Chapter 13

Cinema, sex tourism and globalisation in American and European cinema

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In this chapter, I will be considering three films that centre on female sex/romance tourism. They are, in order of production, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (Kevin Rodney Sullivan, Twentieth Century Fox, 1998), *Heading South* (*Vers le sud*) (Laurent Cantet, Haut et Court, 2005) and *Paradise: Love* (*Paradies: Liebe*) (Ulrich Seidl, Ulrich Seidl Film, 2012). Why should one look at these three films, given what might seem their rather disconcerting theme? There are at least three reasons that one can give and which will be developed as the chapter progresses. To begin with, cinematic sex/romance tourism engineers a direct collision between northern consumer and southern producer or worker, short-circuiting the usual bodily, spatial and temporal separations between consumption and production. It thus provides a particularly privileged filmic vantage point both on global inequalities and on evolutions in consumption, production and their interaction. Secondly, female sex tourism, a very contested object of study, is a particularly interesting cinematic topos, precisely because of its capacity to probe and unsettle categories and judgements. Thirdly, the films represent very different modes of filmmaking. Despite its refreshing and atypical focus on an older, black women, Sullivan's film is an otherwise standard Hollywood chick flick, a post-feminist reworking of the romance. Despite their differences, Seidl's and Cantet's films are European arthouse works. Although they refuse neat generic categorisation, they do engage with the romance to the extent that they are abortive or grotesque versions of it. Contrasts between the films at the level of genre and style will be a necessary part of our analysis of their engagement with consumption, emotional labour and racialised North–South interactions.

Female sex tourism: a contested object

In stark contrast to its typically utopian and even paradisiacal image, an increasingly globalised tourist industry demands to be understood in broader economic and social contexts. Thus, when Sanchez Taylor analyses sex tourism in the Caribbean, she first places it in a much wider frame. She notes that 'tourism has become central to economic development programmes designed to reverse crippling economic problems and poverty, repay international debts and improve rates of unemployment'. She also notes how agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and policy packages tied to different World Bank loans have undermined traditional subsistence economies and redirected subsidies away from social spending and basic commodities towards the servicing of debt. The poor have increasingly been 'forced to scavenge a living in the informal economy', sometimes by engaging in 'sexual-economic exchanges with tourists' (Sanchez Taylor 2006[BIB-015]: 43). We know that the conventional mise-en-scène of tourism in 'exotic' destinations typically includes the erotic promise of scantily clad bodies, sea, sun, alcohol and lithe, young 'natives'. Stripping this veneer away, Sanchez Taylor reminds us that tourism is conditioned by constraints that work at the macro-economic level of the economy and policy and at the micro-level of working lives and bodily encounters.

With respect to the gendering of sex tourism, Sanchez Taylor suggests that commentators often apply a double standard to the phenomenon, linking men to sex tourism and women to 'romance' tourism, refusing to acknowledge that women tourists can engage in exploitative relationships (Sanchez Taylor 2006[BIB-015]: 43). Kempadoo takes a similar stance. She observes that the 'racialised–sexualised bodies of Caribbean women and men' are made into 'primary resources' that the global tourist industry can 'exploit and commodify' to satisfy the tourist needs of western and North American men *and* women (Kempadoo 2001[BIB-009]: 50). Acknowledging only a degree of asymmetry, she then suggests that male sex

tourists use the Caribbean as a place where they can re-assert their dominance over women, while women carry out 'an experimentation with being able to control men, while retaining a sexualised femininity'. The Caribbean thus serves, she concludes, as a site for 'the (re)construction of First World/white/Western masculinity and femininity' (Kempadoo 2001[BIB-009]: 51). Sanchez Taylor also concludes that 'female tourists who travel … for "romance" or sex exploit Caribbean men in the sense that they wittingly or unwittingly take advantage of unequal global and local power structures in order to both pursue their own sexual pleasure, and to affirm themselves as raced, sexual and engendered beings' (Sanchez Taylor 2006[BIB-015]: 52).

Writing from a radical feminist stance, Jeffreys takes a diametrically opposed position and retains the term 'romance tourism' to differentiate the behaviours of women from those of men. The sexuality of men in a context of male dominance, she suggests, is 'constructed to confirm their masculinity through practices of objectification and aggression'. The clearest expression of this sexuality of dominance, she adds, 'lies in the existence of the sex industry which both reflects and helps to shape it' (Jeffreys 2003[BIB-008]: 228). Dominance spills over into relations between 'beach boys' and tourist women, with the former remaining in control of the sexual interaction. While prostituted women service men without sexual pleasure on their part, local men derive pleasure and prestige from their interactions with female tourists (Jeffreys 2003[BIB-008]: 229). Behind Jeffreys' analysis of sex tourism lies a more fundamental equation of prostitution with male sexual violence 'which is concealed, through the act of payment, as consensual sex' (Jeffreys 2003[BIB-008]: 232). If violence and the power asymmetries of patriarchy lie at the core of prostitution, it is wrong to suggest that women can 'do it too' (Jeffreys 2003[BIB-008]: 232–6).

While Jeffreys rightly draws attention to the violence and profoundly oppressive patriarchal structures that characterise much sex tourism, her position in the end is a reductive

one that underplays the importance of hierarchies other than gendered ones. Sanchez Taylor and Kempadoo's insistence on the need to consider the complex interplay of a range of power differentials is ultimately more convincing. Seidl and Cantet are clearly drawn to female sex tourism not just by this complexity but precisely by the phenomenon's capacity to refuse easy judgement and to oblige the spectator to think.

Globalisation and embodied affectivity

If part of the 'attraction' of female sex tourism is this ability to challenge presuppositions, another part is its capacity to engage the *shifting* interplay of global forces and embodied affectivity. Bernstein's important analysis of the evolution of sex commerce is instructive in this regard. She differentiates between three broad modes of the phenomenon, the pre-modern, the modern-industrial and the post-industrial, while underlining that they may overlap rather than simply succeeding each other in an over-neat periodisation. In the pre-modern mode, the commerce of sex was typically self-organised and small-scale and involved occasional exchanges during periods of hardship. Large-scale commercialisation of prostitution emerged with modern, industrial capitalism, urbanisation, wage labour and the decline of the extended family. Accentuated gender differences and the cult of bourgeois domesticity entrenched sexual double standards and dichotomised women along class lines. Spatially zoned and Taylorised, prostitution involved the emotionally contained exchange of cash for sexual release so that career prostitutes sold sex rather than selves and typically kept certain practices and bodily areas off limits. However, the global restructuring of capitalist production and investment occurring since the 1970s has resulted in a series of shifts that have expanded and diversified the international trade in sexual services: corporate-fuelled consumption and the increase in business and tourist travel; the rise of services and temporary work; the increase in labour migrations; and the symbiotic relationship between information technologies and the privatisation of commercial consumption (Bernstein 2010[BIB-002]: 149).

The post-industrial sex commerce that arises in this context typically involves a transition from a Taylorist model to a more personalised service in which the labour is more diffuse and less narrowly focused on the sex act. The sex worker is more likely to draw on his or her own private, erotic and emotional life to provide what Bernstein calls 'bounded authenticity', a way of generating meaning and pleasure that is made possible rather than ruled out by its commercial containment (Bernstein 2010[BIB-002]: 151–7).

Some of the importance of Bernstein's work is the way in which she enables the study of sexual commerce to connect to broader analyses of evolutions in labour and consumption. The transition she notes from emotional containment to affective implication is reminiscent of Arlie Hochschild's classic study of the emotional labour of flight attendants and bill collectors in *The Managed Heart* (2003), a book first published in 1983 in response to the decline of manual labour and the rise of the service economy. Noting the commodification and disciplining of affect required of service workers, Hochschild suggests that such workers are as alienated from their feelings as had been the factory worker from their physical labour in the time of Marx (Hochschild 2003[BIB-006]: 3–9). She also notes how, faced with programmed interactions, customers increasingly value the personal touch, the search for this 'authentic' supplement being the inevitable corollary of the managed worker heart. Of course, the more 'authenticity' is sought, the more workers have to put their feelings to work, align their emotions with their work, or create a split within the self by absenting themselves from the emotions they project (Hochschild 2003[BIB-006]: 192).

Hochschild and Bernstein usefully remind us of the historically shifting nature of the boundaries and interactions between working and private selves, intimate and commercial activities. In their different ways, the three films also carry out their own mapping of the shifting boundaries between domains, *Stella* through a conservative re-assertion of the stereotypical sanctity of the personal as the space of authentic interaction, the other two

through a more interesting renegotiation and questioning of traditional borders and a probing of the alienations, power differentials and interpersonal encounters involved when emotional labour meets apparently empowered consumption.

Romance, chick flicks and post-feminist subjects

Because all three films recount failed or successful North–South romantic entanglements, it is useful to situate them in relation to the romance, or its contemporary reworking, the chick flick. It will be suggested that, apart from the blackness of its leads (of which more later), *Stella* is a very conformist example of the chick flick and thus a perfect illustration of the kind of post-feminist subjectivity that the sub-genre requires. In contrast, the other two films are knowing deconstructions of the genre which, through the failure and negativity of their 'romances', seek to bring out, as we shall see, the problems of the post-feminist consumer subject in terms of the heroines' relation to themselves and others.

Stella Gets Her Groove Back (henceforward *Stella*) tells the story of Stella (Angela Bassett), a high-flying, single-mother, black stockbroker, in her early forties, who is persuaded by her friend, Delilah (Whoopi Goldberg), to take a vacation in Jamaica. There, she has a relationship with Winston (Taye Diggs), a twenty-year-old Jamaican student and kitchen worker from a well-to-do family. The relationship overcomes a series of obstacles (Winston's mother's opposition, the couple's different tastes, the age difference) and leads to mutual commitment. Cantet's film seems similar in some ways. Set in the 1970s, it begins with the arrival in Haiti of Brenda, a middle-aged American widow, in search of Legba (Ménothy Cesar), a young black man whom she seduced when he was a boy and with whom she enjoyed her first orgasm. The story is complicated by the introduction of two other older women tourists, Ellen (Charlotte Rampling) and Sue (Louise Portal), the first of whom also lays claim to Legba's attentions. It is further complicated when we realise Legba is in danger from the Tonton Macoute, the Haitian dictator's militia. The film ends when Legba's dead

body is found dumped on the beach along with that of a young Haitian woman: while the cynical Ellen decides to give up romance tourism for good, the previously more innocent Brenda departs in search of new lovers on other islands. The final film of the three, Seidl's *Love*, recounts the story of Teresa (Margarete Tiesel), another single mother and a care-worker, who travels to a coastal resort in Kenya in search of romance and seems to have found it with Munga (Peter Kazungu), a handsome young Kenyan, only to discover that he has a wife and child and has been using a story of sick relatives to extract money from her. A second attempted 'romance' is shorter but similar in outcome. Her holiday friends, women in Kenya for similar reasons to hers, hire a young black man to perform naked in her hotel room as a birthday present to her: he cannot get an erection and is dispatched from the room. Finally, she brings a barman to her room but fails to persuade him to perform oral sex on her.

Stella can be categorised relatively unproblematically as both romance and chick flick. According to Pearce and Stacey, the classical romance typically involves displacement, perhaps to an exotic location, love at first sight, despite one or both parties' denials, obstacles, often to do with some form of social distance, transformation of the heroine, who finds a new social place for herself, and the ultimate triumph of love (Pearce and Stacey 1995[BIB-014]: 15–20). *Stella* ticks all these boxes. It also aligns with familiar features of the chick flick or its literary sister, chick lit, perhaps unsurprisingly as the film was an adaptation of Terry McMillan's eponymous 1996 chick-lit hit novel. Gill and Herdieckerhoff see the sub-genre, which rocketed to prominence in the mid-1990s, as a modern retooling of the romance. The chick-lit heroine is typically employed and committed to a career but also single and unhappy about it. She is no longer virginal but is in some way 'revirginised' by her encounter with her special man. In line with the times, her body needs constant disciplining and surveillance, unlike that of her effortlessly beautiful romantic forebears. In fact, the obsessional and narcissistic preoccupation with the unruly body suggests that it has become a

key, if not the sole, source of feminine identity (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2006[BIB-005]). Again, a docile subject, *Stella* ticks all the boxes. Although she is a high-flying career woman, its heroine clearly has something missing in her life, as her friend Delilah tells her. She is rendered girlishly shy by the courtship of Winston, not least when she attends a pyjama party with him. She is desirable, as the young man's adoring gaze confirms, but her body is the product of work, as shots of her running powerfully in the park or on the beach confirm (figure 13.1). Her life is completed by Winston, but not before he has helped her reorient her activities away from a stereotypically male profession (stockbroking) to one with more domestic connotations (furniture design) that allows her to express her 'real' self (Papayanis 2012[BIB-013]).

The chick flick clearly demands to be situated within a broader post-feminist sensibility as described by key figures such as McRobbie and Gill. For both scholars, postfeminism is, to a considerable extent, the outcome of the incorporation of feminist demands within neoliberal hegemony. What distinguishes neoliberalism from earlier liberalisms is the way in which the enterprise is not simply sanctified but held up as the model and measure of all things (the state, the public body and, crucially, the individual) (Foucault 2008[BIB-003]).

Figure 13.1: Here

Reshaped from within neoliberalism, feminism loses its collective dimension and its radical challenge to oppressive structures of oppression and shrinks to an expression of individual identity, alleged empowerment and ambition within the capitalist, consumerist status quo (Gill 2007[BIB-004]: 162–4; McRobbie 2009[BIB-011]: 24–53). The feminist critique of the objectification of women is hollowed out by a focus on women as active, desiring subjects *choosing* to objectify themselves. Power is encountered not as an external judgement but as an internalised, self-policing and narcissistic gaze (Gill 2007[BIB-004]: 151; McRobbie 2009[BIB-011]: 64). Older, larger, less attractive women are still stigmatised, but these

judgements can no longer be connected back to patriarchal structures because women are considered empowered individuals who choose to be looked at (Gill 2007[BIB-004]: 152–3).

If we accept this kind of explanation of postfeminism then we can see the tensions and contradictions that it must inevitably erase or mask to maintain its grasp. Neither structural limitations on individual empowerment nor ideological or socio-economic constraints on women's power to define themselves can be allowed to come to the surface. If we scratch the surface of *Stella*, potential cracks do nonetheless start to appear. People suggest that Stella should not be with Winston because of her age. She herself admits she could be his mother. But her undoubted attractiveness and honed physique, the young man's approval and sexual interest, and the not negligible fact that she is *just* over forty, over-ride these views so that the tension between self-definition, the ageing body and the judgements of others is successfully repressed. There are also hints at the limits to empowerment when we find that Stella's employers have fired her after a merger. But this admission that work may be associated with radical disempowerment is quickly over-ridden when the employers at her old company find they cannot do without her and she decides in any case to resurrect her real vocation as a furniture designer. She remains a successfully self-defining subject and, besides, true satisfaction is to be found in the private sphere as the arena of authentic feeling and real happiness. Seidl's *Love* and Cantet's *Heading South* are far more willing to open cracks.

Cantet opens the cracks slowly. His three heroines, Brenda, Ellen and Sue, are all older, less toned, and, in Sue's case, fatter that Stella. All acknowledge the limits placed on their self-definition and the expression of their desires back home in North America. Brenda's family treat her as a minor rather than a responsible adult. Ellen, a university lecturer, finds that the only men interested in her are 'losers' or cuckolded married men looking for an affair. Sue is exposed to the surveillance of her male workmates when she

engages in a relationship. However, when they are in Haiti, they can take lovers, give free rein to their desires, and live out a fantasy of empowerment and complete acceptance. Sue comments that she feels free and alive, 'like a butterfly'. Brenda has come in search of that moment of lost plenitude and virginal innocence when, despite being in her forties, she experienced her first orgasm. Ellen compares the island to paradise. Yet things are not so straightforward. Brenda and Ellen find that they are rivals for Legba's attention and must share him with others. They find themselves exposed to critical comments: Ellen mocks Sue behind her back for her weight. She calls Brenda 'a bitch in heat' to her face. Ellen herself cannot escape her own ageing, even though she is played by that icon of middle-aged glamour Charlotte Rampling. This comes out most strongly when she is swimming with Legba, apparently without a care in the world. She ducks her head under the water and emerges with her normally elegant hair plastered to her head. Clearly unimpressed, Legba comments that she looks old. At another moment, Brenda allows herself to dance in an inappropriate way with a young lad when she finds that Legba is occupied with Ellen. When Legba protectively pulls the boy away, she is horrified at her own actions and asks what she was thinking. The dynamics here are very different from those of *Stella*, which closes down any contradiction it opens up.

Cantet's films typically give a central role to shame, which, as Sartre reminds us, is both deeply personal and profoundly social. It arises when the subject senses that they may have been caught by the other in a shameful act such as voyeurism, and the subject is forced to recognise the other's status as an observing, separate subject rather than an observed object (Sartre 1969[BIB-016]: 222 and 261–3; O'Shaughnessy 2015[BIB-012]: 16–18). Simone de Beauvoir deploys a not dissimilar account of the unwelcome encounter with the look of the Other in her famous analysis of ageing. She notes that, while a woman may still feel young on the inside, she is forced to confront her age when she becomes aware of how she looks in the

eyes of others (Beauvoir 1977[BIB-001]: 315–29). It is not that these forced confrontations with the looks and judgements of others are entirely absent in *Stella*, but they are overwritten by the heroine's self-policing fitness and her value in her lover's eyes. In Cantet's film, this compensatory overwriting does not occur. Characters are forced to confront both how other subjects judge them and their own ageing. If it seemed that they could float free from the limitations upon their freedom as self-defining consumers in the island 'paradise' of Haiti, the film forces them to realise that this is not the case.

Heading South drives contradictions slowly into view. *Love* obliges us to confront them frontally and uncomfortably. Like the women of Cantet's film, its heroine, Teresa, is clearly frustrated. She works providing care for her handicapped charges but, when she comes home, she struggles to get her own daughter to tidy her room or even to communicate with her. Long, static shots of her in the house develop a sense of claustrophobia and isolation. In contrast to this, her vacation in Kenya promises freedom from domestic obligation, empowerment and the satisfaction of desire. To begin with, a shy newcomer to an exciting new location, she is 'revirginised' and thus made ready for a reopening of the self to romance and erotic satisfaction. Her first suitor is too brusque: 'I can't control myself', he explains. She refuses him. Her second, Munga, seems the real deal: 'love has no end', he claims, later adding that he wants love not money. His gestures are too rough: Teresa teaches him to stroke, not grab, her bosom. She warns him that her breasts sag when she undresses: he reassures her about her attractiveness. 'You have to look into my eyes, look into my heart', she tells him, reminding him not to use too much tongue when he kisses. We seem to be in a classic romance plot with its negotiation between male and female scripts and its taming of the undomesticated male. We also seem to be on some of the territory of the chick flick with the woman being evaluated and self-evaluating according to her body shape and size. Yet, we know from the start that the romance is a sham and that Munga wants money,

even if it takes the second abortive relationship for Teresa herself to fully realise what is happening.

Some key differences between the three films play out at the level of the ageing female body and reactions to it. With its determination to close down fissures, *Stella* evokes age only to deny any of its consequences. With its subtle exploration of tensions, *Heading South* only gradually pushes the recognition of the consequences of ageing to the surface, knowingly using glamorous but older actresses to explore the policing of the female body and the limits to its power of self-definition. *Love* takes a different route. With its static long takes, and its distinctly large and obviously ageing female protagonists, it forces us to stare at the glaring mismatch between the desire to be desired and the limits of the body. Even the sustained emotional labour of those who service the global tourist economy cannot cover this up entirely.

Emotional labour and bounded authenticity

The approach of the three films to labour in general and emotional labour more specifically can initially be approached [ed reply: replace 'approached' with, say, 'considered' to avoid repetition of 'approach'] through a comparison of the scenes showing the heroines' arrivals in their respective resorts. In *Stella*, we see the heroine approach [ed reply: replace 'approach' with, say, 'go to'] the hotel reception desk and ask about the whereabouts of her friend Delilah. Immediately, the latter announces her presence and the focus shifts to her and the heroine as they embrace and discuss their plans. The receptionist needs to be there for the scene to function but the film has no interest in her work. *Heading South* is different. We see Brenda go through the arch at the entrance to the hotel grounds with Albert (Lys Ambroise), the hotel manager, following behind her, carrying her luggage. There is no dialogue, so our focus is on the two bodies and the contrasts between them: the white woman in front is free to take in her surroundings and given over to leisure; the black man is behind her, not in her

eye-line but in ours, inviting us to see the dependence of her liberated leisure on others' unacknowledged efforts. The pattern continues when Brenda goes down to the beach: Albert instructs other black workers to make sure she has everything she wants. A lounger is put out for her. Through its focus on moments and actions that have no real importance for the main plots, the film coaxes work into view. As we might expect, Seidl is less subtle. As his white women tourists arrive at their seafront hotel, we see a typically symmetrical Seidl long-take tableau with the women arriving in the centre, a group of porters carrying their luggage on one side of frame and a group of young women singing and smiling on the other. Seidl forces us to confront how the utopian tourist 'experience' relies on the manual labour of one group and the performance of joyful welcome by the other. These arrival scenes set the pattern for much of what follows.

Stella is and is not interested in labour. It does take us into the eponymous heroine's pressured workplace, but only to establish her as a successful career woman before it makes it clear that, despite her success and in line with what we know of the chick flick, true happiness is to be found in the private domain. Beyond that, and especially once it reaches Jamaica, its tourist paradise, it has no interest in work or in the anonymous workers who sometimes, of necessity, make it into shot. Stella's young lover, Winston, works in a kitchen, but the film ignores his labour and role in the tourist economy. Because his parents are well-heeled and he is destined for a career in medicine, his work has no social or economic consequences for him and serves to mark no real boundary between him and the prosperous Stella. This is part of the film's more general erasure of class as a division worthy of attention.

Cantet's film subtly but inexorably forces labour to our attention and thus undercuts the apparently utopian freedom of the world of tourist consumption. Part of the way it does this is through the literal and metaphorical widening of the frame that we noted in the arrival

sequence. Shots are held long enough or filmed from sufficient distance to allow tourists and workers to share screen space and time, images of white women lounging on chairs in the sun appearing less innocently utopian when we see the labour around them that makes their carefree leisure possible. At the same time, because its [ed reply: replace 'its' with 'the film's'] story centres on sex/romance tourism, it constantly plays on the tension between the intimate and the commercial. The young black men and the white women seem to share the beach in an egalitarian manner. Yet it is the women who buy food and drinks. There is no evidence of direct payment for sex or company, but the men receive gifts of clothes, jewellery or money from the women. In some ways, the men seem in control, in a way which might seem to chime with Jeffrey's analysis of sex tourism (Jeffreys 2003[BIB-008]). Ellen says that Legba chooses which woman he wants to be with and no woman owns him. Yet, a telling scene in Ellen's beachside hut tells a different story: Legba plays at being a tiger and calls Ellen a gazelle. Unamused, she instructs him to lie face down so that she can photograph his bottom. The submissive pose is a visual expression of the unstated power dynamics. He is playing a role in someone else's fantasy in a way that brings us closer to the vision of Sanchez Taylor (2006[BIB-015]) and Kempadoo (2001[BIB-009]).

Part of the film's deliberate questioning of our presuppositions lies in the uncertainty over quite what type of interaction we are watching. For Brenda, when she arrives in search of the emotional and erotic plenitude of her earlier relationship with Legba, it is clearly something deeply personal that seems to lie entirely outside the commercial sphere, following the traditional 'hostile worlds' division as described by Zelizer (2000[BIB-019]). Ellen teaches Brenda a more pragmatic negotiation between the personal and the commercial. As she explains, she decided that, when she grew older, she would pay men to love her. While she expects sex, her interactions with Legba are also playful, social and affectionate. This is neither a purely romantic pairing nor a narrowly commercial transaction but clearly

constitutes, in Bernstein's terms, a form of bounded authenticity. However, its careful management by those involved does not mean that it is unoppressive. As we noted, Legba must satisfy his women partners on their terms and despite the 'tigerish' masculine self-image he would like to maintain. He puts his sexuality and emotions to work while repressing his objections to the situation, very much in line with Hochschild's analysis of the alienations of the 'managed heart'. The film gives a strong sense that his position is becoming untenable even before he is murdered: he can be himself neither in town, due to the brutal dictatorship, nor in the resort where he must please the women. His death serves to underline what we already know. His situation and that of the women are poles apart. Brenda finally acknowledges that, although she *felt* she loved Legba, she is sure that she loved the way he looked at her. Her departure to other islands in search of more young men is a recognition of the essential narcissism of her desires and the impossibility of really sharing Legba's life.

Similar dynamics are worked through rather more crudely by *Love*. Like Cantet's Brenda, its heroine tries to live out a classical romance script with Munga. The latter works to provide an authentic 'boyfriend experience', buying her drinks, holding her hand, caressing her how she wishes, taking her to his home and making love to her. When she discovers that the 'authenticity' was manufactured and he wants money, she attacks him, pulling his dreadlocks, placing him in the subordinate position, reminding us that romance cannot efface power dynamics. Teresa's response to this and the subsequent disillusionment is to become more crudely exploitative. When the Kenyan is brought into her birthday party, he is made to dance naked and to follow various demeaning instructions. A red ribbon is tied around his penis and removed by the heroine's teeth. The women compete to make him hard and express their disappointment that he cannot oblige. Although we have now moved completely away from the bounded intimacy of the 'boyfriend experience', we are still witness to the emotional labour (and self-division) of the Kenyan male who can raise a smile, but nothing

else, his body divided against itself. The barman is unable to sustain even a smile in the last sexual encounter of the film. All he can do when told to perform cunnilingus on her is decline and say 'I am sad.'

Cantet and Seidl stage the inequalities, oppressions and alienations of the globalised consumption–production nexus over the terrain of individual bodies and affects. While the discourse of tourism typically emphasises fit and youthful bodies, positive emotions and gratified desires, the two directors focus on ageing or overweight bodies, negative affects and frustrated desires to challenge and disrupt any consumerist pleasure in the appropriation of the exotic. Cantet's film gives a prominent place to shame or shame denied: the shame of Albert, the hotel manager, at the corruption of his country by the tourist dollar; Brenda's shame at her inappropriately close dance with an adolescent boy; her refusal to acknowledge the shame of her earlier seduction of the under-age Legba. Seidl is less a filmmaker of shame than of embarrassment and less that of the characters than that felt by the audience when forced to stare at things they would rather not see or finding themselves laughing uneasily at things like the incongruity generated by long-shot tableaux of large Austrian women, in pairs or groups, on loungers and bar stools or in the swimming pool, facing or flanking slim, young, Kenyan men (figure 13.2). Yet, embarrassment is not all there is in Seidl. *Love* and the *Paradise* trilogy of which it is part are about a desperate search by lonely, isolated modern individuals for some form of human or spiritual belonging. The sadness at the end of *Love* is not just that of the Kenyan barman unable to mask his real feelings enough to do the emotional and erotic labour expected of him, it is a conclusion to the film itself, a comment on the condition of the characters, a failure of desire and of connection. While we might be tempted to read the barman's refusal as a form of resistance, the film's mood serves to block this more positive interpretation. We are left with nothing positive to cling to unless it is the

capacity of negative affect, both ours and of the characters, to disrupt pleasure and force us to think (Lübecker 2015[BIB-010]).

Figure 13.2: Here

Love plays on the contrast between the standardised and the individual. The hotel where the heroine stays is the domain of the former as expressed notably by lines of loungers provisioned with identical towels laid out by the swimming pool or another line of loungers on the hotel side of the rope that divides the beach between the policed space reserved for guests and the unpoliced space where Kenyan men wait for customers. When Teresa steps over the rope to be surrounded by young men seeking to sell her things, including themselves, she also makes herself available for an apparently less manufactured experience, not just with the young men, but also with the beach as an apparently natural space. This movement towards apparent authenticity is continued when she is taken by Munga to his room, passing through his decidedly non-scenic neighbourhood in the process. Coinciding with the movement to greater physical intimacy, this penetration of Kenyan space seems to promise authentic, embodied engagement. Yet, as those who study tourism know full well, the industry relies upon both the 'front stage' of the formal sector *and* the 'back stage' of the informal economy, the latter providing a vital, rawer, apparently more real but still staged supplement to the more structured and predictable front stage (Urry and Larsen 2011[BIB-018]: 10–11). This is, of course, the lesson that Teresa will learn when she realises that all her intimate interactions with Munga were in fact staged. Something similar but also different occurs in *Heading South* when Brenda leaves the protected space of the resort and visits Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital, with Legba. This is another managed encounter with a staged authenticity; that is, until it goes wrong and Legba's life is threatened by the Tonton Macoute, a threat carried through when his body appears on the beach by the hotel, a foreign object in a sanitised space. Together, the two films suggest that the tourist's experience is either the bounded authenticity of the managed interpersonal encounter, as described by

Bernstein (2010[BIB-002]), or the unbearable meeting with the underlying violence of deeply oppressive situations to which the tourist can only relate as something entirely foreign.

Stella's world has none of this unevenness. There is a scene early in the film when, watching a television advertisement for Jamaican holidays, the daydreaming heroine sees her own face on the screen instead of that of the actress in the commercial. This is clearly done for comic effect, but it underlines the functioning of the frictionless world of the film, the way in which the heroine's romance and the tourist fantasy version of place can flow seamlessly into each other. There is no mismatch between Stella's story and Jamaican reality as shown in the film: the island simply serves as a suitably exotic background for her life-changing encounter. In any case, the film makes no attempt to take us outside the safe leisure space of the resort, except during the sequence when Stella visits Winston's middle-class Jamaican home.

Commodified black bodies and the erasure of history

In her seminal work on representations of blackness, bell hooks analyses the contemporary commodification of cultural difference, noting how it is used to 'spice up' the pleasures of consumption for jaded western palates, including in the sexual arena (hooks 1992[BIB-007]: 17, 21–7). She comments that 'encounters with otherness are clearly marked as more exciting, more intense and more threatening' than other interactions (hooks 1992[BIB-007]: 26). Within a primitivist imaginary with deep roots in colonialism, contact with the less 'civilised' promises the overcoming of the western subject's alienation from the body and the restoration of a more natural harmony (hooks 1992[BIB-007]: 27). Young black men are marked as potent yet fragile and associated with the tension between pleasure and danger, death and desire in a way that seems to promise access to vibrancy, intensity and joy in living (hooks 1992[BIB-007]: 35). This consumption of blackness and the exotic feeds off classic colonialist tropes, although the naked domination of the past has given way to a (narcissistic) desire to

be changed by the encounter with the Other. As hooks comments, 'the desire to make contact with those bodies deemed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past, even takes the form of a defiant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connection'. Within a context of desire and seduction, domination seems to fade away (hooks 1992[BIB-007]: 25).

Stella seems to match much of what hooks describes. Stella's recovery of her 'groove' clearly relies on her sensual encounter with a young black man in an exotic context. Yet, because *both* leads are black *and* middle-class, the film simultaneously refuses the predominant whiteness of the chick flick and negates potential tensions involving race and class. It thus turns its back on broader structural inequalities and any history of racialised oppression in Jamaica or in the United States. All that is really at stake in the relationship is the difference of age. The film is ultimately as post-racial as it is post-feminist.

The other two films are very different. Neither engages explicitly with history, except for one brief scene in *Heading South* when Albert comments that the coloniser now uses dollars rather than guns to ruin Haiti. However, both are knowingly inhabited by traditions of colonial representation. In Cantet's film, this is apparent from the first time Brenda walks on the beach and finds Legba lying motionless on the sand, clad only in a swimming costume, in a position which anticipates the later discovery of his corpse on the beach (figure 13.3). Found in this way, the young man is stereotypically aligned with nature rather than culture and positioned as both erotically exciting and vulnerable, the latter quality being confirmed by his death. The beach seems to be a place outside of time, but the encounter between white and black people on the sand evokes a whole history of colonial encounter. More broadly, Brenda and her female companions seem to match precisely hooks' description of jaded western consumers who feed on blackness to reconnect with their physical selves. The same

could be said of Seidl's *Love* except that its evocation of exotic and colonial imagery is predictably more crude.

Figure 13.3: Here

To begin with, zebra-skin patterning seems omnipresent in the resort where the women stay: from the bus that takes them to the hotel, to the shirts of entertainers, to the bar stools they sit on and, finally, to the décor of the bar where they drink (see figure 1.2). With the bus being labelled 'Comfort Safari' and Teresa's room walls being adorned with pictures of giraffes, flamingos and leopards, the iconography of the big game hunt is everywhere, albeit in derisory, commodified form.

The stereotypical association of Africa with wild animals continues when the women visit a crocodile farm to see the predators jumping out of the water for meat hung over their pool. But in the same way as the images of zebras and other animals are part of a staging of wildness, these crocodiles are being called upon to perform a safe version of their wild selves, under the tourist gaze. The women's look upon the Kenyan men continues the same exoticist theme. Teresa's more experienced holiday friend has bought a motorcycle for a young man: when he arrives upon it, the friend shows him off to Teresa, drawing attention to his muscled thighs, talking of him as an investment, while Teresa comments on his fine ears and his strong hands, as if he were one more piece of captured wild-stock, or a slave. Later, when Teresa has slept with Munga, we see her naked on a bed under a mosquito net in his room, the image a classic exoticist fantasy, except that the large, ageing body of Teresa serves to block any voyeuristic pleasure that the spectator might take. While *Stella* cannot engage frontally with the history of exotic representation upon which it nonetheless draws, the other two films deliberately engage with and undermine it to strip their heroines' fantasies of their consumerist innocence and bring their prolongation of colonial power relations to the surface.

Conclusion

The romance seems to offer us a glimpse of what a world might look like in which we could gain complete recognition as human beings, realise our deepest desires and achieve full and transparent reconciliation with another person, no matter how different to us they might initially appear to be. Set within the context of North–South encounters, the romance seems to offer a fantasy of oneness with the world and the difference it contains. What Seidl's *Love* and Cantet's *Heading South* do is to dismantle the romance, showing that its fantasy of globalised reconciliation relies on an ultimately narcissistic illusion of empowered consumption, a wilful blindness to the alienations of emotional and other labours, and a historically forgetful mobilisation of colonialist representations. Tourism, consumption and, of course, cinema itself all offer the world up to us for our 'innocent' pleasure and in a way that confirms our narcissistic sense of consumer empowerment. Through their focus on negative affects, frustrated desires and bodies that do not fit, Cantet and Seidl block those consumerist pleasures and invite us instead to ponder our own place in global circuits of consumption and production. Sullivan's film, in contrast, seems to offer a purely negative counter-example. By bracketing off the private sphere from the world of production, by restricting happiness and fulfilment to the former, and by evacuating questions of race, labour and history, it seems to suggest that we can indeed be reconciled with ourselves, others and the world and transcend our limits so long as we settle for purely private happiness and work, as good neoliberal subjects, to make ourselves desirable.

Yet, we cannot leave things quite there in a way which might suggest that, in a rather predictable manner, the Hollywood film is overwhelmingly conformist, despite its progressive casting decisions, while the two European films, true to the best traditions of the art film, are able to challenge the spectator. Every film, no matter how critical, tends to have its blind spots. Those of *Heading South* and *Love* relate to the unquestioning linking of self-

indulgent consumerism and narcissism with women. As we know, there is a long-standing and still continuing association of women and consumption with the unfortunate consequence that the stereotype of the gullible, irresponsible and hedonistic consumer often wears a female face. Something similar can be said of narcissism. Freud famously suggested that, while men achieve adulthood by learning to love an Other, women remain locked into infantile narcissism, choosing love objects on the basis of a love of self (Tyler 2007[BIB-017]: 28–9). Echoing this prejudice, Christopher Lasch's famous work *The Culture of Narcissism* (1982) linked the rise of the narcissistic personality to the decline of more traditional American values such as rugged, outward-looking, self-restraining masculinity, and the rise of a hedonistic, self-obsessed individual, typically associated with groups (black and gay Americans, women) who had challenged traditional hierarchies and exclusions during the era of the counterculture, turning inwards, away from public duty, to a culture of self-realisation and personal identity in the process (Tyler 2007[BIB-017]: 352–9). By associating narcissistic consumption with their female characters, Cantet and Seidl tend to reinforce these stereotypes even as they demonstrate their capacity to disturb and challenge in others.

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