

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE  
**FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL**

Montage

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**A SURVEY OF THE EDITING METHODS IN YOUSSEF  
CHAHINE'S ALEXANDRIA TRILOGY WITHIN THE  
DELEUZIAN FRAMEWORK OF MINOR CINEMA**

**Marguerite FARAG**

Thesis advisor: Martin ČIHÁK

Examiner: Tomáš Doruška

Date of thesis defense: 21.09.2022

Academic title granted: MgA

Prague, 2022

AKADEMIE MÚZICKÝCH UMĚNÍ V PRAZE  
FILMOVÁ A TELEVIZNÍ FAKULTA

Montage

**DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE**

**PŘEHLED METOD STŘIHU V ALEXANDRIJSKÉ  
TRILOGII YOUSSEFA CHAHINA V DELEUZIÁNSKÉM POJETÍ  
MENŠINOVÉHO FILMU**

**Marguerite FARAG**

Vedoucí: Martin ČIHÁK

Zkoušející: Tomáš Doruška

Datum obhajoby práce: 21.09.2022

Akademický titul udělen: MgA

Praha, 2022

## **Declaration**

I declare that I have prepared my Bachelor's Thesis/Master's Thesis, Dissertation independently on the following topic:

**A Survey of the editing methods in Youssef Chahine's Alexandria Trilogy within the Deleuzian Framework of Minor Cinema**

under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

Prague, date: .....

Signature of the candidate

## **Warning**

The use and public application of the findings of this thesis or any other treatment thereof are permissible only on the basis of a licensing contract, i.e. the consent of the author and of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.



**Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the head of the Montage department. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Martin Čihák, who guided me throughout this project. Special thanks to Nathalie Farag for her help in proofreading the thesis and many thanks to Iman Fares for her valuable insights on Chahine's films.

**Keywords**

Youssef Chahine, Gilles Deleuze, Rashida AbdelSalam, minor Cinema, montage, editing methods, dialectics, sound editing, semi-autobiographical, shot by shot breakdown

**Klíčová slova**

Youssef Chahine, Gilles Deleuze, Rashida AbdelSalam, menšinový film, montáž, metody střihu, dialektika, střih zvuku, polo-autobiografický, analýza záběrů

## **Abstract**

In 1985 Gilles Deleuze published his second book on Cinema entitled *The Image - Time*, where he used Youssef Chahine's *Alexandria ... Why?* (1979) the semi-autobiographical film as an example of 'minor cinema', and almost a decade later Youssef Chahine finished the semi-autobiographical trilogy with his film *Alexandria: Again and Forever* (1990). The thesis acts as a survey of the editing methods used by Rashida AbdelSalm in Chahine's Alexandria trilogy; *Alexandria...Why?, An Egyptian Story* (1982), and *Alexandria: Again and Forever*. The framework of the thesis follows Gilles Deleuze's three conditions for minor cinema; compositional mode of missing people, deterritorialization of language and collective utterances as its structure. Through the survey and through the analysis of micro and macro structures of the films, the thesis traces how progressively Chahine and AbdelSalam stray away from the Deleuzian concept of minor cinema to formulate an authentic Egyptian filmic language.

## **Abstrakt**

V roce 1985 vydal Gilles Deleuze svou druhou knihu o filmu nazvanou *Obraz – čas*, v níž použil polo-autobiografický film Youssefa Chahine *Alexandrie...proč?* (1979) jako příklad menšinového filmu, a téměř o dekádu později Youssef Chahine dokončil svou polo-autobiografickou trilogii filmem *Alexandrie: Stále a navždy* (1990). Tato diplomová práce slouží jako přehled metod střihu použitých Rashidou AbdelSalm v Chahinově alexandrijské trilogii; *Alexandrie...proč?*, *Egyptský příběh* (1982) a *Alexandrie: Stále a navždy*. Rámec této diplomové práce sleduje tři strukturální podmínky pro menšinový film podle Gilles Deleuze: kompoziční styl chybějících lidí, deterritorializace jazyka a kolektivního vyjádření. Skrze mapování a analýzu mikro a makro struktur výše zmíněných filmů tato diplomová práce sleduje jak se Chahine a AbdelSalm postupně odchýlili od deleuziánského pojetí menšinového filmu, aby zformulovali autentický egyptský filmový jazyk.

## **Table of Contents:**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Alexandria ... Why?</b>	<b>6</b>
Compositional Mode of Missing People	7
General Structure of Alexandria ... Why?	7
Diagram of the Different Characters	14
Deterritorialization of the Cinematic Language	17
Colonial Inspiration: Traditional Hollywood & French New Wave	17
Atypical Egyptian Melodrama	23
Collective Utterances	30
The Different Types of Footage in the Collective and Political Spirit	30
Sequence Breakdown: The Play	35
<b>An Egyptian Story</b>	<b>42</b>
Compositional Mode of Missing People	43
General Structure of An Egyptian Story	44
Inventing People in a Theatrical Trial	51
Deterritorialization of the Filmic Language	56
Mise en abyme of a Film	56
Filmmaking as an Industry	59
Collective Utterances:	61
Self Referentiality in a Collective Frame	62
Newsreel Footage in the Collective Spirit	65
<b>Alexandria: Again and Forever</b>	<b>69</b>
Compositional Mode of Fantasy & Reality	70
General Structure of Alexandria: Again and Forever	70
Breakdown of Characters featuring a dialectic muse	76
Deterritorialization of the Cinematic Language	79
Hollywood: The Fantastic and the Ironic	79
Case Study: Cannes Film Festival Scene	84
Collective Utterances:	87
An Operetta's Dialectics	88
Chahine, The Activist, the Striker	92
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>101</b>



## Introduction

The works of the Egyptian director Youssef Chahine (1926-2008) have always been under the scrutiny of film critics, academics and general audiences alike. Studying his work under the lens of postcolonialism & queer theory is frequent. More so that in 1985, Gilles Deleuze published his second book on Cinema entitled *The Image - Time*, where he uses Chahine's *Alexandria ... Why?* (1979) as an example of 'minor cinema'. More specifically, the film is used to illustrate the first condition for minor cinema which is 'people are missing' and frames it within modern political cinema. Yet, what this thesis is proposing to do is to study Chahine's semi-autobiographical trilogy: *Alexandria...Why?*, *An Egyptian Story* and *Alexandria:Again and Forever* through surveying the different methods of editing employed, in order to put forth the three conditions of minor cinema; compositional mode of missing people, deterritorialization of language, and collective utterances, under a Deleuzian lens.

The three films were edited by Rashida AbdelSalam (1932-2008), a long time Chahine collaborator, her career spanned five decades editing over 160 feature films. "When a friendship between a man and a woman is strong they become small pieces of painting that can't be complete without each other. So if Youssef Chahine had the directorial vision that makes us feel that every frame in his film is a painting then the reality is that Rashida Abdel Salam was the brush used to execute his unique imaginations". (Samy). They were long-time collaborators that worked together on most of Chahine's films until their deaths in 2008.

The structure of the thesis is divided into three parts and it will follow a chronological analysis of the three films. Each part will be dedicated to each film; *Alexandria ... Why?* (1979), *An Egyptian Story* (1982), and *Alexandria: Again and Forever* (1990). The trilogy spans over three decades but they are intertwined both on a narrative and stylistic level.

It is a unique work that can be called an autobiographical trilogy in Arab cinema, perhaps even in international cinema. Given that all the other examples of autobiographical works represented did not complement each other, and they can be considered as private experiences, recorded in separate films, even if they dealt with the same characters, or the same stage of age. However in Youssef Chahine's trilogy, the director completed and complemented the subsequent events of the events that he

narrated in the first part, into the third part where he also continued the events we saw in the second part, and therefore, Youssef Chahine's experience is a unique case of cinematic autobiography. (Kassem, 23)

Therefore the conclusion will be dedicated to the trilogy as a whole unit. Within these parts, the thesis will tackle both the macro and microstructures within the films, from the general assembly of the film to a scene and even a shot breakdown - all under the umbrella of 'minor cinema'.

Starting off with *Alexandria ... Why?* (1979), where the first condition and an important trait of minor cinema, the 'compositional mode of missing people' is met and will become the starting point of this section. "Deleuze speaks about a mode that defines itself in relation to Chahine's film as it projects several overlapping subplots that represent people of different minorities." (Abdul-Jabbar, 168). The overlapping of the subplots is the essence of *Alexandria ... Why?* as it is, in brief, Chahine's mosaic of Alexandria through its cosmopolitan status with the vast and wide array of characters. Hence, there will be a breakdown of the characters and how they relate to each other in terms of story and plot. The breakdown will be in the form of a diagram, as it is essential in order to make the rest of the analysis intelligible.

Secondly, lies the condition of 'deterritorialization of language'<sup>1</sup>. In this film, the deterritorialization extends from the spoken language used in the film to the cinematic language. As Chahine's technique blends the styles of Hollywood Cinema, French New Wave, alongside his own, rooted in traditional Egyptian Melodrama. In this case, the thesis will explore how the editing varies within these different languages and how they fit within the rest of the conditions of minor cinema.

As for the final section of the first part, there will be a focus on the usage of found footage and different formal elements and how they operate to complement the narrative, and to reinforce the exclusion of borders between the private and political.

The second part of the thesis is concerned with the second film of the trilogy *An Egyptian Story* (1982), a film usually compared to *All That Jazz* (1979) by Bob Fosse. Yet,

---

<sup>1</sup> Displacement of language from its original territory. In this thesis, language isn't limited to the spoken language but extends to the filmic and cinematic language that shift from its native position being influenced by other languages.

Fosse was content to fictionalise himself as an individual artist; Chahine aspires to show himself as an individual, a participant in Egyptian history, and a representative of Third World filmmakers, all at once<sup>2</sup>. In *An Egyptian Story*, kitchen-sink reenactments of family life and Catholic-school education in 1940s Alexandria get tossed together with newsreel footage about Nasser and Suez, romantic and satiric episodes set at film festivals in Cannes and Moscow, snippets from Chahine's films of the 1950s, and fragments of home movies.(Klawans, 3).

This statement is accurate to the concept of minor cinema where the director relinquishes completely of his individual self for the sake of a collective utterance. Moreover, the statement encompasses all the formal and filmic tools utilised by Chahine in order to make this film unique from an editing standpoint. So similarly as for *Alexandria...Why?*, there will be three sections each one dedicated to one condition of minor cinema.

The first section addresses how the characters are reinventing themselves in a theatrical form within Yehia's mind. Since a large part of the film operates as an imaginative trial where young Yehia is condemning adult Yehia of his murder; family members and friends come out on the stand to plead their case. In this format, Chahine's filmmaking weighs a lot on theatre for style. Even outside of this trial, the characters from *Alexandria ... Why?*, resurface and continue their stories.

The second section focuses on the deterritorialization of language and shifts from deciphering the cinematic language to the introspection of filmmaking. Since the film is based on Yehia, the filmmaker. The language of the film pertains to the process of filmmaking referencing the system and the procedure to make a film. In this case, the language shifts from the spoken and the stylistic one as in reference to *Alexandria...Why?*, to another nuclear level that is the examination of filmmaking itself: on set, off set and dealing with the industry's complications. All visually shown through the prolific usage of archival footage.

Finally, as always, Chahine weighs his political leniencies and statements with different formal aspects, for example using newsreel footage that are ingrained within the collective spirit, bringing forth what is private in his life to the political reality of Egypt. Uncovering the tools he used to do that will be the main focus of the last section.

---

<sup>2</sup> It is crucial to note that Chahine was against the term 'Third World country' to be used to refer to Egypt. He was verbal about the misuse of this term in several interviews and opposed using it on a country whose civilisation started thousands of years ago.

As for *Alexandria Again & Forever* (1990), the third and final instalment of the trilogy, similarly to the structure of the above two parts, it will include three sections paralleling the conditions of minor cinema. This film usually receives a queer reading into it and because of that it inadvertently brings back the notion of minor cinema under a different socio-political context. Nevertheless, it is the film that Chahine and AbdelSalam stray away the most from the concept of minor cinema and destabilise it.

Firstly, the main appeal in this film is the blending of three timelines; the past with the present and a surrealist timeline. The formal experimentation is very clear in this film that is why a graphic analysis of the structure of the film detailing the different timelines and how they interact with each other is essential to catapult the analysis of this part. This is also the time to deconstruct the notion of the missing people through a characters' breakdown diagram since here the characters are represented as individuals free from an ethnic or a social stereotype unlike the previous instalments.

Secondly, reminiscent of *Alexandria...Why?* Chahine evokes different cinematic languages inspired from several places such as Hollywood but also European cinema. "In the words of Ibrahim Fawal, the film stages "baffling moments" that come across like a hybrid operetta of straight-forward narrative, cinema verite, formalism, expressionism, and some animation." But while these different stylistic moments may cause some unease in the viewer, the final result is indeed "stimulating, its style fresh and original." (Khouri, 155). In this section the focus will be to display how the use of musicals is turned around for the sake of Chahine's fantastical retellings of his life and concealed desires, moving away from his typical referencing of Hollywood's golden age to land on an Egyptian based ironic filmic language.

As for the last condition of minor cinema that converges the private and political using a collective utterance, it can be argued that in this film it wasn't fulfilled. The allocated section brings forward all of the different methods of editing used from Eisenstein's dialectics to Wellsian montage within the image in order to highlight the importance of individuality in contrast to the collective previously exalted in the previous instalments.

This semi-autobiographical trilogy is intended to be a unit; each film compliments and expands onto each other. That's why the conclusion of the thesis will be focused on culminating all of the survey's results as well as creating coherent threads between the films. This will be done through summarising the deviation from Deleuze's concept of minor cinema through AbdelSalam's prolific use of sound, her constant manipulation of space and time, as well as her mastery in using archival footage among many other editing methods.

## Alexandria ... Why?

The first film from the trilogy is *Alexandria ... Why?* (1979). It is considered as the magnum opus of Chahine and one of his most complex works. It is also Chahine's personal favourite film, as it was his answer when asked by Michael Fargeon in an interview in 1997. There is the possibility that his answer might have changed with time but it is doubtful. His justification for his love lies in two parts:

First of all because I was born in that city.

Secondly because it depicts two aspects of my Alexandria - the Alexandria I knew that are dearest to me: friendship and tolerance. All religions, all cultures, all kinds of ideas lived side by side in that Alexandria. There were no barriers between people: Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, Italians, Jews, Russians and French, were all friends. No one despised anyone else. We spoke almost all these languages, not very well perhaps, but we made ourselves understood with a few words and phrases. Everyone accepted everyone else. Friendship was the rule. This melting pot of people and cultures has vanished today [1997]<sup>3</sup>, and this is something I bitterly regret. *In Alexandria . . . Why?* the city is a character in its own right and has its own identity and vitality.

With this quote, there is a clear confirmation and echo to what Deleuze proposes as minor cinema - the plurality of the people to the extent of their status as 'missing'. The analysis of this film is divided into three sections with two chapters each tackling a condition of minor cinema in detail.

---

<sup>3</sup> The vanishing of the 'melting pot' goes back to the somewhat indirect exile of the Jewish population parallel to the rise of the Israeli state (the promised land), and the Egyptian war against it. On top of that there was a planned rise of Islamic extremism and fanaticism during Sadat's rule (1970-1981), to fight off the socialist mentality put forth by his predecessor Nasser (whose presidency lasted from 1956 to 1970). These two variables in turn resulted in the dwindling of the cosmopolitan status of Alexandria and Egypt as a whole. That is an oversimplification of decades of history but crucial for understanding Chahine's point of view.

## Compositional Mode of Missing People

According to Deleuze, with the change of politics and the dynamics of hegemony between the government and its people, a change occurred in the understanding of what people are in relation to their presence in cinema. In Classic cinema, there is a unanimity that defines the people, and the people are already present. Whether as individuals or a mass they share the same presence, facing hardships in union. That is specifically clear in Soviet Cinema. Yet, with the rise of fascism, a break occurred where the people were used as “masses subjected”, losing their unanimity in exchange for political agendas. Deleuze’s main argument is that the shift of the politics and representation of people was deeply ingrained within the hegemony making it undiscoverable by Western artists. Nevertheless, this shift didn’t affect third world countries as their status of people was always compromised by the fact of being minorities as well as being subjugated to colonisers, “[they] remained in a state of perpetual minorities, in a collective identity crisis” Deleuze said.

Third world and minorities gave rise to authors who would be in a position, in relation to their nation and their personal situation in that nation, to say: the people are what is missing. [...] This acknowledgement of a people who are missing is not a renunciation of political cinema, but on the contrary the new basis on which it is founded, in the third world and for minorities. Art, and especially cinematographic art, must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people. (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 217)

## General Structure of *Alexandria ... Why?*

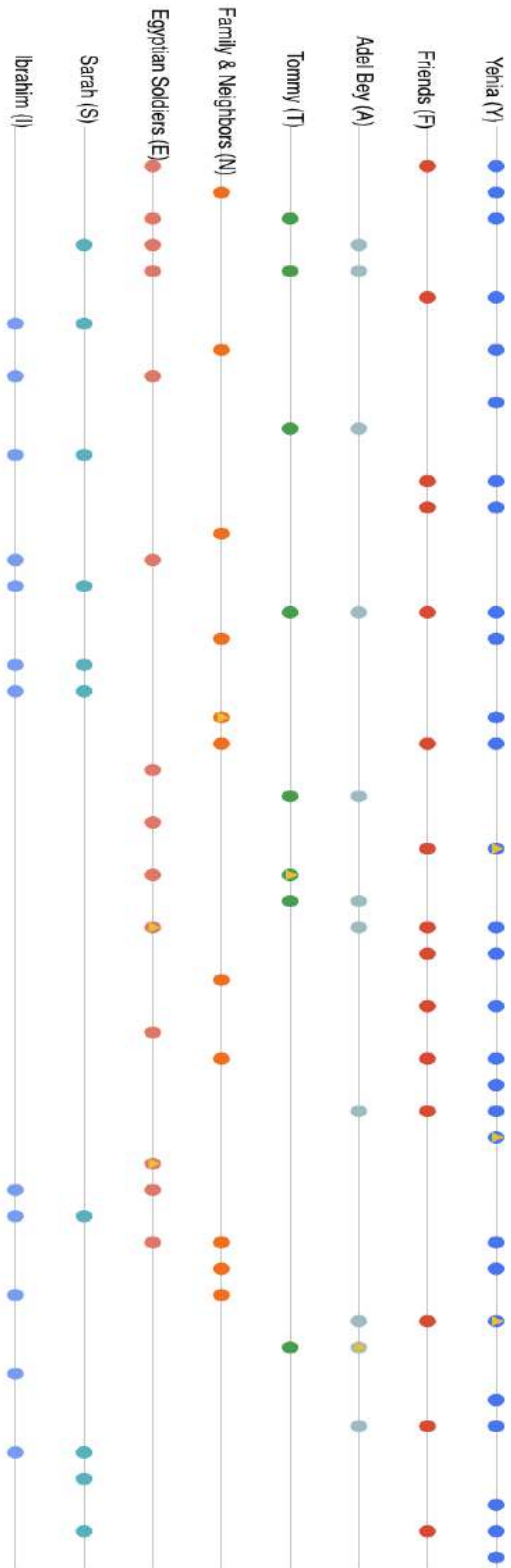
According to the Oxford Dictionary, ‘composition’ means the artistic arrangement of the parts of a picture. To follow the analogy that this film is a laced fabric, then there are the threads of different characters that intertwine and form shapes, but also by separating those threads different shapes are created too, arranging the picture as a whole. “The film presents a kaleidoscope of stories intermingled in simple and complex ways and which the film's narrative attempts to unravel and weave together.” (Massad, 78)

In order to untangle this, below is a diagram of the different storylines/threads, in relation to the film’s timeline. “This is the compositional mode of Chahine in Arab cinema: [*Alexandria ... Why?*] reveals a plurality of intertwined lines, primed from the beginning, one

of these lines being the principal one (the story of the boy), the others having to be pushed until they cut across the principal one” (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 220) The lines in the diagram aren’t always divided by character, rather sometimes, a number of characters are grouped together such as ‘Family and Neighbours’ and ‘Egyptian Soldiers’ as the value of the characters is shared within their group in their effect on the plot. Also, a line is dedicated for archival footage, since it is a recurring motif throughout the film, however, in this case its value changes with every usage. It is to be compared to different pearls that are attached to the main structure of the lace. This, however, will be discussed in more detail in the chapter: *The Different Types of Found Footage in the Collective and Political Spirit*.



Archives



Alexandria... Why? Timeline

From a top view of the diagram, it is impossible to find a pattern that binds the storylines together. We move from long sequences with Yehia, to brief interjections with the Egyptian Soldiers, to an even smaller interjection of the Family and Neighbours, to a long sequence with Adel Bey and Tommy. Yet, this sequence of order of characters (Yehia - Soldiers - Family - Adel Bey and Tommy) isn't repeated consistently. The choice of whose character's storyline is framed by whose else's is always changing. It can be argued that it is intentional and it is used to mimic Chahine's stream of consciousness' attitude towards his own autobiography and to have the character of Yehia act as his vessel. "The film is loosely constructed through episodes of the various subplots, which although linear in their connection with the overall story, are impressionistically juxtaposed, conveying a sense of Chahine's own selective memory and his personal experience of events and history." (Khouri, 129). Nevertheless, this stream of consciousness isn't the only drive to edit and cut in between the storylines. For example, Adel Bey and Tommy's storylines merge then separate. Same applies for Sarah Sorel and Ibrahim's. Yet, Chaker Pasha's line acts like a link in between these four storylines, the knot that binds them. A social and familial connection allows the jumping back and forth between these lines in a logical and justified way by having Chaker Pasha in between, since Chaker Pasha is Ibrahim's employer and Adel Bey's brother-in-law.

Whether the cut from one storyline to the other is based on an emotional weight such as the stream of consciousness or a logical one, Rashida Abdel Salam masterfully plays with these joints. Here is a list of several techniques and strategies employed by her in order to make the cuts smooth and to add to the both personal and surrealistic aspect of the film.

### 1- Graphic Cuts

Graphic cuts consist of cutting on a visual element that looks similar to another. Here the movement of the Egyptian soldier pointing the gun and saying "I'll grab this, and blow out Farouk's<sup>4</sup> brains" is cut to the passing of a folder to the producer. Here the visual elements are the gun and the folder. The blocking of the actors and their gestures mirror each other

---

<sup>4</sup> Farouk: King Farouk who was subjugated to the British colony, was always seen as a traitor and a powerless monarch against the coloniser.



You can see Yehia, in the background, about to get a taste of the greedy film industry that won't help rising stars and refuse to give him money for his play.

## 2- Sonic Cuts

Sonic cuts refer to editing based on a sound motif. In the example below, the cut is based on the sound of the sneeze of the Egyptian soldier matched with Chaker Pasha's firing a gun and hitting the car's window.



The cut in this case plays on humour and irony, as the sneeze with the line of "Chaker Pasha should be shot down" said by the soldier, is matched with Chaker Pasha testing the safety of his car. This is a clear political critique on the impotence of the resistance movement against the rise of the opportunist nouveau riche.

Another example is during the trial of Ibrahim, where Yehia's dad loses the case as expected and Ibrahim is sentenced unfairly and unjustly. Over that sad scene as Yehia's dad walks off the court the uplifting music of *In the Mood* by Glen Miller plays non-diegetically first till we see the two Egyptian soldiers celebrating in a bar with the music becoming diegetic within the space. Even though their colleague will suffer the consequences of their actions by going to prison, the soldiers bask in their new found wealth. Here the music

extends from an asynchronous sound that exalts the melancholic to land on a critique of the hypocrisy of the soldiers, expanding on the joyous tune of the song.



### 3- Thematic Cuts

As Yehia goes and asks for financial help and support from an opera singer. He is met with her sympathy but lack of possibility to help. Frustrated, he writes down with her red lipstick on the mirror “Pasadena - Help !!”, A track in on the word “Help” cuts to Yehia’s father offering help to Ibrahim by taking on his case, yet, Ibrahim is refusing him. The joint between the storylines in this case is a prime example of stream of consciousness represented visually and in a way could be called a thematic cut.



Another example is a graphic cut that transforms into a thematic one by paralleling young Yehia’s ambition to a clown. We cut from Yehia proud and defiant about his new show sponsored by Princess Shahinour to his failed show. The show encompasses a lot of

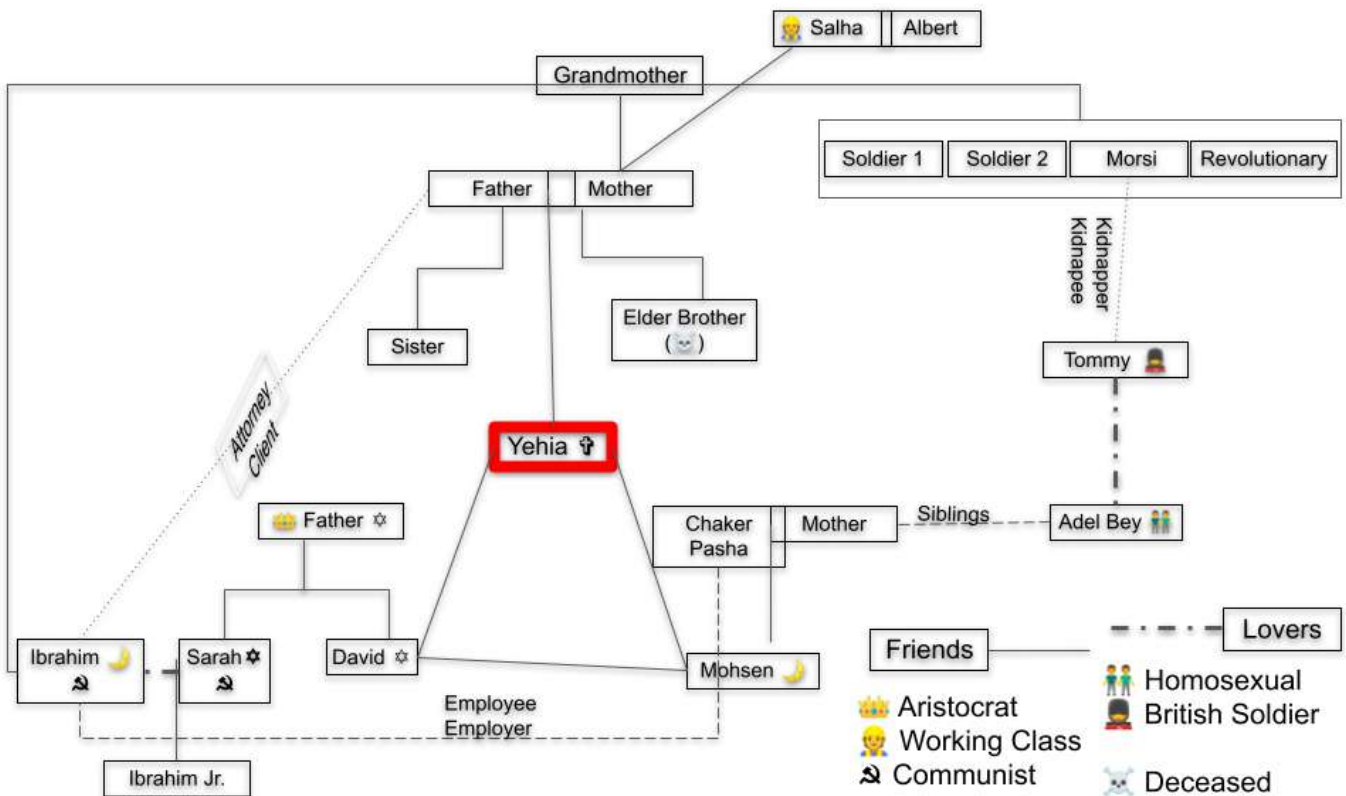


acts, yet what AbdelSalam decides to cut to is the clown, creating a metaphor and a critique to Yehia's unfounded ambition.

The examples seen of cuts joining different storylines are; from Egyptian Soldiers to Yehia, Egyptian Soldiers to Chaker Pasha, Yehia to Yehia's father and Ibrahim. The first one doesn't seem to have a logical connection only a visual one, the second relies on logic by associating the subject talked about to him being shown after, the third is based on a stream of consciousness connection. In brief, by creating an array of 'missing people' whose storylines merge and disconnect, Chahine laces a whole movie, with his alter ego Yehia in centre, in the backdrop of his questioning of Alexandria.

## Diagram of the Different Characters

“Invention of a people” is what Chahine crafts in this film, and he does it with great complexity. “[The film’s] subplots offer a multiperspectival study of Egyptian society, describing how different classes, ethnicities, and religions, working-class communists, aristocratic Muslim homosexuals, middle-class Egyptian Jews, petit-bourgeois Catholics react to Egyptian-Arab nationalism. The subplots stress the diversity of Egyptian experience, but the unanimity<sup>5</sup> of the reaction to European colonialism.” (Shohat & Stam, 282-283). In order to clarify the number of characters and how their stories connect, a diagram is drawn below.



<sup>5</sup> Note that both authors Shohat and Stam use the same term of “unanimity” as Deleuze does.

At the centre of the diagram in the red box is Yehia (played by Mohsen Mohiedine), the protagonist of the film and Chahine's alter-ego. Yehia is a young boy who wants to become an actor and to study in the USA. He is a Christian from a working class family filled with motherly figures; his mother, sister, and his grandmother. Even though the latter's screen time presence isn't big, her occurrence is strong and influential to the story's development. His mother is a tender woman, who is close friends with her neighbours Salha and Albert, a working class couple who from their names you immediately recognise their Christian religion. The mother's tenderness is shown in various scenes, where she is forced to pawn her jewellery or even their piano in order to have money for her daughter's wedding, and to cover the costs of Yehia's trip to study in Pasadena.

Yehia's father is a lawyer (played by Mahmoud ElMelegy, one of the greatest Egyptian actors of all time whose career spanned for decades and gives one of the most moving performances in the film). He gets assigned the case of Ibrahim a Muslim nationalist and a communist. He is persuaded to take the case out of nobility and patriotism without fees. He is certain of the injustice that will follow in the ruling, and takes the case anyways giving place to one of the most emotional monologues about the injustice of the world at the time, criticising concentration camps, poverty, and the army too. The speech is helmed with the line "and you want me to win it?" said in an ironic tone filled with sorrow. This connection between the father and Ibrahim is also a connection with Egyptian Soldier 1 who persuades him to take the case and Salha the neighbour who recommended him as a lawyer. This iteration of connections between characters through words of mouth is frequent and it is a sign of the community of Alexandria, where everyone knows everyone.

Ibrahim's storyline includes Sarah a Jewish Aristocrat whose brother David is one of the closest friends of Yehia. Their love story is consummated outside of marriage and outside of social norms - A Muslim and a Jewish is a taboo. The end of Sarah's family is tragic, as they are forced to escape Egypt in fear of the Nazi invasion<sup>6</sup>, and in turn David is led into Zionism while Sarah has to carry her bastard unrecognised child from Ibrahim.

Moreover, on the left side of the diagram, comes a more complex branching of the characters. By starting again from Yehia for the sake of consistency, but this time we branch to Mohsen, his Muslim friend. "In one scene, when Yehia's friend, Mohsen, tries to slow

---

<sup>6</sup> Footnote 3

down Yahia's megalomaniac vision of the play he intends to put on, he shouts at Yehia: "Stop, arrête, siga-siga," showing off his English, French, and Greek, languages in concourse in polyglot Alexandria." (Lekatsas, 144). Aside from being an indication of how diverse the characters are, through Mohsen we are indirectly led to another tragic love story. Mohsen's uncle is Adel Bey, he is an aristocrat with an inherited title, unlike his brother-in-law Chaker Pasha who bought his title. Right away once again by just the names of the characters, Chahine evokes how Egyptian society is constructed both socially and ethnically.

Adel Bey is connected to Morsi, as he enlists him to kidnap a New Zealander soldier, for Adel Bey to kill. An eccentric way to show his patriotism and rebellion against the war as well as the British Occupation. Morsi, however, makes the mistake and kidnaps Tommy, a young soldier from Dover instead. Adel Bey falls in love with him and can't come to the terms of killing him. Their journey becomes one of forbidden love as well as an exploration of the social norms and how they differ from the UK to Egypt. Henceforth, "as both affairs are tabooed [the Jew + Muslim, the nationalist + the British soldier], neither is ultimately consummated socially. By straddling the central theme of the film (Chahine's ultimately successful quest to become an actor and director), these two love stories show the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of realising other goals, namely, revolution and transgressive love." (Massad, 79).

To come back full circle to what Deleuze said and Chahine applied, by acknowledging that people are missing, Chahine built a mode, around Alexandria - the cosmopolitan city by excellence, a locus where the people's stories can be told without letting go of their minor status nor their political affiliation that is in turn unanimous (in their opposition of the war and the colonial power)<sup>7</sup>, but rather by enforcing this reality and exaggerating it in the shape of the multiplicity of the characters. The film offers them room to invent themselves. From the diagram alone, you can count up to twenty characters, but it is important to note that the diagram isn't complete as there are other secondary characters not represented like Chaker Pasha's assistant and his son for example.

---

<sup>7</sup> This unanimity excludes Chaker Pasha, a representative of the shift of society with his status of nouveau riche, and his opportunist attitude gaining from the coloniser and exploiting his employees.



## Deterritorialization of the Cinematic Language

According to Deleuze, there is a manifestation of a deterritorialization of language of minor artists and to that he describes that “sometimes the minority filmmaker finds himself in the impasse described by Kafka: the impossibility of not ‘writing’, the impossibility of writing in the dominant language, the impossibility of writing differently” (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 217). That is why this part will focus on establishing how the cinematic language of Chahine isn’t localised to one consistent cinematic language. It draws hints from a colonialist language while at the same time being heavily inspired and influenced by its local language in the form of Egyptian melodrama.

### Colonial Inspiration: Traditional Hollywood & French New Wave

The film kicks off with a prologue composed of found footage and oral narration of an unknown speaker setting up the time and place of the story: it is the 1940s in Alexandria. The Axis more specifically the Nazis with the leadership of Rommel are approaching to remove and conquer the British occupation<sup>8</sup>. Following that sequence, the audience meets for the first time the protagonist, Yehia as he steps forward in a busy theatre hall looking dazed, and hypnotised over the instrumental version of *Perfidia*. He stops in his daze only to be framed next to a still from *An American In Paris* (1951) stuck on the glass of the tickets’ seller’s booth with the credit in bold red of Youssef Chahine as ‘Réalisateur’<sup>9</sup>. This triadic information in one frame explains the totality of the film. The director is equated to his alter-ego Yehia in an autobiographical film that centres around his dream to go to the USA to become an actor.



The cutout still from the film is taken from the performance by Georges Guétary of the song ‘I’ll build a Stairway to Paradise’. The sequence of this song from the film is then projected in the cinema where Yehia and his friends are watching. Yehia’s dazed expression

---

<sup>8</sup> This is how the battle of Alamein was prophesied and perceived to be for Egyptians - a gateway to independence from British colonialists).

<sup>9</sup> Since the film is an Algerian co-production, the credits are also written in French

of awe persists while his friends are messing around in the background. Two things are important to note from this detail; firstly, the sequence is subtitled in Arabic as well as French and this refers to the significance of the scene lying beyond the traditional value of a spectacle that automatically comes with a hollywood film but rather it is to point out the goal of the protagonist to the general Arabic speaking audience, the magnificence of the dream, and to foreshadow the persistence of Yehia in order to achieve it :

*I'll build a stairway to Paradise  
With a new step ev'ry day!*

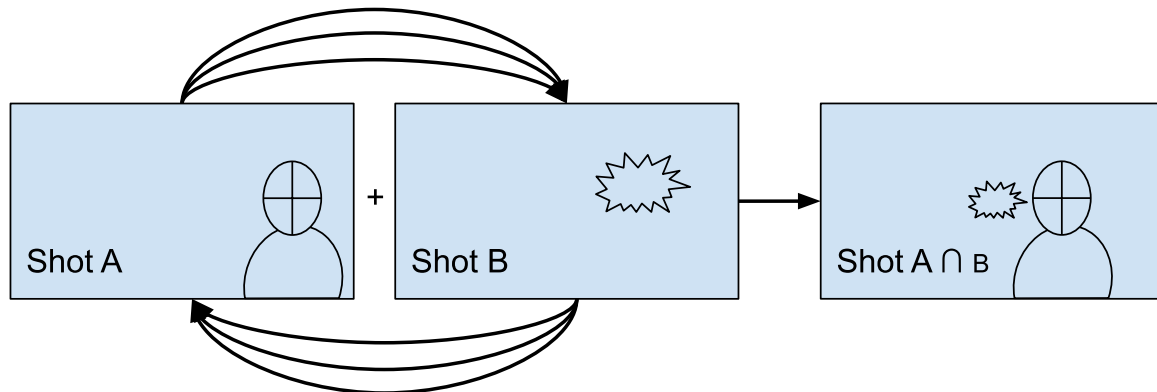
This ambition is also heightened stylistically speaking by using the first instance of track-in into a close up on Yehia's face.

Secondly, the film used is released in 1951, while the events of the story ensue in the 40s, this asynchronistic mistake was carefully selected and dismissed as this moment of stepping up the staircase and having a goal achieved visually as such, will be mirrored later in the film. It could also be argued that this 'mistake' was carefully selected. Since the second sequence that projects in the cinema is from *Born to Dance* by Roy Del Ruth which was released in 1936 making it a correct synchronistic choice. It can be argued that within the space of the cinema the temporality of the film is purposefully disfigured by intercutting films in colour and films in black and white to be juxtaposed with Yehia parallels his state of mind, as he is having an out of the world experience, a truly cinematic experience that defies the linearity of time.

The sequence projected is of the final dance over the song '*Three Cheers for the Red, White & Blue*', nevertheless this sequence in the actual film starts with Elaonar Powell stepping down the staircase and not up so the visual metaphor can't be used later on. The sequence projected is towards the end of the performance when the music and the complexity of the choreography escalates. This sequence is then intercut with Yehia's face



looking in wonder. The shot reverse shot starts slow, accelerates with the tempo of the music and slows down again towards the end. With an L cut, the sound of the firing of the tanks and applause mesh and continue from Powell's tap dancing and marines to Yehia still in the cinema. In the span of 38 seconds, there are nine shots and reverse shots. It could be argued that in this sequence, there is usage of rhythmic montage as the emphasis is on the music and its escalation to mimic the character's psyche.



The diagram above is to illustrate how the repetition between Shot A and Shot B result in the transference of an element from B to A. The transference of the element isn't accurate to size, rather the element adapts to the situation of Shot A. As the tanks fire and the smoke fills the black and white screen, the smoke extends from the film on the cinema screen to the filmic world with Yehia's cigarette covering half of his face (Stills above).

It is important to note here, that when talking about an inspiration to a colonial power in the influence of cinematic language, the 'colonial' doesn't solely connote a geographical occupation but it is clear that American Hollywood cinema was a tool comparable to colonial power through its dissemination of the American ideals and ideology. This is also understood through the director's filmic experience; "the style, and the method on which [the film is] based, recall the period of Chahine's first exposure to moviemaking. When he went to Los Angeles in the late 1940s, he got to witness the studio system in its last years of full operation. When he later returned to Egypt to take up his career, he again found himself in a film industry -



small, makeshift, and powerless by Hollywood's standards, but an industry nonetheless.” (Klawans, 4). A nod to the studio system is clear in the shot above, where in the renovated version, the stitching of the MGM lion credits into the screen of a cinema is easily discerned.

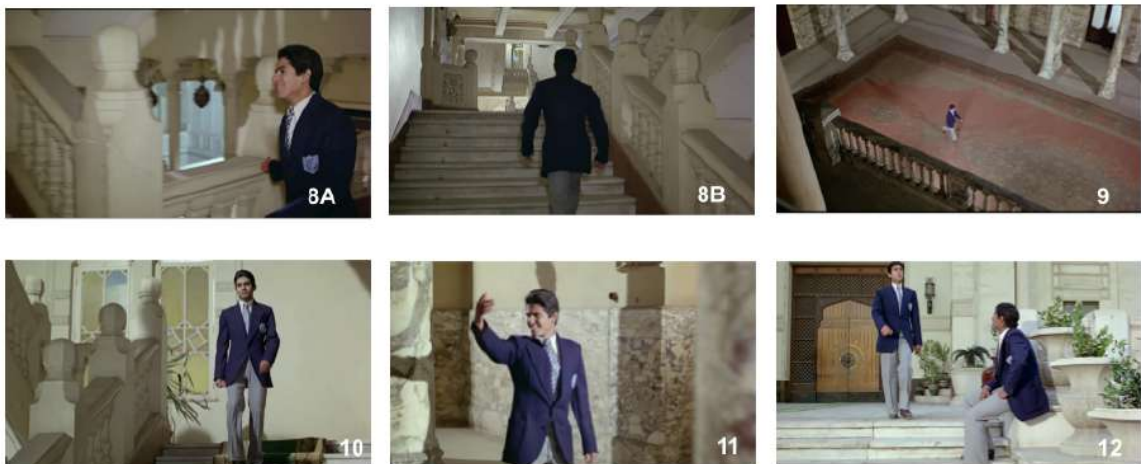
In order to illustrate this deterritorialization of the cinematic language of Chahine, a shot by shot breakdown is indispensable<sup>10</sup>. The sequence follows Yehia and his friend Mohsen as they think on how to find the means to produce a play in their school that is to be directed by Yehia. The scene starts off with them waiting in front of a tram as Yehia exposes the need “I wish we could have a super-show”, he says. The following is cut in a fashion similar to Jean Luc Godard’s signature jump cuts that defined the French New Wave in his film *Breathless* (1960). The conversation between Yehia and Mohsen flows in a way that is illogical and dissonant to the cutting of the image. In the span of seven shots that show the physical and spatial displacement of the characters in the tram the conversation doesn’t cut. A goal is set - “a super show” (Shot 1), a tool is established, Princess Shahinour shall be the patron and would pay for the costs (Shot 3) and then in (Shot 7) the task is done with a nod of her approval.



<sup>10</sup> Available in the appendix

While in *Breathless* Godard jumps in time and not in space, yet here Chahine and AbdelSalam take the same principle and expand on it by jumping both in time and space.

This scene is followed by a dream-like trip in the mind of Yehia as he foreshadows his fortune and success and inadvertently his failure. While being serenaded by the tunes of Glen Miller's *Moonlight Serenade*, Yehia dwells in an imaginative future. The shots are longer and dynamic as they follow Yehia's movement as he climbs up the staircase in (Shot 8A-B) (in reference to the Hollywood film mentioned above *Born to Dance*). Then with an extreme high angle, Yehia morphs into a small creature in a vast space that engulfs him, the decline starts and in continuation to that metaphor he climbs down the stairs in (Shot 10) while his disillusionment of his own case of american dream persit, alongside non-diegetic applause, Yehia waves his hand accepting fame in (Shot 11).



While this chapter affirms that Chahine's cinematic language is deterritorialized as it takes influence from both French and American cinema. It is also important to emphasise that Chahine is cognisant of this, amplifies it, and also critical of it. As such, "the final scene mocks the middle-class Arab enthrallment with the notion of American freedom, particularly as it was being mythologized toward the end of the Second World War when the United States was forging its role as the alternative to the old colonial powers of Europe.



As Yahia's boat reaches the New York harbour, the Statue of Liberty is transformed into a toothless, laughing woman over an image reminiscent of 1940s Hollywood back-projection. The technique emulates the flattened stock shots often used by Hollywood to show foreign locales, but is used here as an ironic comment on the illusionist fantasies of American consumer culture." (Khouri, 128). The music used in this scene is the same one used in his dream-like sequence of his success with *Moonlight Serenade* sealing the dream into reality.



## Atypical Egyptian Melodrama

From a simplistic viewing of the film, it could be categorised as a melodrama, abiding with the rules and the expectations of the genre. The film's story is after all about a struggling middle class teenager's wish to become an actor and study in the USA albeit successfully in the end. "Samir Farid<sup>11</sup> suggests that the film was meant to reflect upon the limitations of typically middle-class ambitions [...] Through the film's emphasis on Yehia's family's struggle to find acceptance and a place for themselves and their son among the ruling-class elite symbolically alludes to how this ambitious class could become the victim of its own dreams and illusions." (Khouri, 131) Yet, what characterises melodrama in general is taken here and stretched into the realm of the atypical in a Chahinesque typical fashion.

There are several themes distinctive to the genre used in this film. For example, the theme of loss, struggle to survive, and forbidden love. Chahine takes those themes to the extreme, by pairing highly unlikely couples; an aristocrat Jewish woman Sarah and a socialist Muslim worker Ibrahim who consummate their love outside of marriage - committing a sinful act forbidden by Egyptian traditions and laws. Another example is the patriot aristocrat that buys and kills soldiers for the sake of the cause yet this time he falls in love with his captive from Dover - in this case it isn't only an unlikely relationship but also taboo as it deals with a homosexual affair and on top of that an affair with the enemy i.e. the colonial British.

While those themes are controversial and from an Egyptian perspective they are transgressive. Nevertheless, if "we can attempt to read and appreciate melodrama as a barometer of social tastes and transformations, a reflection of a broader politic as well, at times as a swipe at elite criticism. We might even recognize how audiences may at once be both "oppressed" by an affirmation of normative behaviour and simultaneously "liberated" by the very suggestion of a possible alternative narrative - even if that narrative remains unfulfilled by the filmed script that audience view."(Gordon, 210), then understanding Chahine's position within Deleuze theory would be clearer. Focusing on the themes of

---

<sup>11</sup> Samir Farid (1943-2017) is a reputed Egyptian writer and film critic. He was a member of FIPRESCI, and participated in several film festivals as a jury member. He was also the consultant for cinema affairs in the Bibliotheca of Alexandria.

forbidden love through the stories of Yehia and his complex relationship with his elder brother as well as Adel Bey and his love interest, the soldier from Dover, Chahine weaves seamlessly between these two disparate storylines using the motifs of religion and in this case and under Deleuze's lens it happens to be Christianity<sup>12</sup> - the religion of the Egyptian minority.

Following the approval of Princess Shahinour to fund his play, Yehia puts his heart and soul in a failed production. Like Icarus, he wanted too much and flew too close to the sun. As he is hit by the catastrophic flop of his production he faints into the only flashback in the film - the death of his elder brother. A shot by shot breakdown of the scene is in the following pages. While the content is conventional drama; the death of a child, the form utilised is expressionistic, almost theatrical reminiscent of the etymology of the word 'melodrama'<sup>13</sup>.

The sequence is framed by Yehia in present time. It starts with his performance in the play in (Shot 1) over Claude Ciari's guitar music, there is a rapid circular movement of the camera that creates a dizzying effect paralleling the character's state of mind and in a musical theatre fashion, silhouette of hands come to cover Yehia's face in (Shot 2) initiating the flashback sequence. It starts on an impossible POV in (Shot 3), where the camera is positioned inside the nativity scene looking out at young Yehia playing with a candle.



From the beginning of the scene, Chahine asserts Christianity in the front and centre, choosing to compose the shot as such: the nativity scene in the foreground, a Christmas tree

---

<sup>12</sup> In order to briefly illustrate the context of Christians/Copts in Egypt at that time, here is a quote from Jason Brownlee's report on *Violence Against Copts in Egypt*: "The regime of President Anwar Sadat grew more overtly pious in the 1970s, inserting the call to prayer into national television programs and banning the sale of alcohol in much of the country. Copts found Egypt being defined in terms that excluded them from belonging in equal measure alongside Muslim Egyptians."

<sup>13</sup> According to Oxford Dictionary "Melodrama is a play interspersed with songs and orchestral music accompanying the action."



in the background and our protagonist Yehia in the middleground. The placement of the nativity related objects framing Yehia creates a straight diagonal line that cuts through the frame. In (Shot 4), Yehia plays with a candle and by mistake sets the nativity scene on fire,

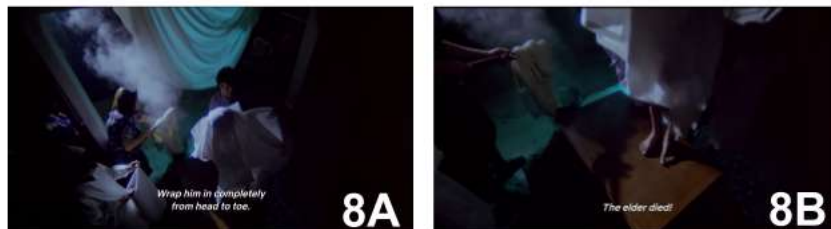


a dramatic zoom focuses the audience's attention to baby Jesus on fire.

The grandmother enters the frame menacingly saying “You are the one that burnt Christ!” Yehia barely escapes her grasp and hides behind his brother and blames him instead (Shot 5), upon saying that “It is not me. It is him” the light changes on the brother's face to green - foreshadowing his death and with the grandmother's scolding that if he did burn Christ, then he will die, the scene unfolds as predicted.

There are overwhelming whispers from the mother, and her neighbour Salha about the doctors' orders: to cover the boy with “hot sheets”. The atmosphere is haunting and the camera circles around the house from Salha, to the grandmother, to young Yehia as he peeks through the door to a

painting-like composition in Shot (8). The shot starts with the doctor's whispered



instructions on what to do to save the boy, the hot sheet and the camera flow from above only to fall and cover the boy, seamlessly modelling his figure like a ghost, covering all of his body only leaving his feet vulnerable and bare. “The Elder died”. Young Yehia looks through the room, fast cut to Jesus on the cross. In these two shots (10, 11), the extreme zoom alongside the low angle of the camera accentuate the looming ominous and haunting presence of Jesus from young Yehia's point of view. With an almost blink from the boy in Shot (13) we cut to the feet of Jesus - an important motif that is discussed later in detail.



The mantra of ‘the elder died’ amplifies the haunting atmosphere building up to the extravagant Shot (16) on the right. Its composition is Chahinesque par excellence, utilising the depth of field and the blocking of the actors to perfection in order to illustrate the emotions of the characters and bring forth the themes of loss and religion. As the mother screams in agony in the foreground, the background is filled with imagery of death; the small white casket is carried away and a big funerary cross made out of flowers follows. Here, the precise movement of the mother towards the camera coupled with the dutch angle of the framing heightens the melodrama. The flashback ends on a grimm beat: “ the younger should’ve died instead ”, shot (18) and from this statement we are pulled to the present, Shot (19, 20) where Yehia is mourning his brother in front of his grave.



On top of showing the background story and traumatic childhood of Yehia as well as his complex relationship with God, the value of this scene lies in its counterpart scene with

Adel Bey. Where the trope of someone standing, mourning in front of a loved one's tombstone is repeated.



This time however, the loved one is not a family member rather a tabooed lover. The scene is set in Alamein war cemetery, reiterating the historical context of the film, WWII. Amid a sea of sand and white tombstones, Adel Bey stands in front of Thomas Friskin's tombstone - note the similarity of composition with Yehia in Shot (19). *The White Cliffs of Dover* by Vera Lynn plays and with the lines "There will be love and laughter and peace ever after. Tomorrow when the world is free" Adel Bey breaks down and cries. The song choice in this scene parallels the exposition of Tommy where he is introduced as an innocent young soldier singing drunkardly with his troop *The White Cliffs of Dover* in a cabaret just before he gets kidnapped and sold to Adel Bey. The scene is heartbreaking on many levels as through its composition it refers to the differences of the lovers in their religious beliefs, social statuses and their state of being - one is alive and the other is dead at the age of 21.

The parallel created between Yehia and Adel Bey is mainly put forth through the theme of loss of a loved one. Yet, Chahine alludes to their parallel stories from the beginning of the film by seamlessly intersecting their storylines in the scene below. It starts with the corpse of a soldier killed by Adel Bey washing in the shore, where Yehia is swimming, he sees the foot and the fast cuts to Jesus crucified strike the audience not understanding the meaning behind it.



Then the scene goes back to Adel Bey's storyline where he stares at Tommy Friskin's waking body in bed, with a gun at hand and a lust filled gaze. The starting point of their complex love affair erupts. "In essence, the film is about tolerance, emphasising the possibility for human connections at a time of war and crisis." (Khouri, 131). Human connections are woven between direct relationships such as Adel Bey and Tommy but more importantly between characters that on the surface are disparate, like Adel Bey and Yehia that share an essential and humane link of love and loss.

Moreover, Malek Khouri defines very well the ambivalent position of Youssef Chahine within the context of Arab cinema and consequently his cinematic language within the genre of melodrama. In the introduction of his book *The Arab National Project in Youssef Chahine's Cinema* he says:

Chahine's cinema both challenged and preserved traditional practices in Egyptian and Arab cinema. Much of this cinema's history tends to confirm coalitionist, rather than independent, strategies and industrial cinematic practices. Historically, the term "Hollywood on the Nile" in reference to Egyptian cinema reflected at its extreme the appeal of a homogeneity within the Egyptian filmmaking industry as a normative form of cinematic expression; it also reflected the western tendency to marginalise national cinematic practices whose local appeal did not extend to Hollywood's traditional audiences. In the case of Chahine's cinema, the advocacy of alternative, oppositional modes and industrial strategies was also synonymous with a desire to

appeal to a wider audience that is more familiar with traditional cinematic techniques and approaches. While Chahine's film practices have historically challenged the homogenising accounts of local cinema, they simultaneously provided a space where diverse cinematic practices converged and interacted. In this way, Chahine's cinema has been the site where consensual models of industrial growth and creative merit can be decentered and where new affiliations can be forged." (Khouri, xviii)

## Collective Utterances

Deleuze ends his chapter regarding minor cinema with this statement: “as a general rule, third world cinema has this aim: through trance or crisis, to continue an assemblage which brings real parties together, in order to make them produce collective utterances as the prefiguration of the people who are missing” (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 224) Accordingly, in the case of *Alexandria ... Why?*, it can be argued that it is through the autobiographical form that can be both ‘trance’ and ‘crisis’, continues ‘the assemblage’ to which the focus of this part will be on one of its elements: the archival footage and how it operates in fulfilling the unanimity of the missing people as demonstrated in the previous parts.

### The Different Types of Footage in the Collective and Political Spirit

#### 1. Film Footage

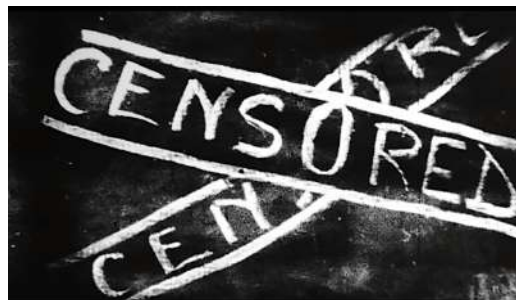
##### a. Hollywood Films

The first type of film footage refers to the excerpts of films seen in *Alexandria ... Why?* They are Hollywood films: *An American In Paris* (1951) by Vincente Minnelli and *Born to Dance* (1936) by Roy Del Ruth. Their usage and impact is discussed in detail in a previous chapter - *Colonial Inspiration: Traditional Hollywood and French New Wave*.

##### b. Chahine’s Short Film

The second type of film footage is Chahine’s own short film. It is called *School Life* and it was produced in 1944. It is seen projected in Mohsen’s house with the presence of Mohsen’s father Chaker Pasha, Adel Bey, some foreigners (both American and English) and the maker of the film Yehia. The film is a short comedy set in Victoria College, Chahine’s high school where his friends are running around engaging in slapstick humour.

When a shot of Chahine is shown on the projector, a young girl turns to Yehia and asks “Is that you?” to which Yehia answers “You could say so”, engaging in a self-referential joke. However this self-referentiality isn’t limited to humour and breaks of the fourth wall, rather by using



a

shot of the sign “Censored” and projecting it, the crisis that Deleuze is discussing is put forth in a playful yet raw manner showing Chahine’s own demise. As his films were always prone to debates and legal battles with the Egyptian Film Censorship before their release.

Moreover, the value of including this short is to advance the story by highlighting the talent and the inevitable need for Yehia to travel to study abroad. Nevertheless, this film also contextualises the story in a specific period of time, giving room for a locus for critique: “the relationship of the autobiographical genre to the question of the social is a complicated one. It is through exploring one's own life through a wider historical and social lens that autobiography emerges not merely as individual experience but as social critique” (Massad-78). This social critique is clearly represented through the audience in the room. Their reaction varies from appreciation to Yehia’s talent to thoughts about their financial advancement plans. One of the British guests says: “We will make an Arabian boomtown, there is a lot of oil around here!” while Adel Bey scorns this colonial attitude by a wry eyeroll. Once again, a critique of the colonial occupation is established in the realm of abusing the arts for other financial gains i.e oil.

## **2. Newsreel Footage**

### **a. Newsreel as newsreel**

While in the previous section, the passion of Chahine for cinema is seen through including excerpts from Hollywood films and even his own, this passion is then later generalised to other characters going to the cinema. The soldiers regularly go to the cinema to watch the subject of their obsession - Churchill. This calls for using some newsreel footage, in its standard form, as a break before the start of a film. Cinema becomes a hub for characters that are together without their knowledge. It becomes the focal point of a collective space. When the newsreel that announces that the war is over and Germany has surrendered unconditionally is played, we find Yehia and Mohsen watching together thinking about their future studies. While Adel Bey is also in the same cinema, thinking about the whereabouts of Tommy.

b. Newsreel integrated

In addition to newsreels being used in their original form, their use is extended to being integrated within the scene. “The intercutting of Second World War footage into the film’s action provides perplexing breaks in the movie’s rhythm, but also injects events of an intimate, personal nature with a sense of historical resonance and context.” (Khouri, 129).

Some of the integrated newsreel footage acts in a dialectic form. For example, the scene below where we see the people gathering during a raid in a house, followed by the footage of the war then its result, the destruction of the people’s houses. There is a linearity of cause and effect. Yet, due to Chahine’s emphasis on the people’s status as collectively passive, the scene’s value is upgraded to match Deleuze’s argument that people are missing at the expense of the collective. “[T]he very diversity of the social and political development through which he has lived has fostered an eclectic approach, and his work offers a kaleidoscopic view of a shifting society in which the individual is constantly pulled in



diverging directions. Chahine’s openness to external events and to his own moods and impulses means that his work is bound to be uneven. His work holds a great lesson, however: that it is possible for the Third World film maker to deal with social and political issues intelligently within the formal narrative structures of a cinema directed toward a mass audience and to combine this commercial concern with a totally personal style.” (Armes, 254). The men are hiding in their houses and can only talk and curse the British, this is the thesis. While the antithesis is the destructive power the British army has, leading to the synthesis, the destruction leading people to search for their innocent loved ones under the rubble.

In addition to using the newsreel footage as cause and effect, there are instances where the newsreel footage materialises as part of the mise-en-scene. For example, the scene below where we cut from Tommy being beat up to some newsreel footage of bombing to Adel Bey in the car where the bombing continues in the background. The usage of the



newsreel footage here has two sides, one the integration within the scene and contextualising the war concretely in Alexandria. While also mimicking the distraught state of mind of Tommy paralleling his fear with the war.

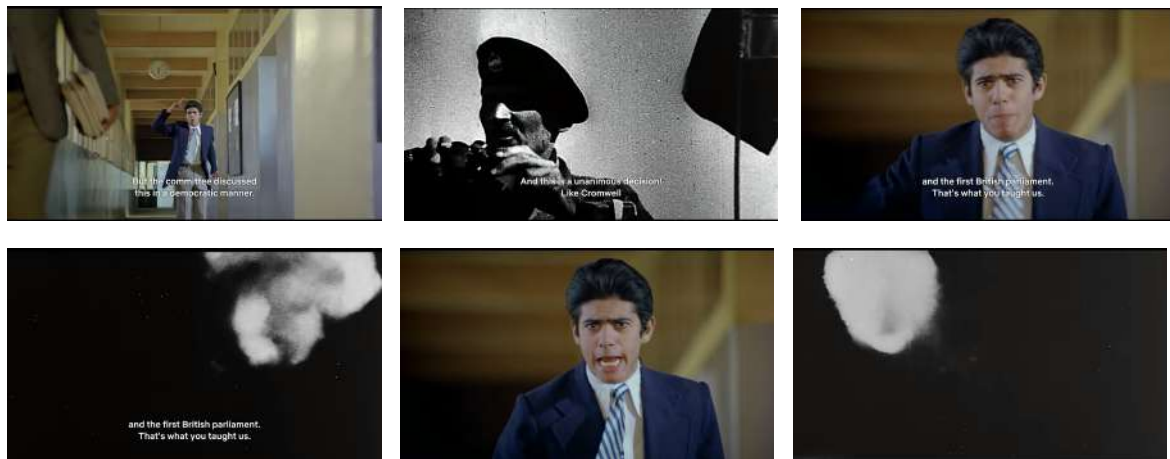


c. Affective newsreel

The second usage of the newsreel footage in the above example can also be categorised separately as affective newsreel. These are the cases where the footage is solely used for emotional effect to relay the character's feelings and denote their mood to the audience in a powerful visual form. When Yehia is refused to play *Hamlet*<sup>14</sup> in a school play and forced to perform *The Taming of the Shrew*, Yehia explodes in anger to his British teacher. A monologue of this injustice is then marvellously performed and written as something seemingly childish about which play the students will perform turns into a political jab at the British hypocrisy of their democracy. Yehia argues that it was the students' committee that voted for Hamlet in "a democratic manner" and that is what the British have been teaching them about Cromwell and the parliament and that their insistence to play *The Taming of the Shrew* is nothing but unfairness. His anger turns into footage of bombing and his words spewed are then silenced to be replaced with the sounds of tanks firing. This is an example of how the private and the political become muddled in minor cinema. "Kafka suggested that 'major' literature always maintained a border between the political and the private, however mobile, whilst, in minor literature, the private affair was immediately political and 'entailed a verdict of life or death'[...] The private element can thus become the place of a becoming conscious, insofar as it goes back to root causes, or reveals the 'object' that it expresses ." (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 218)

---

<sup>14</sup> Note that *Hamlet* is a recurring motif in the trilogy, with Yehia/Chahine's obsession with this character represented in the three films.



Another scene, where the newsreel footage is solely used for affective and political jabs is when Adel Bey visits Tommy's tomb in the Alamein cemetery. After he breaks down and cries, we are met with a montage of the different tombstones of the soldiers in Alamein with the footage of the destruction of Dresden and photographs of the surviving victims of the concentration camps. The montage is accompanied with upbeat jazz music that contrasts greatly the desolate imagery. With stark zoom ins and outs on the tombstones, the audience are allowed time to see the details of the engravings, and to read the age of one soldier - 18.



Once again from a private situation of a lover grieving, Chahine expands to a collective grievance of the futility of the war. “*Alexandria ... Why?* represented an autobiographical first in the history of Egyptian and Arab cinemas and marked a new phase in Chahine’s stylistic appropriation of the personal as political and vice versa; it also presented an explicitly new outlook on Arab identity as heterogeneous.” (Khouri, 117)

## Sequence Breakdown: The Play

Towards the middle of the film, the audience are met with one of the most important and complex sequences of the whole film. A sequence where real historical events are intermingled with a satirical students' performance of a theatrical play alongside imaginative critical situations that are seemingly incongruous to the rest of the film. In order to make sense of this sequence and to highlight its application of the different conditions of the minor cinema, this last chapter is then divided into three different parts. Starting with the primary level of the sequence which is the play itself, performed on stage, and representing Yehia's storyline. Then focusing on the things that happen outside of the play, which includes other characters' storylines. Lastly is the focus on the plays within the play, where Chahine integrates the fantastic with the absurd within the whole sequence<sup>15</sup>.

- The Play on Stage:

A school production directed by Yehia and acted out by his classmates takes the form of a satirical retelling of the power dynamics of WWII, where “ [the] Allied and Axis powers are chasing each other across an Arabian desert speaking their respective languages as confused Egyptian and Arab characters powerlessly watch the events. While some Arab characters hold a sign claiming “No One Is Allowed to Pass through Here,” European armies continue to chase each other in total indifference to the group.” (Khoury, 128). The play includes most of the parties involved in the war, starting chronologically by their order of their appearance:

- Germany & Hitler

The stage is filled with handmade signs of the third reich: the eagle and swastika flags surround the students. Yehia puts on the Hitler/Chaplin moustache<sup>16</sup> and performs the Nazi salute with ardor. Yet, what is thought to be a



---

<sup>15</sup> A shot by shot breakdown is available in the appendix

<sup>16</sup> A trope reiterated in *An Egyptian Story* through Yehia's school teacher having the same moustache and acting like Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator* (1940)

serious portrayal of Hitler turns into satire with multiple Hitlers confronting each other and puzzle each other over who is the right one. In the still above you see Mohsen and Yehia both dressed up as Hitler saying:

Yehia: Who are you?  
Mohsen: I am Hitler?  
Yehia: Then who am I?  
*Audience Laughs*

The scene of the play is in-media-res, we aren't aware of the whole joke for this moment to become its punchline. We are only met by the audience's laughter as the right and only reaction to the scene. On top of this being a joke to ridicule the persona of Hitler, there is a parallel reflecting the identity crisis, since Yehia is the one asking who he is. It can be argued that this falls under the condition of missing people as Yehia attempts to reinvent himself in other stereotypical characters, he is still at loss to who he really is.

- France and their Claim for Liberty

A bomb drops from the newsreel footage to hit the stage with a fog. The stage is filled with signs and arrows pointing everywhere. At the centre Yehia and Mohsen are dressed as Arabs sitting cross legged while the action unfolds around them with Italians coming in from the right and French from the left. The French are distinguishable because of their khaki uniform and hats but more importantly it is because of Marianne.



We notice a plump boy wrapped in a blanket, wearing a blue cap hat with a cockade, and holding the french flag. His look matches the iconography of the allegory of the french revolution, Marianne. The allegory was first portrayed in Eugène Delacroix's painting *Liberty Leading the People*. His appearance lasts only for three seconds but he is accentuated as his movement is followed by the camera till it stops in front of Yehia and Mohsen. The irony of including Marianne leading the French army across the desert hits all the political marks. While in the film, the main enemy that all of the characters unite against

is the British occupation, Chahine finds room to criticise another colonial power - the French. It is important to note that Chahine himself was francophone and was heavily influenced by the language and the country as it co-produced a lot of his films and it is where he got his first international recognition and acclaim. Nevertheless, true to his political stance against occupation, he depicts French hypocrisy in a light-hearted manner.

○ Italy's Surrender

The humor continues as the same boy that played Marianne in the previous scene is now cross-dressing once again as an Italian woman in a sultry red dress. Yehia's identity crisis continues as he impersonates another fascist dictator, this time it is Mussolini. He lip syncs speech by Mussolini against the USA, while the rest of the Italians drink 'Vino Rosso' and dance over the song *Vincere* by Beniamino



Gigli. A song infamous for its fascist propagandist undertones. It is due to the blocking of Yehia and his movement towards the camera that the voice over is emphasised.

○ Britain's Impotence

While the battle continues in the newsreel footage, the play takes time to mock the impotence of the British with a phallic joke, a broken canon. The British soldier (who is also Marianne, and the sultry Italian) is engrossed by his cigar and tea and doesn't care about the bad arms. He is notified by Yehia to look left off screen to see the surrender of the Italians on the right. The footage of the surrender comes from the newsreel footage, bridging the real events of the war with the play on stage like with the arrival of the French.



Reality and the play blend, creating a causal chain, where actions continue from one form affecting the other and vice versa (as seen in the French and British scenes on stage).

- Outside of the Stage:

Outside of the absurd play exists real life. That is represented mainly by the audience and the newsreel footage that respectively ignores and interacts with the play. Three storylines outside of Yehia's appear:

- Chaker Pasha's Storyline

The audience consists of a full theatre of students' parents and friends, headed by the British ambassador who is sitting front row as the guest of honour. Behind him is Mohsen's father, Chaker Pasha who doesn't follow the play at all but obsesses over the ambassador's reaction. The emphasis here lies on relaying information about the war and thanks to Chaker Pasha's dubious position with the British, there is the excuse to follow the action of the ambassador as he receives a letter. With the dramatic lights change of the theatre, the letter can be read.



"The British forces are heading for Alamein" to stave off the German offence. With a zoom in on the word Alamein from the letter, we cut to newsreel footage that integrates into Tommy's running to the trenches.

- Tommy's Storyline

The direction of the weapons from the newsreel footage matches Tommy's flight direction and that is followed with more footage of the war firing at the opposite direction.



Tommy's appearance in this whole sequence is reserved in the above shot. He is a reminder that the war includes young, innocent, lovers, struck by baseless violence. He becomes a reiteration of the contextualisation of the characters in a specific period of time.

- The Egyptian Soldiers' Storyline

While the opportunist Chaker Pasha is content that the British ambassador isn't flinching, meaning his fortune will remain untouched and the British will continue the occupation. The battle continues as the Germans retaliate with Rommel (present in the newsreel footage) headlining the attack. The Egyptian soldiers are also present in the



battleground, as their attacks are framed with newsreel footage. The space of the battle is established by the newsreel footage alongside its positioning of the soldiers reacting to the battle. They are happy to see the British panic and their plot closer to fruition. Their plot is to kidnap Churchill in hopes to blackmail him into ending the British occupation.

- Plays within the Play:

- Who is who?



The Egyptian soldiers relay their ridiculous plot to the Germans. Turns out that the person who has been listening isn't a German official but Yehia. An unrealistic break from reality to the stage occurs, one that isn't justified in a causal line like the ones mentioned in the above section. This instant is fantastic for the sake of fantasy and to play on the silliness of the soldiers' plot. This is emphasised by the stock laughter made by the audience watching the play and acknowledging Yehia's performance. Deleuze says that "what replaces the correlation of the political and the private is the coexistence, to the point of absurdity, of

very different social stages.” making this moment ideal in representing the rift between private and political. Yehia’s whole performance on stage was a political statement.

- Toll Fees

This political statement isn’t solely against the occupation and the absurdity of war. It extends to “the theme of oil and its centrality in colonial Middle East politics and its implications for Arab national liberation.” (Khouri, 128). From the arrival of the French on stage, we cut to a new unidentified space - the desert. Yehia and Mohsen with the same Arab costumes from the stage manifest in the desert with a big cash register in between them. Feigning to be pacifists, Mohsen holds an olive branch while Yehia holds a guitar. Their intention, to make people pay as they pass here as if it is a toll station, transpires, on stage, as the Egyptian soldiers pass through. The soldiers refuse to pay saying they are Egyptian, only to be told off by Yehia saying: “The English paid, the Italians did, the Germans too. So



you can pay half price like kids.” By creating an absurd situation like this, Chahine manages to critique and mock the whole Arab world’s passive attitude towards their land<sup>17</sup>, but escaping condemnation from them as the scene is engulfed in humour and fantasy.

In Chahine's work, the question 'why' takes on a properly cinematographic value, [...] 'Why?' is the question of the inside, the question of the I: for, if the people are missing, if they are breaking up into minorities, it is I who am first of all a people, [...] the people of my arteries as Chahine said . 'But why?' is also the question from the outside, the question of the world, the question of the people who, missing, invent themselves, who have a chance to invent themselves by asking the I the question that it asked them: Alexandria-I, I-Alexandria. (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 220-221)

In short, to parallel Deleuze’s logic, it is through the crisis of the war, that in this sequence the students unite to collectively reinvent themselves in the play and protest the British

---

<sup>17</sup> Chahine denounces the passive reaction of Arab countries facing the rise of the Israel state in Palestine.



occupation. It is through the trance of delving in one's biography that Chahine reiterates his private life in a political context as his minor status is never free of it.

The sequence includes all the characters of the film except for Sarah and Ibrahim. It includes most of the characters within the space of the school either as actors on the stage or audience in the room. Also through parallel editing the sequence manages to include Tommy and the Egyptian soldiers that are in the battlefield. Through extensive manipulation of space and time, the battles are integrated within the play seamlessly, connecting them with archival footage and having a consequential continuation on the stage, or the gazes of the actors reacting to the battle like in the British segment.

Moreover, the editing of the sound allows the cohesion of different spaces: the archival footage of the bombs falling, with the stage acting as its consequence with smoke filling the space accentuates the sound of the bomb. Another example is when Yehia starts his speech on stage and continues it in the desert and provokes the Egyptian soldiers. Throughout the sequence sound is used humorously especially with the choice of songs like *Vincere* in the Italian sequence. The editing of both image and sound amplifies the collectivity of the sequence, elevating it from a simple school play to a statement production.

## **An Egyptian Story**

*An Egyptian Story* is a semi-autobiographical introspection on Chahine's dual lives as a filmmaker and as a family member through his alter-ego Yehia. Continuing on the first instalment, extending in time and expanding on social historical events, Yehia evolves and matures as an Egyptian director. Unlike the two other films from the trilogy, *An Egyptian Story*'s idea isn't Chahine's rather it's Youssef Idris' (1927-1991). Idris is an Egyptian author who is famous for his short stories and direct style: "Idris's distinctive mark is his individualism, from which comes his unbent rebelliousness and his complex relationship with ideology and authority." (Fishere, 1). This mark is clearly shared with Chahine's filmography and auteurism as he is always challenging the prevailing ideology more so that "the contemporary academic obsession with Chahine as an anti-establishment maverick director whose themes of cosmopolitanism, liberalism and homosexuality mark him out as an anti-regime figure in Arab society." (Wharton, 33). While this is true, the focus of the thesis lies on the editing techniques that highlight his filmmaking approach in the terms of minor cinema. That's why this part will also include three sections dissecting the different conditions of minor cinema and how they are put forth through the editing.

## Compositional Mode of Missing People

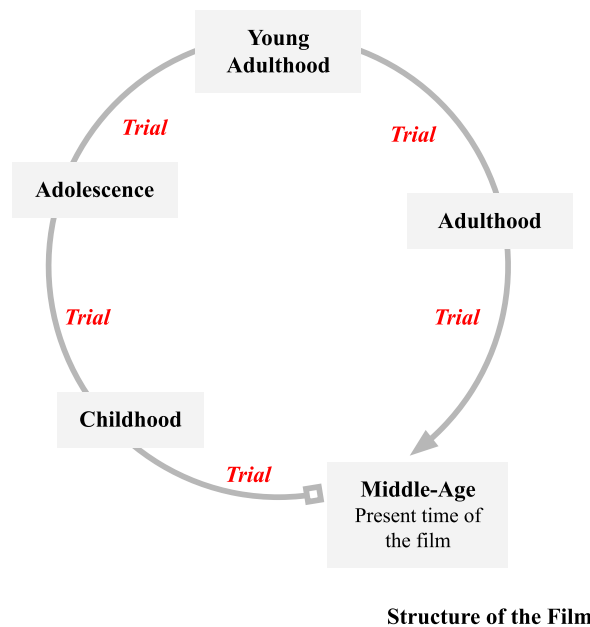
A jump in time occurs from *Alexandria ... Why?*, to *An Egyptian Story*. Yehia now is a middle-aged director based in Cairo struggling to receive the international recognition he deserves. One day, he dwells on the notion of cosmopolitan Alexandria saying that “In Alexandria a 100 races lived together”. His wife, Amal, shatters his nostalgia by shouting to him “Alexandria’s finished”.

Some argue that the death knell of cosmopolitanism sounded with World War II, when Germans and Italians began to feel threatened and to leave. Others would cite 1936, when the Montreux Convention abolished Capitulations and deprived the foreigners of their privileges, so they realised that their days were numbered. However, the actual rupture came in 1956, when the English, French and Israeli attack on Egypt in the Suez War led to the expulsion of English and French nationals. Waves of exodus followed the 1961 nationalisations: most of the remaining foreigners escaped the growing nationalism and restrictions on enterprise and commerce. Within a few years, Alexandria had lost its multicultural diversity and its polyglot Character. (Awad & Hamouda, 12)

It is important to note that with the displacement of the setting of the story from Alexandria to Cairo, the re-invention of people who are missing shifts. As Alexandria was the representative of the cosmopolitan status of Egypt, filled with ethnic and racial minorities, while Cairo was devoid. Re-inventing minorities and bringing them to the surface is now replaced by Chahine reinventing himself, representing various aspects of himself in the flashback sequences. Nonetheless, the re-invention of people isn’t completely eliminated but persists in the trial sequences in a theatrical form, where the characters defend themselves and mould themselves.

## General Structure of *An Egyptian Story*

The structure of *An Egyptian Story* is divided into a present time where Yehia suffers from a heart condition, goes to London to perform a bypass operation. During the surgery the timeline of the film splits creating the second timeline: the surreal trial where young Yehia is putting adult Yehia on trial for his murder. In the trial timeline, and in the form of testimonies from different characters; the third timeline is framed in the form of flashbacks. In the flashbacks we go as far back as young Yehia in elementary school to the almost present time of Yehia fighting for his right against the censorship to direct *The Sparrow* (1972), and suffering from heart problems on set.



The quasi-circular structure of the film allows the re-invention of Chahine, through his alter-ego Yehia in the different stages of life. The flashbacks span decades, and include transformative years and events in the life of Yehia/Chahine. From Childhood to his adulthood, his traumas and experiences are intricately traced with a very subjective point of view.

While the shift of setting from Alexandria to Cairo occurs, Chahine still clings on to the past. That's why the flashbacks set in Alexandria draw a lot from the first instalment. Starting with the childhood sequence, catapulted by Yehia going to surgery and being asked about his religion, to which he responds: "Supposedly Catholic", so when the first witness, Yehia's school teacher is taken to the stand, religion is brought up as the centrepiece of the sequence<sup>18</sup> and the first flashback of the childhood sequence ensues. From the teacher, old with grey hair and a full moustache standing in court, we cut to him young with the infamous Hitler/Chaplin moustache standing at a school's church. The setting is an all boys Catholic school, where the students are in a mass singing. Yehia, oblivious to the hymns, is distracted by the Way of the Cross. Here the editing mimics Yehia's focus as the stations of the cross<sup>19</sup> are not in order. It goes from the second station where Jesus is made to bear his cross (Shot 2), to the sixth as Veronica wipes Jesus' face (Shot 3), to the ninth station where he falls for the third time (Shot 4), then he is taken down from the cross which is the thirteenth station (Shot 5), back to the eleventh where he is nailed to the cross (Shot 6).



The most noticeable shift in the order is in the last two shots (Shot 5) and (Shot 6), where after Jesus' death at the cross he is put down to be nailed again.



---

<sup>18</sup> A shot by shot breakdown is available in the appendix

<sup>19</sup> As ordered in Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Stations of the Cross". Encyclopaedia Britannica, 13 Jul. 2021.

From the frozen sculpted soldier with a hammer up, to a real live person putting the hammer down on a young boy's hand (Shot 7). A cut based on continuity of action connects the two realms; the reality of the school setting to Yehia's imagination. A jump cut in (Shot 8) accentuates the fall of the hammer and creates an impression of a jolt of pain. That imagined



jolt of pain from the nail connects with Yehia's open mouth back in the church (reality), suddenly engaged and singing loudly 'Hallelujah' (Shot 9).

With a dramatic zoom-in on the teacher who gives Yehia a stern gaze, the crucifixion insert shots actualize in (Shot 11) of Yehia wearing the crown of thorns and with a zoom-in he takes his last breath and dies.



Overall this sequence evokes what Khouri illustrates thoroughly in the chapter *Chahine as an Author and as an Arab Organic Intellectual*:

Chahine's stories tended to revolve around moments of crisis, punctuated by brief and sometimes interrupted dialogues and flashbacks often introduced without clear markers. These playful juxtapositions, often including moments of intermingled representations of the implausible and the real, expose the world according to Chahine, in which he avers "the fantastic is always [present], and fiction and reality are separated by a thread." In this *mélange*, Chahine suggests, "even the erotic arousal comes out of imagination, out of thought." (Khouri, 217)

Crucifixion becomes a recurring visual motif in Chahine's filmography. Yet, its usage varies immensely from *Alexandria ... Why?* to here in *An Egyptian Story*. In the former, the crucifixion represents the weight of the trauma of death and its integration within the sequences was on a psychological level, emphasising the trauma of Yehia. While in the latter its value shifts to self-representation and allegory, where Chahine sees himself as the victim of persecution but also admitting to the god complex of a director. Its usage in this sequence as well as in the previous instalment is to primarily carry an emotional value and to emphasise the context of Yehia's upbringing as Christian minority.

As for the adolescence sequence, Chahine casts the same actors in the roles of Mohsen, Yehia and Ahmed (respectively from left to right) as seen on the still on the right. There is also a reiteration on the theme of national identity as when "Yehia's schoolmates exhort him to join a political demonstration and hurl stones at the British: "Are you one of us?" They want him to prove he is an Egyptian. [...]



The film implicitly asks its Egyptian audience to accept its minorities as part of its national fabric." (Lekatsas- 145,146). So it extends from representing Chahine as the Christian child to the Egyptian rebel. Due to the continuation of the stories and the persistence of the same characters between the instalments, the timeline of both films interlock and compliment each other, extending from both ends of time.

From an editing perspective it is important to note the different types of joints that connect the three timelines. Whether it is a jump in time from present to past memory or from a jump in space; from the surrealist space of the trial to Alexandria for example, Rashida Abdel Salam employs similar techniques like in *Alexandria ... Why?* utilising the subjective weight of the different timelines and dovetailing them in a cohesive narrative.

#### 1- Continuous Cuts:

In these cuts, the action is initiated in one timeline and continued in another timeline utilising one of the most basic editing discoveries made by Kuleshov - the artificial landscape also known as creative geography. What Kuleshov has established using the

actors' gaze to link the spaces, here the action's continuation operates in the same way. In the example below, the telephone rings in the flashback timeline only to be picked up in the flashforward by Amal in the trial setting. Here the same character/actor continues the action in different spaces.



Hence, AbdelSalam takes Kuleshov's theory and extends it by jumping not only between spaces but in time with different actors representing the same character. In the example below where adult Yehia jumps playfully on Mahdi in the real world, the audience follows the action with young Yehia replacing adult Yehia and Mahdi gets older, expanding the creative landscape to the realm of false continuity. Since “ false continuity occurs when two shots are joined together in a narrative context and “read” as being part of a coherent stream of space, time, and action, even though the shots were taken at widely separate places and time” (Messaris, 1997). Even though here the coherent stream is Yehia's stream of consciousness and it defies the conventional norms of space and time.



The artificial landscape discovered by Kuleshov, is then used to represent Chahine's mind as a landscape where the trial spaces are filled and are void of time simultaneously, as both versions of Yehia can co-exist and also replace each other. It can also be said that it parallels the work of Maya Deren and Alexander Hackenschmied in *Meshes of the Afternoon* by synthesising a homogeneous space of Yehia's mind.



## 2- Point of View Cuts:

It is through the sound that these shots are affirmed as truth as the sound extends from one shot to the other creating a narrative, connecting the point of view of the character. Whether in a conventional sense where the audience sees what the character does or remembers like in the example below where Amal in the trial looks at the distance reminiscent of the good times she had with Yehia and we cut to archival footage of Cannes.



At this point in the film the audience are already accustomed to treat found footage and read them like ordinary establishing shots and to accept the lack of cohesion in time “ the cinema, even more directly than painting, conveys a relief in time, a perspective in time: it expresses time itself as perspective or relief” (Epstein -115) That way playing with time and space through points of view becomes part of the film’s storytelling threaded together by the voice of over and the sonic narration.

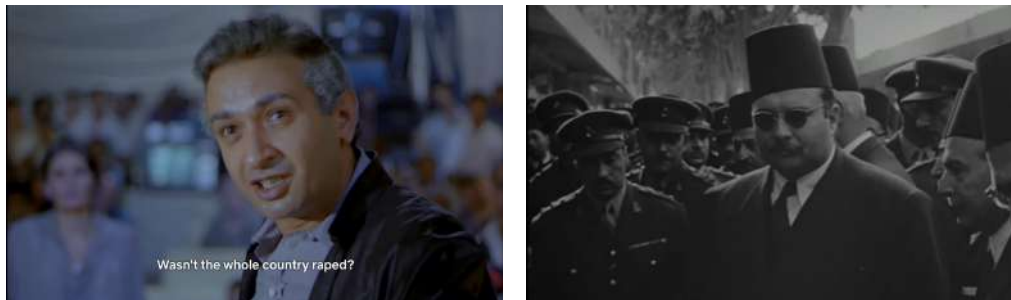
Another problem that the audience would have in this film is to recognize the same character in the different timelines as they are portrayed by different actors. Yet, AbdelSalam manages to solve this issue seamlessly by connecting the actors/character through sound. In the example below, Yehia’s sister when she was young looks at Yehia with sadness and then an adult voice comes in and describes her sadness, from there we cut



to the adult version of Yehia's sister in the trial as she testifies about the past. That way through the voice over the character is established across the timelines with different actors.

### 3- Thematic Cuts:

In the trial when Yehia's sister exclaims about her premature marriage she explains the difference in treatment she received. She says: "you were a boy, they were worried that I'd be raped by a British Soldier." to which Yehia angrily responds "wasn't the whole country raped" and AbdelSalam cuts to archival footage of King Farouk<sup>20</sup>. Here Chahine and AbdelSalam work together in combining the story with the historical context in order to exalt the plot into a critique of the unjust reign during that time.



In this case, the cut is used in order to emphasise the theme of the film and put forth the fact that the political always impacts the personal.

Through the various types of cuts, AbdelSalam manages to jump from space and time, jump between the same character performed by various actors and highlight a socio-political critique, all this is done seamlessly through the continuation of movement, or the manipulation of sound, or the combination of archival footage with filmed footage.

---

<sup>20</sup> Check footnote 4

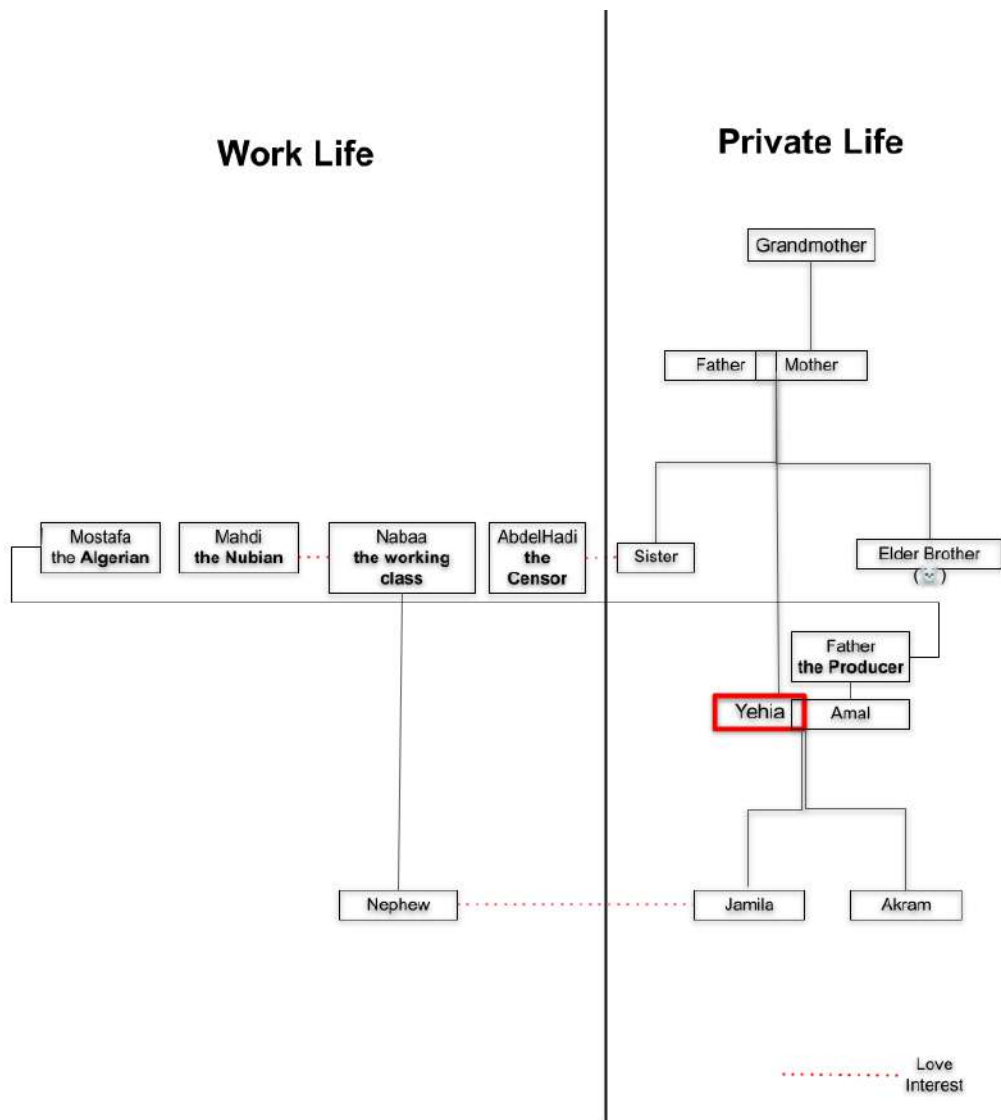
## Inventing People in a Theatrical Trial

Chahine's introspection used in the flashbacks is driven by the sequences of the trial. They represent a conjecture where Yehia manifests his accusatory family members. Yet, he allows them a freedom to take the stand, invent themselves whilst accusing him of neglect in order to retrace parts of his life (nonetheless from his perspective). In this way, they are fulfilling what Deleuze says about missing people, as they are in reality missing from Yehia's life due his neglect for them. Nevertheless, they complete the other side of the theory by replacing their status of missing by inventing themselves.

In the diagram *An Egyptian Story Characters' Breakdown* below, there is an overview of the characters and how they are linked to each other. There is a straight line that separates the work life and the private life, as Yehia is being tried by his family members, they are condemning him for negligence, as he favours his work at the expense of the family. The only connections that cross the line are his father-in-law who produced his first films and his daughter's love affair with Nabaa's nephew. In the work life section, you can see that each character represents a specific category of people, such as Mahdi the Nubian representing a minor population in Egypt, Nabaa representing the working class, while Abdelhadi the censor is a representative of the government. As for the private life section, it is exactly the same as the one in *Alexandria... Why?* with his parents, sister and elder brother that passed away, yet this time it extends downwards in an imaginary<sup>21</sup> future where Yehia is married and has children.

---

<sup>21</sup> 'Imaginary' since Chahine doesn't have any children.



An Egyptian Story Characters Breakdown

Idris like Chahine had to undergo a bypass operation, that is why the setting of the trial, where characters face Yehia about his wrongdoings, is of a ribcage and a heart operation. The form of these sequences rely heavily on the aesthetics of theatre as “Chahine’s reflexivity was also expressed in his long-standing interest in the theatre [...] The theatre featured prominently in many of Chahine’s films, whether as a theme, a stylistic muse, or as a point of reference.” (Kouri, 221). In this case, theatre is used as a stylistic muse, where the mise-en-scene takes great inspiration.

Note the still on the right, where all the arms of filmmaking are put to use to match the aesthetic of theatre. This sequence starts after the flashback of adolescent Yehia’s sister’s forced marriage.

In the background sits the judge in the raised wooden desk, his space is separated from the rest by a curved structure - the ribcage. The ribcage is an allusion to the ongoing present timeline of Yehia undergoing a heart surgery. He is only seen as a silhouette , since his



actual role as a judge is dismissed the moment adult Yehia shows up and the hearing is directly happening in between the characters.

The middleground is occupied by the grandmother, the mother and the sister all engaged in domestic affairs. The grandmother kneads the bread, the mother puts nail polish on, while the sister on the phone recounts her trauma of getting married young, reprimanding adult Yehia for not stepping up to stop the affair. Behind her is young Yehia in his futuristic costume locked in the transparent tubed prisoners’ cage. The futuristic costume alongside the elaborate production design emphasises the fact that this is the realm of fantasy, and imagination. In the foreground, adult Yehia alongside Mahdi<sup>22</sup> are rewriting a script, the latter uses a typewriter with the help of his Algerian friend next to him. These two characters foreshadow the execution of the film *Djamilah*<sup>23</sup>(1958), featured in a later

---

<sup>22</sup> Mahdi is played by Mohamed Mounir, a Nubian singer representing an ethnic minority that lives in the south of Egypt.

<sup>23</sup> A film about the Algerian rebellion against the French occupation. The film was shot and played in Egyptian Arabic with Egyptian actors.

sequence of the flashbacks. On the far left, Amal, his wife is sitting reading silently, while her daughter<sup>24</sup> Jamila is standing behind her father also in silence.

The scene's theatrical aesthetic isn't simply because of the structured composition and blocking of actors or the stark lighting or the exaggerated production design, rather it is also due to the directing of the scene. It is one long shot, where the actors interact with each other without moving. That opposes Chahine's usual style of nervous editing. Here the camera stays still, unlike the sequence about to be discussed below where Chahine's style of complex camera movement is accentuated: "his films were also known for a stylistic approach that was recognizable for a liveliness manifested in long and complex scenes diligently composed and meticulously executed. These complex scenes involved elaborate camera movements that brought together his thematic dispositions and character variations resulting in a relentless process of locating and expunging." (Khouri, 216). This style is reminiscent of Wellsian montage within the image.

In the sequence<sup>25</sup> Amal reproaches Yehia about his neglect and his lack of love towards her. Through precise camera movement and blocking of the characters, Chahine manages to have five characters interact seamlessly in the space of the court. The sequence starts with a cut based on narrative continuity, where the phone ringing in reality (Shot 0), is picked up in the courtroom by Amal (Shot 1) in position (A).



The shot is elongated as it follows Amal's movement to include more and more characters. She steps up to talk to her husband as the judge sits useless, position (B), lighting

---

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that Chahine never had children of his own and this character is completely fictitious.

<sup>25</sup> Shot by shot breakdown is available in the appendix

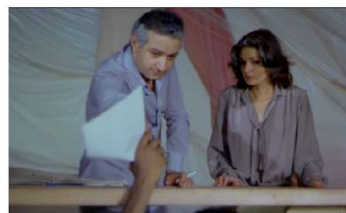
Yehia's cigarette. As Yehia exits to the left, the camera lingers with Amal then follows her gaze as she walks to join him in another framing and position (C).

The shot is a uniquely spatial determination, indicating a 'slice of space' at a particular distance from the camera, from close-up to long shot (immobile sections):



movement is therefore not extracted for itself and remains attached to elements, characters and things which serve as its moving body or vehicle. Finally, the whole is identical to the set in depth, such that the moving body goes through it in passing from one spatial shot/plane [plan] to another, from one parallel slice to another, each having its independence or its focus. (Deleuze, Cinema-1 24)

What is thought to be a scene where the wife can have a moment with her husband to talk about their love life, is then disrupted with Yehia's movement and passing of a paper downwards, the camera follows this moment to reveal another position (D), where Mahdi is still using his typewriter. Work takes over intimacy.



To continue on what Khouri said, the judge is being "expunged" from the story as he is only used as an accessory to the setting of a trial but moreover, with the usage of the camera and its movement, Chahine illustrates how the characters stray away from each other. It is impossible for the couple to be framed together for long. The editing within the image occurs while the speech continues. Intimacy between the couple is missing in reality and it is also missing in its re-invention as Yehia prioritises and obsesses over his role as a filmmaker far more than his role as a family member.

## Deterritorialization of the Filmic Language

If we assume that the language of film is based on the suspension of disbelief and immersing you in the illusion of film as a medium void of its maker, then what Chahine does here in *An Egyptian Story*, by bringing forth the filmmaking aspect, he is deconstructing the language and displacing it from its original self. Advancing Deleuze's theory of deterritorialization of language from the spoken language and influences of different cinemas like Hollywood cinema and French New Wave in *Alexandria ... Why?* to the realm of deterritorialization of the filmic language itself.

### Mise en abyme of a Film

It can be argued that by referencing the filmmaking aspect within a film, parallels the mise-en-abyme technique used in western art history. This self-reflexivity of the medium is put forth from the beginning of the film in the opening sequence<sup>26</sup>. The film starts with Yehia calling "Action" off screen when in reality it is a "Cut" and the crew is resetting the scene. The clapper changes the number of the shot and the film that is being shot is seen as *The Sparrow*. An arm with a cigarette in hand is stretched asking for a chair to sit on and so appears Nour ElSherif in the role of Yehia. The cigarette is the totem of Chahine par excellence, he is never seen in an interview or on set without one whether he is smoking it or having it dangle from his lips. The shot continues with the arrival of the Assistant Director concerned about his well-being saying "you never asked for a chair before" and Yehia clutches briefly his chest, and insists on finishing the scene. Mahdi (the Nubian singer) is asked to come to sing a song, while someone lights Yehia's cigarette and the credits start.



---

<sup>26</sup> A shot by shot breakdown is available in the appendix



From the hand with a cigarette pointing to the chair arrives to the director scorning the first AD, Chahine demonstrates what Deleuze describes in his book *Cinema-1-The Movement image*:

The shot is like the movement which continuously ensures conversion, circulation. It divides and subdivides duration according to the objects which make up the set; it reunites objects and sets into a single identical duration. It continuously divides duration into subdurations which are themselves heterogeneous, and reunites these into a duration which is immanent to the whole of the universe. Given that it is a consciousness which carries out these divisions and reunions, we can say of the shot that it acts like a consciousness. But the sole cinematographic consciousness is not us, the spectator, nor the hero; it is the camera - sometimes human, sometimes inhuman or superhuman. (Deleuze, *Cinema-1* 20)



At first, the camera movement deceives the audience with its superhuman consciousness then it breaks this illusion by showing the people behind the camera and more importantly the crane juxtaposed on the credit of ‘the machinistes’, “in other words, the essence of the cinematographic movement-image lies in extracting from vehicles or moving bodies the movement which is their common substance, or extracting from movements the mobility which is their essence.” (Deleuze, *Cinema-1*, 23) the vehicle here being the crane.

The shots in this sequence are usually long tracking from left to right showing the different departments of the crew. From the camera department all the way to post-production The only exception in the movement is in the censorship department where the camera



tracks from right to left, subtly highlighting the distaste and the continuous feud of the institution with Chahine.

Nevertheless, including the facets of filmmaking in the opening credits alone isn't sufficient to be a case of *mise-en-abyme* but by using the real crew it actualises and becomes self-reflexive. On the credit of the editor juxtaposed is the actual editor - Rashida AbdelSalam next to the flatbed, and on the credit of director Chahine inserts himself in a humorous cameo scorning one of the drivers on set. He breaks the fourth wall and displaces the suspension of disbelief for a brief moment.



While in *Alexandria... Why?* Chahine embraces his minor status and explores different filmic languages, in *An Egyptian Story*, he strays away from that and affirms himself as an Arab first of all and a filmmaker foremost. That's why, there is a scene where Yehia and his crew watch the dailies of his epic film *Saladin* (1963)<sup>27</sup>, an excuse where Chahine can defend himself through the voice of Nabaa when she says "Yehia is being more Arab than Arabs themselves". It is important to note that the "editing [of *Saladin*] demonstrates Chahine's attempt at mastering the form through the use of allusions to Eisenstein Montage" (Kiernan -137) and this is brought up again in another scene in the premiere of his film *Jamila* in Moscow Film Festival where Yehia is flabbergasted by the crowd and attention and says that he can only talk about "Pudovkin" and "Eisenstein".

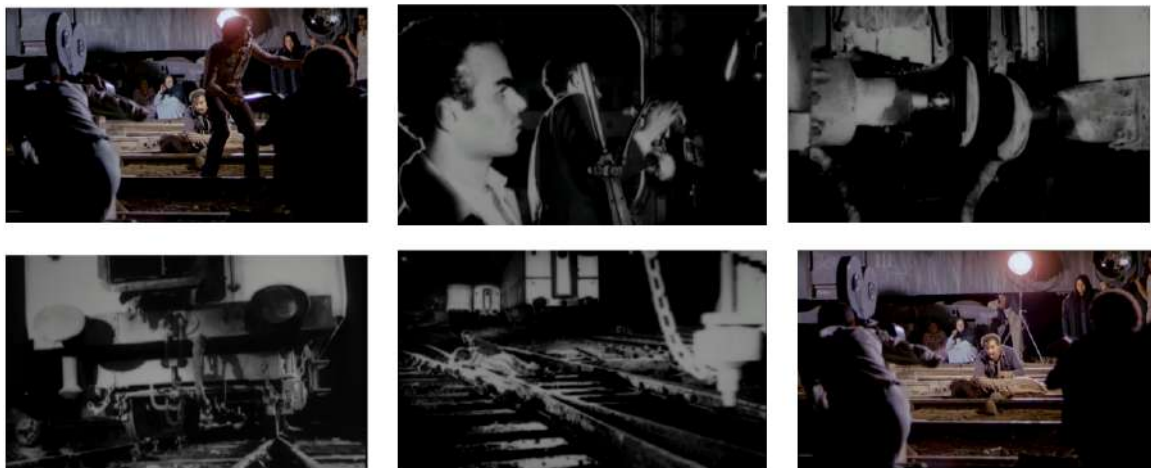
---

<sup>27</sup> In an interview in the documentary series *Chahine Why* Chahine defends making this film and adapting an Islamic/Arabic historical figure to represent Abdel Nasser's pan-arab vision. He says: "It is a film I made based on my admiration of Abdel Nasser" "Gamal Abdel Nasser, leader of the secret military organisation that toppled Egypt's monarchy, ended Britain's seventy-year occupation, and established the authoritarian republic that still governs the country" (Gordon, 209)

## Filmmaking as an Industry

Narratively, the film extends its mise-en-abyme aspect from the behind the scenes of the shooting of *The Sparrow* discussed in the above chapter to all of the phases of filmmaking, emphasising the fact that after all film is an industry and not simply an art form. The film takes time to shed light on the other aspects of the film industry, usually disregarded like the post-production, censorship and distribution, highlighting film festivals' biases and the capitalist side of it all. Chahine and AbdelSalam masterfully use archival footage to relay this to the audience.

Starting from the pre-production phase, the audience see Yehia pitch and beg his father-in-law to produce *Cairo Station* (1958). During the shooting of the film we see Yehia acting as Qinawi, the protagonist of the film. Chahine had two major roles in this film; he was the leading actor as well as being the director. One of the most important and dangerous scenes of the films was towards the end where Hanouma, the love interest of Qinawi falls down the train tracks and Qinawi tries to save her before the train comes. It's the making of that scene that is included in *An Egyptian Story*. Framed by Yehia directing and his AD signalling the start of the action, AbdelSalam cuts to an archive of the train conductors and inserts of the train itself to elevate the tension then she adds a cut from the film itself (middle bottom shot)



This order of shots doesn't only create a verisimilitude of what happened while shooting *Cairo Station*, but shows it as an objective truth marked by the intrinsic quality of the archival footage

Furthermore, what is innovative is the inclusion of the film festivals in the thread of the story using mainly newsreel footage. For example during the premiere of *Son of the Nile* (1951) in Cannes Film Festival, Amal in her attempt to calm Yehia's anxiety says looking at the festival's guests "they are bunch of unknowns" and then there is a montage where AbdelSalam cuts to important people and celebrities like François Mitterand Jean Cocteau as well as the Begum Aga Khan III.



The montage's main purpose is to show the luxuriousness of the festival and how out of place Yehia and Amal are. Yet as always AbdelSalam expands on that by choosing the specific footage of Begum Aga Khan III in Cannes (last shot) as she is later mentioned in the dialogue inviting Yehia and Amal over dinner. So once again the choice of the archival footage supports the factual aspect of the industry..

## Collective Utterances:

It is important to note that the title of the film in English and Arabic is different than it is in French. While this change may relate to different distribution and marketing plans, the change of the name has great significance. In the English and Arabic version the name of the film is *An Egyptian Story* incorporating Egypt in the name is essential to understanding the scale of the reading of the story of the film as a country's story, unlike its French title *La Memoire*, limiting the reading of the film to a private recollection.

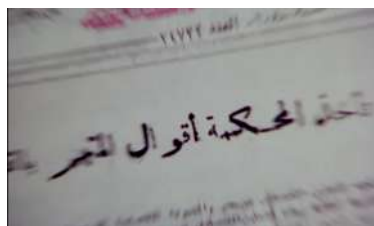
Chahine's cinema originates both intellectually and structurally from within the personal, and only as such does it indulge the collective; as his plots develop, a narrative commences its gyration around personal trepidation, expressing his dilemma and thus his spectators' within a society, a nation, and ultimately an entire world. Such dilemmas assume their shape as characters on the screen, and take on lives of their own that surpass predetermined or prescribed intellectual paradigms. The concern here becomes not as much to pander to the background of a character, whether it embodies Chahine himself or not, but to focus on and indulge characters within the world of social, political, and cultural incidences that inform them.” (Khouri, 227)

This parallels what Deleuze says regarding the private and the collective and how the former garners the latter for minorities. That's why in this section, there will be the chapters: *Self Referentiality in a Collective Frame* and *Newsreel Footage in the Collective Spirit* on how the collective aspect is formed within the self referentiality of Chahine/Yehia through his usage of newsreel footage. These two chapters are proof that the last condition of minor cinema as described by Deleuze, where the private is meshed with the political, is fulfilled.

## Self Referentiality in a Collective Frame

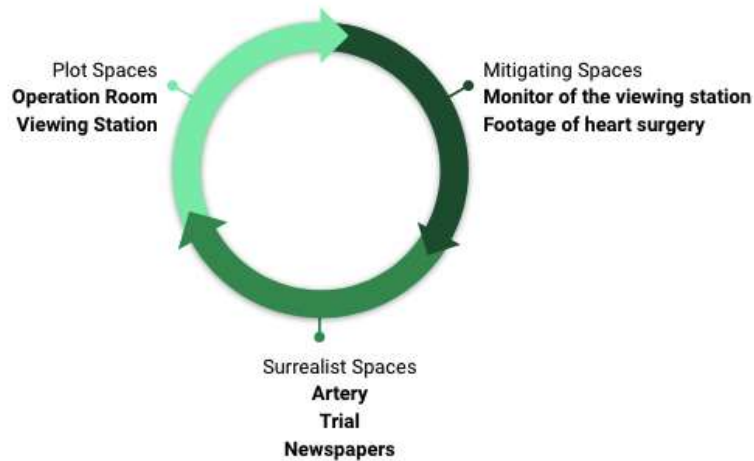
One of the instances in the film that are very personal and intimate to Chahine's life, is the shock of going under anaesthesia in a life-threatening heart operation. It refers to Chahine's actual heart attack that he had during the shooting of *The Sparrow*. However, the way it is treated in the film expands this personal experience exalting it into an international newsworthy event. "Chahine's cinematic practice operated at the intersections between esthetic and political expressions, and personal creativity and collective responsibility." (Khouri, 226). "For the first time ever a non-political event has attracted such widespread attention, hundreds are fascinated by this strange case" an unknown reporter narrates the entry of the family to the trial space that acts as a parallel of the operation room.

Even though the whole film's story is about the trial set during the operation, the sequence that catapults it, the inciting incident with the first appearance of young Yehia and the exposition of the trial space. The sequence is a montage that joins different spaces seamlessly. The spaces can be categorised into plot spaces like the operation room with Dr. Magdy<sup>28</sup> and an unconscious adult Yehia, the viewing station where resident doctors observe the operation. Inside the viewing station, there is a monitor that broadcasts a closer look onto the heart operation where footage of an actual heart surgery is shown; this is to be categorised as mitigating spaces. There is also a close up of an artery, where young Yehia appears as a clot amongst a fury of white and red balloons, and finally the space of the trial that looks like a ribcage where press and journalists gather to report the case giving way to the last space which is the print titles of a newspaper reminiscent of the opening titles of *The Sparrow*; surrealist spaces.



---

<sup>28</sup> referring to OM FRS Magdy Yacoub (1936- ), a famous heart surgeon that resided in England



The diagram above highlights how the spaces feed off each other. The plot spaces lead to the mitigating spaces that prepare the audience for the surrealist spaces. AbdelSalam establishes each space separately and then she jumps within them in a logical order; plot, mitigating then surrealist spaces in order to facilitate the understanding for the audience. In the example below, the audience sees a doctor in the viewing station looking at the monitor, from there it is justified to cut to footage of a real heart operation and with a zoom comes the reveal of the surrealist space - the artery, where young Yehia sleeps.



Once the logic is established, AbdelSalam jumps freely in between the spaces in order to raise the tension and once the logic is established and the audience is familiarised with the different spaces, AbdelSalam plays more freely with her cuts jumping in between spaces more sporadically and at a faster pace. Like in the example below she jumps from a plot space, the operation room directly to the surrealist space of the artery with young Yehia pushing through the balloons/blood cells then back to a mitigating space - the viewing station. By doing this she managed to create a flurry of tension and engage the audience

with the unfolding of the surrealist space and to follow as young Yehia wakes up and puts his adult self on trial.





## Newsreel Footage in the Collective Spirit

While in *Alexandria... Why?*, the usage of newsreel footage was categorised in three: newsreel as newsreel, newsreel integrated and affective newsreel. In *An Egyptian Story*, the usage of newsreel footage evolved. “The film creates a historical framework through flashbacks by incorporating archival footage of the British occupation of Egypt, the French occupation of Algeria, the Cannes Film Festival, and [Umm] Kalthoum at the Cairo Opera House.” (Lekatsas, 145) The first instance of newsreel footage used in the film was when Yehia accuses King Farouk of raping his country because of his lean reign. This scene was discussed above in the first chapter of this part: *General Structure of An Egyptian Story*, and it paved the way for future usage of newsreel footage. In this chapter, the newsreel footage will be categorised according to their subject . First is Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second president of the new republic of Egypt “[whose] era was characterised by heady optimism, dreams of modernization, social welfare, and regional and global prestige.” (Gordon, 209) Second is Umm Kulthum, the renowned singer named ‘the Planet of the East’ as she was recognized and deeply celebrated in the whole Arab region.

### 1- Gamal Abdel Nasser:

While in King Farouk’s scene the usage of the newsreel footage was thematic in order to make a statement against him, below is an example where the use of footage is illustrative. When Yehia and Mahdi listen to the radio they hear the news about the nationalisation of the Suez canal - a major win against the British occupation. Out of their joy, AbdelSalam cuts to a montage that demonstrates what happened exactly by featuring footage from Nasser’s speech as well as footage that illustrates Nasser’s rise of popularity. From a personal experience of listening to the radio, the film takes on a general note showing the feelings of the whole population.



While Chahine was previously criticised for being subservient to Nasser and his politics with his film *Saladin* (1963). Here Chahine takes a stance, since this scene doesn't end on the happy note that is put forth, rather it shows a critical view of Nasser; by jumping in time from Mahdi, an avid Nasser supporter to Mahdi being imprisoned<sup>29</sup> by Nasser, highlighting Nasser's political paranoia:

Chahine's auteurism, therefore, cannot be divorced from the dynamics of cultural struggle and political commitment. Throughout his career, Chahine's socially and nationally oriented preoccupations and their cinematic expressions were developed in propinquity to modernist self-reflexive stylistic practices. As such, the filmmaker's work uniquely contributed to the evolution of the nationalist cultural thrust within Egyptian and Arab cinemas in general.(Khouri, 223)



Moreover, AbdelSalam's prolific usage of sound is once again used here as she takes on the usage of archival footage not simply in image but also in sound. Towards the end of the film in the shooting of a scene from *The Sparrow*, the voice of Nasser appears announcing his resignation after the great defeat of 1967. His speech is very well known and easily recognised in Egypt as it catalysed major protests, showing the people's support to Nasser, asking him to rescind his resignation. This is an example of a double usage of the sound snippet, as it was featured in the film *The Sparrow* but it is also to highlight Chahine's mature stance on Nasser through the eyes of Yehia. Once again we go from the private to the collective, by using the footage in two ways; illustrative and affective.

---

<sup>29</sup> Note the framing of both Yehia and Mahdi. Both are caged. Mahdi is imprisoned while Yehia is metaphorically imprisoned within himself

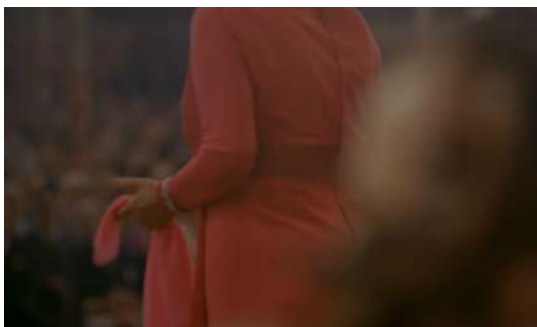
## 2- Umm Kulthum:

In this sequence, Yehia and Amal go to an Umm Kulthum's concert, primarily the usage of newsreel can be seen as 'newsreel integrated' as the audience are exposed to the concert from Yehia's point of view. Yet another example of Rashida AbdelSalam's usage of Kuleshov's creative geography: a character's gaze matched with what they are looking at.



Even though they aren't cut one right after the other, the context is established well enough that the lack of proximity of the shots doesn't work against the understanding of the cohesion of space.

Nevertheless, because of the specific framing of several shots below which are an impossible point of view of the concert as they aren't from the point of view of the audience or any of the characters, rather the shots are from behind the orchestra and behind the stage. That's why the usage of this footage is elevated from being 'newsreel integrated' within the context of the story of the film to another level, making Chahine an archivist and not simply referencing the concert. "This is the only colour footage of Umm Kulthum ever recorded, giving Chahine the role of cultural archivist as well as creative artist." (Massad, 80)



In this sequence, Yehia's private life is collapsing. The distance between his wife and himself is widening. Umm Kulthum's lyrics: *All those days gone by. Only now do I realise how precious time is*, emphasising Yehia's state of mind. Chahine talks about this in the documentary series *Chahine Why* and says: "the words used in that song are all that I wanted to say but didn't know how. Someone had already written it better than I could have ever had and sang it with much more heart." In such an intimate moment the rest of the characters are present: Nabaa with his bastard son, Mahdi, as well as AbdelHadi the censor. From a private intimate moment, Chahine and AbdelSalam reorganise it to become a collective experience, everyone is enjoying Umm Kulthum. The usage of the footage expands from simply being integrated within the plot to having an affective undertones as well as becoming an archive. The line between the private and the collective is broken.

Humour compensates for the bitterness of Chahine's film. Liberty and freedom of expression are the artist's goal, and so much of the narrative of the trilogy deals with holding on to what vestiges one could have of one's rights. There are more fictional and surreal sequences in *An Egyptian Story*, and it is not fully clear if Chahine wants the viewer to make a connection between his personal quest for international recognition and respect with that of his country's or if the family squabbles are symbolic of Egypt's factionalism. (Lekatsas, 145)

In this film Chahine sheds his minor status from the content of the film. He portrays his christianity as forced and let's go of it, he folds the filmic language on itself, yet he still clings on the private and the collective being one. It can be said that Chahine deviates from Deleuze's three conditions for minor cinema but not fully yet.

## Alexandria: Again and Forever

In the final instalment of the trilogy *Alexandria: Again and Forever* (1990), Chahine himself takes up the role of his alter-ego Yehia. Actualising himself as the outlier director that he is, Chahine evokes socio-political themes in an imaginative and innovative way within the historical context of the Egyptian Actor's Union strike of 1987<sup>30</sup>. "The film is a surreal presentation of Chahine's life between filmmaking and living; between the staging of Anthony and Cleopatra, an Egyptian actors' union strike, and state-sponsored anti riot teams; between ancient dictators (Alexander the Great) and present ones; and between artists committed to art and artists committed to money." (Massad, 80). Moreso, the film opens with a melancholic song of the soliloquy of Hamlet "To be or not to be" as a reiteration of Chahine's identity crisis. It can be argued that with this film, Chahine sheds his minor status and replaces it with an individualistic approach that materialises in the character of Nadia, the upcoming rebellious actress representative of the younger generation. This part is divided into three sections paralleling Deleuze's conditions of minor cinema. Yet, unlike in the previous parts where the editing techniques are listed to affirm Deleuze's theory, here they are to illustrate Chahine's active disassociation from it.

---

<sup>30</sup> "The Egyptian parliament had passed laws governing unions that would have allowed the term of each head of the union to run forever. One of the remarkable things about the film is how Chahine filmed the fictional strike in the exact locations where it had happened with the people who had participated in the strike, inserting footage of the actual strike, documentary footage from the union's conference that was organised as part of the strike. The conference issued a declaration that eventually led to the government backing down and rolling back the changes in the union law." (Arroyo)

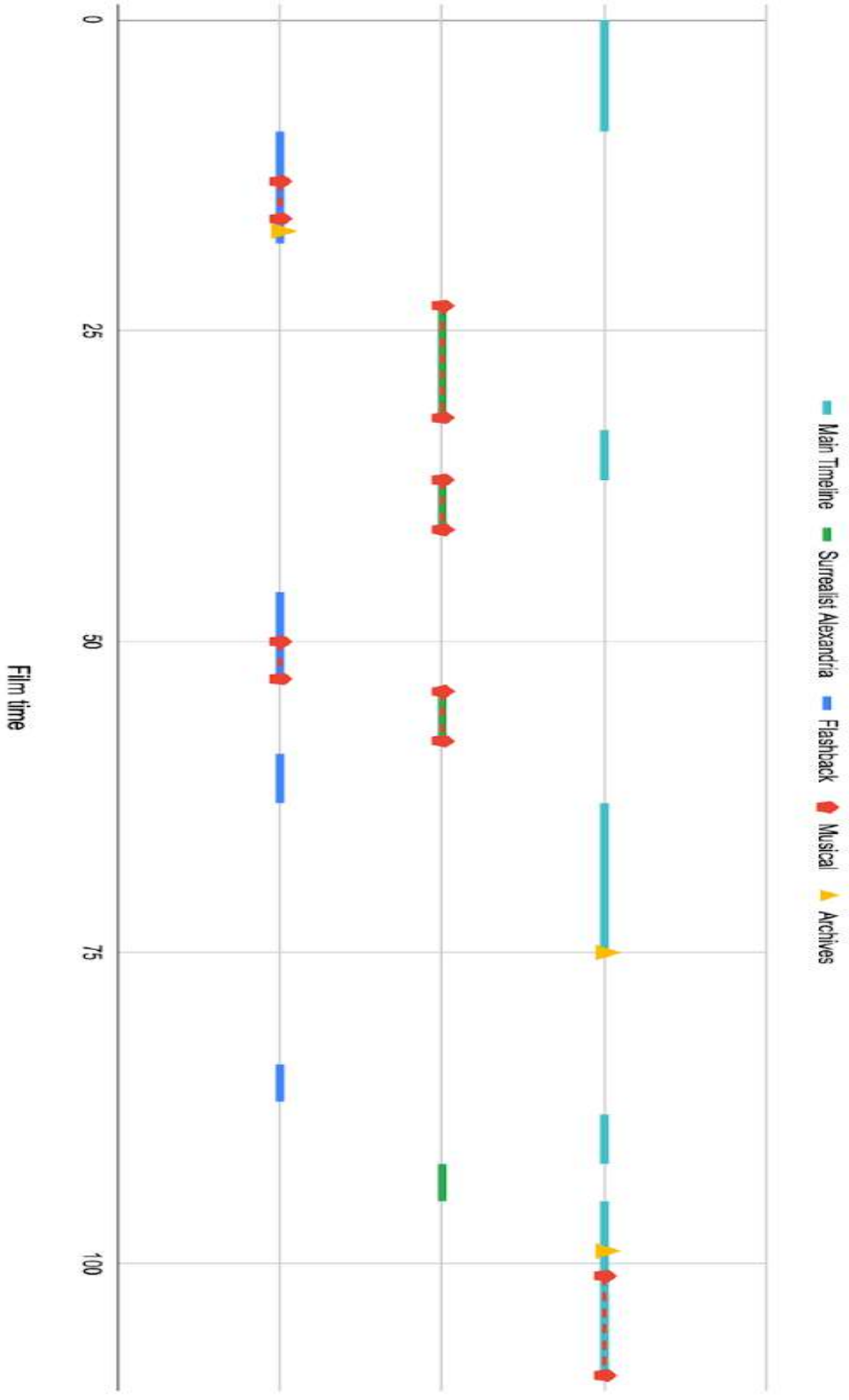
## **Compositional Mode of Fantasy & Reality**

While the re-invention of people in *Alexandria ... Why?* is based on their status as ethnic minorities, the re-invention of people in *An Egyptian Story* lies on Chahine's personal retelling of how he sees his people, in *Alexandria: Again and Forever* however, the re-invention of people strays away from Deleuze's principal concept based on minorities and takes the form of re-inventing people and characters in between realms: the real and the fantastical, the former what could be seen as objective truth in the characters and the latter in the subjectivity implied by Chahine/Yehia's gaze which takes place in several musical sequences. So the first chapter will tackle the structure of the film and how it alternates from the objective to the fantastic, and the second chapter will focus on the breakdown of characters and the dialectic approach in the representation of the character Amr.

## **General Structure of *Alexandria: Again and Forever***

While it's difficult to encompass the plot and the story of the film in a few lines, it is necessary to break the structure of the film using the diagram below and from there elaborate on the story and the timelines's dynamics. The film's structure is divided into three timelines; the main timeline, the surrealist timeline and the flashbacks. Within those timelines, there are recurring motifs such as the usage of archives marked with the yellow triangle and musical interludes marked with the red hexagons. The main timeline is the present time, where the filmmakers' union strike ensues. While in reality the film's main story is of Yehia's falling out with his favourite actor Amr and his search for a muse takes precedence but with the inclusion of the strike Chahine threads the surrealist timelines that binds the main timeline with the flashbacks.

The flashbacks are mainly about Yehia's arduous relationship with Amr in film festivals failing to garner the recognition they deserve. Towards the second half of the film, as their falling out unfolds, Yehia's hunt for a muse shifts from Amr to Nadia in the main timeline as well as the surreal one. In a circular way, the film starts with "To be or not to be" and Chahine's obsession with Hamlet and ends with Nadia, the new generation's voice asking for the right of individuality.



In Malek Khouri's book *The Arab National Project in Youssef Chahine's Cinema*, Khouri parallels the non-linear structure of Chahine's films to a tradition in Arabic poetry labelled as "decentering" coined by Malkums and Armes where they explain it as "in classical Arab poetry there is [a] dialectic of place and displacement [...] The poem would begin as the poet returns to traces, to an abandoned campsite, and tries to name who was there before him. Long misread as some kind of exercise in description, a search for a tribe, a manifestation of lack, of separation, of desire, as the classical poem develops, this feeling of incompleteness is assuaged as the poet leaves the desert". Based on this tradition of storytelling the connections between the timelines is clearer and justified. Since the whole film becomes an introspection of Yehia's relationship with Amr. Similar to the poet that traces the story, Yehia does too. Here the campsite is the strike acting as the backdrop of the story where Yehia's exposure to different people impacts his memory, perspective, and shapes the whole film, highlighting his desires and lacks. In a sense the three timelines pour into each other. Below are some examples:

While physically present in the previous two instalments, Yehia's mother here is present in the form of portraits in the main timeline and the flashback. The set design and especially the blocking of Yehia highlights her presence.





An example of reality feeding into the fantastic is the costume design of Magdy played by Hesham Selim, similarly to the reality residue in dreams, Magdy's pyjama that he



wears during the strike is blue, while his rebel outfit in Alexander the Great's operette is also blue.

A more advanced example is Marianne Khoury, she is the producer of the film. Her name appears in the credits, and she physically appears in the flashback timeline during the Berlin Film Festival, and hands an award to Yehia and Amr for their film *Alexandria... Why?*, later she appears to be working and reporting the strike.



It can be regarded as a casting mistake but it isn't, it is Chahine's emphasis on the frailty of memory and how it bleeds into the present and vice-versa.

Moreover this malleable form of memory that crosses the present and the past also passes to the surrealist timeline. In the scene below, Yehia and Nadia talk about Alexandria, Alexander the Great and the lighthouse, then Nadia excuses herself to wash her feet leaving Yehia in awe of her manners. The exchange between them triggers a surrealist sequence about the sculptor of Alexandria's lighthouse and his hunt for the perfect feet. This marks the beginning of the shift of Nadia's status to a muse in Yehia's eyes.



“These interrupted traces and reconnections as expressed in classical Arabic poetry[...]where stories emerge from one another and sometimes are revisited after a brief or elongated sojourn. This back and forth tug between the linear and the non-linear, the controlled and the spontaneous, easily traced throughout the narrative structure of Chahine’s cinematic work, is therefore deeply entrenched within an authentic Arab artistic tradition.”(Khouri, 218)

AbdelSalam is once again faced with the problem of having to cross between the timelines, jumping backwards in time or falling into a surrealist sequence. In order to do so, in an understandable way she employs similar techniques that were used in the previous instalments but the maturity of her work and Chahine’s are obvious in the details:

### 1- Graphic Cuts

In this case, the cuts aren’t just based on the similarity of their contents - Portraits of Yehia and a marble statue of Alexander the Great at almost the same position. With the contrasting camera movement, a track in on Yehia’s face to underline his thought process juxtaposed with a track out of the marble statue to reveal the space, the cut is extremely smooth and aids the audience to get immersed in the surrealist sequence that is about to ensue.



### 2- Point of View // Thematic Cuts

While the gaze of Yehia strays to the distance, the audience immediately recognizes this trope as a connecting link to a flashback based on the point of view. Yet, what AbdelSalam does to take it to the thematic level is cutting it from a steady shot of Yehia to a dynamic shot of Amr opening a package. From the quiet in Yehia’s gaze to the brutal sound of the shredding of the paper foreshadows and acts as a physical metaphor of the rupture in

their relationship and the tension that fills the whole scene. In that way a simple point of view cut is elevated to a thematic one.



### 3- Sonic Cuts:

When Yehia is tasked with writing to write a new script, he gets distracted and puts on his cassette player playing *Walkin' My Baby Back Home* by Nat King Cole, as he looks into the distance, the song is jarringly interrupted by the whistling of the kettle, breaking the audience's haze with Yehia's to a flashback. This sonic disruption heightens the audience's attention and makes the cut to another timeline easily digested. It is important to note that Nat King Cole's song plays again in an upcoming scene where Yehia and Amr dance in celebration, so here the song's choice acts as a sonic memory residue that crosses the timelines but also this technique is reminiscent of Pelechian's montage at a distance where a motif is incepted in one scene then unveiled completely in a follow up scene, allowing the audience to link the situation and its importance.



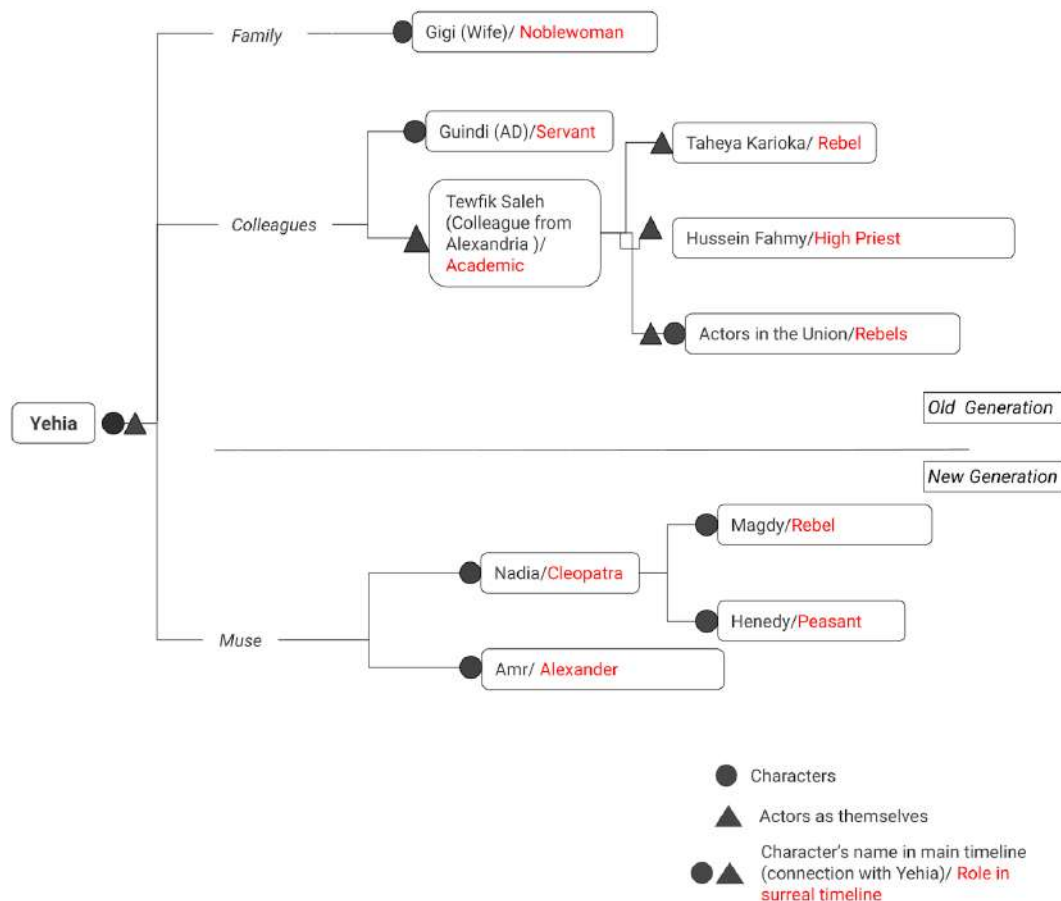
Another example of contrasting sounds that heighten the audience's attention is when AbdelSalam cuts from the calming songbird in Yehia's imagined surrealist operette where Amr is coronated in Siwa as if he is Alexander the Great to the loud noise of the strike and the gathering of the crowd in front of the union's office.



So in the final instalment, AbdelSalam uses the same techniques she used in the previous instalments yet, this time she expands on each one to elevate the meaning, engages the audience and advance the plot on different levels; story and emotions altogether.

## Breakdown of Characters featuring a dialectic muse

Unlike the two previous instalments' characters breakdown's diagrams, the below diagram is horizontal and not vertical. This change in direction is meant to reflect the shift in Chahine's composition of the missing people. They are no longer dependent on him and they are no longer missing; rather they become individuals. They do not fall under a certain ethnic minority like in *Alexandria... Why?* nor a category of society like in *An Egyptian Story*, they are simply artists, united in their hunger strike. The main difference that separates these individuals is the generation gap dividing them into the old generation and the new one. To compare with *An Egyptian Story* and *Alexandria... Why?*, the line that encompasses Yehia's family has visibly shrunk as the film takes place in the present and it doesn't refer to Chahine's family affairs as much as the other films did.

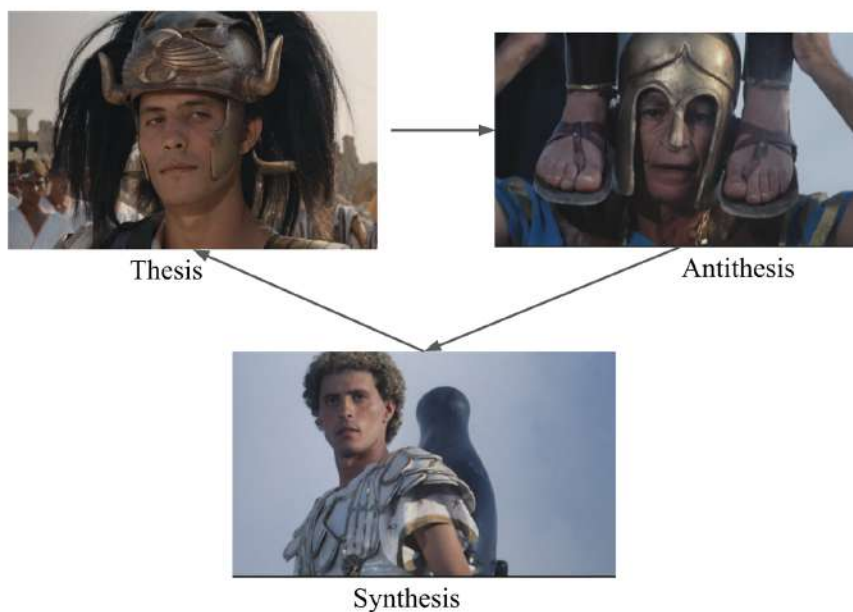


Characters Breakdown of *Alexandria Again, and Forever*

On the contrary it focuses on his colleagues in the strike and his obsession to find a muse, that's why there is a separate thread, especially dedicated to that where Amr (the past muse) and Nadia (the upcoming one) become the inpoint for the new generation of artists to reveal themselves.

Some actors play themselves like Hussein Fahmy, Taheya Karioka and the director Tewfik Saleh forming the old generation. They also play different roles in the surrealist sequences. For example Fahmy becomes a pharaonic high priest that defends Alexander the Great's holiness while on the other side Karioka who leads the hunger strike in the main timeline also leads the rebellion against Alexander in the surrealist timeline.

In that surrealist sequence, "Alexander the Great becomes a musical that parodies the director's obsession with Amr and Stelios' obsession with Alexander. Yet in a musical number debating the true nature of Alexander, we "know that Alexander is partially responsible for Yehia's being what he is, for he had built a magnificent city which became a cradle for many cultures which in turn had helped shape Yehia's character" (Lekatsas, 146). Nevertheless, it is important to note that Chahine is critical of his own obsession and with AbdelSalam's craft, they manage to visualise that through a dialectical approach. In this sequence, Amr transforms from a dark haired man to the blonde god Alexander the Great by literally stepping on Yehia to rise forming a dialectic triangle as shown below:



“The dialectic, as is well-known, is defined by many laws. There is the law of the quantitative process and the qualitative leap: the passage from one quality to another and the sudden upsurge of the new quality .” (Deleuze, *Cinema-1* 37). The above is a clear example of the qualitative leap. From a civilian to a god, Amr transforms on the expense of Yehia and this is visually shown by the construction of that scene as such.

Moreover, this toxic obsession has been hinted at in the first appearance of Amr. Unlike the example above, where the cuts make the dialectics, the example below by using the montage within the image exposes a dialectic truth. When Amr goes to Yehia to tell him that he won't be able

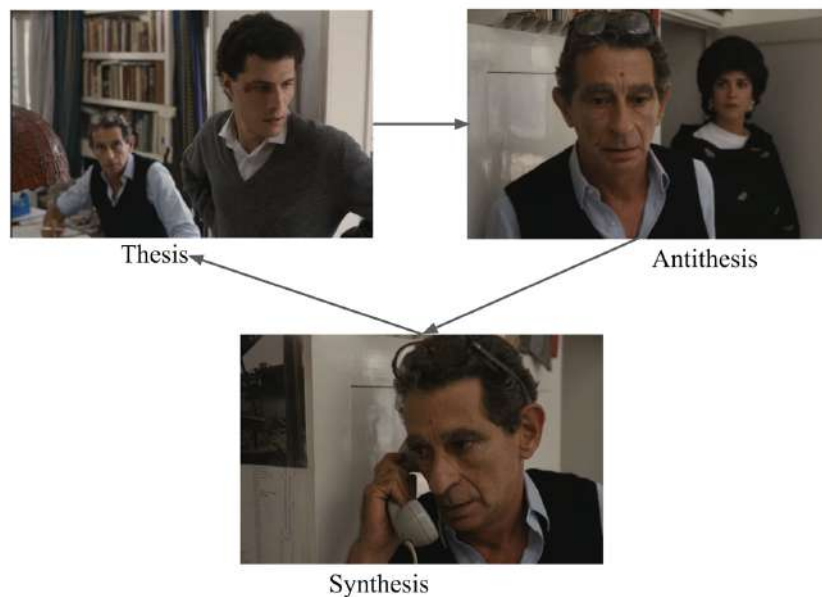
to take up the role of Hamlet (thesis), Yehia begs him to stay to no avail. In this framing,

the position of superiority lies with Amr. Yehia then

follows him to the other side of the room allowing a reframe

with Gigi in the

background telling him off about his futile obsession (antithesis) with Amr, then when the phone rings and he picks up, Gigi leaves culminating the synthesis of this scene and the whole relationship. Yehia will remain alone without support in his hunt for his muse - Amr.



## **Deterritorialization of the Cinematic Language**

At one point in the film Nadia asks Yehia: "You write in English?" he answers her "the dialogue is in Arabic ... it is wittier. French for love scenes, English for precision, and, coming from Alexandria, I get by in Greek, of course!" Similarly to *Alexandria ... Why?* The variety of languages exists and this case of not being able to write in a specific language parallels Deleuze's minor literature theory about Kafka. Yet this deterritorialization of language is specific to Yehia as an Alexandrian individual and no longer generalised to the rest of the people like in *Alexandria ... Why?*. "Chahine's work was becoming increasingly informed by the tension between his love for Hollywood movies and his engagement with the changes affecting his social and political milieu. As such, his work tended to defy prescriptive formulations, and eventually favoured the creation of a cinema anchored in a joint engagement of subjective and social, experimental and popular cinematic perspectives." (Khoury, 226) So, unlike what Deleuze says about the deterritorialization of language for minor filmmakers, and based on the concept of decentering explained above, it can be argued that Chahine's layering of different filmic styles is rooted in an Arabic tradition and on top of that throughout the film you see Chahine's attempts of distancing himself from other cinematic languages (mainly the Hollywood ones) by ironicising them and achieving his own.

## **Hollywood: The Fantastic and the Ironic**

In this chapter, the focus is to highlight Chahine's critical reference of Hollywood tropes, more specifically slapstick comedies and musicals and how Chahine progressively moves away from them to achieve an authentic Egyptian filmic language. There are several instances in the surrealist timeline where Chahine exaggerates a situation to amplify its irony through humour and those scenes become physical comedy and slapstick humour.

When Yehia argues with Nadia over Cleopatra's intentions, him seeing them malicious and her seeing them noble, Yehia delves into the surrealist realm with a hypothetical scene on what happened between Cleopatra and Antony. Yehia plays Antony and Nadia Cleopatra. Their characteristics are oversimplified and ridiculous, filled with



asynchronous details like Antony wearing eyeglasses for example. When Cleopatra seduces Antony by undressing the humour heightens, it starts with the exaggerated performance by Chahine crossing his eyes to the set design with the phallic symbol of a cannon breaking into the ship and drenching their bed with water. On top of the scene being edited in a fast pace both the picture and sound are sped up, moving this scene into the slapstick realm, with squeaky sounds as well as cartoon-like movements.



Yet, what makes this scene critical of slapstick lies in AdelSalam's proficient use of sound. When the attack happens, the fanfare of 20th Century Fox blares and ends with MGM's lion roar relegating the slapstick to Hollywood's studio system and mocking it.

In another sequence, when Nadia and Yehia discuss her feet, Yehia starts thinking about her as a potential collaborator and muse. In that scene Nadia's playfulness is shown through physical humour, pranking the workers in the sculptor's studio by using the rope as a bait where they fall in. She goes across the studio in Tarzan fashion hanging from a rope with Tarzan's chanting sound. The scene is filled with sonic jokes and visual ones.



At the peak of the chase scene Nadia pushes a fist into the sculptor resulting in him fainting in a silly fashion with an animated halo on his head.



Nevertheless, it is the ending of that scene that highlights Chahine's mockery. When finally Nadia settles down and decides to pose as a model for the sculpture's feet she is shown standing tall with flowing hair, the lighting is even flattering too in a long shot. So when Gigi as a noblewoman says:

— “Her beauty is divine. Otherwise where is that wind coming from?”



Yehia retorts: “Don't be silly we put fans in front of her”

breaking the beautiful moment with witty humour that also breaks the fourth wall and the suspension of disbelief. In that way, Chahine is self-aware and critical of his need for a muse that ironically only he can make through filmic tools; light and props.

The Yehia in *Alexandria... Why?* was fascinated by Hollywood musicals and three filmic decades later this fascination persists. So no wonder there are several musical based sequences in this instalment. Yet, what marks their importance is their union with the plot. The dances don't take an additional quality of the film, rather an essential one that shows the characters' feelings and emotions as well as progressing the narrative. So when Amr and Yehia win in Berlin Film Festival, they celebrate by dance:



The camera movement works with the minimalist staging and cold bluish lighting to focus our cinematic gaze on the couple, their contradictory relationship and Yehia/Chahine's continued struggle with his alter ego. The dance choreography itself keeps Yehia and Amr at the center of the frame, but it also intermittently pulls them apart into two performative solitudes foreshadowing their imminent parting. Furthermore, and despite his youthful vigor, Amr's dancing allows him just enough freedom to remain within the filmmaker's orbit as he emulates a male bird flapping his wings to impress his female object of desire. The scene reiterates Yehia's performing artist ego's struggle between controlling and loving Amr. (Khouri, 161)

It's a Gene Kelly type dance over Nat King Cole's *Walkin' My Baby Back Home*<sup>31</sup>. It is a flirtatious dance filled with love and lust in their gaze. The editing is smooth and matches the american-like choreography. The cuts are made to flow with the rhythm of the song. Moreso, in this scene Yehia promises Amr an award in Cannes, yet when that promise isn't met another dance sequence<sup>32</sup> ensues showing Amr's disappointment. The contrast in the editing technique in between those two scenes is great. As the former is edited to the rhythm of the song while the latter is edited to the lyrics of the songs to amplify the emotions.

Moreover, "[the dance] also contemplates a period in Chahine's career when he was criticised for becoming overly self-indulgent and elitist, and for losing his focus on Egypt's social and political problems. But on another level the sequence also functions allegorically as a sly expression of postcolonial resistance. The dance takes place in a snowy European country, and dance assumes its shape to the tune of an American song. (Khoury, 161). On top of the postcolonial resistance with the choice of song, there is another sequence in the film where Chahine defends his authenticity as an Egyptian. The whole sequence is set in ElHusseini a famous neighbourhood in

Cairo where crowds from all over the country gather to celebrate the prophet's birth, the setting shifts from a snowy European country to a truly Egyptian locus and when Yehia is challenged into a game of *tahteeb*<sup>33</sup> he gladly accepts. The challenge occurs silently, it is with a raise of a stick that



the signal of challenge is issued. To illustrate this tension, AbdelSalam uses sound by silencing it altogether. The game starts and the only sound the audience hears is of the sticks hitting each other. AbdelSalam also extends the moment when Yehia is winning by lingering

---

<sup>31</sup> Check chapter *General Structure of Alexandria: Again and Forever* for the foreshadowing use of this song

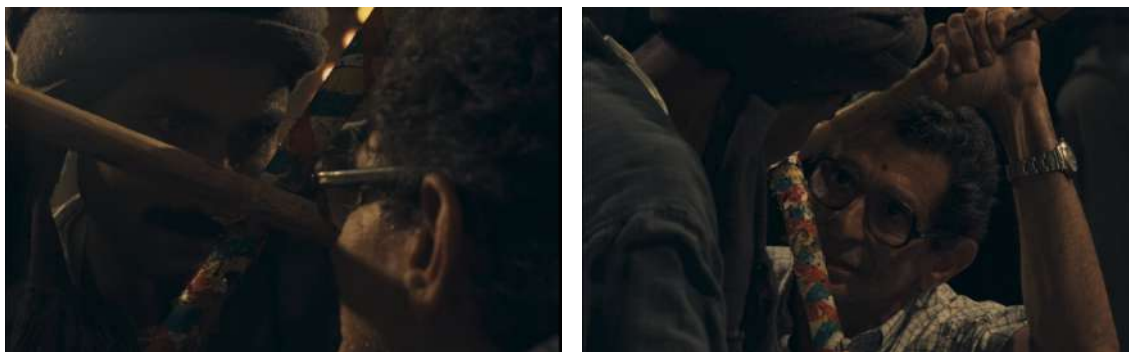
<sup>32</sup> This sequence is discussed in detail in the following chapter: *Case Study: Cannes Film Festival Scene*

<sup>33</sup> A traditional martial art that uses sticks and is reserved to men. It's mainly performed in festivities over music.

on the shot and its reverse punctuating their gaze. There is no sound of sticks hitting, rather they are pushing each other in silence. This rupture in sound allows the audience to see Yehia's infatuation.



Yet when the roles are reversed and the opponent is on top and Yehia is below an affectionate music starts and AbdelSalam cuts to the tighter shots allowing the audience to sympathise with Yehia. This change in strategy, with switching from only diegetic sounds to



the musical score, plays deeply with the audience's emotional understanding.

In sum, Chahine appropriates Hollywood tropes like slapstick and musicals by inverting them on themselves, ironicising them and using them for his own gain - to show his authentic Egyptian side. This is aided by stylised editing from AbdelSalam's side speeding up some shots in order to create humour while also managing to elongate shots in order to punctuate an emotion, a meaning and a statement of loss and love.

## Case Study: Cannes Film Festival Scene

When Amr loses in Cannes after Yehia gives him high hopes their relationship becomes irredeemable. The rupture of their relationship is shown in a form of dance full of heartache and expressionism. The sequence<sup>34</sup> is marked by a lot of camera movement and track outs mimicking the distance between them. It begins with Yehia and Gigi slowly climbing down the stairs and as soon as they exit the frame, a man's feet walks in and drops his cassette player (Shot 5C) - it is Amr. With the drop of the cassette Umm Kulthum's<sup>35</sup> *Fat ElMaad* starts and so does the dance.



The camera follows Amr in his dance moves and AbdelSalam cuts in continuity, showing the choreography that heightens Amr's despair. Yet, the dance is suddenly interrupted and the music stops as Amr runs and looks down to Yehia (Shot 8) who is being offered champagne by other people who are celebrating their win (Shot 9A). At this moment, Dalida's *Mais il y'a l'accordéon* starts in-media-res with the verse 'In my illusions I see that Earth is red with passion' signalling the gap in communication. Yehia thinks in French and is aware of Amr's despair, yet Amr choses Arabic to show his authentic side. Here AbdelSalam plays with the sound by her meticulous choice of cuts on lyrics but also with

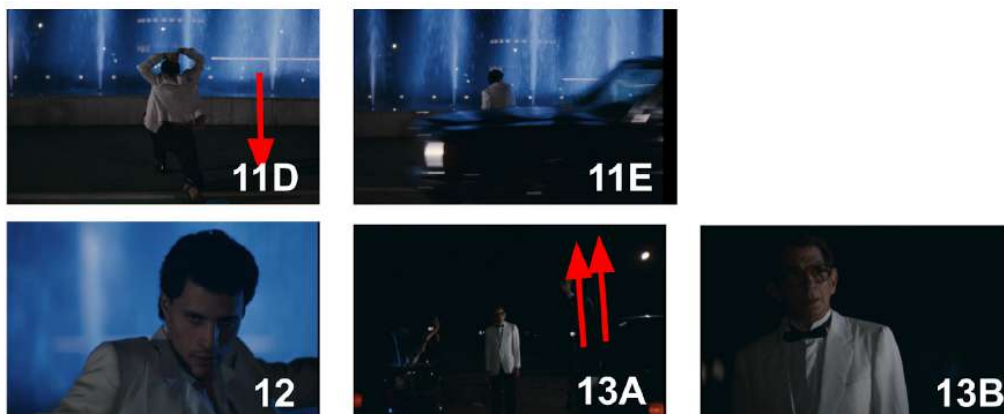
<sup>34</sup> A shot by shot breakdown is available in the appendix

<sup>35</sup> This is the second time Chahine uses Umm Kulthum's song to describe a character's feelings in the trilogy. The previous time was discussed in detail in chapter: *Newsreel Footage in the Collective Spirit*.

the length of the shot (Shot 9B) to emphasise Yehia’s despair as the shot lingers on him alone and the camera tracks out to show his solitude.



The car moves away and the camera tracks out to go back to Amr’s dance; the fastest cut happens here when Amr (Shot 12) turns with his blaming eyes to Yehia with Umm Kulthum’s chagrined voice singing: ‘*Enough suffering and misery*’ then cuts back to Yehia with the only shot in the scene that combines a track in and a zoom (Shot 13) to emphasise his inability to do anything, his inability to salvage this rupture and to further clarify the situation, Umm Kulthum sings: ‘*Why do you blame me? What's there in my hand to do?*’.



AbdelSalam’s edit respects the continuity of the choreography but she also advances the emotional weight of the scene by editing the sound to stop and play in important moments, as well as editing to the lyrics of the songs to reflect the emotions of the characters and exalt them. Moreso, by saving a unique camera movement to be used only once (Shot 13) at the end of the scene, ammplifies the whole scene and especially Yehia’s heartbreak.

## Collective Utterances:

Extending on the decentering concept discussed above, Khouri continues and says: “[It] is within a similar framework and dialectic that Chahine finds himself interacting with the politics of each of the historical periods depicted in his films. As a result, the body of Chahine’s work assumes the same sense of uncertainty characterising the unfinished social and national Arab project itself, the project that preoccupied his life and his cinema.” (Khouri, 218) and in the case of *Alexandria: Again and Forever* the socio-political period is fixed within the event of the actors’ union strike of 1987.

The film revolves around this event where a collective ensues to protest the new changes of the law that would impose a dictatorial head of union. Nevertheless, what would have been a great opportunity to mesh the voices of the people into one voice for the sake of the collective, Chahine scrapes that for the fight of individuality highlighting the uncertainty mentioned by Khouri. This uncertainty is personified in the relationship of Nadia and Yehia. Nadia becomes a voice that fights for its individuality and her own freedom and Yehia finally understands that. That’s why even though the collective utterance wins in the face of dictatorship Chahine sees it as a loss of individual selves and criticises that. It is a fine thread to cross, since the result is positive yet the process amalgamated the artists’ different voices across generations as one - something that Chahine opposes greatly. His opposition is visualised in an operette sequence and through his diverse use of archival footage, each will have a dedicated chapter.

## An Operetta's Dialectics

“I think that politics are inevitable. Politics control our lives the way world economics influences our local economy and how that influences our social life [...] But the point is, in film, you can't bring politics out as a slogan. You have a drama first, a drama of people being influenced by a certain type of political situation, but the drama comes first. Youssef Chahine said” (Massad, 88). The falling out of Youssef Chahine and the actor Mohsen Mohieldine that played Yehia in *Alexandria... Why?* Becomes the basis of the drama. Nevertheless, Chahine being self-critical and self-reflexive includes masterfully the socio-political context to produce an engaging drama. In the discussed sequence, Yehia laments his obsession over Amr as he sees him fit to be Alexander the Great while everyone in his surrounding objects.

So in the form of an operetta the coronation of Amr as Alexander happens within the backdrop of an uprising - the union strike bleeding into the fantastic. Here Chahine replaces the Christian motifs used in the previous two instalments with Pharaonic, Greco-Roman and more traditional motifs. The sequence was shot in Siwa, an oasis in the Egyptian western desert where the real Alexander the Great was crowned. The authenticity of the space is contrasted with asynchronous elements like the hookah in the background and the backgammon in the middle ground, accentuating the surreal and the fantastic aspect of Yehia's perspective.



In this sequence, through dialectics through the montage within an image first and second through the editing and AbdelSalam's craft, Chahine exposes the individuality of his perception negating a collective voice.



### 1- Dialectics within the image:

Within the same shot with the actors' movement and blocking a triadic structure of



dialectics ensues. In the example above, Magdy the young actor becomes a leader of the rebellion. By first walking alone, he progressively gathers a crowd. By reaching his hand out to a young boy, the crowd appears from left and right and fills the frame. Yet Magdy keeps walking forward till he exits the frame but nonetheless the crowd gets bigger and bigger. In a sense it is through him (thesis) that the younger generation (antithesis) can follow and become a true revolution (synthesis) even without him.

Another example is during Yehia's song, where he persists in his admiration and fascination with Amr/Alexander. He sings: "If he weren't a God, then I would be the blind fool" and to contrast his blind love, Yehia walks through the devastation made by Alexander.



It starts with a hanging man in the background and continues to scenes of torture. It is important to note that the people who are representing the force are dressed in police helmets - they were previously shown in front of the union's office. The progression of the devastation accelerates till Yehia leaves the frame leaving the Mountain of the Dead (a monument in Siwa) in the background representing the synthesis of his love - destruction and death.

## 2- Edited Dialectics:

Moreover, AbdelSalam uses a triadic structure to her editing in order to showcase the brutal force of this so-called God/Alexander. The first triadic instance is discussed in the above chapter: *Breakdown of Characters featuring a dialectic muse* where the audience understands that it is only through Yehia's eyes that Amr can transform into Alexander. Below are examples that exalt the politics in this drama;

Within the tracking shot of one of the protestors there is an insert showing a weapon being pushed behind his back, illustrating that he is forced to change his tone from saying "Alexander is an oppressor" to "Glory to his miracles and dancers". That way a cause and an effect is visualised with the aid of an insert shot in between .



Another example is when one of the peasants talks to the head of the law enforcement (ironically in the real timeline he is the head of the union) pleading his sympathies, he is pushed away only to be shown as a hose spilling blood.



This is a parallel to the real timeline where the head of the union is oppressing any voice that contradicts him. Here it is shown as a visual metaphor.

Last example also parallels the real timeline with Taheya Karioka (the one who led the hunger strike) mocking Alexander (thesis) who in turn shows his true colours - a bubblegum popping fool (antithesis), causing nothing but devastation and destruction (synthesis). Here even in his surrealist imagination, Yehia's colleagues attempt to warn him about his obsession to no avail.



Through dialectics, Chahine and AbdelSalam managed to do several qualitative leaps that highlight the personal within a socio-political context albeit being self-reflexive and critical.

## Chahine, The Activist, the Striker

There are three clear instances of archival usage in *Alexandria: Again and Forever* the first is Chahine watching Gielgud as Hamlet, the second is the footage of the feast in ElHusseini, celebrating the Prophet and the third and last usage is the strike, fixing the film in a specific time and place with a political event. Each instance is edited differently and integrated within the plot and narrative for a different reason.

First, after Yehia and Amr celebrate their win in Berlin, Yehia sits down and explains to Amr his fascination with Shakespeare that was started by watching Gielgud. As Chahine narrates his experience we cut to archival material of Gielgud, this case is unique as the footage isn't film rather a simple photograph. Then AbdelSalam cuts to "[Amr] playing the role of Chahine [Yehia] in a theatre audience watching himself playing a Gielgud interpretation of Hamlet. In this complex and confusing play of images [...] the present moment is suspended by memory. Chahine here masterfully manipulates the shocking effect of photography with the fluid flow of cinema to transmit the past into the present and vice versa." (Khouri, 162)



In this case, the integration of the photographs act as a visual narration that matches the oral one. Nevertheless, by the inclusion of the clip in the middle between Gielgud and Chahine himself of Amr, AbdelSalam mimics Chahine's narcissistic obsession with his muse. Since Amr is playing Yehia instead of Yehia. As Khouri said it is a very complex scene but by framing the clip with the photographs, the audience gets some time to digest its metaphorical meaning. "Chahine's relentless leaps between fact and fiction, the individual and the collective, the personal and the public made these films unique in their challenge to thematic, generic, and stylistic norms in Egyptian and Arab cinemas." (Khouri, 118)

The integration of archival footage of the crowd in ElHussein was done masterfully. AbdelSalam manages to cut from Qinaawi<sup>36</sup> dancing on the TV screen to the people whirling in their prayers. It is a cut on movement as Qinaawi spins the bottle and the man spins his head. The contrast between the american music to which Qinaawi dances on and the traditional song playing in El Hussein is striking that it immediately catapults the audience in the mood of the feast. Here AbdelSalam combines two different types of footage seamlessly: Chahine's own film and the archival footage of ElHussein



The last moment where the archives are used is during the voting on the decision of the union and the end of the strike. In a theatre, artists gather to vote but unfortunately not everyone is allowed to voice their opinion - a unanimous decision is made without considering everyone. Here Yehia frames himself among the archival material as a reporter witnessing the moment but not partaking in it. Having the footage of the artists surrounding his camera makes him act as an archivist recording this moment. The quality of the archives is very similar to the rest of the film since on a technical level they were shot only three years apart. Therefore it could be easy to miss the different types of footage.



---

<sup>36</sup> Qinaawi is the protagonist of *Cairo Station* played by Chahine. Its production was featured in *An Egyptian Story* and its end result as a finished film extends here being featured on TV.

inserts of celebrities like Soad Hosny and Farouk ElFishawy, artists that weren't at all part of the film the audience registers the fact that this footage is archival and represents an objective truth.

It is because of this sad ending that it can be argued that Chahine sheds completely what Deleuze says regarding the collective utterance. To Chahine the collective is no longer important rather the individual opinions are.

– ‘I wish to live among you as my own person with my own identity’ Nadia sings her thoughts and

Yehia/Chahine approves

and sheds a light on that

by letting go of his

camera and focusing his

gaze onto Nadia, spotting

her among the crowd. Albeit without letting go of the bigger picture - the fight for

democracy signing off the film with a title card that reads “In tribute to the struggle of

Egyptian filmmakers and artists for democracy”



## Conclusion

Using the chart below, it is easily noticed how the macro-structure of the trilogy of the films compliment each other. The chart acts as an overview of the setting, characters, archival footage, tropes as well as the three levels of editing within the three films. The settings of the films and their time span overlap, both *Alexandria... Why?* and *An Egyptian Story* cover Yehia's childhood and his story extends till *Alexandria: Again and Forever* with the then present time late 1980s/1990s. *Alexandria... Why?* is set in Alexandria, *An Egyptian Story* in Cairo and the last film's setting includes both cities. The characters' storylines also extend as for example Yehia's dream to become an actor is established in the first instalment, his status as a director is questioned in the second and finally in the last instalment acknowledged and recognized. The secondary characters of family and colleagues are also repeated, for example his friends are shown in the first two instalments then they are replaced by colleagues in the final instalment with a shift in focus from the familial to the political with the union strike as the centrepiece of the film.

Starting with the concept of missing people, the characters' representations and characterisation started primarily ethnically in *Alexandria... Why?* (representing ethnic minorities), then it moved to social categorisation in *An Egyptian Story* and finally to individuals in *Alexandria: Again and Forever*. So in the first instalment, the characters were represented through a complex network of familial and social relationships understood mainly through the script and dialogue of the actors. Then in the second instalment, the characters' representations relied more on formal elements, with theatrical framings reminiscent of Welles and editing within the image where the characters were visually represented. Till finally in the last instalment and through dialectical montage, the characters are represented as individuals. There is a gradation in the levels of the editing as the trilogy progresses. Even though the same tools of editing were used throughout the trilogy, their impact differs greatly.

	<i>Alexandria... Why?</i>	<i>An Egyptian Story</i>	<i>Alexandria: Again and Forever</i>	
<b>Setting</b>	Alexandria	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Cairo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Time span	1930s-1940s	1930s -1970s	1970s-1980s
<b>Characters</b>	Yehia	is a high school student that wishes to become an actor	He is a child putting his adult self on trial. He is a young adult fighting the occupation. He is a director that struggles with recognition.	He is an already recognized director.
	Family	His parents, grandmother, sister and elder brother	His parents, sister and elder brother. His wife and two kids	His wife
	Friends or colleagues	Friends	Friends and colleagues	Colleagues
<b>Archival Footage</b>	Newsreel as newsreel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Newsreel integrated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Affective newsreel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Own films	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Own films integrated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Hollywood Films	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Three levels of editing</b>	Editing within the frame	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Editing with the camera's movement/ Wellesian Montage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Dialectic Montage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Tropes</b>	Hamlet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Chaplin Moustache	Hitler	Teacher	X
	Christian motifs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



As for the deterritorialization of language, the first film *Alexandria... Why?* relied heavily on colonial inspiration referencing both traditional Hollywood and French New Wave techniques while advancing them by manipulating space and time in a creative way. AbdelSalam, inspired from Godard's *Breathless*' jump cuts, extends the concept to jumping in both time and space and not only time within the same scene. On that note, in *An Egyptian Story*, AbdelSalam advances once again the manipulation of space and time by expanding on Kuleshov's creative geography, where Yehia's mind acts as the artificial landscape where logic is established yet the linearity of time is destroyed. Since both versions of Yehia (young and adult) can exist simultaneously and replace each other. That way the deterritorialization of language ceases to be in reference to other languages rather it folds the filmic language on itself. Moreover in *Alexandria: Again and Forever*, Chahine references directly Hollywood cinema yet this time with a critical eye, ironicising his obsession with it and announcing his Egyptian-ness in the form of a raw and authentic musical sequence. This was also accentuated with the sarcastic usage of sound, especially MGM's lion roar that was used to represent admiration in the first instalment and mockery in the last one.

Even though the same tool of dialectics is used in the first and last film, the dialectics used in *Alexandria... Why?* illustrates Yehia's obsession with Hollywood cinema, however, in *Alexandria: Again and Forever*, the use of dialectics represents Yehia's toxic obsession with Amr. "These films incorporate heterogeneous and multitemporal cinematic models to present their subject matter; correlating popular and high art, contemporary and earlier history, and local and foreign perspectives." (Khouri, xiv). This signals a clear shift from Deleuze's theory; moving from a general point of view to a very personal one.

As for the last condition of collective utterance, it was mainly represented through the usage of different mediums such as archival newsreels, archival images, newspaper clippings and sound bites that would on a first level contextualise the story in a specific time and within a specific socio-political context, but also offer an affective reading of the scene. AbdelSalam's mastery of using the different types of footage and how she includes them within the plot of the film, was detailed in the previous parts. First is the most basic usage of the archival footage and that's when the archival material is shown as newsreels as a part of the cinema projection. The second usage is newsreel integrated where the archival material

blends with the film - where the footage acts sometimes as the precursor of an event or a consequence of another.

Lastly is affective newsreel and that's when the archives are used to accentuate a character's emotion; in *Alexandria... Why?* with rhythmic editing of WWII bombing, AbdelSalam mimicked Yehia's anger. In *An Egyptian Story* with the usage of an Umm Kulthum's concert, Yehia's daze was amplified into an existential crisis all the while elevating the status of Chahine to an archivist by using this rare footage, and in *Alexandria: Again and Forever*, Yehia engrained his participation in the union's strike as a fact by relying on real footage of the event, but also in an affective way as he highlighted his opposition and disappointment of the elections' results. It can be traced that slowly the collective dissipates for the sake of the individual. In an interview in the documentary series *Chahine... Why?* Youssry Nasrallah<sup>37</sup> said: "In those films *Alexandria... why?* *An Egyptian Story* and *Alexandria: Again and Forever*, through himself and through his introspection [Chahine] managed to show a democratic awareness" It can be argued that this democratic awareness negates Deleuze's notion of collective utterances.

Furthermore, AbdelSalam's mimesis of the character's psyche is done sometimes through rhythmic montage as mentioned above, or the use of affective newsreels, but also through the destruction of linear temporality by mixing asynchronous with synchronous elements. For example in *Alexandria... Why?* in the cinema where Yehia is exposed and is in awe of the world of Hollywood watching two films, one in colour and the other in black in white, the first being asynchronous to the era and the second synchronous. Also in *Alexandria: Again and Forever* in the operetta where Yehia is in denial over his admiration of Amr, and in other musical sequences where elements like eyeglasses and hookahs appear.

In brief, through advanced manipulation of space and time, destruction of linear temporality, rhythmic montage, dialectical editing, creative usage of sound and combining different types of footage Rashida AbdelSalam alongside Youssef Chahine managed to create a unique Egyptian filmic language that communicates the emotions of the characters all the while revealing a specific cosmopolitan upbringing that strays away from the stereotype of minor and establishes itself as authentic Egyptian.

---

<sup>37</sup> Youssry Nasrallah (1952-) is an award winning Egyptian filmmaker that was also the assistant director in *An Egyptian Story*, *Alexandria: Again and Forever* and other Chahine films

## Bibliography

Abdul-Jabbar, Wisam Kh. *Towards a minor cinema: a Deleuzian reflection on Chahine's Alexandria Why? (1978)*, The Journal of North African Studies, 2015.

Armes, Roy. *Third World Filmmaking and the West*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Arroyo, José. *Youssef Chahine's Career: An Egyptian Perspective Part III*, Web, 2021.

Awad, Mohamed and Hamouda, Sahar. *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria*. Alexandria : Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2006.

Brownlee, Jason. *Violence Against Copts in Egypt*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013.

Chahine, Youssef, dir. *Alexandria ... Why?* Misr International Films, 1979.

—. *An Egyptian Story*. Misr International Films, 1982.

—. *Alexandria: Again and Forever. ?* Misr International Films, 1989.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement - Image*. University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis, 1997.

—. *Cinema 2: The Time - Image*. University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis, 1997.

Ghandour, Mona. dir. *Chahine... Why?*. Misr International Films, 2009.

Epstein, Jean. *Ecrits I, sur le cinéma*, Seghers, 1974.

Fargeon, Michael. *Interview with Youssef Chahine*. UNESCO Courier, 1997.

Fawal, Ibrahim. *Youssef Chahine*. London: British Film Institute, 2001.

Fishere, Ezzedine C. *How Yusuf Idris's Stories Upended Respectability Politics in Egypt*. Penguin Books, 2020.

Gordon, Joel. *The Slaps Felt around the Arab World: Family and National Melodrama in Two Nasser- Era Musicals*. International Journal of Middle East Studies, 2007.

Kassem, Mahmoud *Autobiography in Arab Cinema*. Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, 1995.

Khouri, Malek. *The Arab National Project in Youssef Chahine's Cinema*. The American University in Cairo Press, 2009.

Klawans, Stuart. *Nine Views in a Looking Glass: Film Trilogies by Chahine, Gitai, and Kiarostami*. Parnassus: Poetry in Review, 2001.

Lekatsas, Barbara. *La pensée de midi: Mediterranean Cosmopolitanism in the Work of Camus, Cavafy, and Chahine*. Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, 2014.

Malkmus, Lizbeth and Roy Armes. *Arab and African Film Making*. London: Zed Books, 1991.

"Melodrama." *Oxford Dictionary*, New Oxford American Dictionary.

Samy, Nervana. *Eastern Women as Creators: Rashida AbdelSalam, Best Editor in the History of Egyptian Cinema and a Magician of Dream Realisation*. ElMeezan. Web

Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Wharton, Barrie. *Cultivating cultural change through cinema; Youssef Chahine and the creation of national identity in Nasser's Egypt*. Africana, 2009.

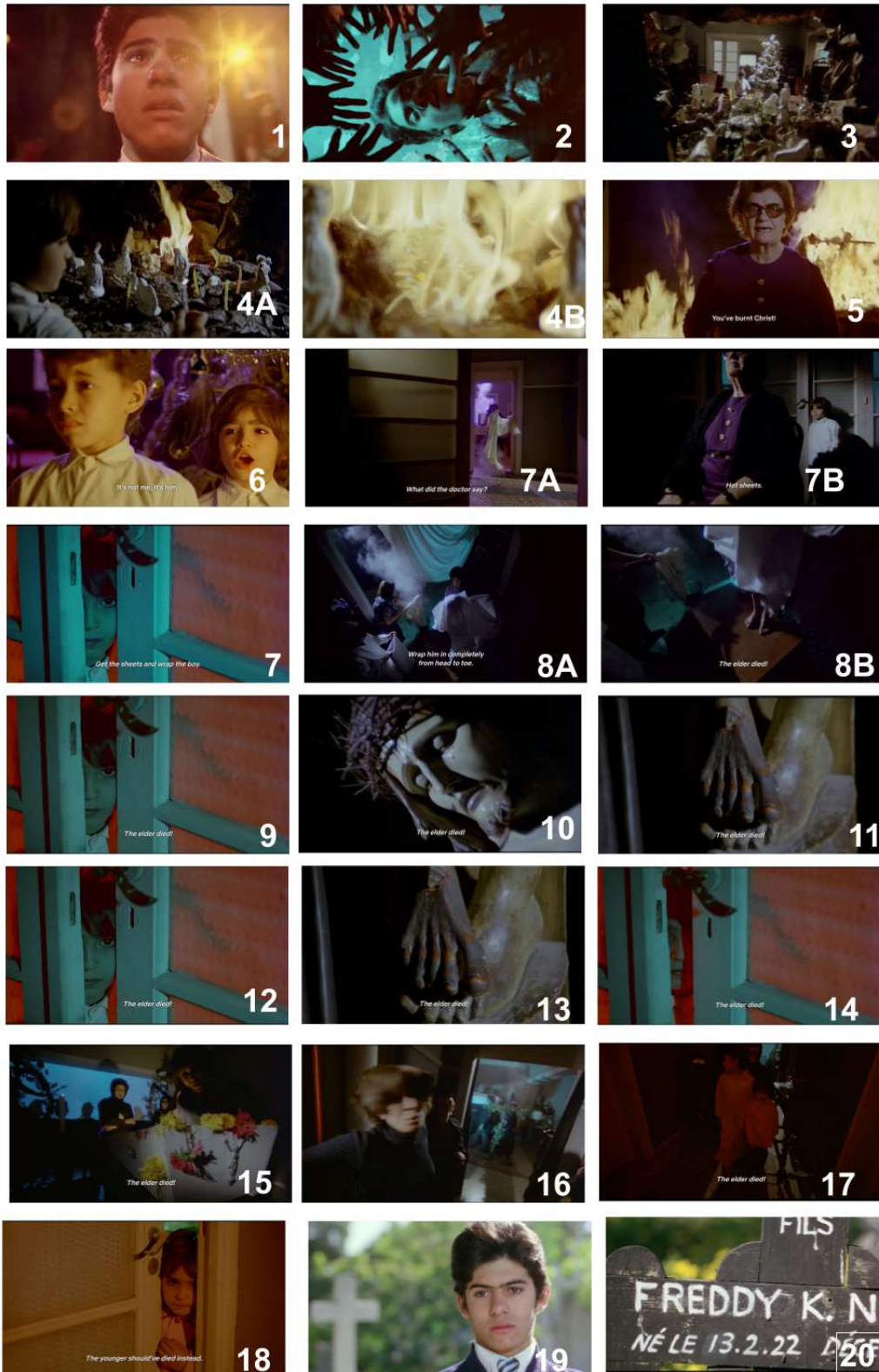
# Appendix

## Alexandria... Why?

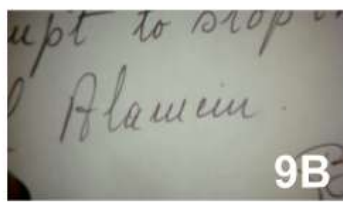
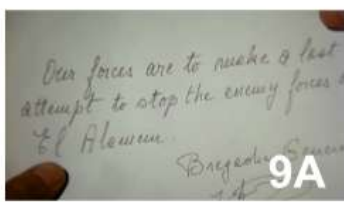
### Colonial Inspiration: Traditional Hollywood & French New Wave



## Atypical Egyptian Melodrama



## Sequence Breakdown: The Play











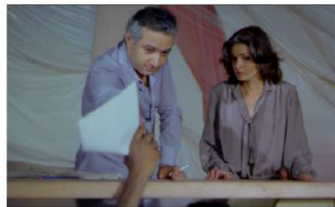


# An Egyptian Story

## General Structure of *An Egyptian Story*



## Inventing People in a Theatrical Trial



# Mise en abyme of a Film





*Cast Credits*



# Alexandria: Again and Forever

Case Study: Cannes Film Festival Scene







