DIALOGUE

FILMING TO PROFANE THE BORDER: CINEMA AS COUNTER-POWER

A Conversation with

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For over two decades, Sylvain George's cinema has confronted one of the most normalized expressions of state violence in Europe: the migration regime. His films traverse contested spaces such as Calais, Melilla, Paris and the frontier zone of Beni Enzar, where the border ceases to function merely as a geographic limit and instead reveals itself as a perverse logic that penetrates bodies, territories, affects and forms of life. In this world-order, mobility is criminalised by the state, repressed by the police, and managed through juridical and technopolitical apparatuses that are increasingly sophisticated and brutal.

Far from adhering to the logic of pure documentation or the victimization-heroization of migrant trajectories, George's cinema embraces a radical poetic and political gesture: it unveils the regimes of sensibility that render certain bodies illegible, disposable, and undesirable. Assuming the camera, the sound recording and the editing, George situates his practice within the dense texture of violence—in the cold, in waiting, in gestures of care and camouflage—making visible the fissures within that global order. With close attention to duration and detail, his films interrogate the ways in which power governs perception and legitimizes, even sacralizes, violence as a fundamental mode of organization.

George's work thus exposes the colonial underside of the European humanist project: a sovereignty affirmed through the fiction of a protected community, sustained by hatred, exclusion, and the lethal administration of precarious lives. This conversation, conducted in writing, is grounded in particularly unsettling images from his filmography—such as that of asylum seekers burning off their fingerprints in the refugee camps of Calais. It seeks to reflects on the forms of representing power, the intensification of violence at the border, and that which exceeds it. And on the potential of cinema as counter-power: a practice that seeks to interrupt the mechanisms of assignment and to open spaces—however fragile and provisional—for the recognition of forms of life that endure against erasure. ■

Part of the current populist right wing discourses relies on the criminalisation of migration. A rhetoric institutionalised in Europe, anchored in its political and colonial imaginaries. Your cinema is positioned against these instituted imaginaries, especially through the political exercise of filming certain bodies, certain affects and existences as forms of resistance to structural violence. Do you conceive of cinema as a space where dominant visual regimes can be contested, precisely through the insistence on images and ways of life that have been historically disfigured by power and its logics of representation?

Certainly, current populist discourses, both in Europe and elsewhere, are based on the systematic criminalisation of migration, often disseminated by state apparatuses and amplified by image technologies. This criminalisation is not just a specific border management strategy: it is part of a long colonial tradition, a structuring racial imaginary, and a logic of differentiated assignment of bodies and affects. It is based on the production of recurring figures: the "clandestine", the "criminal", the "usurper of rights", which fuel a politics of suspicion and fear, and justify, in advance, state violence.

But perhaps it is worth clarifying what these terms mean. "Colonial" here does not refer only to a past period or an external structure. It is a way of relating to alterity, always active in the foundations of institutions, representations and affects. The "figure of the migrant" reactivates the colonial architecture of the gaze, that which measures, classifies and hierarchises, while concealing its own premises. The contemporary "clandestine" is the direct heir of the "colonised", the product of a regime of knowledge-power that combines economic extraction, moral suspicion and symbolic erasure. The historical debt, still unthought, is thus transformed into suspicion. The hospitality that is promised in discourse is always already revoked in practice. And the figure of the internal enemy is recomposed, not on the basis of a real threat, but on the basis of an otherness perceived as excess, as a disturbance of the national narrative and the social order.

It seems to me that the criminalisation of migration operates, then, according to three overlapping regimes:

Politically, this responds to a contemporary mutation of law. The latter no longer guarantees protection, but carries out a selection. It distinguishes between admissible and disqualified lives. The border, in this context, is no longer a geographical boundary, but a mobile technology of exclusion. It crosses cities, camps, administrative counters, bodies. The foreigner is no longer a guest, or even a seeker, but a residual figure, always lacking legitimacy. There, the rule of law is silently suspended.

Philosophically, this logic is part of a differential biopolitics. Not only are bodies governed, but also the thresholds of their recognisability. The "migrant", as understood by Judith Butler, is exposed to a radical precariousness, not only economic or social, but existential. The migrant person becomes a body without support, a life without a frame, a subject without status. What is taken away from him is the very possibility of appearing in the field of the common. Language crumbles, the name becomes suspect, and speech is exhausted before being heard.

But we must go even further. The criminalisation of migration engages an implicit metaphysics of the common world. It reveals an incapacity to think alterity otherwise than as disturbance. It designates not only a foreign body, but an existence that threatens the foundations of the Western subject: its self-narrative, its relationship with history, with the land, with temporality. The migrant person disturbs because he forces us to recognise what has been denied: all the foundational violences, the past spoliation, the colonial continuities. His mere presence questions the fiction of sovereignty. He is perceived as a remainder, but an active, speaking, moving remainder. Hence the

need, by the apparatus of power, to lock him into ontological illegitimacy.

Behind this construction, what is at stake is therefore a work of typification, of defigurement, of desubjectification. Migrant bodies are not simply made invisible, they are also produced as unstable figures, always suspicious, always in excess, too visible or not visible enough. What contemporary regimes of visibility impose is therefore not an absence of image, but an overabundance of directed, captured, staged, redoubled images that end up neutralising all remainders, all otherness, all density. This overabundance of images produces its blind spots, entire zones of unseeing: a whole part of reality is evacuated from the field of perception, precisely because it does not fit into the dominant schemes of legibility.

Confronting this, it is not enough to "show what is hidden". Such a conception continues to assume that cinema is a mirror of reality, a simple device for revelation or restitution. This idea, deeply rooted in certain aesthetic traditions—from the realist theories of Siegfried Kracauer or André Bazin, to a certain contemporary documentary doxa, to say it quickly—postulates that the camera captures the world in its own truth and that the image can restore, through mimetic fidelity, absent or oppressed forms. But this conception, however seductive it may be, tends to forget that every gaze is situated, that every image is constructed, and that the visible, as Foucault conceived it, is always a question of power. A mirror, especially a one-way mirror, is also a disciplinary tool.

It is important, then, to shift the coordinates of this approach. Because what is at stake today is not only the absence of representation of certain existences, but their very production as mutilated representations. The act of filming, consequently, cannot content itself with a reparative or illustrative function. It supposes an active disarticulation of dominant regimes of visibility. It engages a politics of the sensible, as conceived by the philosopher Jacques Rancière, that is to say, a reconfiguration of the forms of seeing, perceiving, feeling, saying.

From this perspective, insisting on historically disfigured forms of life does not mean reconstituting them in their supposed integrity, but rather restoring to them the possibility of an off-screen space, an outside of the gaze, a space where they are no longer immediately identifiable according to the categories of power. It is not so much about granting them an image as about enabling the appearance—in the strong sense of the term: making them come into being in the sensible—of existences that escape from capture, from imposed nomination, from the exhaustion by the visible.

These forms of life, often precarious, fleeting, fragmentary, are not figures of lack or privation. They carry with them powers of disadjustment that can simply be a walk in the night, a laugh on the verge of despair, a face that hesitates to appear, a silence in the din of discourse. They are not the rubble of a lost humanity, but the shards of a world that insists in another way, on the margins of recognised forms. In this sense, they are also figures of thought. They compel us to reinvent the very conditions of attention, to suspend the automatisms of the gaze, to unlearn prefabricated grids of interpretation.

Cinema, then, does not aim at the reparation of a deficit of visibility, but at opening an experience in which the image no longer comes to confirm knowledge, nor to reassure the enunciator. It is not about illustrating a cause, nor denouncing a state of affairs, but about instituting a zone of undecidability: there where faces are no longer assigned to a function, there where bodies are no longer obliged to signify. There where, perhaps, something still holds itself up in the night, not as darkening, but as reserve of meaning, as irreducible opacity.

What such images bring to light are not edifying subjects, but dissident forms of existence, ways of inhabiting the world from its margins, its

interstices, its ruins. A word that was not expected. A gesture that does not align with any official narration. A name, at times, that traverses the film without prior archive.

In this sense, cinema can be conceived not as a reflection, but as an experience of disarticulation, a place where the order of the visible falters, where representations break down, where the power of naming decomposes. Not an aesthetic of the real in the sense of mimetic capture or transparency of the world, but a politics of the fragment, of the remainder, of the glint. A poetics that does not seek to repair the world, but rather reveals its fracture. Where, as Walter Benjamin suggests, something persists that the language of power cannot name and that cinema sometimes allows to be glimpsed.

You began your cinematographic work on migration in 2006, when Frontex was barely becoming institutionalized and the European border was not yet the transnational apparatus it is today. Over the past two decades, we have seen the European Union consolidate an increasingly violent, externalized, and automated regime: from the progressive closure of land routes to the externalization of border control to third countries, through the implementation of sophisticated surveillance systems based on technology. From your practice as a filmmaker, how would you describe the transformation of this border regime? Is it a mutation, an intensification, or a renewed form of administration of European institutional racism?

I do not believe it is simply a mutation. We must speak, I believe, and as you indicate, of an intensification—that is, a systemic deepening of a logic already present, but today carried to an unprecedented degree of density, technological intensity, and brutality. What is called the European border regime has not been transformed by substitution, but by proliferation. It has become more complex, extended, externalized, digitized, sanctified.

When I began filming in 2006, control mechanisms, although already violent, remained localizable: port areas like Ceuta or Melilla, informal camps in Calais, visible police stations. Today, the border is no longer only an identifiable place. It has become a function, a mobile operator, a diffuse fabric of technological obstacles, algorithmic procedures, securitarian delegations. It acts at a distance, in advance, by anticipation, and produces effects without appearing as such.

This transformation is inscribed in a historical continuum, not in a discontinuity. As early as the 1990s, with the Integrated System of External Surveillance (SIVE), the logics of surveillance by sensors, drones, cameras were being put in place in southern Spain. In 2004, Frontex was created, and with it a model of government of migratory flows was established, founded on militarization, externalization, concealment... It was no longer a matter of welcoming, but of repelling; no longer of processing, but of preventing; no longer of guaranteeing a right, but of impeding an arrival. As the figure of migrant persons was dehumanized, racially typified, and juridically delegitimized, borders became increasingly opaque, inaccessible, automated, while presenting themselves as neutral, objective, rational.

This intensification of control has been accompanied by a process of brutalization in the sense that George Mosse gave to this term—that is, a collective habituation to violence, an aestheticization of exclusion, a banalization of the spectacle of suffering. Images of corpses on beaches, of capsized boats, of starving bodies in the woods, no longer provoke either scandal or action. They become the elements of a tragic theater without memory, without consequence, without spectators. What George Mosse analyzed in the post-1918 context is actualized here in a postcolonial democratic regime, where brutality is no longer merely an effect of war, but a principle of organization of the world.

But the border does not content itself with controlling bodies. It sacralizes certain territories, certain orders of the world, certain belongings. It erects an outside whose unworthiness it declares, while elevating its own inside into a legitimate, defensible, quasi-religious space. This sacralization, although it presents itself in secularized forms—bureaucratic, juridical, police—manifests a logic of the sacred actualized: that of inviolability, of purification, of ritual exclusion.

This is not a metaphor. Barbed wire, the fence, the thermal camera become the material signs of a fetishized border, invested with a power of absolute preservation. The territory becomes sanctuary, and any crossing profanes a declared superior integrity. It is here that the bodies of migrants find themselves trapped in a paradoxical figure: at once denied in their humanity, and treated as carriers of a stain, of a quasi-ontological danger.

By this we must understand that these people are perceived, by powers, by security discourses, not as bearers of a history, of a situation, of a right, but as the very incarnation of an essentialized alterity, irreducible, threatening in itself. What this expression designates is less a real essence than an effect of naturalization, an imaginary construction in which the enemy is no longer defined by their acts, but by their mere presence. This is a fetishization of danger, an inverted sacralization of threat, in which the migrant body becomes a sign of an originary disturbance to be conjured away. These bodies become, to borrow an expression from Agamben (but without adhering to his ontological presuppositions nor to the onto-theology that undergirds his figure of "bare life"), *homo sacer*, excluded from the juridical order, abandoned to death, and yet defined in their very relation to a power that designates them as both untouchable and killable.

This border sacrality, although it does not speak its name, rests on a double operation. On the one hand, the invention of an inside that must be protected at all costs, and on the other, the designation of an outside radically other, non-assimilable, unforgivable, unshareable. There is here a perverse dialectic of the sacred and the profane, in the sense that Walter Benjamin conceived it: what is desacralized by modern law (the soil, the border, the blood) returns as armed, fetishized, violent sacrality. And the task of cinema, perhaps, is to interrupt this silent sacralization, to profane anew the forms of power, by showing not the horror, but the fabrication of its acceptability.

It must also be recalled that this configuration is not contingent but constitutes one of the faces of European institutional racism. As Étienne Balibar emphasizes, the border becomes an internal operator of racism. It does not separate exteriors; it sorts people within the territory itself, it differentiates the conditions of presence, of access, of visibility. Racism, here, does not speak itself: it is spatialized. It is not claimed, but delegated—to agencies, protocols, and numbers. It is no longer hatred, but management. No longer fear, nor explicit domination, but procedure and the hierarchization of vulnerabilities.

The contemporary border regime is therefore not only a technology of control. It institutes what one could call, in a critical sense, an *enacted political ontology*: that is to say, a mode of production of realities lived as natural, unquestionable, assigned, which fabricates belonging through exclusion, and security through abandonment. This is evidently not a claimed ontology, but an ontology operated by the dispositifs themselves, a way for power to pass off as necessary what is in reality constructed, situated, arbitrary. It is *enacted* in the strong sense: materialized in camps, biometric databases, walls, thresholds, waiting zones, bodies themselves. It acts in infrastructure, in affects, in procedures. It normalizes the intolerable. This logic of exclusionary belonging produces a hierarchization of lives, an unequal cartography of rights, a machine for producing undesirability.

And if something can be attempted from cinema, it is not so much to denounce frontally what

is already known, or partially visible, as to displace the regimes of appearance: not only to film borders, but to fissure them in their self-evidence, to show their "profane sacrality," to render perceptible their pretension to invisibility. To profane the invisible, to render illegible the distribution, to forbid power from believing in the neutrality of its lines.

In Qu'ils reposent en révolte (Des Figures de Guerre) (2010), we encounter an unprecedented image of the migration regime: people cutting themselves and burning their fingerprints in order to avoid being rejected by the asylum system. It is a raw image, held within a reflexive structure that avoids the shock effect: the gesture appears as the response of a political subject attempting to extract themselves from a system that promises their annihilation. In Les Éclats (Ma gueule, ma révolte, mon nom) (2012), this violence persists in the voices of refugees, who describe their lived experience as that of people who are "burning" ("You just need to know that it's as if we're burning, that's it—that's all!"). This figure of the displaced person, the asylum seeker, the refugee—the human being stripped of rights and turned into a burning body—traverses your entire cinema. What does this figure, as it appears across your filmography, tell us about the contemporary European political moment?

What Qu'ils reposent en révolte (Figures de Guerre) makes visible, in the gestures of cutting, burning, mutilating fingerprints, is not an effect of misery nor a pulsional inscription of despair, but the expression of an extreme political rationality. These gestures, as unbearable as they are silent and meticulously executed, are acts of forced de-identification, the attempt to escape a system that makes of the body an archive turned against itself. For in the European regime of migratory control, of border governmentality, it is not only the individual who is administered, but the epidermis, the finger, the biological trace. The body becomes database, security interface, police memory. It is reduced to a registration function, to an identifier through which law can be suspended, presence invalidated, asylum refused.

By voluntarily burning their fingers, exiles do not so much seek to disappear as to tear themselves away from an assignation. They attempt to neutralize the technology of capture, to short-circuit the automaticity of rejection. These are both desperate acts—in the sense of a raw lucidity faced with the absence of any way out from the imposed framework—and unshakeably affirmative: these are not empty gestures, but inscriptions of refusal. They do not stem from an auto-destructive drive, but from a somatic strategy of escape. A manner of tearing the body from its own inscription, of opposing to the surveillance regime a counter-writing on the skin itself. This figure of the burned body, mutilated, reduced to its most radical vulnerability, is not only an image of despair but also a political counter-signature. Destroying one's fingerprints, in a paradoxical gesture, amounts to erasing one's administrative identity to affirm, in and against this destruction, an inalienable humanity. Faced with a system that transforms the asylum seeker into corpus nullius—a body without rights, negated in its political existence—the carbonized flesh becomes a living archive of state violence, a form of writing whose subject is not erasure but irreducibility, a site of profanation through which the order of the world disavows itself.

This inverted marking, burning what was once burned by power, summons a long memory of colonial history. Impossible not to hear, in this image of charred fingers, the echo of the branding with red-hot iron of slaves, identified by pain, reduced to the state of inscribed thing. Fire reappears here, no longer as an instrument of property, but as tool of disappropriation. In refusing to be scanned, exiles refuse to be reinscribed in a neo-slavery logic of traceability, of profitability, of expulsability. They make appear the imperial and

capitalistic architecture of the migratory regime: a technopolitical assemblage where recognition is valid only on the condition of capture, where the human has value only as data. The burned fingers thus mark the moment when Europe—its humanist pretensions, its principles of hospitality, its liberal façade—reveals its reverse side: that of a necro-security order organized around selection, expulsion, slow killing.

These are not shock images. Cinema does not seek to stupefy. Rather, it seeks to hold, to accompany, to let appear without betraying. This is why these scenes are filmed without pathos, nor insistence. The camera does not dramatize. It persists. It envelops, without absorbing. What is at stake is not the exposure of suffering, but the apparition of a figure: that of a constrained subject, suspended, de-inscribed, who opposes to the power of recording an act of illimitation.

In Les Éclats, this same violence unfolds differently, in speech, in narratives torn out from silence, in the voice that speaks from a "burning" body. Here again, this is not a metaphor. It is a sensible truth, a way of saying what it means to be exposed to a life without recourse, without threshold, without promise. The fire is real. It consumes the flesh (cold, hunger, police violence), but also law, language, hope. To be "burning" means to be devoted to slow disappearance, methodical rejection, erasure as political horizon. But speech persists. And there is a naked dignity in this persistence, a fragile affirmation, irreducible, of being there.

In a ruined cabin, two young Afghan men, one Hazara, the other Pashtun, talk, sharing their food, their fatigue, their memory. Where history had opposed them, exile brings them together. Their conversation is a lesson in living geopolitics: analysis of relations of force, awareness of historical issues, lucidity about the repetition of violence. Then these wrenching sentences arise, seeking neither effect nor pity: "We are already dead. We are burning. We do not exist." Sentences uttered not to alarm, but to ascertain a fact, to describe a modality of existence where the political no longer precedes the subject but traverses it in living flesh. The burning is not metaphorical. It is constitutive.

This figure of the burned body, which runs through all the films, from Qu'ils reposent en révolte to Nuit Obscure, passing through Les Éclats and Paris est une fête, is not a symbol. It does not refer to an abstraction. It is the direct materialization of structural violence. That of a system that transforms asylum seekers into flammable lives, always ready to be consumed, erased, neutralized. These bodies are not what remains after the catastrophe, but the very site where catastrophe thinks itself. They are remainders, not that which survives, but that which resists capture, that which exceeds the logic of elimination, that which endures where everything commands disappearance.

In this context, contempt is not a feeling, but a structure. It manifests in endless queues, in selection mechanisms that redouble humiliation, in closed counters, unanswered forms, gazes addressed to no one. It is not punctual, but systemic. It operates through exhaustion. In the Arab world, it is called hogra—this form of social contempt so deeply rooted it becomes condition. It wears down, it disintegrates, it desubjectivizes. It does not kill instantly: it turns time itself into an instrument of annihilation.

And yet, the burned bodies persist. They speak, walk, keep vigil... They burn so as not to vanish. This fire is not that of disappearance and extinction, but that of an intensity that power would want to extinguish, and which, in darkness, still lights. It is not the spectacular flame of a dazzling revolt, but the subterranean ember of an irreducible existence. One could say, paraphrasing Antonin Artaud who spoke of Van Gogh, *the man suicided by society*, that they are both the fires and the *burned by society*: not those who consume it, but those who reveal what it seeks to ignore, those in whom burns what society refuses to see of itself.

Their fire is both symptom and unveiling, consequence and critique. It does not destroy, it exposes. It reopens the fissures beneath the proclaimed foundations. It breaks the humanist fiction of a European project founded on dignity, by showing what this fiction concretely produces: bodies without place, without recourse, without language. Bodies rendered illegible so they can be more easily set aside. Bodies that, in tearing themselves away from the selection machine, do not simply demand a place, but interrogate the very foundations of the common. What remains of a community that rests on exclusion and erasure? They do not ask for reparation but disturbance. Their fire is a call not to integration, but to desacralization. They do not want to enter the order, but to make the order appear as "mythical violence"—what Walter Benjamin analyzed as law's claim to found itself in force, to sacralize the exception in order to better conceal the continuity of domination. They burn so that another light may come, from the remainder, from what is unassimilated, from what is unrepresented.

To film this is not to bear witness from a distance, but to attempt to expose oneself resolutely to a trial of thought: what does it mean for a gesture to aim at erasing itself in order to continue to exist? What does it mean for a life to have to mutilate its own trace in order to survive? What does it mean for a cinema to receive this without betrayal, without explanation, without moralizing? Cinema then, perhaps, becomes a counter-archive—that is to say, not a place of official memory, but a space of fragile, discontinuous, opaque appearance. A place where forms of presence that escape dominant regimes of visibility are invented, where what the administration sought to erase is inscribed in light itself.

What this "figure" reveals, in all its wounded nakedness, is the contemporary face of European political violence: a violence without executioner, without confession, without explicit scene. A slow, dispersed, normalized violence that passes through law, through waiting, through thresholds, through structures. A violence that deactivates subjects before even registering them. A violence that calls not for reparation, but for thought of the remainder, of the irreducible, of profanation.

The very term "figure" deserves to be interrogated, for it can reproduce a logic of assignment, of instrumentalization, even of political neutralization through formalization. It freezes what should remain open, excessive, conflictual. What appears here does not belong to a figure in the traditional sense—neither allegory nor symbolic incarnation—but to a mode of fragile, unstable, inappropriable appearance. To invoke the unrepresentable too often amounts to reproducing a logic of exception, whereby what cannot be represented is what must be subtracted, sacralized, held at a distance. Yet it is precisely this gesture of setting aside, of sacralizing preservation, that must be interrogated. It is, on the contrary, the representable that must be defended—understood not as closure, but as a profane effort of exposure, as an attempt to bring forth, within the order of the visible, what the dominant dispositifs strive to erase.

Your films trace a cartography of migration in Europe—from its internal borders (Calais), to its continental cities (Paris, Madrid), to enclaves such as Melilla. How does territory, with its different dynamics of exclusion and control, transform your way of working?

The territory is never a neutral backdrop, nor a simple setting onto which human figures are projected. On the contrary, it is an active matrix of visibility and invisibility, a material structure where contemporary regimes of control, ascription, and relegation take shape. It configures the thresholds of the perceptible and the sayable, distributes positions of speech and silence, and marks out the possible trajectories of bodies as well as the horizons of their possible futures. Each space traversed in the films – whether the industrial fringes of Cal-

ais, the militarized margins of Melilla, the grey zones of Paris or the interstices along Spanish roads – bears the imprint of historical, colonial, and securitizing forces that organize what Jacques Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible."

These territories are first and foremost dynamic cartographies of contemporary biopower, combining surveillance, dispersion, and normalization. Calais, with its discontinuous forms and cycles of destruction and reconstruction, functions as an exploded panopticon, an archipelago of zones of exception where the law is suspended or displaced, where bodies become illegitimate by their mere presence. Melilla, a fortified enclave at the edge of the continent, embodies a politics of the threshold, where the border ceases to be a line and becomes a thick space, saturated with sensors, floodlights, barbed wire, and dispositifs of capture and selection. Paris, far from offering an outside to this logic, constitutes a diffuse intensification of it, where exclusion operates no longer through concentration but through methodical invisibilization, through silent dispersion in the interstices of the urban fabric.

Each territory, in this respect, can be read as a palimpsest: both sedimented by colonial histories that continue to inform European political imaginaries, and reconfigured in real time by technologies of power that articulate humanitarian administration, police violence, conditional asylum rights and neoliberal logistics. These are sacred spaces in the theological–political sense of the term, not because they are endowed with a higher value, but because they establish, through the combined interplay of militarization, separation, and legal exception, a perverse sacrality—one of foundational exclusion, of the untouchable, of those deemed illegitimate. The territory then becomes the scene of a deferred, repeated, banalized sacrifice: the sacrifice of rights, bodies, narratives.

However, it is precisely in the process of deterritorialization, whether it concerns the filmmaker or the subjects being filmed, that this architecture of power becomes fully visible, both in its brutality and in its illusion of legitimacy. The more the gesture is displaced, the more the territorializing organization of the world – its spatial partitions, its cuts between the lawful and the unlawful, the instituted and the forbidden – reveals itself as a construction, as a historical and technical dispositif, and not as natural self-evidence. What seemed to belong to an immutable order – the distribution of bodies, the hierarchy of mobilities, the sovereignty of borders – is then revealed for what it is: the product of normative, policing, and logistical assemblages forged in colonial history and consolidated by contemporary violence.

This making visible is not the result of theoretical distance or a position of dominance. It is experienced from a shared uprooting, a common disturbance in reference points. The filmmaker, like those he films, finds himself wrenched from his usual perceptual, affective, and political coordinates, and it is in this uprooting, in this wavering, that the architecture of power ceases to be confused with the order of the world. Control, assignment, and exclusion become legible not as facts, but as forms, as active writings of the territory and bodies.

This displacement opens up a deciphering. And this is undoubtedly why the relationships forged in the field, between the filmmaker and those being filmed, take on such a particular intensity, because they are based neither on identification nor on imaginary projection, but on a co-presence in a zone of disorientation, where no status remains stable, where asymmetries must be recognized without ever freezing positions. The space of the film then becomes the very space of this movement, of this friction between power's lines of force and wandering subjectivities, between the order of the territory and the *geopoetics of the profane*.

By this term, I refer to that which opposes this geography of domination. It is not a purely ideal counter-territory, but rather the recogni-

tion that, in the very fissures of these spatial regimes, in the breaches opened up by relegation, forms of presence that disrupt the established order emerge. The fires lit in the woods of Calais, the words exchanged on the sidewalks of Paris, the gestures of care shared in a besieged enclave are not simply forms of survival: they shift the coordinates of the visible, they produce lines of irregularity, sensory modulations, intensities that desacralize space and reconfigure it from an attention to the infra-ordinary, the ephemeral, the unassignable.

Filming these territories therefore involves experiencing a dual movement: on the one hand, the rigorous mapping of the dispositifs of power inscribed in space, such as architecture, urban planning, logistics, and differential circulations; and, on the other hand, the reception of another spatiality, founded not on mastery, but on crossing, on trembling, on echo. The territory affects the form of the film. It imposes durations, silences, angles; it works the light, saturates or suspends the sound track, modifies the very stability of the frame. It becomes an "actor," not because it is endowed with its own subjectivity, but because it is the place of an unstable composition between antagonistic forces: repression and invention, fragmentation and recomposition, erasure and emergence.

In this sense, filming a territory is neither taking inventory of nor representing it, but rather experiencing its regimes of power and appearance, listening to its piercing sounds, receiving its jolts, accompanying its dissident gestures. It means refusing to close off the landscape in order to make visible the topology of exclusions and resistances. It means inscribing the act of filmmaking within a politics of the sensible that belongs neither to cartographic survey nor to illustration, but to a form of writing in motion, one that acknowledges the conflictuality inherent in space and seeks, without ever stabilizing it, the fragile form of passage between domination and profanation.

In your films, there is a persistent tension between police persecution, destruction, and the reconfiguration of spaces inhabited by migrants. Beyond violence, however, a sensitivity toward fragile forms of inhabiting is also present, we see the life created in places where humans are forced to improvise a shelter—spaces marked by flight, yet still able to inscribe a minimal logic of home. I am thinking, for instance, of the scene in Qu'ils reposent en révolte where a man, standing at the threshold of his tent, unfolds a family photo album: in that moment, the precarious space expands into an immense network of bonds and affections that accompany him, despite everything, as survivals of the world he left behind. Something similar occurs in the third part of *Nuit Obscure*, 'Ain't I a chjld?' (2025) in the scene where one of the boys, lying on a mattress in a crevice beneath a bridge, receives a wolf mask from another boy and puts it on. In such scenes, imagination transforms those precarious spaces into the possibility of another world. Are these fragile modes of inhabiting—and the relationship to objects that your cinema attends to with such care—forms of interruption or deviation from the institutional violence of dispossession? And what role do the affective and imaginative dimensions of those who inhabit these spaces play in that construction?

It is true that some scenes concentrate something essential. Such is the case in Qu'ils reposent en révolte *(Figures de guerre)*, where a very young man scatters family photographs over an old blanket at the entrance of a tent set up in the attic of an abandoned factory ("surviving" photos drawn from a small backpack that made it through the crossings of the desert, the Mediterranean, and parts of Europe). Or in Nuit Obscure – 'Ain't I a Child?', the moment when little Mohamed puts on a wolf mask given to him by Hassan, as he prepares to lie down and sleep under the elevated metro bridge. Even the careful act of folding a blanket, hanging a lamp, drawing on the ground. These are not mo-

ments of "resilience", nor an aesthetics of consolation, but a minimal, irreducible, and fragile form of inhabiting the world otherwise. Amid the ruins of law, in the interstices of dispossession.

These gestures are never neutral. They are not simply realistic details or moments of rest in the dramatic economy of migration. They are what we could call forms that interrupt the dominant logic of deprivation. They demonstrate an ability to inscribe space, however small, where everything is organized toward erasure, instability, and un-belonging. To inhabit, here, does not mean to possess or control, but to profane the violence of non-place. To transform the underside of a bridge, a patch of vacant land, a tent threatened with eviction into a temporary home is to interrupt, however briefly, the programme of errancy, dislocation and interchangeability; it is to oppose the organisation of inoperativity with a precarious, affective, inventive writing. A form of resistance that is not frontal but subterranean, not spectacular but minimal.

The mask scene offers a particularly eloquent example. In this exchange—Hassan hands Mohamed a wolf mask, in a kind of improvised, almost silent ritual—what circulates is not only an object, but a way of provisionally inhabiting space otherwise, away from police relations, in the midst of a decentered symbolic economy. The mask, here, is not a simple accessory: it is an *operator of inversion* and *metamorphosis*. To those whom society qualifies as 'savages,' whom it expels from the human order by assigning them to the order of nature, to a phantasmatic animality, to the inhuman, young people respond with critical irony and a figure of excess: a wolf mask, plastic, derisory, almost grotesque. This gesture, minimal, opens a carnivalesque breach. It does not respond to assignation through interiorization, but through derision. It reverses symbolic violence. It turns it into a game. And this game, while deflecting the logic of humiliation, sets up another scene: that of an irreducible form of subjectivation, of a way of provisionally becoming other to oneself, of loosening the stranglehold of State categories.

It is also a privileged moment, a poetic and political intimacy, born in the very heart of extreme vulnerability, where the act of transmission—of an object, of a look, of a gesture—becomes an act of trust, of presence, of co-invention of the world. Nothing is repaired. Nothing is saved. But something insists, resists, overflows. Another scene opens, in a low murmur. These are *dissident forms of habitation* which, within and against the order of relegation, redeploy memory, imagination, relation. Through this tiny gesture, an entire space of reversibility emerges—a fragile theater where one no longer suffers the imposed image, but where one sketches, albeit briefly, a fiction to escape the State's fiction and disarm assignations.

As for the family album, it does not constitute a simple memory. It is also an active gesture: opening the pages, showing them to the camera is both inscribing one's history in a space of erasure and addressing something—a part of oneself, of one's world, of one's attachments—to another. The family photograph becomes a mobile site of anchoring, a territory without ground, but portable, transportable, activated in the very act of showing it.

These gestures are part of a politics of detail, of attention, of survivance. They are at the heart of a cinema that refuses to separate structural violence from sensible forms of existence, macro-violence from micro-presences. They manifest an ability to produce, within and against dispossession, zones of warmth, thresholds of address, provisional forms of world-making.

It is therefore not simply a matter of resisting. It is a matter of diverting the logic of dispossession; of making forms, intensities, bonds, imaginaries persist, despite everything. Here lies undoubtedly one of cinema's major ethical challenges: not to record what is, but to welcome what insists. To capture not only violence, but what exceeds it. To observe not only destruction, but what, in its cracks, reinvents itself.

To conclude, your films leave us with a lingering concern: what has become of the people who appear in those images? It is not a need for narrative closure, but rather a disquiet that arises from the recognition that these lives are facing a deeply hostile system, where their survival depends on the bureaucracies of migration policies. After the final credits of the last part of Nuit Obscure, a sign recalls the deaths of Streka, Nahel, and Mustapha, three teenagers who died in different contexts under the action or custody of the State. This epilogue situates the poetic exercise within the concrete events that exceeds the film and limit its power as a device for affirming the lives that the necropolitical regime manages to eliminate. Can we think of cinema—of the act of holding one's gaze, of opening spaces for listening—as a place to weave a shared emotion that allows us to make memory and elaborate a collective mourning?

Cinema does not restore life. It does not replace it. It does not save it. But it can, I believe, under certain conditions, through certain gestures, in certain regimes of looking and listening, accompany these presences, insist on what has taken place, and support, even at the limit, what remains.

At the end of the last part of Nuit Obscure, three names appear: Streka, Mustapha, Nahel. Three young boys, three interrupted trajectories, three deaths inflicted under the direct or indirect responsibility of the State. This epilogue does not conclude the work. It does not give it a univocal meaning. It does not produce pathos. It recalls, in the strong sense of the term: it brings back into the present what the political apparatus seeks to dissolve into forgetfulness.

Streka, filmed in Ain't I a Child?, died electrocuted on the Paris metro tracks, not far from where little Mohamed (the boy with the wolf mask) was sleeping, believing that the police were chasing him. Mustapha was found hanged in his cell. He had already been in prison and had sworn never to return. Nahel, shot at point-blank range by a police officer during a traffic stop (which amounts, quite simply, to a republican execution), does not appear in the trilogy, but his death has irrevocably traversed the gaze, the gestures, the editing—because he was of the same generation, because he bore the same signs of foreignness, because he embodied, like the others, a target.

These deaths are not anecdotes. They are not contingent. They express a regime of systemic elimination, a necropolitical logic that decides who can live and who must die (Foucault), according to criteria that are always hidden but always operative: race, class, age, spatial position, language.

These three figures do not belong to a commemorative pathos. They inscribe the work in a tissue of concrete political realities, denied, evacuated, but irreducibly present. They are not exceptions. They reveal a structured regime of slow or brutal elimination, a differential administration of life, a permanent selection between what deserves to be rescued and what can be exposed to death. Therefore, the film neither repairs nor justifies. It records, it gives a name, it inscribes a persistence where the State attempts to erase even memory. This gesture of montage is not offered as proof. It counts as a symbolic interruption, as a gesture of accompaniment, as an attempt to disobey erasure.

To try to film these lives is not only to show them. It is also to recognize them as irreplaceable. It is to grant them a place of appearance that is neither the record of their disappearance nor their compassionate recovery. Cinema here does not document death. It composes with absence. It exposes the unfinished, the interrupted, the suspense, not to fill, but to make last. The final card is not a sign of closure. It opens another temporality: that of deferred mourning, of mourning without ritual, of prevented mourning.

Under these conditions, can we speak of collective mourning? Certainly, perhaps, I don't know. Provided, of course, that we do not mean by this an appeased, integrated, digested mourning. What is proposed here is rather a joint elab-

oration of the irreparable, a pooling of the inadmissible, a shared emotion that does not close the wound. Memory, here, is not a cold archive. It is made up of silences, whispered names, trembling images. It is constantly threatened with erasure. And yet, it insists. Making memory, without closure: a cinema of interminable, shared mourning.

What cinema makes possible is not reparation, but the persistence of a gaze. A gaze that does not look away, a gaze that does not consume, a gaze that sustains without capturing. In a world saturated with flows, immediate images, indifferent scrolling, sustaining the gaze and prolonging listening, is already a poetic and political act. A way of not giving in. A way of holding with those who have fallen, *despite all*. ■

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FILMING TO PROFANE THE BORDER: CINEMA AS COUNTER-POWER. A CONVERSATION WITH SYLVAIN GEORGE

Abstract
This interview with French filmmaker Sylvain George examines two decades of cinematographic work dedicated to confronting the European migratory regime and its systematic violence. Through a dialogue that combines theoretical references with his practice as a filmmaker, George articulates his cinema as a form of counter-power that challenges dominant regimes of visibility, drawing on thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Jacques Rancière, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. The conversation addresses the transformation of the European border apparatus since 2006—when George began filming—to the present, characterized by an intensification of violence, the externalization of control, and technological sophistication. George analyzes how the border regime operates as a perverse sacralization that produces bodies as "killable" and "illegitimate", inscribing itself within a colonial continuity that structures contemporary migration policies. The filmmaker reflects on particularly powerful images from his filmography not as representations of suffering, but as political acts of forced dis-identification. Faced with criminalization and structural contempt, George proposes a cinema that profanes borders, that registers fragile forms of dwelling, and that sustains the gaze upon existences that power seeks to erase, thereby configuring a space to generate an inedit distribution of the sensible.

Key words
Documentary; Border; Sylvain George; Migration; Violence.

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Article reference
Sourdis, C. (2026). Filming to Profane the Border: Cinema as Counter-Power. A Conversation with Sylvain George. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 41, 167-184. https://doi.org/10.63700/0000

FILMAR PARA PROFANAR LA FRONTERA. EL CINE COMO CONTRA-PODER. CONVERSACIÓN CON SYLVAIN GEORGE

Resumen
Esta entrevista con el cineasta francés Sylvain George examina dos décadas de trabajo cinematográfico dedicado a confrontar el régimen migratorio europeo y sus violencias sistemáticas. A través de un diálogo que combina referentes teóricos con su práctica como cineasta, George articula su cine como una forma de contra-poder que disputa los regímenes de visibilidad dominantes, apoyándose en pensadores como Walter Benjamin, Jacques Rancière, Michel Foucault y Judith Butler. La conversación aborda la transformación del dispositivo fronterizo europeo desde 2006 —cuando George comenzó a filmar— hasta la actualidad, caracterizada por una intensificación de la violencia, la externalización del control y la sofisticación tecnológica. George analiza cómo el régimen fronterizo opera como una sacralización perversa que produce cuerpos como «matables» e «ilegítimos», inscribiéndose en una continuidad colonial que estructura las políticas migratorias contemporáneas. El cineasta reflexiona sobre imágenes particularmente potentes de su filmografía no como representaciones del sufrimiento, sino como actos políticos de desidentificación forzada. Frente a la criminalización y el desprecio estructural, George propone un cine que profana las fronteras, que registra formas frágiles de habitar y que sostiene la mirada sobre existencias que el poder desea borrar, configurando así un espacio para generar un reparto diferente de lo sensible.

Palabras clave
Cine documental; Frontera; Sylvain George; Migración; Violencia.

Autora
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Referencia de este artículo
Sourdis, C. (2026). Filmar para profanar la frontera. El cine como contra-poder. Conversación con Sylvain George. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 41, 167-184. https://doi.org/10.63700/0000

Edita / Published by
associació cineforum L'ATALANTE
EL CAMAROTE DE PERE JULES

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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com

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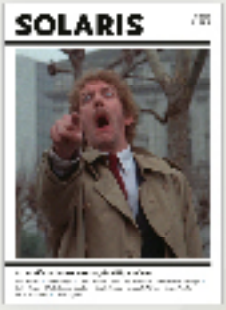

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