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Seeing and Being Seen:
Negotiating the Western Gaze in Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain*

Concerned with the response of Western audiences to Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain*, both Dina Iordanova and Slavoj Žižek argue that, despite intentions to the contrary, the director "offers to the Western gaze what [that gaze] likes to see in the Balkans – a mythical spectacle of eternal, primordial passions, of the vicious cycle of hate and love, in contrast to the decadent and anemic life in the West...." (Žižek 2000). Iordanova insists that "by uncritically continuing the line of traditional representations of the Balkans as a mystic stronghold of stubborn and belligerent people, *Before the Rain* continued an existing Balkan trend of *voluntary self-exoticism*" (147). Whereas some Western reviews show that such concerns with the film's reception are not entirely groundless,¹ I agree with Victor Friedman when he argues that "the fact that many Western viewers interpreted the film literally rather than symbolically" is "not a failure of the film but of the gaze" (143). I believe that Iordanova and Žižek's focus on the presentation of the Balkans *to* the West has led them to miss the film's intricate critique of both the Western gaze as well as the Balkan internalization of that gaze. In other words, while these critics see the film as "performing 'Balkanism'," I join Katarzyna Marciniak in interpreting Manchevski's work as "performatively critiquing" (67) "Balkanism" and the attendant myths of national identity. This short essay cannot presume to do justice to the uncanny process of estrangement to which *Before the Rain*

¹ For an overview of Western responses to the film, see Keith Brown.

submits familiar stereotypes and national myths.² It will rather only touch upon certain aspects of the film's treatment of the complex mirroring between West European center and Balkan periphery.

Iordanova is justifiably concerned that a tendency to depict Balkan cultures “through the eyes of Westerners (or locals who have spent sufficient time in the West) ... results in perpetuation of the Eurocentric gaze” and in the representation of the Balkan people as “other,” strange and foreign (152-3). I would like to complicate Iordanova's reading of *Before the Rain*, however, by pointing out that the film does not simply represent Macedonia “from the point of view of a displaced native,” but makes the problem of representation one of its most poignant themes. Rather than unambiguously endorsing the Western gaze as normative, therefore, Manchevski's film makes apparent a plethora of tensions inherent in the act of gazing itself.

As an émigré war photographer, Aleks occupies literally the position of the Western gaze directed at the Balkans, turning them into an exotic object of curiosity and study, and affirming the West's normative status. He thus stands for the internalization and perpetuation of the Western gaze against which Iordanova has cautioned. Significantly, however, we meet the photographer not during his stable career when he “performs” the Western gaze comfortably, but at the beginning of his journey away from that identification, when he has been confronted with the underlying dangers of his role. The character's development through the narrative constitutes a commentary on the problems of observation and representation. And, in as much as he and his craft refer to

² I attempt a more detailed analysis in my dissertation, “Romulus's Nations: Myths of Brotherhood and Fratricide in Russian and South Slavic National Narratives.”

the director and his work, Aleks's difficult negotiation with his responsibilities is also the film's gesture of self-reflection.

Aleks's involuntary involvement in the violence he hopes to prevent by documenting it exemplifies a plethora of complex dynamic ties between the gaze and its object. The encounter of the photographer, the militiaman, and the prisoner stages the uncanny moment when the object of observation suddenly comes alive and looks back at the gaze. The "uncanny" quality stems not so much from the fact that the relation between observer and observed is suddenly rendered reciprocal and that the observer himself comes under scrutiny, but from the fact that the object "returns" to the gaze its own unconscious (perverse) desires. The object offers to the gaze what that gaze seeks – violence. By satisfying literally (cynically-perversely) the photographer's "wish" for exciting shots, the militia man confronts him with the hidden sadistic dimension of his search for these interesting shots. The need to represent violence to the West in order to shock it into action slides into the quest for violence itself. Watching turns into vampirism. Manchevski himself brings this point up in an interview:

I went to a French TV broadcast when I went to Paris for the film's opening night; there were there some people who had been in Bosnia, who were photo-reporters, people who were very much alike Aleksandar. There was also a French female reporter ... who talked about how her adrenalin goes up, how people change when they are going to set off from Paris, And the host asked her, "Do you like the war?"... (Kunovski 53)

The question of voyeurism within the gaze directed at the violence in the Balkans as raised by the film has been addressed by a number of critics. Victor Friedman, for example, analyzes in detail the film's representation of the local attitude toward the western observers vested in Dr. Sašo's expression "Sega Zapad seir gleda" ("Now the

West is watching the show”). “[S]eir is a word of Turkish origin meaning ‘spectacle’ or ‘sight worth seeing’... the implication is someone who watches uselessly.” Friedman clarifies his point by referring to a cartoon in *Nova Makedonija* where the label of the West European “observer” (*posmatra*) is substituted with the word *seirdžija*, with “the connotation of useless ‘bystander, rubberneck’”(141). I want to add to Friedman’s astute comments that the replacement of *posmatra* with *seirdžija* includes the dimension of *enjoyment* which is lacking from the former neutral term. Calling the western observers *seirdžiji* not only highlights their perceived uselessness but also the perverse enjoyment that a *seirdžija* receives from seeing the spectacle in front of him. The issue of enjoyment is at the center of Žižek’s critique in his discussion of Kusturica’s *Underground*. The West’s relationship to (the violence in) the Balkans, according to him, “is deeply ambiguous,” “a strange mixture of repulsion ... and attraction.” In Žižek’s account, the Balkans become a fantasy space where the West projects its “repressed” dark passions. The ambiguity becomes especially pronounced in a morbid fascination with the victims, with “horrifying pictures of mutilated corpses, of wounded and crying children... They were horrified by them, yet at the same time they ‘couldn’t avert their eyes’”(no pagination).

Thus, if the Western gaze directed at the “other” marks the latter as an abnormal, strange entity whose actions and motivations are entirely beyond the comprehension of the “normal” civilized center, the uncanny moment when the observed object suddenly returns the gaze negates the *radical* difference between observer and observed. Confronting the former with a terrifying dimension of its own perverse desires, this moment shatters the comfortable image of the “civilized” West free from the primitive

passions of the barbaric Balkans, and writes center and periphery within a similar libidinal economy. By embracing his role as an actor in a *spectacle*, the militia man embarrasses the observers with their own voyeuristic enjoyment. Turning them from “monitoring” outsiders into an “audience” (which has gone there to watch a performance, and in other circumstances would pay for it), he gains the moral superiority which has hitherto belonged to his observers, because they can no longer maintain the distance which allows them to take the superior stance of “disgust.” In the militiaman’s gesture, we can detect a type of Dostoevskian Underground-Man attempt to reclaim a morbid kind of dignity.

This encounter in Bosnia brings out an array of other issues as well. First and foremost, as a number of critics have already noted, the incident shatters the naive belief in the neutral position of the observer, in the possibility of watching but remaining untouched, outside the war’s imperative violence. Instead of following its own “autonomous” logic of development, the “object” under scrutiny incorporates the fact that it is being observed into the economy of its own actions. Violence becomes a spectacle enacted *for* the benefit of the gaze, war emerges as an impromptu performance carried in active dialogue with its audiences. In this dialogue, the observed can actively manipulate their own representation – either in aggressively enacting the role of barbaric “others” to the West (as the militiaman does), or in riveting the audience’s attention by embracing one’s role as a victim. I have in mind here the liberation movements in the region at the end of the nineteenth century, when, as is well known, revolutionary activities were often carried out in the hope of attracting the attention of Western public opinion. That Susan Woodward notes a similar manipulation of the representation of violence in the

Yugoslavian wars of succession should not be read as a sign of the Balkan's timelessness but as a symptom of the unchanged relation between the center and its margins:

The psychological warfare to justify the creation of national states would be to no avail if diplomatic recognition did not follow. Military engagements aimed not merely at physical control of territory but at foreign support. Military strategists and political leaders *chose targets* and managed media coverage so as to shape international opinion and local sympathies. ...All sides used attacks (and mutual incriminations of blame) on cultural monuments, on civilians in breadlines, on wedding and funeral parties, on busloads of orphans ... to mobilize sympathies and hostility at home and abroad. ...the UN organizations on the ground became vehicles of [the nationalist leaders'] statemaking, *in effect not observers but integral parts of the political struggles that included war* (236, 318, italics mine).

The spectators bear responsibility because their expectations and responses influence the outcome of the performance. Woodward laments the failure of Western powers to recognize what Manchevski's character immediately recognizes – their own influence on the events on the ground. Thus she calls for “a greater appreciation for the influence that actions by foreign governments and international organizations were having on Yugoslav politics throughout its path of dissolution” (3). Yet another episode in *Before the Rain* highlights, perhaps even unintentionally, the West's role in the relations between Balkan countries themselves. The quarrel between the waiter and his visitor in Part Two, while attesting to the film's refusal to create a space “where the audience can feel safely positioned outside the discourse of ethnic cleansing” (Marciniak 79), also enacts the drama of the Balkans for acceptance. The waiter, clean shaven, hard working and likeable, is trying to blend in the “civilized” West. His ultimate goal as an immigrant is to make money and join “normal” bourgeois life. His dream, of course, is shared by every country on the European periphery – to become a legitimate part of

Europe and to have the chance to live the life of the “civilized,” “normal” West.³ The desire to belong to the Economic Center, especially poignant after the dissolution of the socialist system, is to a large extent the obverse phenomenon of the objectifying Western gaze – if the latter marks the observed peripheral object as alien, exotic, and different, the peripheral *subject* gazes longingly at the center, seeking to erase the difference and write itself as same.⁴

While the motives for the quarrel remain purposefully unclear,⁵ the visitor seems to be ridiculing precisely the waiter’s petty concern with money: with an expression of contempt, he throws money at the waiter’s face and repeats “Money, money, money” (“Pare”). At least to this viewer, the derision relates to the Balkan’s own myth about itself as a place of authenticity – as a place of spiritual rather than worldly concerns, where one rises above petty cares, above money and ownership, and values only ties with friends and community. From this perspective, the waiter is betraying his loyalty to an ethos of community for the ethos of western egotistic individualism. The intruder’s provocative behavior challenges the West’s presumed position of superiority by challenging its esteem of economic success. This militant character then engages in a struggle for dignity similar to that of the militiaman. The latter shocks his observers by throwing back at them – embellished – their own image of him as a violent savage; likewise, the restaurant bully

³ Thus one possible reason for the persistent tendency of Balkan directors to represent their countries through foreign eyes may be precisely the acute urgency with which a re-examination of identities and borders has been taking place in the post-communist countries.

⁴ In the urge to write oneself as same, each part of the periphery is also busily carving out differences between itself and its more exotic neighbors, thus creating its own “nesting orientalisms” as described by Baki -Hayden: “Thus, while Europe as a whole has disparaged not only the orient “proper” but also the parts of Europe that were under oriental Ottoman rule, Yugoslavs who reside in areas that were formerly the Habsburg monarchy distinguish themselves from those in areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire, hence ‘improper’ (922).

⁵ In a question and answer session at Yale University, Manchevski explained that the point is to show that others’ violence is always incomprehensible to the observers. (May 2004)

elevates the myth of his own exotic authenticity, and indulges in the (perverse) enjoyment of moral superiority which he gains, however briefly, in his arrogant denial of bourgeois etiquette.

The waiter, for his part, wants to be distinguished from this unacceptable (to the west) visitor from his past – a connection with him threatens the immigrant’s successful integration. As his guest demonstratively throws money at him and attracts everyone’s attention, the young man struggles with humiliation and restrains himself from responding. The restaurant owner, however, does not appreciate his employee’s efforts:

Owner (with dignity): “George, I think it would be best if you left the restaurant as quickly as possible. And don’t come back.”

George (indignantly): “Sir, sir, I didn’t do anything!”

Owner: “I am sorry, George. And make sure your friend leaves with you.”

While George requires that the difference between him and the disturbing visitor be recognized, his boss refuses to acknowledge the distinction between the two foreigners and insists on seeing them together as an entity, drawing a line between himself and the two of them. It is at this point that the real fight erupts: having lost the battle of acceptance, the waiter relinquishes control and hits the bully. As the fight escalates, the owner of the restaurant fails to see his own role in its outbreak.

This last exchange recalls, in its own peculiar way, the fears of the Northern Yugoslav republics in their quest for admittance to EUROPE. As Tomislav Longinovi has put it, “[Slovenism] was offered as an escape from the Balkans, towards the promise of Mittleeuropa and ... [of] an ever-elusive future of Western Europe.... ‘The serbs’ were a threat to Slovene ‘European identity’ ...because they could coerce the Slovenes to

remain part of the abject cultural space of ‘the Balkans’.”⁶ I do not want to suggest, however, that this incident should be read literally as an allegory of the Yugoslav dissolution. Rather than attempting to map specific historical events and actors unto the film’s episodes, I am hoping to draw attention to the dense web of mirroring gazes from East and West that Manchevski masterfully brings out in his dramatization of mutually dependent identity claims.

Finally, the restaurant scene “does not allow for the representation of Western Europe as a superior ‘civilized’ space that has overcome its ethnic dilemmas” (Marciniak 69), because it insists on reminding its viewers of “civilized” England’s own “uncomfortable” violence. To Nick’s comment (“At least they aren’t from Ulster”), the owner rejoins “No, sir, I am from Ulster.” Just like the waiter before him, the owner is caught in the need to negotiate his own relation to the stigma and violence of his place of origin (the imperial periphery) and his desired belonging to the (imperial/economic) center. Nick’s two unsuccessful jokes (“I guess the civil war gets more civil once they get here” and “At least they aren’t from Ulster”) may be interpreted as a gesture toward what some critics have termed the “comforting” effect of Balkan violence: the savagery of the “other” confirms the “civility” of the self. In the short conversation between Nick and the owner, however, Manchevski precludes the possibility of such comfort. The violence we have witnessed becomes a part of a general problem rather than a uniquely Balkan trait. Rather than confirming the West’s image of itself as free of the barbarism of less developed countries, the director frames the East and the West together.

⁶ The relation of the restaurant owner for the outbreak of the fight in this episode is in fact opposite to the relation Woodward sees between the Western countries and the Yugoslav crisis. In her view, Germany’s hasty recognition of Slovenia and Croatia’s “nesting orientalist” claims to radical difference from the post-Ottoman south that precipitated the violent dissolution.

(SELF)MYSTIFICATION

The incident of Aleks's camera also highlights a problem with the Enlightenment trust in direct representation as a reliable vehicle to "understanding" reality. Erik Tängerstad comments on the issue extensively:

In this film, Manchevski has put forward the argument that no correspondence between knowledge and the 'real world' can be construed. The notion of realism, according to which an artwork can be compared with the 'real' is destroyed. Reality 'as it really is' cannot be documented, nor can there be any direct connection between the past and written history, because we have no access to that kind of past that history could represent. (Tängerstad 178-180)

Observation does not provide adequate understanding of reality, first because it can only take in that which the object chooses to show to the gaze, but also because it fails to perceive what is beyond the frame. As already mentioned, the other problem is that the Balkans' status as the West's object of study immediately bars them from the desired acknowledgment of "likeness" to and participation in the West. It marks them as a strange, opaque entity whose actions and meanings are not readily available but can be understood only through careful deciphering. The problem, of course, is not the urge to study, and we would not want to discourage such a noble endeavor. Rather, it is with the assumption of radical difference between the subject and the object of study, a difference which makes it impossible for the subject to "understand" without the possession of the key to some secret, singular meaning. Here I resort to Žižek's assertions:

The main source of mystification of the Bosnian war is that everybody tries to "understand" it. One of the clichés about it is that, in order to explain what is going on, one has to be acquainted with at least the last five hundred years of history, with its bric-a-brac of wars, religious and ethnic conflicts... This compulsive evocation of the "complexity" of the situation serves to maintain the

quasi-ethnological gaze on the Balkans... What one should do is precisely the opposite... one should ... put in parentheses the multitude of meanings, the wealth of specters of the past that allow us to "understand" the situation. One should resist the temptation to "understand"... It is only such a suspension of "comprehension" that renders possible the analysis of ... the political calculi and strategic decisions that led to the war.

As Woodward has shown, the causes did not reside so much in the past but in the present:

“The real origin of the Yugoslav conflict is the disintegration of governmental authority and *the breakdown of a political and civil order*. The conflict is *not* a result of historical animosities and it is *not* a return to the procommunist past; it is the result of the politics of transforming a socialist society to a market economy and democracy” (15, italics mine).

Before the Rain exposes not only the problematic effects of the Western gaze upon the observed and the gaze’s responsibility, it also presents us with a critique of the obverse side of the West’s frustration at the Balkan mystery. Not only does the West accept that it cannot comprehend the Balkans because their meaning does not lend itself to rational understanding; the Balkans themselves try to affirm their specificity and singularity, and insist on the Western gaze’s inability to penetrate to their true meanings. As an emigrant, Aleks has not lived through the dissolution of the Yugoslav community and the emergence of the nationalist monster. He returns to Macedonia both a westerner and a Yugoslavian antique. His efforts to argue against his cousin’s quest for revenge are thus dismissed on grounds of his inability to understand. Running into Zdrave and the rest of the armed gang as they announce their program “Site šiptari na kol” (“All Albanians to the stake”), Aleks asks the obvious question “I posle?” (“And what then?”). The response neutralizes the “foreign” attempt at intervention precisely by suggesting that there is a meaning inaccessible to outsiders: “Ti glej si seir. Ne si od tuka” (“You

watch the show. You are not from here”). Zdrave retorts far more brazenly during the confrontation at the sheepfold:

Aleks: Zasrami se! (You should be ashamed!)

....

Zdrave: Bra ed, odamna si izlezen od tuka, ne znaeš kako sidi toa. Gledaj si ja tvojata živea ka. (Cousin, you left from here a long time ago, you don't know how things are. Mind your own life.)

By presenting the obvious situation of violence as some inscrutable matter which eludes the grasp even of a local who has spent time abroad, Zdrave effectively invalidates Aleks's judgment and standards. It is in these details that Manchevski critiques not only the Western mystification of the Balkans, but also the local claim to be an incomprehensible mysterious entity – both become convenient ways of avoiding moral responsibility.

ALEKS'S JOURNEY HOME

When the object under Aleks's camera comes to life and throws the perverse truth of his unformulated wish back in his face, Manchevski's character (unlike the restaurant owner or the politicians to whom Woodward refers) immediately recognizes his responsibility in the murder. By embodying the Western gaze, the photographer has sinned against the “western” belief in the absolute value of human life as well as against his former Yugoslavian self. His resignation and his return home are acts of penance and the beginning of a quest to recover, at least partially, a core of his prelapsarian self. Since his responsibility is that of the gaze, his cleansing necessarily passes through the gradual renunciation of the camera as a mediator between himself and violence. The slow process

of emerging from behind the camera accentuates the photographic medium as a protective screen between the self and reality.

His first step is to separate himself from his unfortunate pictures from Bosnia and to bequeath them to Ann. Before Aleks can send his pictures, his cousin is found dead. The film's slow, relentless exploration of Bojan's wounds clearly coincides with the war photographer's experienced gaze, a coincidence which expands the specificity of the scene to the generality of all other scenes of violence that he has shot on film. The slow camera movement, the slowed action, and the reigning silence recall the stunned slowing of time in the moment of shock. As Aleks's hand motions to adjust the imaginary camera's lens and press the button, he also renounces the real camera. His gesture of renunciation seems to be also the gesture of accepting the finality of Bojan's death. Having taken the imaginary shot with Aleks, the film's focus moves away from the dead body and the dripping blood toward the people around it and their emotions. The action speeds up, the sound grows louder. Renouncing the position of the correspondent, the gaze behind the camera does not remain fixated on the (arguably aestheticized) object of the violated body but travels beyond it to the humanity of the people who have to negotiate the death.

Aleks's final distancing from the photographer's mode of looking at the world is also the hero's final preparation for confronting his cousin. I find a possible key to this final step in his conversation with Hana:

Hana: ... Ti gledaš li što se slu uva so lu evo naši? (Do you observe what's happening with our people?)⁷

⁷ I choose the rather clumsy and non-conversational "observe" because it has both meanings of watching and seeing that are present in the interchange between the two.

Aleks: Gledam. (I do).

Hana: Ne e za gledanje! "It's not a sight one should (have to) see!"

Hana's idiomatic expression carries the implications of the act of watching as voyeurism. "Ne e za gledane" indicates the embarrassment that unites the object of observation with the observer in sharing a shameful scene. Recognizing the riveting enjoyment of *sejra*, this expression warns against it and hopes for the aversion of the gaze.

After Hana leaves, we follow Aleks as he steps over a book entitled "Alexander Kirkov, Pictures," lying on the floor. The height of his artistic and journalistic achievement, the book remains behind, useless and ignored. The final gesture in his intimate ritual preparation for his confrontation with the gang is to tear up the fateful pictures of the Bosnian prisoner. In this final act of emergence from behind the camera, the cleansing journey toward "settling his debt" nears its completion. Having given up pictures, the protagonist also cuts the distance between himself and the events happening around him: the responsibility of his camera for the murder of the prisoner translates into his responsibility as an observer *of* his cousins' violence. Now he can refuse to acknowledge the difference between observer and observed; he can refuse to allow his intervention to be neutralized by the argument of his foreignness. The shift of the verb "gledam" which takes place in his response to Zdrave indicates the change in a most succinct form:

Zdrave: Bra ed, odamna si izlezen od tuka, ne znaeš kako sidi toa. *Gledaj* si ja tvojata živea ka. ("Cousin, you left from here a long time ago, you don't know how things are. Mind [literally watch, observe] your own life.")

Aleks: Oti is ja *gledam*, ne možam so sebe da živeam koga te *gledam* vakov! ("Because I mind [watch] my own life, I cannot live with myself when I see you like this!")

Aleks has finally adopted Hana's attitude toward seeing – it is a sight that embarrasses, that degrades both observer and observed. Recognizing the spuriousness of the radical difference between himself and his cousin, between the “westerner” and the “Balkan,” he can at least attempt to wake up the others.

It can hardly be contested that it is Aleks's death that finally breaks the strained anxiety and brings forth release with the first drops of rain. In the personal development of the character, therefore, Aleksandar finally succeeds in “returning home.” This is why, as Manchevski points out, the character dies happy and, more importantly, makes the film a “happy end”: “For him, these thirty seconds before he dies, and even though he dies, are the most important in his life. He dies with a smile on his face, he is the only happy face. Therefore, even if he dies, the end of the film *Before the Rain* is a happy end. Aleksandar ... dies happy” (Kunovski 49). His death redeems him of the camera's murder and gives the hope, however tenuous, that “the circle is not round.”⁸

A detail worth mentioning here is that Manchevski plays the role of the prisoner shot in front of the camera. Tängerstad interprets this “authorial death” as a mark of the director's awareness of his own responsibility as a purveyor of representations:

Depicting himself as the executed and not the executioner, Manchevski suggests that he, like his imagined character Aleks, cannot find a neutral position from which to objectively describe ‘reality’. Manchevski has thus visually stated the moral of the film: that there is no neutral spot outside the temporal stream of events from which reality can be documented (179).

⁸ Zdrave's actions give some reason for hope: as Aleks dies, Zdrave first grabs his gun and runs to shoot after Zamira, who is peeking behind a rock trying to find out what happens to Aleks. After the first volley of chasing bullets, however, Zdrave drops his arms, his face contorting in the first bursting sobs. The scene suggests, to this reader at least, that Zdrave is suddenly overwhelmed by a realization of meaninglessness and grief. As the rain begins to pour heavily on Aleks's body, Zdrave continues to sob – he has released his grief and allowed it to flow out of him with the rain and has not transformed it into the urge for vengeance. Significantly, he is not among the men looking for Zamira in the monastery the next day.

If the fictional character is redeemed of the crime inherent in his craft by dying at the hands of the “dark Balkan types” he tried to observe and represent, the director seems to have borne responsibility of his representational craft.

The character’s renunciation of his photos also finds a parallel in the formal structural organization of the film. As the diegesis progresses, the viewers discover that each of the three segments – Words, Faces, Pictures -- is entitled after the medium of representation which, in that segment, is given up, destroyed, or rendered inaccessible, meaningless, useless. “Words” thematizes speech as an inadequate access to reality or meaning. As Venko Andonovski argues, words become arbitrary signs which have been “emptied” of meaning (“isprazneni”), and we find ourselves in a state of “damaged” communication (Andonovski 22). Part Two, “Faces,” submits our access to the face to gradual erasure. The “spectral” quality of this part and its focus on the representation of faces has been examined in detail by Miroslav Ćepin⁹ and Ian Christie. The formal slippage of the characters’ faces as they appear to us refracted through the windows of the taxi is aligned with the active attention that the film draws to the distortion of Nick’s face. Part Three, “Pictures,” follows the photographer’s slow separation from his camera and his craft, as he learns not to trust its representation. Significantly, it is in this third part, through Aleks’s letter to Anne, that the viewers are confronted with the full weight of the issues of observation and responsibility discussed above. Manchevski has noted that words, faces, and pictures are also the three main elements of the cinematic medium itself.⁹ The character’s journey away from his own medium of representation then is doubled by the film’s form itself, as the medium submits itself to gradual erasure. Making

⁹ Personal interview, New York, February 2003.

this erasure obvious through the section titles, *Before the Rain* contemplates the uncertainty of its own attempts to represent.

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