotions in our response to films comes from film curator Rasha Salti when she says: "In French we would say *coup de foudre*. I fall in love with every single film I programme" (personal communication 2011). What, then, are we to do with films that repulse us, that inspire not love but hate? As part of the 2008 London African Film Festival, I curated just such a set of films for a strand of the festival called "Early South African Cinema." Screened at the Barbican Cinema, the season included some of the first films made in South Africa, such as *De Voortrekkers* (1916) and *Siliva the Zulu* (1927). I detest *De Voortrekkers*, with its racist iconography, glorifying the murder of thousands of Zulu warriors during the Battle of Blood River. However, I felt that it was important to encourage British audiences to confront and reflect on (through post-screening discussions) these early cinematic iconographies of racism and colonialism. I had an interesting debate with a SOAS student several years ago on this topic. She argued that to screen or even teach such films re-empowers these racist discourses. I argued that it is rather a question of balance – that while such films clearly cannot appropriate too much of our time, thereby marginalizing African-made films, at the same time we cannot ban such representations outright but need to contextualize them through creating a dialogue between past and present.[10]

It is important to note here that curators have been slow to self-critique the colonial basis to their work compared to academic critics. The celebrated art curator Hans Ulrich Obrist says that curating, for him, is about two things: Love and conversation (2014, pp. 55–59). Curating, however, cannot be read innocently as *only* a positive process of lovingly nurturing artworks and creating conversations around them. Just as Susan Sontag argues that interpretation cannot be seen as an ontological presence but needs to be assessed historically (1966, p. 7), so too does curation. As I have argued (2015a), the curatorial impulse began as a violent, spectacular, imperial and racist one, and it is remarkable that Obrist, as one of the leading curators globally as well as one of the most vocal analysts and historians of curatorial work, does not acknowledge the brutal history of the "Great" Exhibitions when discussing their founder, Henry Cole (Obrist 2014, pp. 116–120). Every curatorial act, like every artwork, like every act of criticism, needs to be subject to critique itself.

In the final analysis, however, being critical should not be synonymous with being cynical. Writing about a strand of contemporary criticism in English Studies, Lisa Ruddick notes the following trend:

> Decades of antihumanist one-upmanship have left the profession with a fascination for shaking the value out of what seems human, alive, and whole. Some years ago Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick touched on this complex in her well-known essay on paranoid reading, in which she identified a strain of "hatred" in criticism (8). Also salient is a more recent piece in which Bruno Latour has described how scholars slip from "critique" into "critical barbarity," giving "cruel treatment" to experiences and ideals that non-academics treat as objects of tender concern (239–40). (Ruddick 2015, p. 72)

In conclusion, then, at this moment of a "curatorial turn" in (African) film scholarship – with scholars explicitly engaging in curatorial practice, or invoking a "curatorial voice" in their writing – I want to note and respect the history of *bricolage* out of which such a turn has emerged; but I also want to suggest the value of recognizing the symbiotic relationship between film criticism and curation, and to argue that African film critics and curators can enrich one another's work. As I hope to have shown, critical and curatorial practice overlap in significant ways: Deciding which films to research or to teach is nothing if not an act of curation (Dovey, 2014). Similarly, as Ruoff argues, film curating often means engaging in a form of film criticism, in a mostly audiovisual medium and for a different kind of public. The curatorial mode can also bring in more of the performativity that is seen as central to contemporary criticism (Jayamanne, 2001) but in new forms that engage people's senses, emotions, and intellects in unorthodox ways. The "curatorial turn" also offers the possibility of more diverse, heterogeneous conversations than may happen within academic circles. Conventional scholarly film criticism, however, can introduce the necessary critique that may be lacking in the curatorial mode and – in our time of fake news, sponsored content, and anti-intellectualism – allow the necessary distance to consider, rigorously, the object of study in all its dimensions and depth.

Notes

1 In May 2015, South African students initiated the RhodesMustFall movement, thereby inspiring renewed decolonization struggles at universities around the world. In my own university – SOAS, University of London – students have initiated a "Decolonizing Our Minds" society that organizes debates, discussions and events, but that also scrutinizes the diversity of staff, students, and syllabi. Important protests in February 2017 about the lack of diversity in SOAS syllabi, and the need to contextualize any thinker or philosopher within their environment, ~~has~~ been grossly misinterpreted in much of the mainstream media in the United Kingdom (see www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/01/08/university-students-demand-philosophers-including-plato-kant/ and www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4098332/They-Kant-PC-students-demand-white-philosophers-including-Plato-Descartes-dropped-university-syllabus.html). As students within the decolonizing movements have emphasized, their aim is to encourage people to reflect on all kinds of privilege, and an intersectional approach that includes class, gender, and sexuality is central to their work (see https://soasunion.org/news/article/6013/Statement-on-the-recent-Press-about-Decolonising-SOAS/) (accessed June 2017).

2 *Afrique sur Seine* (1955) – made by Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Mamadou Sarr, and Jacques Kane – can be called a "reverse ethnography," exploring Paris from the perspective of African students living there.

3 See Diawara 1992 for a historical overview of the organization. FEPACI's website is www.fepacisecretariat.org/about-us/ (accessed June 2017).

4 Translations from French to English are my own.

5 Some footage of the opening ceremony of this festival can be seen here: www.

britishpathe.com/video/sixth-world-youth-festival-in-moscow-aka-6th-world (accessed June 2017).

6 See Djagalov and Salazkina (2016) for a fascinating account of a different Soviet festival during this era that also had a significant presence of African filmmakers. They call this festival a "cinematic contact zone," thereby implicitly acknowledging the importance of festivals for international exchange and as heuristic devices for scholars.

7 Manthia Diawara is an accomplished documentary filmmaker, having made films such as *Rouch in Reverse* (1995), *Conakry Kas* (2003), and *Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation* (2010).

8 As I complete this chapter (in May 2017), it is exciting to note that *Daughters of the Dust* will be screened at the BFI as part of its *Sight and Sound Deep Focus: The Black Feminine Onscreen* Season in June 2017, and also released in selected UK cinemas. The film will also be released on Blu-Ray and DVD on 19 June 2017, which will help significantly with the inclusion of this film in syllabi.

9 Bekolo can be thought of as a *bricoleur* since he is not simply a filmmaker, but also a film lecturer and a writer. See, for example, his book *Africa for the Future: Sortir un nouveau monde du cinema* (2009).

10 See Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016) for an excellent definition of what constitutes a "decolonial" approach.

References

Atkinson, Sarah and Helen W. Kennedy. 2016. "Introduction: Inside-the-scenes – the rise of experiential cinema." *Participations* 13.1: 139–151.

Bailey, Cameron. 2011. Personal communication (audio interview). Toronto International Film Festival. 17 September.

Bekolo, Jean-Pierre Bekolo. 2009 *Africa for the Future: Sortir un nouveau monde du cinema*. Paris: Dagan.

Bisschoff, Lizelle and David Murphy, ed. 2014. *Africa's Lost Classics: New Histories of African Cinema*. London: Legenda.

Bosma, Peter. 2015. *Film Programming: Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chambers, Iain. 2002. "Unrealized Democracy and a Posthumanist Art." In *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta11 Platform1*, edited by Okwui Enwezor et al., 169–176. Cantz.

Cineaste editors. 2016. "Introduction." *Cineaste* 41.1.

Cousins, Mark. 2014. "Foreword." In Bisschoff and Murphy, xv–xvi.

Diawara, Manthia. 1992. *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Diawara, Manthia. 1993. "New York and Ouagadougou: The Homes of African Cinema." *Sight and Sound*, 3.11: 24–26.

Diawara, Manthia. 1994. "On Tracking World Cinema: African Cinema at Film Festivals." *Public Culture*, 6.2: 385–396.

Diawara, Manthia. 2010. *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics*. Munich and Berlin: Prestel Verlag.

Djagalov, Rossen and Masha Salazkina. 2016. "Tashkent '68: A Cinematic Contact Zone." *Slavic Review* 75.2: 279–298.

Dovey, Lindiwe. 2012. "New Looks: The Rise of African Women Filmmakers." *Feminist Africa*, 16: 18–36.

Dovey, Lindiwe. 2014. "Curating Africa: Teaching African Film through the Lens of Film Festivals." *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, 26: 6–9.

Dovey, Lindiwe. 2015a. *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dovey, Lindiwe. 2015b. "Through the Eye of a Film Festival: Toward a Curatorial and Spectator Centered Ppproach to the Study of African Screen Media." *Cinema Journal*, 54.2: 126–132.

Dovey, Lindiwe. 2015c. "'Bergman in Uganda': Ugandan Veejays, Swedish Pirates, and the Political Value of Live Adaptation." In *The Politics of Adaptation: Media Convergence and Ideology*, edited by Dan Hassler-Forest and Pascal Nicklas, 99–113. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dovey, Lindiwe. 2016. "On the Matter of Fiction: An Approach to the Marginalization of African Film Studies in the Global Academy." *Black Camera*, 7.2: 159–173.

Ellerson, Betti, ed. 2000. *Sisters of the Screen: Women of African on Film, Video and Television*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Ellerson, Betti. 2015. "Teaching African Women in Cinema Part One." *Black Camera*, 7.1: 251–261.

Ellerson, Betti. 2016. "Teaching African Women in Cinema Part Two." *Black Camera*, 7.2: 217–233.

Frey, Mattias. 2015. "Introduction: Critical Questions." In *Film Criticism in the Digital Age*, edited by Mattias Frey and Cecilia Sayad, 1–20. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Frey, Mattias and Cecilia Sayad, eds. 2015. *Film Criticism in the Digital Age*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Gadjigo, Samba, Ralph H. Faulkingham, Thomas Cassirer, and Reinhard Sander, ed. 1993. *Ousmane Sembène: Dialogues with Critics and Writers*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Gibbs, James, ed. 2012. *African Theatre Festivals*. Woodbridge/Rochester: James Currey.

Harrow, Kenneth. 2015. "Manthia Diawara's Waves and the Problem of the 'authentic'." *African Studies Review*, 58.3: 13–30.

Higgins, MaryEllen. 2015. "The Winds of African Cinema." *African Studies Review*, 58.3: 77–92.

Iordanova, Dina. 2013. "Instant, Abundant, and Ubiquitous." *Cineaste*, 39.1: 46–50.

Jayamanne, Laleen. 2001. *Toward Cinema and Its Double: Cross-Cultural Mimesis*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Julien, Eileen. 2015. "The Critical Present: Where is 'African Literature'?" In *Rethinking African Cultural Production*, edited by Frieda Ekotto and Kenneth Harrow, 17–28. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Keathley, Christian. 2006. *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Missouri, Montré Aza. 2015. *Black Magic Woman and Narrative Film: Race, Sex, and Afro-Religiosity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mistry, Jyoti and Antje Shuhmann, eds. 2015a. *Gaze Regimes: Film and Feminisms in Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Mistry, Jyoti and Antje Shuhmann. 2015b. "Introduction: By Way of Context and Content." In Mistry and Shuhmann 2015a, ix–xxxiv.

Modisane, Litheko. 2012. *South Africa's Renegade Reels: The Making and Public Lives of Black-centered Films*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Morgan, Jessica. 2013. "What is a Curator?" In *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, edited by Jens Hoffmann, 21–29. Milan: Mousse Publishing.
Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo. 2016. *The Decolonial Mandela: Peace, Justice, and the Politics of Life*. New York: Berghahn.
Nnaemeka, Obioma. 2004. "Nego-feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way." *Signs* 29.2 (Winter): 357–385.
Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 2014. *Ways of Curating*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
Okeke-Agulu, Chika. 2008. "Contribution to 'The Twenty-First Century and the Mega Shows: A Curators' Roundtable'." *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, Spring/Summer: 152–188.
Rilke, Rainer Maria. 1954. *Letters to a Young Poet*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
Ruddick, Lisa. 2015. "When Nothing Is Cool." In *The Future of Scholarly Writing: Critical Interventions*, edited by Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, 71–85. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Ruoff, Jeffrey ed. 2012a. *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals*. St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies.
Ruoff, Jeffrey. 2012b."Introduction: Programming Film Festivals." In Ruoff 2012a, 1–21.
Salti, Rasha. 2011. Interview with Author. Toronto International Film Festival. 16 September.
Sontag, Susan. 1966. "Against Interpretation" [1964]. In *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 3–14. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
Tcheuyap, Alexie. 2011. *Postnationalist African Cinemas*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Tsika, Noah. 2016. "Introduction: Teaching African Media in the Global Academy." *Black Camera*, 7.2: 94–124.
Ukadike, Nwachukwu Frank, ed. 2002. *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Vieyra, Paulin Soumanou. 1969. *Le cinéma et l'Afrique*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
Vieyra, Paulin Soumanou. 1972. *Ousmane Sembène, cinéaste: première période, 1962–1971*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
Vieyra, Paulin Soumanou. 1983. *Le cinéma au Sénégal*. Brussels: OCIC and Paris: L'Harmattan.
wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. 2012. *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Wilde, Oscar. 1993. Excerpt from "The Critic as Artist" [1890]. In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by M.H. Abrams, 1620–1627. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Filmography

Afrique sur Seine. 1955. Dir. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Mamadou Sarr, and Jacques Kane. France. 22 mins.
Aristotle's Plot. 1996. Dir. Jean-Pierre Bekolo. France/UK/Zimbabwe. 70 mins.
Conakry Kas. 2003. Dir. Manthia Diawara. Guinea-Conakry/USA. 82 mins.
De Voortrekkers. 1916. Dir. Harold Shaw. South Africa. 60 mins.

Domitilla: The Story of a Prostitute. 1997. Dir. Zeb Ejiro. Nigeria. 109 mins.
Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation. 2010. Dir. Manthia Diawara. UK/USA/Martinique. 50 mins.
Lady Gaga. 2012. Ubong Bassey Nya. Nigeria. 241 mins.
Mulholland Drive. 2001. Dir. David Lynch. USA. 147 mins.
The Prostitute. 2001. Dir. Fred Amata.
Rouch in Reverse. 1995. Dir. Manthia Diawara. New York/France. 52 mins.
Saikati. 1992. Dir. Anne Mungai. Kenya/Germany. 94 mins.
Sembène! 2015. Dir. Samba Gadjigo and Jason Silverman. Senegal/USA. 90 mins.
Siliva the Zulu. 1927. Dir. Attilio Gatti. South Africa. 64 mins.