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The Picturesque: Visual Pleasure and Intermediality

(Screenshot from Abbas Kiarostami's *24 Frames*, 2017)

A selection of essays written after the international conference organized with the same title by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, on the 25th and 26th of October 2019, within the framework of a research project supported by the National Research Council and the Executive Agency for Higher Education Research and Innovation Funding in Romania (CNCS-UEFISCDI, project nr. PN-III-ID-PCE-2016-0418).

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Screening Landscapes: Film between the Picturesque and the Painterly

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Abstract. Inherently connected to movement and to a sequential spatial experience in time, the picturesque has been considered as a precursor of the cinematic. In addition, the idea of the picturesque is closely connected to Heinrich Wölfflin's notion of *das Malerische* or "the painterly," which stands for a dynamic style of painting characterized by qualities of colour, stroke, and texture rather than of contour or line. Based on the keynote lecture delivered at the conference, *The Picturesque: Visual Pleasure and Intermediality in-between Contemporary Cinema, Art and Digital Culture* (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, 25–26 October, 2019),[1] the essay disentangles the complex network of connections between image and landscape, painting and film, the picturesque and the painterly.

Keywords: picturesque, photoresque, painting and film, stillness and movement in film.

Steven Jacobs at the conference (Photo by Mira Marincaş, 26 October, 2019.)

1 Video recording of the keynote lecture here: *https://youtu.be/ipLo4-hixKk?list=PLDesrDcatwbaGiIK2Fkg3gH44hIDp6P4H*. Last accessed 12. 12. 2020.

From the Picturesque to the Photoresque

The aesthetics of the picturesque, which developed in the eighteenth century in close relation with new ideas and practices of gardening, exchanged the preference for the geometry of French gardens for a predilection for the whimsicality of nature (Hussey 1927; Tobey 1973, 128–135; Hunt 1976 and 1994; Hunt and Willis 1988, and Macarthur 2007). However, rather than favouring the irregularity of nature itself, the picturesque was first and foremost inspired by the image of nature's whimsicality and irregularity. In the aesthetics of the picturesque, nature is approached indirectly, through pictures – through the paintings of Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, Salvator Rosa, Meindert Hobbema, and Jacob van Ruisdael, for instance. This implied that, on the one hand, English landscape gardens were designed to be viewed as a Lorrain or a Poussin might paint them – trees were replanted, rivers and hills were moved, fake ruins, grottoes, and follies were built so that the landscape answered to the conventions of pictorial composition. On the other hand, viewers were enticed to discover and recognize picturesque scenes in nature itself. Publishing his *Three Essays* in 1792, William Gilpin, for instance, encouraged tourists "to frame views, to graduate prospects from foreground to background, and above all, to ensure variety of painted, drawn, or engraved texture, which minimized similar qualities in the natural world" (Gilpin quoted in Hunt 1991, 236). Furthermore, many travellers looked at the landscape with the help of a so-called Claude glass, an often oval-shaped, black convex mirror, making the landscape more "pictorial" (Maillet 2004).

This interconnection between the image of the landscape and its referent is included in the notion of landscape itself, which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, occurred for the first time in 1603 and was borrowed from the Dutch *landschap*, probably because of the importance of landscape painting from Flanders and the Netherlands. In Dutch, like in many other languages, the word had from the very first the double meaning of both a "piece of land" and an "image" representing such a piece of land: *landschap*, *landscape*, *Landschaft*, *paysage*, *paesaggio*, et cetera (Kolen and Lemaire 1999, 11–26). This double meaning emphasizes that the notion of landscape has been, from the very first, dependent on its structuring by human presence and by the gaze in particular. The experience and the representation of the landscape are closely connected. Several scholars, including art historian Ernst Gombrich, who often emphasized the role of mental concepts in perception, even argue that the art of painting made possible the aesthetic experience of the environment as a landscape (Smuda 1986, 64–65; Howett 1997, 86–87).

Inspired by a modernist self-referentiality or a post-structuralist attempt at deconstruction, many modern and contemporary artists visualizing landscapes explicitly and implicitly play on this tension. Leading artists and photographers such as Robert Smithson, Mark Klett, Joel Sternfeld, Jeff Wall, Andreas Gursky, and Axel Hütte, for instance, have visualized today's posturban landscape, in which the differences between centre and periphery, city and country, and culture and nature are no longer clearly defined. These artists focus on natural landscapes that are marked by the paraphernalia of traffic or tourist infrastructures, while also referring to older pictorial conventions of landscape representations (Jacobs 2009, 23–64; Jacobs 2012). Frequently evoking conventional representations of the landscape by referring to "classical" Arcadian myths, the Romantic sublime, or the picturesque, these artists turn photography into a medium that appropriates, emulates, or deconstructs pictorial representations of landscapes.

The Picturesque and Cinema

Many instances of such a picturesque strategy can be found in the history of cinema. Since cinema's inception, filmmakers have looked at nature through earlier pictorial or graphic landscape representations. Early scenics and travelogues, Scandinavian or Italian feature films of the 1910s, and directors such as Murnau and John Ford, to name just a few, are unmistakably indebted to nineteenth-century landscape painters, whose works can be situated in the tradition of the picturesque (Dalle Vacche 1996, Cowie 2004; Clarke and Doel 2006, 213–244; Bertellini 2009). Through the use of carefully selected lenses, viewpoints, framings, shot compositions, and light conditions, many filmmakers have created veritable cinematic equivalents of nineteenth-century landscape paintings. Sometimes, such references can be quite literal, such as in Peter Schamoni's feature film *Caspar David Friedrich: Grenzen der Zeit* (1986), which can be considered a biopic dedicated to the famous German romantic landscape painter (Hoffmann 2003, 30–41; on artists' biopics, see Jacobs 2011, 38–62). However, the film is not an artist biopic in the strict sense, as its story is set after the death of the protagonist. In addition, the film lacks many other of the tropes of the genre, but consists first and foremost of footage of the nature in Pomerania, the Baltic coasts, and the island of Rügen – sites that inspired Friedrich. Evoking Friedrich's paintings, Schamoni's film offers us expansive vistas but also focuses on various natural phenomena such as clouds, water surfaces, and the play of light.

A notion closely connected to movement and atmospheric effects, the picturesque seems to lend itself easily to film as it has been described as a medium

perfectly suited to evoke the ephemeral by various filmmakers and theorists such as Jean Epstein, Germaine Dulac, and Siegfried Kracauer. In addition, the idea of a series of successive framed views, as organized in picturesque gardens, has been described as "pre-cinematic" (McArthur 2007, 111, 156, 164, 249). The eighteenth-century picturesque came to be seen as a kind of pictoriality with movement added. Sergei Eisenstein too, as I will demonstrate in a following part, connected montage to the picturesque.

Movement, Architecture, and Modern Space

As the picturesque was associated with movement, it is also something that is connected to time and space, albeit in complex and even paradoxical ways. On the one hand, paintings represent spaces in which one can imagine moving. On the other, as material things in our "real" physical space, they have their own position as objects hung on the wall and they are related spatially to a mobile observer. Since the dominance of framed easel pictures, this viewing position has been a disembodied gaze. By contrast, our visual experience of gardens, buildings, and cities is as embodied subjects. A picturesque landscape oscillates between these two spatial registers.

Furthermore, inherently connected to movement, the picturesque is closely linked with stillness. The picturesque in architecture, gardening, and urbanism stills the viewer. Presenting the landscape as a picture, the aesthetics of the picturesque removes the particularity of viewing in motion and duration, flattening space. In so doing, picturesque gardening thwarts movement, breaking the pattern of successive topoi that characterized earlier allegorical gardens. Hence, the earliest attempt at an art of visual duration strikingly grew out of a concept of stillness. This relates to the fact that the literature of the eighteenth-century picturesque was not so much preoccupied with movement in the sense of motion of people through the landscape. Rather, under picturesque conditions, buildings appear to possess movement.

As John Macarthur has demonstrated, this concept of movement in architecture was further developed by Heinrich Wölfflin in his influential description of Baroque architecture, which was also inherently linked to the notion of the picturesque (Macarthur 2007, 240–247; Wölfflin 1999, Wölfflin 1888). For Wölfflin, movement in architecture is a matter of emphatic relations with the building, which have not to do with bodily movement or the body's capacity for spatial extension and locomotion. This harks back to theoreticians of the picturesque such as Uvedale Price, who stated that the movement of the eye is a kind of imitation of the form of the object, moving across it to follow its form. In *Renaissance und Barock* (1888),

Wölfflin uses a distinction that is more or less similar with Price's ideas of the beautiful and picturesque in architecture. Whereas, for Wölfflin, Renaissance is the art of calm and beauty, the Baroque is a "painterly" style – "painterly" in the sense that it lends itself to being painted. Writing in German, Wölfflin uses the word *malerisch*, which can be translated as "painterly," "pictorial," and also "picturesque." Like the English term "picturesque," "*malerisch*" was regularly used in relation to landscape – for instance, in the writings by Schiller and Goethe. For Wölfflin, "a strictly classical temple, if not in ruins, is not a picturesque object. However impressive it may be as a piece of architecture, it would look monotonous in a picture. An artist painting it on a canvas would have great difficulty in making it look interesting; in fact he could only succeed with the aid of light and atmospheric effects and a landscape setting" (Wölfflin quoted in Macarthur 2007, 240). Likewise, baroque architecture is not only marked by massiveness, it is also characterized by movement. For Wölfflin, a rich baroque building is more animated, and would therefore be an easier subject for a painterly effect.

Wölfflin's use of the concept of the picturesque, which would highly determine its twentieth-century reception, was also connected to the notion of movement. However, as Wölfflin asserted, movement is not caused by the object; it is rather an innate mental power and the product of our perception of that object. Wölfflin was reluctant to connect this kind of movement to an actual locomotion in space. Like eighteenth-century theorists such as Uvedale Price or Joshua Reynolds, Wölfflin emphasized a pictorial concept of movement but he had no interest in connecting this with actual motion. This distinction or tension between visual movement and bodily stasis lies at the heart of the picturesque. Picturesque garden design is inherently connected to the principle that the eye can reach where the body cannot go. In picturesque garden designs, framings create distances, turning the landscape into a picture. Hence, movement is counterbalanced by an immobility. Furthermore, Wölfflin's idea of movement in buildings, sculptures, and paintings is marked by the influential psychological theory of *Einfühlung* that stipulated that we can be excited because our eyes move quickly over surfaces. The idea that picturesque or space connected to actual bodily movement was only developed by Wölfflin's contemporary August Schmarsow, who reflected on "*das Malerische*" (the picturesque or the painterly) in architecture and on *Malerische Gesichtspunkte in der Baukunst* (*Picturesque Viewpoints in Architecture*) in his 1897 *Barock und Rokoko*. In his writings, Schmarsow not only developed the idea of the picturesque in relation to architecture and space, he also linked it to the idea of movement as a kinaesthetic sensation.

This idea of architecture as something that is perceived by movement as the experience of a spatial unfolding in time became fundamental in modern architectural theory. As John Macarthur noted, it was first and foremost developed by Wölfflin's student Sigfried Giedion in his seminal *Space, Time, and Architecture* (1941), in which he advocated architectural modernism polemically. Referring to new dynamic conceptions of space in modernist art movements such as cubism and Futurism as well as to Albert Einstein's physics, Giedion, like other protagonists of architectural modernism, saw architecture as something defined by volume of space rather than mass and solidity. Furthermore, for Giedion, movement became fundamental in his argument that modern architecture made space the proper medium of architecture. Space is something that is registered in locomotion and, hence, inherently connected to it.

Similar ideas can be found in the writings of László Moholy-Nagy and Sergei Eisenstein, who connected this dynamic conception of space to cinema. Moholy-Nagy, for instance, stated that "motion pictures, more than anything else, fulfill the requirements of a space–time visual art" (1995, 155). He also noted that modern sculpture and architecture had become "cinematic" as they became increasingly preoccupied with light and movement, evoking volumes that merge with their surrounding space as well as masses that dissolve into a spatial continuum. Modern sculpture and architecture tended, as it were, toward a kind of ephemeral, immaterial art of space akin to film.

According to Eisenstein, the mobile gaze of film was even developed or prepared in architecture, an art that implied real movement of the beholder in space instead of movement in its virtuality. At least potentially, because the cinematic character of architecture, based on sequentiality and montage, has long been repressed by architects. The art of cinema and montage, Eisenstein seems to argue, made architects aware of these features, which were rediscovered by Constructivist artists and architects such as Le Corbusier and his idea of the *promenade architecturale*. Eisenstein elaborated these ideas in an essay entitled *Montage and Architecture*, which he wrote in the late 1930s (see Eisenstein 1989, and the introduction to this essay written by Yve-Alain Bois). In that article, Eisenstein deals with the issue of montage computation within an architectural ensemble – something that he connects with the shifting point of view of a moving spectator. He contrasts two "paths" of the spatial eye: the cinematic, where a spectator follows an imaginary line among a series of objects; and the architectural, where the spectator moves "between [a series of] carefully disposed phenomena" (1989, 116). Eisenstein gives an example, and it is the Acropolis in Athens with its apparent disorder in the placement of buildings – a

feature that racked the brain of so many architectural theorists working in the classical tradition. Eisenstein refers to Auguste Choisy's analysis of the Acropolis, which he cites at length. By means of a series of successive perspective views of the movement of an imaginary visitor of the Acropolis, Choisy (1903) demonstrated the successive *tableaux* and the "picturesque" composition of the site. In line with the writings by Uvedale Price, Choisy uses the word "picturesque" in his theory of urban planning as picturesqueness in regular buildings results from seeing them on incidental angles, avoiding frontality. Eisenstein asks his reader to look at Choisy's text "with the eye of a film-maker," to see it as a kind of perspectival "storyboard" of the Acropolis. "It's hard to imagine," Eisenstein writes, "a montage sequence for an architectural ensemble more subtly composed, shot by shot, than the one which our legs create by walking among the buildings of the Acropolis" (1989, 117). In Choisy's carefully sequenced perspectives, Eisenstein finds "a montage effect" and he even speculates on the desirable temporal duration of each picture, finding that the "shot length" can be determined by the relationship between the pace of the spectator's movement and the rhythm of the buildings themselves and the distances between each of them. He calls the Acropolis "the perfect example of one of the most ancient films" (1989, 117). For Eisenstein, picturesque planning was "cinematic." The picturesque can be interpreted as a form of what Eisenstein called "cinematism," meaning the presence of cinematic effects in various artworks predating the birth of film, and which he found in the Acropolis as well as in the art of El Greco, Piranesi, Japanese and Chinese scroll painters, Robert Delaunay, and the Mexican muralists (Montani 2000, 206–217; Jacobs 2016, 142–159). This led Eisenstein to numerous reflections about the inscription of time in a static picture and about the sequential nature of aesthetic perception.

Eisenstein's ideas were later developed by Yve-Alain Bois (1984), Peter Collins (1965), Richard Etlin (1987), and others, who advocated that the picturesque can be presented as the humble beginning of the idea that durational spatio-visual experience is a kind of material that can be formed in architecture, landscape, and urban design. As picturesque planning evokes motion, duration, and spatialized points-of-view, the idea of the picturesque became fulfilled in the technology and art of cinema, or in the cinematic understanding of the image in architecture.

Paintscapes

These dialectical relations between three-dimensional space and a series of two-dimensional planes, between movement and stasis, and between durational development and stillness, are also at stake when the film camera confronts the

landscape. In the following pages, however, I would like to take the idea of a "cinematic picturesque" back to its origins, investigating the encounter between the film camera and a landscape *painting* rather than dealing with films of natural landscapes themselves.

Some key art documentaries of the 1940s and 1950s, which can be considered the "Golden Age" of the art documentary (Jacobs 2011, 1–37), focus on landscape painting. This is the case in Alain Resnais's *Van Gogh* (1949), which tells the story of the life of the Post-Impressionist painter exclusively by means of a cinematic manipulation of his paintings. Overall, the film consists of a masterful succession of 207 shots of paintings, which suggest a continuity that is comparable with a feature film. Just like a filmmaker constructs a scene with shots and an entire film with scenes, Resnais composed his film by means of images of paintings – for the most part these are landscapes, not only because the landscape was Van Gogh's preeminent subject but also because Resnais attempts to evoke a spatial realm inhabited by the artist Van Gogh himself. In order to tell the story of the painter's life, Resnais rearranges dozens of paintings into a kind of storyboard. Constructing links between the individual images, Resnais mobilizes or animates them. He uses several speeds and forms of transitions (from straight cuts to slow overlap dissolves), bringing the static images to life by means of camera movements in all directions. Furthermore, rather than juxtaposing shots of paintings, Resnais confronts parts of paintings to one another. Consequently, Resnais destroyed the spatial integrity of the individual artworks in two ways: by focusing on isolated details on the one hand, and by jumping through an entire oeuvre on the other. In Resnais's film, Van Gogh's complete oeuvre is seen as a single vast painting.

Something similar is at stake in *The Open Window* (*La Fenêtre ouverte*, 1952), a film that has the history of landscape painting as its subject. The film was realized by Henri Storck, who had previously made seminal prize-winning documentaries on Paul Delvaux and Rubens.[2] Shot in Technicolor, *The Open Window* was an international co-production made as part of a cultural collaboration between the countries that had signed the Brussels Treaty in 1948: France, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The film opens with a shot of the central panel of a fifteenth-century triptych by the Master of the Magdalene Legend. A forward tracking shot draws our attention to the open window in the upper-right side of the panel, through which a landscape can be seen. Moving from the sacred to the profane, from the interior to the exterior, the rest of the film reconstructs the

2 These are *Le Monde de Paul Delvaux* (1946) and *Rubens* (1948, with Paul Haesaerts) (Jacobs 2019a, 23–33).

history of landscape painting from fifteenth-century Flemish painting up to French Impressionism, using 58 paintings by well-known masters. [Figs. 1–4.] In the process, Storck's camera glides over the details – a critic praised Storck as "a great image-maker for knowing which details in the paintings tell a story" (Forsyth Hardy quoted in Aubenas 1997, 116). But Storck also focuses our attention to the overall coherence of some compositions – such as in the case of Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (c. 1565), when the camera pulls back and alludes to the opening of new horizons and perspectives. Prefiguring what will later become the conventional art documentary, Storck's camera tracks and dollies over the pictorial surface, mobilizing and animating static paintings.

Storck stated that the crew did "its outmost to completely eliminate the artifices of filming, to conjure away, so to speak, the camera in order to plunge the viewer into the very world of the painting and finally into the landscape that it represents. We want the viewers, through the paintings of artists, to discover for themselves the sentiment of nature" (Debrix n.d.).[3] Storck, as it were, abolishes the frames of the paintings to enter the frame of cinema, attempting to reconcile the space of a painting with the space of film. For André Bazin, this is why the new art documentaries of the late 1940s and early 1950s were precisely so interesting. According to Bazin (1975), the fixed frame of painting encloses a world that entirely exists by and for itself; it draws the attention in a centripetal way to a static composition. The frame of the film camera, by contrast, is mobile and implies a centrifugal space extending beyond the frame into the smallest and most remote corners of everyday life. When we show a part of a painting on a film screen, the space of the painting loses its orientation and it is presented as something borderless and hence as something that extends beyond the frame. Apart from the (educational or democratizing) fact that cinema is capable of bringing art to wider audiences, film presents a painting as part of the world. According to Bazin, Resnais succeeded precisely in introducing this centrifugal space of film into the centripetal space of painting. By switching between paintings and by letting the camera glide over surfaces the limits of which remain invisible, Resnais breaks through the spatial restraints of painting. In the most exciting of the lyrical art documentaries of the 1940s and 1950s, filmmakers play on this tension, which is inherently connected with the confrontation of both media. Even when using a static shot, facing the painting frontally, due to the differences between the aspect ratio of the film and the proportions of the painting,

3 Jean R. Debrix's article Les peintres paysagistes is quoted on the webpage of the Henri Storck Foundation: *https://fondshenristorck.be/en/henri-storck/filmography-hs/films-alphabetically/the-open-window/*. Last accessed 12. 12. 2020.

the encounter between the frame of the film and the frame of the painting creates a spatial tension – this is what Jean-Marie Straub and Danièlle Huillet, for instance, emphasized in their *Visit to the Louvre* (*Visite au Louvre*, 2004), which is marked by highly remarkable asymmetric framings (Jacobs 2018).

While so many filmmakers attempt to present a landscape as a picture, subjecting a site to an image answering to pictorial conventions, documentaries on paintings do the opposite: they willing or nilling present paintings as material things in three-dimensional space. Resnais, Storck, and other filmmakers in the 1940s and 1950s played on this, presenting the art documentary as a platform on which the borders between movement and stasis, the two and three-dimensional, and reality and artificiality could be explored. Since then, many filmmakers and artists have emphasized the spatial ambiguities engendered by the encounter between film and painting. Using various pictorial effects in many of his feature films, Aleksandr Sokurov, for instance, made several essay films dealing with painting, and landscape painting in particular. One of these films deals with Hubert Robert, the eighteenth-century painter closely connected to the picturesque. In several scenes, Sokurov scans Robert's pictorial surfaces like Resnais and Storck but, with the help of distorted lenses or digital processing, he also creates a waving texture that gives us the feeling that we enter a dream world, a dimension outside time, or that we enter the realm of a painting and the texture of paint. Likewise, in *Elegy of a Voyage* (*Elegiya dorogi,* 2001), Sokurov himself plays the part of a nocturnal intruder of the Rotterdam museum, touching the surface of several canvasses. With the help of blurred lenses and forward tracking shots, he conflates real and painted landscapes. This practice of trying to enter the painting also aspires to the aesthetics of the picturesque, which invites us to walk into the view, to dissolve the picture, while this immersion is somehow always thwarted. Filmmakers, too, have attempted to integrate characters into the painted landscape – famous examples are Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams* (1990 with a segment featuring an art student who finds himself inside the world of Van Gogh's artwork, where he meets the artist (impersonated by Martin Scorsese); or Éric Rohmer's *The Lady and the Duke* (*L'Anglaise et le duc*, 2001), in which the actors were filmed superimposed over eighteenth-century scenic paintings.

In various ways, Kurosawa, Rohmer, and Sokurov, like Storck and Resnais, create the illusion that we are getting close to the painting, that we are stepping into it, that we touch it – as Sokurov literally does in his *Elegy of a Voyage*. The film camera, and especially the moving film camera enables not only an optical but also a haptic confrontation with the painted landscape. Close-ups reveal texture and tactility, but this tactility abstracts the landscape image and focuses our attention on the paint

and the canvas. In *Van Gogh* and *La Fenêtre ouverte*, Resnais and Storck respectively present painted landscapes as something pictorial, in the sense of painterly. Close shots obscure spatial contexts, focusing on cut-outs without a horizon – when there is no horizon, we cannot speak of a landscape. Creating a pictorial intensity, close-ups undermine the mimetic coherence of the paintings, evoking what Georges Didi-Huberman called the "pan" that is "a symptom of paint within the picture" (2005, 261). Details seem to collapse, crumbling into a pure coloured chaos. The close-up gaze, in the words of Didi-Huberman (2005, 236), "manages only to undo matter and form," condemning itself "to a veritable tyranny of the material."

Resnais and Storck's close-ups abstract the image but they make visible the paint in the painting. Resnais's film does not only focus on Van Gogh's insanity, it also emphasizes his nervous brush strokes. In so doing, the art documentaries of Resnais and Storck fully exploit the logics of mechanical reproduction as art theoretical tools. Although the admiration of the bravura brushwork of master painters reaches back for centuries, it was only in the 1930s that photographic close-ups focusing on the application of paint started to appear in art books. Photographs and films were deployed in the discovery and the representation of "painterly effects" – in the modernist, Greenbergian sense –, that is the application of the paint on the canvas, the rhythms of the brushwork, the texture of the canvas, et cetera. In the process, paintings are turned into abstract landscapes – paintscapes. The flat surface of the painting becomes an ambivalent space – not unlike Abstract Expressionist painters who presented their wall-sized all-over structures as abstract landscapes. Paradoxically, the mechanical media of photography and film thus enabled the celebration and even the fetishization of the craftsmanship of the artist and the mastery of the manual, evoking the "impasto" on the surface and the "hand" of the artist.

It should be noted that the abstracting and "paintscaping" qualities of close-ups are, of course, not exclusively dependent on a painted landscape in front of a camera. Any object can be transformed into a landscape by means of the magic of close-ups, as demonstrated by Salvador Dali in his *Impressions of Upper Mongolia* (*Impressions de la Haute Mongolie*, 1975). This mockumentary about a hunt through Mongolia for a giant hallucinogenic mushroom uses magnified images derived from the metal part of a fountain pen. However, in the case of close-ups of paintings, an additional spatial complexity is invoked. Many artists have used film to explore the ambivalent spaces of close-ups. Marcel Broodthaers, for instance, made several films on paintings. *A Voyage on the North Sea* (1973–1974) is both a book and a four-minute film (Jacobs 2019b, 257). Only to a certain extent, the book can be presented as a scenario for the film. Likewise, the film can be seen as a documentary on the

book, demonstrating Broodthaers's lifelong fascination with doubling and with the confrontation between different systems of meaning or communication (word versus image, for instance). Both the book and the film meditate on the appropriation and mechanical reproduction of images and the way a montage of a series of images creates meanings. Strikingly, book and film use an opposite strategy: while the film is organized statically and strictly according to the page numbers, the book is characterized by a dynamic montage of images. The illustrations contain, on the one hand, black-and-white photographs of a small sailboat, and, on the other, colour reproductions of a painting of a seascape with a fishing boat. In various ways, the photographs are juxtaposed with the painting: recreation versus labour, twentieth century versus nineteenth century, reality versus art, black-and-white versus colour. Broodthaers reminds us of the fact that this exploration of the materiality of paint and the fascination of the painterly were highly dependent on mechanical reproductions and hence on the media of film and photography.

It is not a coincidence that Heinrich Wölfflin, who was so important for the link between the eighteenth-century picturesque and the modernist painterly, was one of the first art historians who used slide lectures and who reflected in his writings on the way how mechanical reproductions changed our understanding of art, prefiguring the ideas of Walter Benjamin, André Malraux, and others.[4] Given this perspective, film is thus in two ways connected with the picturesque. While the picturesque prefigures the motion, duration, and spatialized point-of-view of cinema, film and photography, with the devices of the close-up and montage, contributed to the development of the "painterly." As John Macarthur reminds us, Wölfflin used the word *malerisch* standing for both "the picturesque" and "the painterly" (Macarthur 2007, 240–247). What's more, Wölfflin investigated the relation between the two different concepts. "The really interesting question now is this," Wölfflin wrote, "what is the relation between the painterly style of treatment and the picturesque quality of the theme?" (Wölfflin 1915, 26). In his later writings, Wölfflin disconnected the picturesque from a specific theme. It became a concept standing first and foremost for something that was characterized by qualities of colour, stroke, and texture rather than of contour and line. In his influential *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, *das Malerische* became an important category, opposing *das Lineare* or "the linear" (1915, 20–79). Here, the painterly had nothing to do with a naïve taste for charming the views of the poor, becoming an abstract transhistorical category, closely connected to the modernist concept of the painterly.

4 See, for instance, Wölfflin (1896, 224–228; 1897, 294–297; and 1915, 237–244); Wölfflin (1941, 66–81); and Wölfflin 1941, 82–89. See also Adler (2004, 431–456); and Alexander (2018, 79–109).

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"Show the Clichés:" the Appearance of Happiness in Agnès Varda's *Le Bonheur*

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Abstract. *Le Bonheur*, perhaps Agnès Varda's most beautiful film, is also her most perplexing. The film's insistently idyllic surface qualities, overtly beautiful imagery, and psychologically impenetrable, improbably content characters mystify and confuse. Of late, feminist scholars have clarified the situation, noting Varda's incorporation of advertising and pop cultural visual rhetoric to implicate the social forces framing the picture and those insistently "happy" people: more like advertising ciphers than dramatic characters. Varda herself referenced Impressionist painting as a source of the film's aesthetics. The purposes of this vivid, chromatic intertextual and intermedial source, in relation to the rhetoric of commercial and popular culture, demand attention. Varda studied art history and connected the milieu of *Le Bonheur*, the Parisian exurbs, their petit-bourgeois and working-class populace, and bucolic leisure, artisanal and industrial settings, to the modernity of 19th-century Impressionism. *Le Bonheur* uses an Impressionist picturesque dialectically, in relation to a pop contemporaneity, to observe and critique an ideological genealogy of capitalism and its oppression of women.

Keywords: Agnès Varda, *Le Bonheur*, Impressionism, advertising and pop cultural visual images in film, feminism.

In 1819, Constance Mayer, one of a number of women who had made careers as painters following the French Revolution, showed a major painting at the annual Salon. *Le Rêve du Bonheur* shows a young couple and their infant being rowed down the river of life by Love and Fortune. [Fig. 1.] As Helen Weston has noted, "Mayer's work expresses a continuing belief in the Stendhalian moment of perfect illusion and the beauty of the pursuit of happiness […]. It is a dream-world, illusory and intangible" (1980, 19). Whose dream is this? In the picture, the mother and baby cradled in arms are asleep while the father against whom they slumber looks down at them adoringly and the wind blows his hair and cape. In the moonlit darkness, there is just a hint of storminess around the idyll that is hard not to regard as an omen.

Constance Mayer (1775–1821), who had previously undertaken extensive and influential instruction with Jean-Baptiste Greuze, a master of domestic and sentimental subjects, became a student of the painter Pierre-Paul Prud'hon (1758–1823) in 1802, when she was already a mature, accomplished artist. When Prud'hon's wife was institutionalized the following year, Mayer became a frequent caretaker of his five children, while continuing to work in his studio, where the two began a long-term artistic collaboration. They also became domestic partners. According to Weston, "the partnership between them was so close, the give and take in the relationship so mutual, the contributions to the pictures so interwoven, that the traditional distinction between teacher/pupil, master/subordinate, producer/assistant cannot seriously be upheld" (1980, 17). The resulting collaboration led to a genuinely mutual oeuvre, one which posterity has tended to attribute mainly to Prud'hon. However, evidence suggests that for *Le Rêve du Bonheur* and other works, the theme was conceived by Mayer, often inspired by Greuze; that Prud'hon, who was a consummate draughtsman (and, of course, had much greater access to live models than Mayer), prepared drawings and sketches; and that Mayer, the better painter, completed the final canvas from Prud'hon's studies (Weston 1980). Elizabeth Guffey notes that when Mayer entered Prud'hon's studio in 1802, she was already an established artist and had exhibited more paintings in the Salon than her new "master" (1996, 396), having exhibited in every Salon since 1796 (Weston 1980, 15). There is evidence to suggest that Mayer may have suffered from depression; however, her suicide is said to have been precipitated by Prud'hon's rejection of the prospect of marrying again after the death of his wife. She slit her throat with his razor. She was 46 (Weston 1980, 19).

I begin with this sad excursus because I have long wondered if Constance Mayer and her *Dream of Happiness* might not have crossed Agnès Varda's mind when she undertook *Le Bonheur* (*Happiness*, 1965), her third feature film, her first in colour, probably her most misunderstood, certainly her most disputed. As Amy Taubin notes, "Is it a pastoral? A social satire? A slap-down of de Gaulle–style family values? A lyrical evocation of open marriage? […] Are the implications of the film's title ironic or sincere?" (Taubin 2008). Varda had studied art history at the École du Louvre, so it is not unlikely that she would have known Mayer's chef d'oeuvre and her sad story. Moreover, I shall argue in this paper, art historical intertexts, which appear frequently in Varda's oeuvre often provide interpretive keys. In *Le Bonheur*, a narrative that might sound like a melodrama is shown like a fairy tale, a picture book, or an advertisement: François (Jean-Claude Drouot), a blissfully happy young man, father of two adorable young children (Olivier and Sandrine Drouot, the actor's own

children), and husband to an adoring wife, Thérèse (Claire Drouot, the actor's wife) meets and happily falls into a love affair with a beautifully accommodating working girl, Émilie (Marie-France Boyer); finds himself so moved by the surplus of happiness that he confides in his wife, makes love to her as the children sleep after their picnic lunch, dozes off, and awakes to find her missing. She has gone off and drowned. He appears heartbroken, at least briefly, although not the least bit guilty. The word suicide is never uttered. After Thérèse's funeral and a summer holiday with his family and the children, he returns home and soon his happy equilibrium is reestablished, with Émilie, who now inhabits the domestic place once occupied by Thérèse: the conjugal bed, the maternal duties, the bucolic Sunday picnics in the country.

It is the film's visual pleasures that have given rise to critical doubts: its insistently idyllic surface qualities; pretty people and places, dazzling displays of colour – accompanied by the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (*Adagio and Fugue in C*) – and psychologically impenetrable, improbably sweet, content characters. In her book, *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image* (2011), Rosalind Galt has interrogated the longstanding bias in film culture against such pleasures, astutely analysing its patriarchal and sexist origins; and she further observes the paradoxical double bind that led this bias to be embraced by much feminist film theory. In her article, *Subversive Imitation: Agnès Varda's Le Bonheur*, although she doesn't refer to Galt's book, Heidi Holst-Knudsen notes that such biases are part of the enduring contradictions of the film's reception, pointing out that: "many read *Le Bonheur* literally, qualifying it as a 'mindless rhapsody' (A.S. 118), a 'celebration of all sensory pleasure' (Kozloff 35), or worse, as an insidious confirmation of women's lack of agency and blind submission to male domination. Elizabeth Sussex of *Sight and Sound* believed Varda took 'a fool like François seriously' and reduced her experimental style to a desire to make pretty pictures, condemning her 'meaningless' use of 'style for style's sake.' […] Claire Johnston, in her much anthologized 1973 essay 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema,' reads *Le Bonheur* as a portrayal of female fantasy celebrating bourgeois myths of women: 'There is no doubt that Varda's work is reactionary: … her films mark a retrograde step in women's cinema'" (Holst-Knudsen 2018, 504–505). It was over twenty years after *Le Bonheur*'s release that some feminists, Barbara Quart (1988), Susan Hayward (2000), and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1990) among them, began to see, not *past* the prettiness, but *into* it and how integral it was to the film's ironic implications, which were hidden in plain sight.

Of late, scholars, including Holst-Knudsen, have clarified the situation further, analysing Varda's incorporation of advertising and pop cultural visual rhetoric to

implicate the social forces framing the picture and those insistently "happy" people: who seem more like advertising ciphers than dramatic characters. In *Unhappily ever after: visual irony and feminist strategy in Agnès Varda's Le Bonheur* (an article later adapted as a chapter of her recent monograph), Rebecca DeRoo focuses on two parallel sequences in the film – one towards the beginning, of Thérèse's hands in close-up performing a series of domestic tasks; the other towards the end, of Émilie's hands [Figs. 2–3] – connecting these to advertisements from French women's magazines that "idealized the daily drudgery of the housewife." DeRoo observes that this structured repetition plainly suggests the domestic housewife's replaceability and a conscious critique of French ideals of femininity, persuasively arguing that *Le Bonheur* "engages with two influential [feminist] texts: Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)" (DeRoo 2018, 51). Kierran Horner in *The art of advertising happiness: Agnès Varda's Le Bonheur and Pop Art* (2018) also focuses on imagery that derives from popular magazines, advertising, and pop culture – connecting Varda's strategies to both pop artists, including Peter Blake and Evelyne Axell, and to friend and fellow filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, in his contemporary films, *Une femme mariée* (1964) and *Pierrot le fou* (1965). "Through the détournement of advertising images to critique an idealised and untenable notion of happiness, *Le Bonheur* is a Pop Art film" – he maintains (Horner 2018, 152).

Holst-Knudsen notes that certain stylistic features of the film heighten its aura of artifice. "The extraordinary coloration and composition of the shots in the film also call attention to themselves and demand interpretation. In several frames, the focus is so blurred as to yield visual abstractions as opposed to photographic images," she continues. "A chromatic alliteration visually unifies the characters populating the sequence, their color-coordinated clothing blending perfectly with the tonalities of the surrounding floral landscape, exposing the "natural" scene as staged composition. Varda's excessively composed shots and her pointedly unnatural manipulation of color force the spectator to adopt a distanced critical stance with respect to this Edenic representation" (Holst-Knudsen 2018, 510). Although it could be argued, based on the confused reception of the film, that spectators have often in fact *refused* to adopt a critical stance, the effect to which Holst-Knudsen refers is similar to what Brigitte Peucker has called "pictureness," a modernist anti-perspectivalism she observes in, among others, the films of Michelangelo Antonioni, who, she says, "draws on painting, the flat art, in order to fashion an alternative conception of film space as inherently dissonant" (2019, 29–36). Varda engages such perhaps similarly motivated "pictureness" variously: using shallow and racked focus, self-conscious

framing, richly chromatic dissolves, and other pictorial devices, as well as certain rhythmic editing patterns. This modernist strategy should alert us to look critically at Varda's pretty pictures [Figs. 4–6].

Amidst the film's prettiness one notes an insistent equation of woman and nature, particularly in the figuration of Thérèse, whose "dresses are often patterned with floral designs, and this clothing blatantly emphasizes her assigned role: be fertile and produce" (Quaranta 2017). It should be added that these floral designs are almost always echoed by flora in the mise-en-scène [Figs. 7–8] and that the equation of woman and nature is also echoed in the script as dialogue, both when François assures Émilie that for him she and Thérèse are different sorts of love objects – his wife is like a plant, while she is a wild animal… he loves nature! – and when he assures Thérèse that to him the family is like an orchard and Émilie a tree beyond it he had to explore. She is supposed to be mollified by this! The equation of woman and nature is initially much more visually evident in the film's treatment of Thérèse, who is strongly associated with the garden and domesticity, than of Émilie, who, in her job at the post office is surrounded by printed matter (the film includes close-ups of stamps, cards, and advertisements), and, in the world (a café scene) and at home, is semiotically associated with advertising and pop culture [Fig. 9]. The visage of pop singer Sylvie Vartan, whom Émilie rather resembles – or fashions herself after – along with head shots of other celebrities (including Sacha Distel, Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot, and Jean-Paul Belmondo) are seen as part of her apartment décor, and echo pictures and pin-ups seen in the carpentry shop where François works [Fig. 10]. This dual construction of womanhood – traditional and modern – in *Le Bonheur* has been noted (Schmid 2019, 100). But Varda, by associating pop imagery with the more modern, "liberated" Émilie, may, in fact, be drawing a parallel between her and Thérèse, as much as a contrast. The single Émilie, with her public-facing, bureaucratic service position at the post office, occupies a role that did not exist for women until the 20th century, but by the film's end she will abandon it to the more traditional, domestic role of wife and mother after she supersedes the dead Thérèse. She too often dons floral prints. Her freedom is temporary. Thérèse had been a wife, mother, and a self-employed seamstress, a petit-bourgeois possibility since at least the 19th century. In the very few moments where she is neither working nor making love to her husband, Thérèse looks at women's magazines; and the one commission she undertakes in the narrative is a wedding dress she is asked to copy from one seen in *Elle*. These small moments point to the common influence of the mass media and the feminine ideals it reinforces, which DeRoo saw reflected in Varda's parallel construction of working hands sequences.

Conventional marriage, still the societal ideal, is implicated as the tradition that belies women's liberation. Indeed, one could argue that the film paints a history in continuity of the paradoxes of gender and class in French modern culture, drawing on imagery and paradigms from Impressionist painting to pop culture.

Thérèse, the domestic animal (or plant), a more old-fashioned character, is less free than Émilie, more restricted in her worldly activities, but more supported by family and community, especially by other women. Her leisure activities are entirely connected with her husband and extended family, shown in bucolic and convivial scenes vividly reminiscent of Impressionist painting. Varda openly acknowledged Impressionism as an inspiration for *Le Bonheur*, which begins with a *déjeuner sur l'herbe*, one of Impressionism's enduring subjects, and she draws heavily upon the iconography and the look of Impressionist painting: the picnics in the country [Fig. 11 and hyperlink 1], the luncheons *en plein air* [Fig. 12 and hyperlink 2], the weekend dances at outdoor cafés [Fig. 13 and hyperlink 3], as well as the more intimate and feminine themes of the two eminent woman impressionists, Mary Cassatt [Fig. 14 and hyperlink 4] and Berthe Morisot [Fig. 15 and hyperlink 5]: notably mothers with children, constrained leisure, and handwork. Varda's intertextual engagement with Impressionism and its legacy is acknowledged in *Le Bonheur* in an early scene set at the home of François's uncle (owner of the family carpentry business), where on a television set is seen playing Jean Renoir's 1959 film *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, one of his two cinematic homages – along with *A Day in the Country*, 1936 – to the Impressionist idylls of his father, the painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir [Fig. 16]. Varda also stylistically echoes Impressionism, using cinema to achieve some of its most innovative effects – a forfeiting of spatial depth in favour of an ephemeral and plenitudinous play of diffuse colour and light [Fig. 17 and hyperlink 6].

Although these lovely Impressionist homages might seem politically toothless, indeed, to contribute to the widespread impression (so-to-speak) of *Le Bonheur*'s banality, it is my contention that they constitute part of a critique of French society. Varda said in a 1971 interview, "when you have in mind to show the clichés of society—and that is what *Le Bonheur* is all about—you have to show the clichés" (Varda 2014, 55). However artistically radical Impressionism may have been in the 1870s, by 100 years later in was something else altogether and very much cliché. And although to an international audience, the milieu of *Le Bonheur* may appear to be small-town, provincial France, it is, in fact, as would be clear to a French audience, set in very much the same sorts of places as were many Impressionist paintings: the Parisian exurbs, with their petit-bourgeois and working-class populations, their admixture of bucolic leisure, as well as artisanal, and industrial settings. Art

historians, including, among others, Robert Herbert, T. J. Clark, and Tom Crow, have well established the manner in which this landscape, from the 1860s was "recognized to be a special territory in which some aspects of modernity might be detected," as Clark puts it, "at least by those who could stomach the company of the petite bourgeoisie." Noting that the word "suburban" is misleading, Clark points out that in the exurbs an alternative to city life was staged, "a way of living and working which in time would come to dominate the late capitalist world, providing as it did the appropriate forms of sociability for the new age […] industry and recreation were casually established next to each other, in a landscape which assumed only as much form as the juxtaposition of production and distraction (factories and regattas) allowed" (Clark 1984, 147). Just as the Impressionists generally left the industrial part of this landscape out of their pictures, or relegated it to the distance, Varda marginalizes it, too, leaving small glimpses of industry on the horizon, or fleeting shots of large urban apartment blocks – just enough to signal the political economy lurking around the edges of the narrative.

According to Tom Crow, the classic Impressionism that emerged in the 1870s, particularly the *plein air* scenes of Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, portrayed lives "lived entirely within the confines of real-estate development and entrepreneurial capitalism; these are images of provided pleasures. But they are images that alter, by the very exclusivity of their concentration on ease and uncoerced activity, the balance between the regulated and unregulated compartments of experience. They take leisure out of its place; instead of appearing as a controlled, compensatory feature of the modern social mechanism, securely framed by other institutions, it stands out in unrelieved difference from the denial of freedom that surrounds it" (Crow 1996, 22). Crow adds that "the disjunction of sensation from judgment was not the invention of artists, but had been contrived by the emerging leisure industry to appear the more natural and liberated moment of individual life. The structural demarcation of leisure within the capitalist economy provided the invisible frame which made that distracted experience cohere as the image of pleasure" (1996, 23). Varda plays with this visual frame, one that is barely removed from advertising. Her brief glimpses of modern apartment blocks and transportation, commercial signage and advertising, are all peripheral to the focal prettiness of family life in *Le Bonheur*. She does not limit the visual field to leisure activities but emphasizes them; they are the literal frames of the film, which begins and ends with bucolic weekend outings. Varda gives François a peculiarly satisfying quasi-artisanal job, as a carpenter, working for a family business. This allows her to avoid showing him as either an alienated proletarian or disaffected

functionary. Neither proletarian nor bourgeois, his workplace is shown in short scenes as familial, convivial, and relaxed; he is not alienated from the products of his labour. This frame allows for an illusion of familial happiness that depends upon a gendered politics: Thérèse's acquiescence to her role: ceaseless domestic labour, which she performs even during their country idylls. "So that the promises of leisure would not be tested against too much contrary visual evidence," Crow notes of Impressionism's distinct approach to iconography and style, "not only dissonant features of the landscape, like the prominent factories of Argenteuil, but also the all-too-frequent failure of the promise of happiness – the painters consistently fixed on optical phenomena that are virtually unrepresentable[…]. These phenomena have become, thanks largely to Impressionism, conventional signs of the spaces of leisure and tourism, of their promised vividness and perpetual surprise" (1996, 23–24). Crow concludes, noting how readily this optical obfuscation became a cliché, "it was only a matter of a few years before the Impressionist vision of commercial diversion became the advertisement of the thing itself, a functioning part of the imaginary enticement directed toward tourists and residents alike" (Crow 1996, 35). Without a doubt Varda borrowed the lovely imagery of Impressionism, in the very sort of social environment in which it originated, to emphasize its ideological role – along with its pop cultural descendants – in maintaining a cruel status quo: a bill of goods, one sold to us all, but particularly to women. The happiness of *Le Bonheur* is, to quote Simone de Beauvoir, the ideal "of happiness, which means the ideal of quiet equilibrium in a life of immanence and repetition […] the maintenance of the *status quo*. A gilded mediocrity lacking ambition and passion, aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away toward death without questioning its purpose" (Beauvoir 1989, 447).

It is that failure to question that distinguishes the characters in *Le Bonheur*. François seems a happy, uncomplicated man who does not question his own pursuit of happiness or his entitlement to more of it. He does not perceive that his happiness could possibly be achieved at the expense of someone else's. Although Thérèse and Émilie both seem to struggle briefly with the imperative of having to share him, neither demands his fidelity. Émilie accepts her partial claim, just as she will later accept her new role as domestic servant. Thérèse seems to accept the gilded mediocrity of her lot, as well… until she slips away and dies. François and the children are all asleep in the golden afternoon when she goes. The ellipsis that obscures the narrative moment of her death leaves a yawning hole in the viewer's comprehension of it, as does the ambiguous and fleeting image of Thérèse struggling in the water that appears out of sequence – part of a modernist montage of reaction

shots – only when François confronts her lifeless, drowned body; it is an image that cannot be securely assigned either to his imagination or to the narrative chain. An obscure gust of tragedy has blown like a small squall across the river of clichés along which this happy family, like Constance Mayer's, had been rowed by Love and Fortune, as they slept. I cannot help but connect the beautiful dreamers in *Le Bonheur* to those in *Le Rêve du Bonheur* and especially Thérèse to the painter of that illusory idyll, so rudely awakened from the oblivion of ideology, so suddenly confronted by the limits of their domestic worth, so unwittingly escorted to their premature graves.

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Screens of the Picturesque: Aesthetics, Technology, Economy

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Abstract. The 18th-century notion of the picturesque is somewhat lesser known as compared to the more celebrated categories of the beautiful and the sublime, even though it may not only help us critically reflect upon modern perceptions of the landscape, but it may also provide us a unique way to link the field of aesthetic speculation with questions of technology and economy. The article will focus on two of the major theoreticians of the picturesque (William Gilpin and Uvedale Price) and will examine their ideas in relation to Edmund Burke's aesthetics on the one hand, and contemporary tendencies in landscape gardening (as represented by Lancelot "Capability" Brown and Humphry Repton) on the other. Such an investigation may shed light on the multiple shifts in the perception of nature and the sense of naturalness during the long 18th century, as well as on the pictorial and theatrical aspects of landscape design. But examples of the Claude glass, the ha-ha, and Humphry Repton's Red Books may also indicate the role of technological innovations and economic interests, and thereby the relevancy of the very discourse of the picturesque to more modern or even postmodern artistic, cultural, and medial developments.

Keywords: picturesque, English garden, aesthetics, technology, economy.

The 18th-century notion of the picturesque is somewhat lesser known as compared to the more frequently discussed aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime. A closer look at its emergence may not only help us critically reflect upon modern perceptions of the landscape, but it may also provide a unique way to link the field of aesthetic speculation with questions of technology and economy. One way to do so is to trace the ways in which, well before the emergence of cinema, or even of photography, the picturesque is intimately linked to practices of screening. While today, picturesque spectacles seem to flood cinematic, television or computer screens, in a more archaic sense of the term, "screens" were part and parcel of the development of landscape gardens and the evolving discourse on

the picturesque throughout the long 18th century, at least in two respects. From a technological point of view, the notion of the picturesque applied to landscaping implies a logic of framing, one based upon the blotting out of unwanted visual elements by lines of trees used as theatrical "screens," while from an economic perspective, the picturesque is closely intertwined with a practice of idealization, in which landscape gardens have been used as "screen" memories (*Deckerinnerungen*, in the Freudian sense), with a function to conceal the trauma of forced enclosures. Looking into two of the major theories of the picturesque (by William Gilpin and Uvedale Price), as well as their relation to contemporary practices in landscape gardening (as developed by Lancelot "Capability" Brown and Humphry Repton), will serve as an occasion to spell out these linkages between aesthetics, technology, and economy, and the multiple "screens" of the picturesque.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the English term "picturesque" was still understood in a much broader sense as compared to the meaning it came to bear later on. In its initial sense, it could refer to any of the favoured objects or themes of painting. Alexander Pope, for instance, applied it with reference to the historical and mythological scenes of the *Iliad*. At the point when he speaks of the vigour or liveliness (*enargeia*) of Homer's expressions, he refers to the natural environment of these scenes as "the most picturesque imaginable" (Pope 1996, 513).

The narrower contours of the concept were drawn by William Gilpin, who recounted his ramblings in England, Wales and Scotland in travelogues illustrated with his own sketches or water colour paintings. In contrast to the Grand Tour, which targeted the ancient relics of the Mediterranean, Gilpin's travel writing contributed to the growing popularity of the homeland tour. Besides, the descriptions he gave both of landscapes and of emotions and thoughts elicited by viewing them turned loco-descriptive writing into a major mode of aesthetic speculation. Gilpin's speculative wanderings had a great impact on subsequent generations, and the romantics' emotional attachment to the Wye valley or the Lake District was considerably informed by such readings. The following description of the landscape surrounding the ruins of Tintern Abbey on the bank of the Wye would later echo in William Wordsworth's romantic descriptions of the Wye valley: "the abbey, intended for meditation, is hid in the *sequestered* vale. […] It occupies a gentle eminence in the middle of a *circular* valley, beautifully *screened* on all sides by woody hills; through which the river winds its course; and the hills, *closing* on its entrance, and on its exit, leave no room for inclement blasts to enter. A more pleasing *retreat* could not easily be found. The woods, and glades intermixed; the winding of the river; the variety of the ground; the splendid ruin, contrasted with

the objects of nature; and the elegant *line* formed by the summits of the hills, which *include* the whole; make all together a very enchanting piece of *scenery*. Every thing *around* breathes an air so calm, and tranquil; so *sequestered* from the commerce of life, that it is easy to conceive, a man of warm imagination, in monkish times, might have been allured by such a *scene* to become an *inhabitant* of it" (Gilpin 1782, 31–32, emphasis mine, Gy. F.). According to this passage, the environment of the abbey is first and foremost a "scene" or "scenery," and that is how it has a power to seduce monks or wanderers to visit its location, to stay, linger, and meditate. For us, however, it is Gilpin himself who produces a framed spectacle out of this site by describing it as something circularly enclosed and hidden "in the sequestered vale," "sequestered from the commerce of life." "Screened" by the surrounding hills, the valley attains its beauty due to the vision-blocking geographical formations that encapsulate it, as the hills screen out any visually disturbing effects from the background, just like theatrical screens that are supposed to block the spectator's gaze from seeing the backstage. That is how Tintern Abbey and its situation are produced as a scenery, as a site to be seen, a demarcated natural spectacle with easily discernible contours. That is how the abbey's location is actually turned into a landscape, which is not just a sight but also a soundscape as far as screening does not only blot out unwanted visual elements but also any noise that might disrupt the tranquillity of the place. The potentially negative sentiment of isolation is counterbalanced by a notion of homeliness, the image of the spot as a "retreat" for any shelter-seeking "inhabitant." Apart from providing a verbal description, Gilpin at this point also offers his readers a watercolour illustration, shown within an oval frame and representing the secluded spot of the ruins. While he appears merely to copy the circular formation of the valley through the verbal and pictorial arts of description, he in fact actively participates in the phantasmatic production of the landscape as a framed scene with clear outlines.

Gilpin first addressed the question of the picturesque in his 1768 book *An Essay upon Prints*, where he treated it as a kind of natural beauty, associating the term with another adjective, the "romantic." In the glossary of his book, "picturesque beauty" appears as "that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture" (Gilpin 1768, x). What he implied was that natural spectacles that can only evoke pleasure when represented in painting can in fact be pleasurable even upon direct viewing when viewed *as if* they were depicted in a picture.

To view nature as a painting or picture was not simply an intellectual feat for Gilpin and his contemporaries. There was a particular device that was supposed to assist travellers in their aestheticizing efforts. This was the Claude glass, a mid-size,

slightly dimmed and convex mirror, set in a square or oval frame and covered by a lid for the purposes of protection (and also perhaps to serve as a support when the mirror was placed on the ground). It was so named after the 17th-century French landscape painter Claude Lorrain, because it provided large angles and dimmed hues so characteristic of his pictures. A contemporary of Gilpin, Thomas West referred to it as a "landscape mirror" in the introduction to his *Guide to the Lakes in Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire* (1778), and suggested that, next to a telescope, travellers should also take along such a glass in order to more fully enjoy the beauties of nature (West 1778, 15). The Claude glass served as a technological enhancement of the aesthetic experience of nature in several respects. Firstly, due to its convex surface, it provided a large angle view and thus made it possible for spectators to take in relatively close spectacles or vast objects. Secondly, its dimmed glass reduced the brightness of the sun, which made the clouds or waves more clearly discernible, also making the bushes, trees, or shady areas in the foreground (or the figures standing in their proximity) gloomy – a feature again reminiscent of Lorrain's paintings. And thirdly, it actually framed a selected part of nature, turning the place into a vision, the site into a sight, that is, into a landscape. No wonder it was widely used as a tool in the service of the aesthetic enjoyment of nature. (And no wonder, it is still in use, albeit in a somewhat different form and size, and under a different name, as reflectoscope, in various touristic locations, most notably at the Desert View vista point on the Southern rim of the Grand Canyon.)[1] Since, however, as West himself admitted, "the person using it ought always to turn his back to the object that he views" (West 1778, 15), travellers chasing the picturesque beauties of nature (stumbling around with a Claude glass in their hands, amazed by the spectacles of nature, and perhaps also by their own reflected image) soon became objects of public ridicule – funny prototypes of the selfie-maker, as we would perceive them today.

Gilpin was well-acquainted with this device and recognized its potentials early on, as is clear from the 1789 account of his 1776 journey to Scotland. But he still had reservations concerning its usefulness or necessity. For him, it is the human mind that makes us capable of viewing landscapes *as if* they were pictures, so there is no need for any specific technical aid (1789, 1, 124). The same principle of the

1 The Desert View watchtower was designed by May Colter in 1932 according to Ancestral Puebloan architectural style. Apart from the tower, visitors may also enjoy the view of the landscape from the adjoining terrace, by looking into 45-degree inclined dimmed mirrors built into the surrounding stone barrier, which provide a somewhat darkened but relatively sharp and vivid picture of the canyon. In the hall beneath the terrace, large windows frame the landscape as so many paintings, and beside them, huge reflectoscopes offer dimmed pictures of the same views.

"as if" is highlighted in Gilpin's later work of 1792, *Three Essays*, a book which attempts to clarify the picturesque in three consecutive studies: the first one on picturesque beauty, the second one on picturesque travel, and the third one on the principles of sketching landscape. In this book, the adjective "picturesque" is attached at times no longer to this or that external object, but to the spectator him- or herself. The adjective is tellingly transferred from the object to the gaze at the moment when Gilpin speaks of the shaping power of the "picturesque eye" (1792, 24). According to his argument, it is primarily due to the activity of the picturesque eye that picturesqueness is ultimately not confined to nature, but can be found also in human products or artefacts, especially if they are ruinous (1792, 45–46).

The reason why ruins came to provide the main examples for the picturesque needs further explanation. As opposed to Edmund Burke's aesthetic theory, according to which beauty is attached to the qualities of smoothness and gradual change, Gilpin associates picturesque "beauty" precisely to features that Burke linked to the category of the sublime: fragmentation or roughness. Whether we speak of the picturesqueness of nature or art, fragmentation is in both cases pleasurable because, according to the principle of the "as if," the spectator views the spectacle as a painting. The picturesque eye frames, as it were, and thus artistically beautifies the real. Gilpin brings the example of mountainous areas full of rocks, crags, sharp ridges, and sudden obtrusions. For an artistic counterpart of such natural sights, he mentions shabby or half-collapsed buildings. According to his provocative claim, a classicist edifice acquires its picturesque "form" not by the "chisel" but by the "mallet:" "A piece of Palladian architecture may be elegant in the last degree. The proportion of its parts – the propriety of its ornaments – and the symmetry of the whole may be highly pleasing. But if we introduce it in a picture, it immediately becomes a formal object, and ceases to please. Should we wish to give it picturesque beauty, we must use the mallet instead of the chisel; we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. In short, from a smooth building we must turn it into a rough ruin. No painter, who had the choice of the two objects, would hesitate a moment" (1792, 7–8). With the emergence of the cult of ruined landscapes and buildings we are witnessing the emergence of a practice of designing or building spontaneous-looking vegetations and artificial ruins.

Gilpin's book of 1792 played an important role in the developing speculation on the picturesque, and was one of the main reasons why a debate concerning the practices of landscape design broke out in the last decade of the century. The debate was erupted by Uvedale Price's book, *An Essay on the Picturesque* (1794). Price's polemic was by no means a lonesome gesture. Just a few months earlier, his close

friend and intellectual companion Richard Payne Knight voiced a similar critique in his didactic poem, *The Landscape*, a piece dedicated to Price himself.

Price's book had two targets to hit. On the one hand, it contested Gilpin's theory, while on the other, it unleashed an attack on the landscape planning practices of the so-called "improvers" (William Kent, Lancelot Brown, and Humphry Repton). As for the former, Price was generally impressed by Gilpin's description of the picturesque (Price 1794, 34–35), he even tried perfecting or completing it. Yet, in opposition to Gilpin's conception, he lay strong emphasis on the necessity to more clearly distinguish the picturesque both from the beautiful and the sublime, and thus to add an important appendix to Burkean aesthetics. Just as Gilpin, Price himself associated the picturesque with irregularity, brokenness, roughness, or sudden change (1794, 43–45), but since Burke had placed these attributes outside the beautiful, within the realm of the sublime, Price saw Gilpin's notion of "picturesque beauty" as a gross confusion of the picturesque with the beautiful (1794, 42). For Price, the picturesque can also be terrible, ugly, or even deformed. On the other hand, picturesqueness just as much differs from sublimity, as far as terror is by no means a necessary component in the picturesque experience. Price finally concludes that the picturesque neither relaxes, nor stretches the fibres. Instead, it "corrects the langour of beauty, or the horror of sublimity" (1794, 86).

For Price, the emphasis falls on feelings of mutability, or "decayed grandeur" (1794, 71). According to him, time is what "converts a beautiful object into a picturesque one" (1794, 47–48). Although his examples contain many of the classical occurrences of the sublime (from rushing mountain torrents to thundering waterfalls, or wild animals like a stubborn ass, a formidable lion, or various birds of prey), more significant are examples that indicate the emerging cult of ruins, or, in some ways, even the extension of that cult. Beside the ruins of Greek temples or Gothic cathedrals there begin to appear other buildings such as old mills, cottages, huts, shanties, barns, and stables – all of them in distressful shape, decaying, on the way to collapse, and overgrown with ivy. Among Price's series of examples, one also finds certain plants (old oak trees, struck by thunderstorm and lightening), as well as certain types of humans (cottagers, beggars, gypsies, elderly women and men, and other shabby looking creatures). Thus, according to Price's description, the cult of ruins did not only involve architectural remains, it also encompassed fading vegetations or vegetating humans.[2] As part of this cult, the wealthiest

2 While the cult of ruins was to elevate decomposition and death through artistic stylization, it also contributed to the emergence of an aesthetics of disgust. Ever since Joseph Addison's mention, in his *Pleasures of the Imagination,* of a painted "dunghill" as a potential source of pleasure, disgusting images appeared more and more frequently in aesthetic speculations.

landowners even hired hermits to sit and meditate by the ruins. With the addition of plants and buildings, the two-dimensional pictorial admiration of the landscape gained a dimension of depth, but with the employment of paid hermits a further dimension of time was added. As a result, the aesthetic enjoyment of the landscape came to a completion in the four-dimensional complexity of theatrical art, and the picturesque was indeed "staged" for viewing.

The other target of Price's book, attacked with even greater vehemence, was the gardening and landscape planning practice of the "improvers." Their major representative was Lancelot "Capability" Brown, the inventor of the long-lasting idea of the "English garden," or, as Price called him, the "great legislator of our national taste" (1794, 188). Brown designed more than 250 parks for his wealthy customers throughout England, parks like Stowe, Petworth, Croome Court, Chatsworth, or Ashridge Estate. In consequence of the enclosures that took place from the 15th through the 19th centuries, huge territories of fertile ground went into private possession. A new class of landowners was formed and with them emerged a market which helped Brown make landscape improvement into a new industrial branch. His nickname "Capability" was itself a result of his marketing slogan, for he tried to convince his future customers about the necessity to improve their estates (an investment that could even involve the displacement of small villages or hills, or the creation of lakes) by underlining the extraordinary "capabilities" of the property in question. Brown himself was of course part of a larger process of transformation: he continued the work of William Kent, painter and gardener, who himself followed the footsteps of former royal gardener Charles Bridgeman. They tried to replace French style "formal gardens" with irregular, asymmetrical formations, to create the impression of spontaneous growth. At the basis of these improvements it is not at all difficult to recognize some of the characteristics that Burke would later subsume under the rubric of the beautiful: the smoothness of surfaces, their gentle alteration, the gradual, hardly perceptible change that evokes pure pleasure.

Brown added a whole array of technical innovations. Next to the winding walkways, there emerged "false rivers," which were lakes in reality, but their

Cottages and cottagers were perceived as prime examples (Macarthur 2007, 115). In *A Dialogue on the Distinct Characters of the Picturesque and the Beautiful* (included in a later edition of his *Essay on the Picturesque*), Price himself elaborated on the possibility to find entertainment in such images. He brought the example of Dutch pictures, among them Rembrandt's painting of the carcass of an ox (*Slaughtered Ox*, 1655), arguing that one could perceive such pictures "not only without disgust, but with a degree of pleasure," although the subject is mean and even offensive (Price 1842, 525). What is more, even "the real carcass of an ox" will "lose part of its disgusting appearance" when viewed through a Claude glass (a mirror "often made use of for viewing scenery" (Price 1842, 528).

serpentine shape made it practically impossible for any viewer to spot the whole water surface or the whole bank, so they could indeed look as if they had been tiny rivers. Here and there Brown placed clumps of trees upon the hilltops and made the environment of the buildings pleasingly varied by exotic plants (like cedar trees, evergreen oaks, or plane trees). He favoured a green lawn running from the main building up to the riverbank or the wood, and was strongly against bushes, with a preference for full transparency. Brown shared Pope's conviction that "all gardening is landscape painting" (quoted by Hunt 1992, 106), and the main principle guiding his improvements was that of spectatorship. Much to Knight's regret, Brown "banish'd the thickets," and was convinced that "every thing which indicated decay should be removed" (Knight 1794, 17, 52). The sunken wall (the so-called "ha-ha"), already used by Kent to keep away live stock (sheep or deer) from the close proximity of the central mansion, itself served the purposes of unobstructed viewing. Brown several times used it in the neighbourhood of the main building. In the distance, on the other hand, he planted lines of trees or a strip of wood to function as a screen whose major role was not only to physically isolate the garden from its wider surroundings, but to prevent the eye from seeing unwanted elements in the distance that would have spoiled the painterly impression. Thus, these screens were installed to form an apt background for the newly created formations in the foreground. They were not only supposed to screen out disturbing elements, but also to actually frame the landscape. The effect was enhanced by some ancient or oriental looking building, rotund, shrine, stone bridge, or by an artificial ruin that domesticated mutability by stylistic elevation.

Following Brown's death in 1783, one of his disciples, Humphry Repton became the main promoter of the tradition of landscape design. Repton, who actually coined the expression "landscape gardening" and was also the major target of Knight's poem and Price's essay in 1794 among the contemporaries, became famous primarily for his professionalism in business. He presented his recommendations for improvement to his potential customers in "Red Books," in the form of watercolour illustrations, which were supposed to amaze landowners by showing them, with the help of hinged pictures, a before-and-after view of the particular segments of the estate that he was proposing to reshape. Customers could then order his services on the basis of seductive images and the landscape clearly became an object of purchase in the form of a picturesque spectacle. Land improvement soon turned into a status symbol, the fashionable way of "gratifying purse-proud vanity," as Knight put it (1794, 11).

With the 18th-century emergence and intensification of homeland tourism, the owners of landscape gardens gradually developed a "heritage industry" (De

Bolla 2003, 136), partly in the service of their own "purse-proud vanity," partly in order to forge a more solid national identity. They offered visitors guided walks around their mansions, inviting them to spend a few days immersing in the views of plants, animals, buildings, as well as busy working gardeners and servants around them. Spontaneous as these may have seemed, such walks were carefully planned to provide a pleasurable everyday image both of natural processes and human activity. But the growing invasion of tourists in the countryside also elicited an increasing uneasiness among contemporaries, a resentment often packaged in sarcasm or mockery. Dorothy Wordsworth bitterly referred to the multitude of visitors as "prospect-hunters and 'picturesque travellers'" (1874, 97), while her brother William, whose view of the Lake District has been largely shaped by the descriptions of Thomas Gray and Thomas West (by their different views, for instance, about the ideal prospect of Grasmere), expressed serious reservations in his own *Guide through the District of the Lakes* concerning the doctrine of the picturesque (W. Wordsworth 1835, 102).[3] Later on, some have produced critical gestures in a more literary vein. William Combe's narrative poem *The Tour of Doctor Syntax in Search of the Picturesque* (1812) parodied Gilpin as a prospect-hunter (to send him hunting for consolation and for a wife in two successive volumes). Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) or Thomas Love Peacock's *Headlong Hall* (1816) might also be seen as instances of literary mockery that target the zeal of picturesque travellers or gardeners, as well as the controversial economy surrounding their practices.[4]

Price had nothing against the picturesque quality of landscapes, nor did he deny the necessity for land improvers to study landscape painting. He also agreed that landscapes should not fall prey to violent human intervention, since he believed that gardeners should act in a way which creates the impression of the spontaneous self-formation of nature, so that walking spectators, immersed in the enjoyment of such views, would experience the free proliferation of vegetative life. The difference between him and the improvers rather lay in precisely what kind of pictures, what

3 On the other hand, in a partial polemic with Klopstock, Wordsworth used the term in a linguistic context when he argued that the German language is "more picturesque," than most others, because "it *depictures* images better" due to its ability to unite more images simultaneously in a single word by the prolific use of prefixes. He brought the examples of the verbs *reissen* and *schmelzen*, with potential prefixes like *ver-, zer-, ent-* etc. (W. Wordsworth 1876, 3: 412–413).

4 The British vogue of prospect-hunting would later find its professionalized large-scale equivalent in the New World, in the US national park system (with Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite as its flagships). Vista points in these parks have been offering natural spectacles as a kind of "found art," turning landscapes into "outdoor museums," based upon a newly evolving market of the "picturesque commodity" (Byerly 1996, 55 and 59). Due to a recently implemented ecological paradigm, today the same parks are attempting to provide visitors scientific insights into "nature's laboratory" (Byerly 1996, 64).

specimens of landscape painting they kept in mind, and what image of nature they cherished as a model for the "naturalness" of landscapes. The improvers (Kent, Brown and Repton) promoted an image of nature which seemed more and more artificial in the perception of critics like Price, whose notion of the picturesque ideal was much closer to the emergent romantic idea of a raw and untamed nature. In his view, although Kent and his followers aimed "to banish formality, and to restore nature," the result was just the opposite: "formality still remains; the character of that formality alone is changed" (Price 1796, 247). Thus, although the English gardens were supposed to replace the formal gardens of the French, all they did was to substitute one type of formality for another: "they may have substituted other narrow prejudices and absurdities in the room of those which they had banished" (Price 1796, 248). And since Price's own idea of an untouched, raw or rugged wilderness may have just as well become subject to suspicion, by the end of the 18th century, more and more critics have doubted whether *any* landscape could be called "natural," and many came to share William Marshall's insight that "Nature scarcely knows the thing mankind call a *landscape*" (1785, 604).

That the English garden, so "romantic" in the public mind, was in some ways a mere idealization even for some of the romantics could also be formulated from a different perspective – if one considers the particular events that created the infrastructural and economic basis of these gardens, that is, if one takes heed of the several waves of violent enclosures and all the trauma they meant for four centuries. The English garden is ultimately nothing but a gentle, tranquilizing cultural veil, an idyllic memory in the British social imaginary that is supposed to screen out all the violence and robbery taking place at its birth. Seen from the angle of historic brutality, the English garden has been functioning as the most effective "screen memory" possible (Freud 1962), whose lasting popularity and role in the forging of a national character erases the trauma of its own emergence, namely, the fact that it deprived whole communities of their common grounds (pastures and plough fields), thus depriving them of their fundamental resources for living. No wonder the enclosures became propelling forces in the development of modern capitalist economy and also became classical examples for "original accumulation" (*ursprüngliche Akkumulation*), if I may refer to Karl Marx, who in the related chapter of the first volume of *Capital* did not hesitate to call these violent moves sheer "terrorism" (Marx 1992, 895). Not to speak of the fact that the maintenance of these newly created private gardens was financed largely by the profits coming from the colonies (colonization being the other major mode of original accumulation for Marx).

Starting as early as the 13th century, the intensity of enclosing common lands first reached its peak during the 15th and 16th centuries, with the "piecemeal" enclosure of mostly open arable fields (Williams 1975, 96). General or so-called "parliamentary" enclosure, on the other hand, appeared later as a more sophisticated form of the expropriation of common lands.[5] As John Macarthur explains: "commons were areas of land held by a parish over which rights were held by members of the parish on differing bases, but they were usually connected with ownership or tenancy of other land or cottages. The parish administered shared rights of grazing and cultivation on commons. While large enclosed pieces of land owned by a single interest had always been a form of land tenure, the end of the eighteenth century saw a vast increase in the scale of enclosure" (Macarthur 2007, 117). Parliamentary enclosure took place in two waves during the 18th and 19th centuries, with the first wave between 1750 and 1780 still concentrating on open arable lands and reaching a total amount of 4.4 million acres, while the second wave between 1793 and 1815 was focusing mostly on common "waste" grounds and reaching 2.3 million acres – the two waves covering altogether nearly one-quarter of the area of England (Oles 2015, 75). All this was processed by way of nearly 4000 Acts brought by Parliament (Williams 1975, 96). The usual procedure of parliamentary enclosure began with an informal negotiation among the landowners of a given parish, at least the four-fifths of whom would then draft a petition for a bill of enclosure to be introduced in Parliament. Upon the passage of the bill an enclosure commissioner was appointed to carry out the rest of the transformation, that is, to have the parish surveyed, convince potential opposition, and finally produce an "enclosure award" map performing the reallotment of the parish, a document which projected new boundaries upon the land (often fundamentally reconfiguring former parcels and roads), against which no contesting or appealing was in place (Oles 2015, 76–77). That is what Marx called the "parliamentary form of the robbery" (Marx 1992, 885), for he saw in it a legal procedure which produced "the wealth of the nation" (indeed "the wealth of the few") out of "the poverty of the people" ("the poverty of the great majority") (Marx 1992, 873, 886). He approvingly cited Richard Price, the most published 18th-century defender of commons, for whom England was becoming a kingdom "of only gentry and beggars, or of grandees and slaves" (Marx 1992, 829, cf. Neeson 1996, 25). In Price's view, engrossing was in fact "erecting *private* benefit on *public* calamity" (quoted in Neeson 1996, 26). Accordingly, for Marx, the enclosure of the commons, even in its parliamentary form, appeared as just another

5 For the different meanings of enclosure, as well as the difference between piecemeal and general enclosure, see Yelling 1977, 5–6.

evidence for the fact that original accumulation was intimately intertwined with diverse forms of violence: with "conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force [*Gewalt*]" (Marx 1992, 874).

But, as some readers have pointed out, the Marxian critique of the "anything but idyllic" methods of original accumulation itself implies the phantasm of a previous idyll, the myth of a "pre-enclosure 'rural democracy'" (Williams 1975, 102), a picture which itself needs to be critically examined. As Raymond Williams argued, the Marxian myth of an organic or natural society before capitalism and urban industrialism promotes the idyllic picture "of independent and honourable men, living in a working rural democracy, who were coldly and 'legally' destroyed by the new enclosing order" (1975, 100). The Marxian description of this process neglected several other factors (the growth of population, the changing birth and death rates, or the increase in agricultural production) which had just as much contributed to the formation of the impoverished working class of the new industrial towns (Williams 1975, 98). Enclosure was "a factor within this complex of change, but not a single isolated cause" (1975, 104). So, for Williams, the difference is rather "a matter of degree" (1975, 106), implying both an intensification of expropriation, of violence already present in earlier decades and centuries, and a continuation of certain practices of negotiation and persuasion, of protocols that gave the process its legal framework.

Parliamentary enclosure was still "a form of legalized seizure enacted by representatives of the beneficiary class" (Williams 98). With a compensation that was "unjust and overcomplicated" (Macarthur 2007, 117), villagers were deprived of their right of cultivating common arable fields, as well as of grazing cattle or gathering fuel on nearby pastures and wastes. As Williams concludes, "what was drastically reduced, by enclosures, was just such a breathing-space, a marginal day-to-day independence, for many thousands of people" (1975, 107). As a result, "the economic system of landlord, tenant and labourer, which had been extending its hold since the sixteenth century, was now in explicit and assertive control" (1975, 107). The series of general enclosure acts enabled a new and highly productive "rational" agriculture, but a price was to be paid. While the enclosure of common land may have rationalized or modernized agriculture, it also increased the dependence of agricultural workers on largely seasonal wages, and the resulting cyclical unemployment produced a more "tractable work-force" not only for improved agriculture but also for factories (Macarthur 2007, 118). As a result, a large number of villagers flooded the cities and became the propelling torque of an evolving industrial economy.

As far as the concomitant theories of the picturesque have contributed to the nourishment of the idyllic image that was supposed to obliterate this violent past, they have also participated in the screening out of a history that is laden with agony and harm. Such a traumatic history is what lurks uncannily behind the 18th-century picturesque landscape and its theoretical underpinnings in aesthetic discourse.

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Picturesque Pictures: Italian Early Non-fiction Films within Modern Aesthetic Visions

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Abstract. Within early non-fiction film, the Italian travel or scenic films of the 1910s may be considered the most picturesque. They are remarkable for their presentation of landscapes and cityscapes, their co-existence of modernity and nostalgia, their accent on beauty – at times at the expense of geographic veracity and indexicality – and their focus on the transformed gaze through the use of special masks, split-screens, and other devices. The transmedial roots for this aestheticization can be found both in art (painting) and popular culture (postcards, magic lanterns, etc.). While the author was one of the firsts to write on this subject decades ago, today there is a need for radical revision and a deeper approach. This is due to the influx of recent literature first by Jennifer Peterson's book *Education in the School of Dreams* (2013) and her scholarly articles. Secondly, Blom's co-presentation on Italian early nonfiction at the 2018 workshop *A Dive into the Collections of the Eye Filmmuseum: Italian Silent Cinema at the Intersection of the Arts* led to the recognition that revision was needed. Finally, the films themselves call for new approaches while they are being preserved and disseminated by, foremost, the film archives of Bologna, Amsterdam, and Turin.

Keywords: travel film, Italian cinema, early cinema, picturesque, transmediality.

Introduction

In her 2013 monograph, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film*, Jennifer Peterson analysed the history and genre of the early travel film thoroughly and with considerable nuance, explicitly linking it to the notion of the *picturesque* from the late eighteenth century onward. Peterson's book was the product of her long dissertation project, and benefitted from prior Dutch Eye Filmmuseum workshop publications on early nonfiction and colour film as well as from Eye's vast and richly coloured early nonfiction collection. "Scenic films appropriated

picturesque representational strategies in two ways: by depicting picturesque subject matter (pastoral scenes, peasants, ruins, and places familiar from picturesque tour itineraries), and by using picturesque compositional strategies such as side screens and composition in depth. But the films transformed picturesque conventions by rendering them in a cinematic form, which means adding movement and the fragmentation of editing to an aesthetic that was previously quite static. The films also transformed the aesthetic institutionally. What once had been a style or a practice that supposedly marked those who appreciated it as elite now became a sign of commercial value in a rapidly industrializing new media business. This transformation marked the picturesque's saturation point but also heralded its demise: in its guise as a term of the mass-culture marketplace, which always must remake itself, the picturesque necessarily became outmoded as the new century wore on." (Peterson 2013, 196.)

All of Peterson's words come back when we research Italian early nonfiction film and, in particular, early travel films known as *dal vero*. From the late aughts to the mid-1910s, Italy was one of the most active producers of travel films. They were distributed worldwide and were valued for their rare beauty, as comments in the international trade press confirm. Italian cameramen such as Piero Marelli deliberately reused picturesque subject matter and compositional strategies to embellish their views and enchant their spectators. In addition to the side-screens that Peterson mentions, we may include curves in rivers or roads that increase depth; *repoussoirs* or depth cues of people, trees or objects; natural framings such as arches in bridges; and masks in various shapes, most having precedents in the visual arts (both professional and amateur) such as chromolithography, postcards, and lantern slides. On the other hand, filmmakers also added typical cinematic elements such as movement (either within the mise-en-scène or by the camera, such as tracking or dolly shots, and which often referred to means of travel such as trains, cars or boats). They also fragmented the cinematic image by editing or split-screen effects.

While international literature on early travel film has gradually grown thanks to the efforts of Peterson, the Eye team and a few others, literature specifically on Italian early travel film has been scarce even though I took some initial steps some years ago (Blom 2000).[1] Progress was made in 2014 in a special issue of the Italian film historical journal *Immagine*, edited by Luca Mazzei, together with Ilaria Agostini (Agostini and Mazzei 2014). Sila Berruti's essay in this issue on the Italian travel film related it to the 1912 Italo-Turkish war (Berruti 2014). This research inspired Luca Mazzei and me to

1 Cf. also Bernardi 2002. He writes in his chapter *Tipologie*, on the early years of cinema and landscape as "panorama scheletrici del mondo," which derives from the poem *La Notte* by Dino Campana.

present on Italian early nonfiction film at the December 2018 workshop, *A Dive into the Collections of the Eye Filmmuseum*, which I co-organized with Elif Rongen and Céline Gailleurd within the framework of the international research project *Le cinéma italien muet à la croisée des arts européens*.[2] We had a fruitful discussion with everyone present but also realised that more work needed to be done, both stylistically and contextually. Moreover, while we can continue to benefit from greater access to the Eye collection, other film archives have given more access to their holdings as well, such as those at Turin, Bologna, Milan and Rome. Turin and Milan have put several films online, films from Rome can be seen at a new general early cinema site, while Bologna issued a DVD in 2016 with sixty-one Italian nonfiction films from various archives in- and outside of Italy, entitled *Grand Tour Italiano*; the DVD especially has been a goldmine for my research.[3] I will now focus first on the historiography, with Peterson as my main source, after which I will discuss and contextualize some examples.

Historiography

In 1994, the Eye Filmmuseum organised the workshop *Nonfiction from the Teens*. The discussions were published (Hertogs and de Klerk 1994) and also led to an additional publication, *Uncharted Territory: Essays on Early Nonfiction-Film* (Hertogs and de Klerk 1997). It can be said that the Eye workshop was a kind of Brighton conference for early nonfiction film. Participants discussed the lack of literature, prints and access, and attempted to analyse some films after several viewings. While Charles Musser noted the lack of narrative in the early nonfiction films (1994, 29), Tom Gunning warned against a dichotomy of narrative/non-narrative.[4] He proposed instead a spatially-based rather than a process- or temporally-based early nonfiction film, stressing that several early travel films contain both narrative and non-narrative elements, but also that the process-based versions seem to contain more narrative. Within more place-based non-fiction film, "even though a sunset seems to function as a kind of concluding image, there is less sense of it being absolutely necessary" (Gunning in Hertogs and de Klerk 1994, 16).

2 Workshop *A Dive into the Collections of the Eye Filmmuseum. Italian silent cinema at the intersection of the arts*, Amsterdam, December 20–21, 2018, *http://eur-artec.fr/2018/11/22/a-dive-into-the-collections-of-the-eye-filmmuseum-20-21-dec/. Last accessed 27. 02. 2021.* For the general research project, see *http://www.labex-arts-h2h.fr/le-cinema-muet-italien-a-la.html?lang=fr. 27. 02. 2021.*

3 Two-DVD *Grand Tour Italiano. 61 film dei primi anni del '900*, Cineteca di Bologna 2016, curated by Andrea Meneghelli.

4 Tom Gunning's comment was part of the discussion after Session 1., *So Much to See, So Much to Save*, moderated by Nicola Mazzanti. See Gunning in Hertogs and de Klerk 1994, 16.

Moreover, in his later essay in the volume *Uncharted Territory*, Gunning coined the term "view aesthetic" for early non-fiction cinema, arguing that these films "mime the act of looking and observing" (Gunning 1997). This observation works twofold as spectators are also well aware that they are being filmed, and so they look back and even react. This "view" can be split in two categories of films: either spatially or temporally focused. The first category is about places and consists of a series of shots edited together that either focus on a specific place, say a town, or that mimics a trajectory, say, of the course of a river to the sea. Typical here is the *phantom ride shot* as device, with the camera mimicking the first person's view from a riding vehicle, in most cases a train. Gunning notices a development, though: while early film combined landscape views with the thrill of the mobilized gaze, gradually the films emphasize exclusively the contemplation of the landscape. The second category is that of process-based films, for which there is a clear temporal order from raw material to consumption article, say, in films showing the transition from wooden log to paper. This category is therefore much more narratively driven, even if lacking the diegesis and characters from fiction film.

In *Uncharted Territory*, Peterson picked up on this "view aesthetic" when she discusses the idea of a *travel gaze* (1997). Peterson, who was not present at the 1994 workshop but soon became the leading expert in early nonfiction film due to her doctoral research that culminated in *Education in the School of Dreams*, already wrote in her 1997 essay to the volume *Uncharted Territory* that she preferred the term "travel gaze" to that of "colonial" when discussing early travel films, as it "puts the stress on place and allows for subtler descriptions of appropriative gazes that take place in one's own backyard" – that is, travel films that deal with locations relatively nearby (Peterson 1997, 84). She linked this travel to familiar places to the European Grand Tour tradition "which often had major cities or sublime mountains as destinations" (Peterson 1997, 84). Early nonfiction films that featured, say, the classical sites in Italy or farmer life in France dealt with, as Peterson writes, "the West's own mythologized past and nostalgic rural landscape. That mythology works on the register of 'types', but this time the types are denoted by that commonly-used and extremely loaded turn-of-the-century adjective: 'picturesque'" (1997, 85).

Peterson refers to Gunning's aforementioned statement that nonfiction film developed after 1907, where he also writes, "actors portrayed tourists as mediators for the audience's enjoyment of distant places. The landscape itself, the *view*, was now more important than the experience of motion" (Peterson 1997, 86).[5] Indeed, the

5 The original citation is from Gunning's article *An Unseen Energy Swallows Space: The Space in Early Film and Its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film* (1983, 365).

tourists are often stand-ins for us spectators. The focus was not just on phantom rides anymore. Peterson confronts landscape-oriented travelogues ("picturesque views") with people-oriented travelogues ("native types"). She links this to landscape painting and portraiture, which travelogues themselves often combine, by the way (Peterson 1997, 86). Often colours, such as stencil-colouring or combinations of tinting and toning, enhance the "picturesque-ness" of the images. I might add that the frequent use of pan shots in these films has its predecessors in panoramic painting, e.g., the landscapes and cityscapes of the Macchiaioli in Italy, though one could easily find all kinds of Realist and Impressionist painters in Europe and the US employing the panoramic format. We also have the tradition of the European 360° painted panorama itself, whose popularity peaked in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Indeed, as Peterson writes, while early travel filmmakers were quite obsessed with realism and a certain kind of obsession with realism seems transhistorical, early travel filmmakers presented their relationship with the real as if it were unmediated (1997, 87). The latter needs to be a bit nuanced though, as Italian non-fiction filmmakers used various devices to embellish views on nature through the use of mattes (in all kinds of forms, reminiscent of certain fragmented images in postcards), or by fragmenting static and moving images simultaneously through modern split-screen techniques. Also, we notice the deliberate use of multiple sunset and backlight shots to aestheticize nature in the best nineteenth-century romantic bourgeois tradition: nature presented as beautiful, serene, sometimes a bit thrilling (as with canoeing), but basically non-violent and surely not lethal. A domesticated kind of nature, that is. So, often the reality of filmed nature is a mediated reality, filmed through a lens of bourgeois aestheticism.

Peterson stresses the *narrative openness* of early nonfiction film that was already discussed at the 1994 workshop – and not only by Gunning. Peter Delpeut, then curator of the Eye Filmmuseum, suggested that we should not project narrative models excessively on these early nonfiction films but rather consider the studio-related use of spectacle (as in changes in colour, sophistication, or filmic tricks). In *Education in the School of Dreams*, Peterson explores in greater depth this connection between the openness in the narrative form and the openness in meaning in early nonfiction film. She cites Catherine Russell, who appears to confirm this connection in her study *Experimental Ethnography* (1999), where she claims early ethnographical film had a kind of *textual openness*, "in which meaning is not closed down" (Peterson 2013, 32). Indeed, early nonfiction films often balanced between educational purpose and aesthetic pleasure with the scales moving to and fro. In European, and even more so in Italian early nonfiction films we know of many

cases where the scales slide towards the aesthetic side at the expense of geographic veracity and indexicality. Furthermore, Peterson points out that, in addition to Alison Griffith's research on otherness and exoticism within early nonfiction film, many such works also focused on more familiar topics: the city and the countryside (2013, 32). Of course, while views of faraway places (Asia, Africa, Scandinavia, etc.) may have suggested fiction to many cinemagoers, even images of closer geographies and customs may have presented them with experiences that they would never have had otherwise. City slickers (most moviegoers were city inhabitants) may never have seen certain agricultural traditions or innovations from first-hand experience. For many, the rail or tram networks around the city were their radius, and anything beyond was already "exotic." Finally, cinema could show things the ordinary eye could not, such as in microscopic or time lapse films. During the height of the second Industrial Revolution, cinema also documented various traditional topics such as craftsmanship, costumes, and folkloristic dances, thus striking a balance between modernity and tradition, present and past.

It is here that the picturesque returns as in the early travel cinema of the 1910s. The contemporary was often framed, in every sense of the word, in a picturesque way. As Adam Freeman, when reviewing Peterson's book, confirmed: "the concept of the picturesque originated as a key aesthetic principle in the 18th century but by the early 20th century had become a commodified term used for its association with cultural capital and its soothing and tranquil connotations which were well adapted to mass culture, mechanical reproduction, and modern consumer habits" (Freeman 2015). While revealing these films as depoliticizing and masking conflict is one approach to the picturesque, as Linda Nochlin has done, Peterson focuses on how early travel films use the picturesque as an idealized fiction of the represented subject (2013, 179). Indeed, she indicates that the theory of the picturesque started in late eighteenth-century England, when Reverend William Gilpin, an amateur artist himself, coined the term with an aesthetic elitist connotation, relating it to the elitist tourism of the Grand Tour, to aristocratic taste and sensibility (Peterson 2013, 182–184).

Peterson also links this with Edmund Burke's defence against the rise of the bourgeoisie and his focus on the individual sensation (2013, 184–186). Here he distinguishes between the sublime (linked to exciting astonishment, horror and terror vs. nature) and the picturesque (related to the representational, likeness, realism, connoisseurship, reduplication of the landscape, singularity [otherness] by repetition, and generic conventions). With the picturesque, nature is looked upon pictorially – as a series of pictures created to stimulate automatic aesthetic enjoyment

(following Barbara Stafford) (Peterson 2013, 187). Eventually this turns nature into a commodity. The late eighteenth-century preference for images of ruins, decay, and the past seen from the present "transmutes real social conditions into aesthetic pleasantries" (Peterson 2013, 188), and therefore portrays an elitist yearning for pre-modernity. Peterson notes a persistence of the picturesque during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a search for otherness from a Western perspective, by use of various means: tourism, travel literature, professional landscape painting, and also amateur art. The long-lasting tradition of Gilpin's picturesque techniques such as a preference for side-screens and the use of curves in a river to create depth, often returns in early travel cinema. This corresponds to a long-lasting mutual exchange of tourism and aesthetics since the late eighteenth century, even if the aristocratic Grand Tour tourism became bourgeois tourism in the early twentieth century, and armchair travel for the average moviegoer. Peterson points to the importance of reproduction, such as the proliferation of chromolithography prints or cards of art, which democratized art, made women an important target group, and which also had an important effect on early filmmakers such as Griffith. About the commodification of the picturesque, Peterson writes: "over the course of decades, the picturesque became a popular style, a mass-cultural short-hand for anything visually pleasing" (2013, 194), although by the late nineteenth century it had come to be considered outmoded and parodied. Yet it was still commercially very viable, perhaps rightly so, as Peterson suggests, because of the pleasure of predictability in the picturesque (2013, 196).

Cases and Reflection

This brings me to my cases: early Italian travel films. These films are embedded within a broader context of rising tourism and a developing infrastructure. Train companies were created and the railway network rapidly expanded between the mid- and late nineteenth century. Thomas Cook's travel agency started organized trips to Italy in 1864 and introduced such innovations as hotel coupons and the traveller's cheque. By the early 1900s, Cook dominated the Italian tourism business that still served a mostly elite clientele. Nevertheless, Baedeker guides, travel journals, and art books on Italy proliferated, as well as postcards, posters, stereo-cards, lantern slides, and book illustrations. The Dante Alighieri society, founded in 1889 and recognized in 1893, promoted the Italian language and culture internationally (Blom 2000, 63–64). While Italy was still a young nation in the early twentieth century, Italy as a concept and as an image was fast spreading nationally and internationally. Yet, what about the form and style of early Italian travel films?

Thanks to the wealth of early travelogue cinema (and some additional reportages and scientific films) on the 2016 DVD *Grand Tour Italiano*, but also to the online availability of Italian early travel films provided by the archives of Turin, Milan, and Amsterdam, it is now more possible than before to recognize certain recurring stylistic motifs even if they are not present in all *dal vero* films. First, there is the exploratory *establishing shot*, taken from a high angle, giving an encompassing overview of a territory (a city like Naples, the Forum of Pompeii, etc.), either statically or through a pan shot, mostly from left to right. These films may also begin with a hand on a map, indicating where in Italy the locale to be featured is located. Sometimes, as in the film *Sorrento* (Cines, 1912) a woman's hand is used, curiously enough. Indeed, the films are often invitations to not only men but also to women or families. In *Un giorno a Palermo* (Lucarelli Films, 1914), we see an elegant lady who with her binoculars explores the territory from high up, showing us both the sites through the mask of the binoculars (a format often used, mixing first and third person views) and her ecstatic reactions to the scenery or to a theatrical show. In other films, we see a gentleman with his children in a boat, for example, which is used to make the featured scenery comprehensible and the diegetic excursion appealing to children viewers. Certain excursions, however, could be quite hazardous: the men and women walking on slippery slopes in the Abruzzi or the daredevils climbing the Matterhorn may only inspire courageous viewers at home to explore these sights.[6] On the other hand, early travel films were mainly for armchair tourists, so for many it would have been a relaxing idea that *they* were not venturing forth. One striking feature in the travelogues on the *Grand Tour Italiano* DVD is the recurring craving for the picturesque within the images, both in scenery (locations) and types. The landscape is often given more depth by using persons or trees in the foreground as *repoussoir*, steering our gaze just like in painting. In the final shots, we often have sunsets where the sea or the lake is filmed through the branches of a tree, or a big tree that obstructs our view of the wide-open spaces behind it. Whenever there are a few shots of sunsets at the ending of the film, the last one is pure nature with no humans strolling in the foreground. The human figures disappear and the filmgoer is directly united with nature. All this adds up to the Romantic conception of nature as landscape which is framed by the camera lens and often re-framed within the image through the use of masks (iris-like, or ovals), split-screen images (the films by Piero Marelli on the Venetian lagoon and Tripoli[7]),

6 *Excursion dans les Abruzzi* (Eclipse, 1910) and *Ascensione al Cervino* (Mario Piacenza, 1911–12).

7 *La laguna pittoresca* (Pasquali, 1911), *Tripoli* (Ambrosio, 1912). For more info on the films, see Bernardini 2002, 234 and 299–300.

or the natural version of split-screen – by filming through the arches of a bridge to accentuate our observing, gazing, contemplating. In this respect I am reminded of the words of the Romanian-French art historian Victor Stoichita that the frame turns nature into landscape (1999, 87–99). Yet, as Andrea Meneghelli writes in the DVD's booklet, the films accelerate the viewer's contemplation. "They are films suitable for quick contemplation, swiftly moving from one to the next, almost as though they must rapidly feed an insatiable eye. Their most sincere joy seems to be that of passing through, driven as they are by a desire that tends to perpetually shift the end goal." (Meneghelli 2016, 32–33.)

Jennifer Peterson, in her book and articles, makes clear that apart from the picturesque in *setting*, there is another kind of picturesque in the early travel film that is linked more to a tradition of *portraiture* through its focus on local types and their physiognomy, folkloristic costumes, hair styles and ornaments, typical handcrafts, or local gestures. These people are filmed either in isolated settings, or are sustained by a picturesque one, reminiscent of certain late nineteenth-century Naturalist paintings or romantic postcards from the early twentieth century. The films on *Grand Tour Italiano* often show a combination of this spatial and typological focus, which Peterson already attributes to early travel film in general. The attention to the picturesque as concept, even as a commodity or a commercialized concept, is very deliberate as certain intertitles indicate how we should understand these images.

Of course, we should not forget that the main difference between the picturesque in painting and in travelogues is movement. While the camera is often moving, either panning or tilting on the tripod, or placed on a moving means of transport (mainly trains or trams), creating the so-called *phantom ride* effect as if we have a first person OV-shot from the train, other shots without any camera movement always provide movement within the mise-en-scène. There is always an approaching pedestrian or cart, a train running through, or a boat on the sea or the lake to indicate not only the scale of the landscape or cityscape, but also to establish that we are not watching static paintings or photos but the time-based art of cinema. So, even if certain filmic images of seascapes may remind us of familiar seascapes painted by Gustave Courbet, Claude Monet and others, painting can only suggest motion while cinema shows it; viewable motion makes a difference. From this craving for mobility Meneghelli explains the frequently used motif of moving water in Italian travelogues (2016, 33).

Finally, it is also striking how the camera is acknowledged in these early travel films, confirming Gunning's idea of reciprocity within his concept of "view aesthetic." The filmed locals look right into the camera and are very conscious

about it and its effect (the film screening afterwards). Both children and adults make extra efforts to get into the film frame, while in process-based films we may see bosses who pretend to be terribly busy while their workers are much more relaxed and laugh at the camera. By the way, child labour was very common in those days, and little is done to hide this fact, creating a sharp contrast between the tourists' children and local children working in factories, workshops, or farms. Rarely do the two categories of children meet. When tourists encounter, for example, a salt harvesting facility in Sicily,[8] the bourgeois couple only visits the outside, and not the production process indoors, where the workers are. Often, these process-based films finish with the consumption or the use of the product (say, bourgeois children eating the chocolate after we have seen how it is made), but the salt harvesting film finishes with the workers having their lunch (and not too eager to be filmed in their private life as well). Although it is not on the *Grand Tour Italiano* DVD, *L'industria della carta nell'Isola del Liri* (Cines, 1910) is equally interesting as it ends with the classical motif of workers leaving the factory, in this case women collecting their children after work. After the Lumière brothers' famous short film, several process-focused nonfiction films would end with workers leaving their factories. In general, it is striking to see how much the workers are part of the images of these films, in contrast to later documentaries, from the 1920s, in which the nearly exclusive focus on the machine makes humans disappear from view.

Before we start our analysis of the Italian *dal vero* films, we need to discuss briefly the relevant terminology. Meneghelli indicates that while the terms "travel film" or "travelogue" were used before, the term "non-fiction" is the current usage despite its implicit self-denigration as it defines itself by what it is not: fiction film. Italian scholars tend to use the historical term *dal vero* – real-life films or films shot on location. As Meneghelli fears that this term is too antiquated, he prefers "documentary," even though this latter is also quite controversial as it does not cover all sorts of nonfiction films from the 1910s, only those that documented processes such as industrial processing. Meneghelli explains it instead as a documentation of visions and therefore links it to the classical term of the *veduta*. "The *veduta* is a genre that cinema had carried with it since the 19th century and one that crosses over different methods and devices: painting, illustration, the magic lantern, photography, the picture postcard and many others. Cinema, reviving a tradition at once distinguished and popular, and by and large severely codified, is a big eye that asserts a power: it takes us on a walk in every reachable corner. For this reason, more than resurrecting in 20th century fashion the romantic

8 *Exploitation du sel en Sicile* (Pathé Frères/Milanese Film, 1912).

spirit of the Goethean 'Italian Journey' and the aristocratic custom of the Grand Tour, these films allowed themselves to gently pull up alongside a certain notion of touristic experience, at a time when tourism was starting to become, for those who could afford it, a compelling desire and a natural right." (Meneghelli 2016, 27.) Meneghelli too confirms cinema's power of transportation through armchair travel: adventurous but without the risk of physical danger or even inconvenience, and more powerful than such competitors as lectures, romanticized travel journals, and illustrated adventures.

First of all, we may look at Gilpin's late eighteenth-century techniques of the use of sidescreens of trees and branches, and the creation of depth thorough the presence of rivers sinuously displayed before our eyes as if they were a kind of crawling serpent [Fig. 1]. That these were not his inventions can be seen in such examples in classical painting as Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt* (1563). The same setup is also used in early Italian travel films on rivers and lakes such as *Trento e dintorni* (Piero Marelli, title, company and year unknown).[9] In general, the framing of images by front- and sidescreens created by trees, branches, columns, etc. [Fig. 2] returns ever so often in the Italian *dal vero* films, such as in the views from above the coast in *Amalfi* (Cines, 1910).[10] When we think of painting and its derivatives in postcards as the model for idyllic images, then we may compare, for example, the sunset in *Sul lago di Como* (Cines, 1913) with early twentieth-century postcards depicting similar scenes. Or take the backlight on the Venetian lagoon created by a setting sun in *La laguna pittoresca* (Piero Marelli, Pasquali, 1911) that matches a late nineteenth-century painting of the Neapolitan coast, *Fuochi d'artificio sul litorale napoletano* (1875) by Oswald Achenbach [Fig. 3]. Or we should consider the shepherd boys as a motif of sunset scenes in *Trento e dintorni* by Marelli, and Giovanni Segantini's *Ave Maria a trasbordo* (1886). Italian travel films employed all kinds of framing devices to mark the staged construction of the picturesque scene, for example by the use of natural arches, bridges and town gate porches, as in *Trento e dintorni*, which is comparable to *Spreeufer bei Stralau* (1817) by Karl Friedrich Schinkel [Fig. 4]. However, all kinds of artificial masks were used as well, some of which, but not all, have parallels in painting such as the ovals used by Gilpin. For instance, I found no painterly equivalent for the strange, diamond shaped mask in *Sestri Levante* (Cines, 1913). Moreover, another

9 The film can be viewed on a DVD released by the Cineteca di Milano. They date it as of 1912. Bernardini's book on the *dal vero* does not list this film title. Bernardini (2002, 323), however, mentions the film *Nel Trentino* (Ambrosio 1913), which may well have been this film.

10 Adolfo Romanti did various *dal vero* films for Cines in the early 1910s, but it is unclear which ones.

mask unique to cinema is the imitation of binoculars [Fig. 5], sometimes matched with shots of a stand-in using them and explaining this peculiar device, as in *Un giorno a Palermo*, in which a well-dressed lady steers our gaze and passes her point of view to us. The concept of *exhortatio* from art history comes to mind: the figure on screen demonstrates how we should behave and react to the spectacle.

The image may be fragmented as in *Sestri Levante*, comparable to the fragmentation of images on postcards. Actually, I wouldn't be surprised if this fragmentation originated in films before becoming a cliché in postcard layouts. The overabundance of sunsets in the finale of many Italian travel films also seems to precede the popularity of this motif on postcards. At the same time, Italian travel films' opening shots may feature extreme long shots of city views or coastlines, providing a full overview of the landscape to the spectator. Then again, many other examples lack this, confirming the irregularity in the genre and the openness of its style and structure. A particular kind of fragmentation is the splitscreen effect [Fig. 6] that we encounter in many of the still existing films by cameraman Piero Marelli. Marelli worked for the Turinese company Pasquali until late 1911 and afterward for Pasquali's Turinese competitor Ambrosio. He shot many travel films in- and outside of Italy, such as *La laguna pittoresca* and *Trento e dintorni* within Italy, and *Tripoli* (1912) and *L'Olanda pittoresca* (1911) abroad.[11] The splitscreen always shows one shot that employs mobile framing (say from a train or a boat) combined with a shot with a fixed camera recording motion onscreen. Marelli's splitscreens were purely cinematic and experimental within the travel films. As his films were later re-edited and re-released by his own company, Tiziano Film, under new titles such as *Bellezze italiche*, etc., the identification of Marelli's films is difficult even though the splitscreens are his trademark.

Content-wise, I would like to mention two popular motifs with pictorial roots that often recur in Italian *dal vero* films. First of all, the classic motif of the *lavandaie* or washerwomen [Fig. 7] doing the laundry on the riverside, as in *Da Piombino a Portoferraio* (Latium Film, 1911), *Paludi Pontine* (Helios Film, 1909), and *Sestri*

11 During our 2018 workshop at the Eye Collection Center, Luca Mazzei remarked that Eye's print of *Tripoli* may perhaps be the film *Tripoli pittoresca*. The Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin uploaded to Vimeo the compilation film *Bellezze italiche* by Marelli for Tiziano Film. One episode of it is the original film *La laguna pittoresca*. Eye has *La laguna pittoresca* in its Desmet Collection under the title *Santa Lucia*. On Vimeo, Turin has placed the film *Vita d'Olanda*, which is a compilation of three original films: *Rotterdam, città dei ponti*, *L'Olanda pittoresca*, and *L'Isola di Marchen*. The latter two deal with Volendam and Marken. In the fall of 1911, Marelli travelled for Pasquali from Italy through Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. The resulting *dal vero* films can be traced in Bernardini's 2002 reference book.

Levante. When talking about pre-modernity, nostalgia, and an embellished image of the working class, this motif is a classic and was reproduced extensively in a proliferation of postcard and stereocard images as well as in such Italian naturalistic paintings as Angiolo Tomasi's *Le lavandaie all'Ema* (1884), non-Italian works like Eugène Boudin's *Lavandières de la Touques* (1888–1895), and even in romanticized or almost abstract versions from François Boucher to Vincent Van Gogh. The modern train crossing the landscape or the nostalgic cityscape is an example of another such motif. In *Attraverso la Sicilia*, an undated work by Marelli,[12] the film imitates train travel starting with the arrival of the train engine via ferryboat and then segueing into images of the fast moving vehicle cutting through the archaic countryside. In other Italian travel films, such as *Bellezze italiche*: *La valle d'Aosta* [13] and *Nella svizzera italiana* [14] [Fig. 8] the moving and puffing train and its supporting infrastructure such as new train bridges spanning over great depths, give a typical cinematic excitement and celebrate modernity, but also have their roots in such nineteenth-century paintings as Giuseppe De Nittis's *Passa il treno* (1880), in which the train's steam creates a giant diagonal pattern over the canvas. The phantom ride shot from the front of the train also often recurs, either as the point of view of the conductor or indirectly standing behind him.[15] In addition to trains, the large tourist-filled *vaporetti* or steamboats on the Italian lakes or in Venice, the funiculars going up and down the Alps and the Abruzzi mountains, or the trams heading for elevated sites such as the Monreale cloister near Palermo share the same motif of using modern technology to reach ancient, even timeless sites of nature and spectacle.

In conclusion, we notice both in content and style how early Italian travel film hearkens back to motifs and compositional strategies familiar with painting and

12 This film title does not appear in Bernardini's book. Perhaps this is the film *Costiere sicule* (Ambrosio 1912). See Bernardini 2002, 265. Marelli, in later years, started his own company Tiziano Film, for which he re-edited his earlier *dal vero* films made for Pasquali and Ambrosio.

13 While the print on the DVD *Grand Tour Italiano* states it is the second episode of the series *Bellezze d'Italia* by Marelli for Tiziano film, we do not know what the original film was. Bernardini indicates for 1911 an unidentified Pasquali film of which he has only mentioned the title in The Bioscope: *The Valley of Aosta and the Great Saint Bernard*. That may well be this film.

14 On the site, *https://www.europeana.eu/portal/nl/record/08632/103747900000304148.html* (last accessed 06. 03. 2021), the film is indicated as by Marelli, and the opening title indicates the company Pasquali, but no such title is listed in Bernardini 2002. This may have been a compilation of the film *Le ferrovie del Bernina* (Pasquali, 1911) and *Fra I ghiacciai del Görnergrat* (Pasquali, 1911), both shot by Piero Marelli during his European round trip.

15 POV phantom ride shots from trains we can see e.g. in *Le ferrovie della Bernina*, while the film *Da Sorrento a Amalfi* by Marelli opens with shots from behind the train driver. The latter film was given its title by Tiziano Film, the original title is *La penisola sorrentina* (Pasquali, 1911). See *https://vimeo.com/116322971.* Last accessed 06. 03. 2021. The description of the film given by the trade paper *The Bioscope*, mentioned in Bernardini 2002, 232, confirms this identification.

the picturesque, while also containing elements typical for the cinema – a new and modern medium – that parallel the emerging modernity outside of the screen. These films reveal a young nation eager to show the world its ancient culture, its natural scenery, its traditional cultures and folklore but through such modern means as the train, the car and the camera, linking picturesque landscapes with modernity.[16] Of course, Italian *dal vero* films masked certain issues of social conflict, as Aldo Bernardini has indicated, and therefore may lack in content and style (2002, 16–17). Nonetheless, we should follow Peterson's plea to first analyse what we do see, and where this comes from, including the craving for the picturesque, as "the idealized fiction of the represented subject."

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Voiceless Screams: Pictorialism as Narrative Strategy in Horror Silent Cinema

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Abstract. As a complementary condition to narrative, the notion of pictorialism in film is rooted in the first decades of the medium. In their quest to demonstrate the capturing and restoring of images with various devices, early filmmakers selected views with pictorial qualities in the long-standing tradition of painting, transferring them on film in the form of non-narrative shots. The evolution of fictional narratives in silent cinema displaced the source of inspiration in theatre, assimilating its nineteenth-century tradition of pictorialism. Thus, the film audiences' appeal for visual pleasure was elevated with balanced elements of composition, framing and acting that resulted in pictorially represented moments actively engaged in the narrative system. The paper explores the notion of "pictorial spirit" (Valkola 2016) in relation to that of "monstration" (Gaudreault 2009) aiming to describe the narrative mechanism of provoking fear by means of pictorially constructed cinematic images in a selection of short-length horror silent films belonging to the transitional era, consisting in *The Haunted House*/*The Witch House* (*La Maison ensorcelée/La casa encantada,* Segundo de Chomón, 1908), *Frankenstein* (J. Searle Dawley, 1910) and the surviving fragments of *The Portrait* (*Портрет*, Vladislav Starevich, 1915).[1]

Keywords: silent cinema, transitional era, horror genre, pictorialism, narration, monstration.

The development of the horror genre in cinema has determined debates over its foundational works. Most historians have linked the first horror films to the early sound era. While containing frightful entities or terrifying scenes, titles belonging to the silent era have been dismissed as inspiration for what was to come. They were categorized as "a series of unrelated attempts at dealing with […] nineteenth-century literary sources" (Newman 1996, 12) such as Mary Shelley or Edgar Allan Poe. On

1 This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of National Education, UEFISCDI Romania, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0067, contract number 135/2018, with the title *Iconography of Witchcraft, an Anthropological Approach: Cinema, Theatre, Visual Arts*.

this note, even cult film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari,* Robert Wiener, 1920) was considered to have represented "a style and a vision," while *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) "represents a formula, and the beginnings of a genre" (Hardy 1985, ix). The latter also seems to have been the first horror film to be referred to as such (Kinnard 2000, 1).

However, in the words of Noël Carroll, ultimately "horror films are designed to provoke fear" (1999, 38). Regardless of the critical response they received in the era or the subsequent integration in an evolutionary classification of film genres, horror films are defined by the emotion they generate in the audience, namely fear. Since this emotion can also be provoked by various dystopic cinematic narratives, such as those depicting time travel, defining horror film implies an additional element to fear and that is disgust. They usually revolve around a harmful monster character hostile to the protagonist, threatening to destabilize the established diegetic coordinates of normality by certain supernatural capacities or advantages. In doing so, they provoke not only fear, but also disgust. For the spectator, the prospect of a hypothetical physical interaction with the monster becomes not only fearful, but also repelling (Carroll 1999, 39–40).

In the specific case of horror silent films, inherent characteristics intensified this process of reception. Seemingly immured in quiescence and deepened in black and white footage, they were in fact vibrant by means of live music and, sometimes, by tinted film stock. Discussing the role of their live music accompaniment as a substitute for human vocal expression, Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler associated its effect to the ghostly impression of the shadow plays, with the role "to exorcise fear or help the spectator absorb the shock" (1947, 75). And while the standardized use of colour in cinema is linked to *Becky Sharp* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1935), as the first feature film to use the three-strip Technicolor technology throughout, an estimated two-thirds of surviving nitrate prints made approximately between 1908–1925 present evidence of tinting, excluding the ones with only tinted intertitles (Cherchi Usai 2019, 49). The remarkable expressive results of this colouring practice can be observed in their punctuation of dramatic situations.

On this introductory note, the three titles selected for analysis, *The Haunted House/ The Witch House* (*La Maison Ensorcelée/La casa encantada,* Segundo de Chomón, 1908), *Frankenstein* (J. Searle Dawley, 1910) and *The Portrait* (*Портрет*, Vladislav Starevich, 1915), share as common denominator the eliciting of a particular emotional response by means of pictorially constructed portrayals of their antagonists actively conducting the narrative. It is relevant to note the fact that from the very start they delineate themselves from seemingly similar films such as *The Haunted Castle* (*Le*

Manoir du diable, Georges Méliès, 1896) or *The Haunted Curiosity Shop* (Walter R. Booth, 1901). These two titles mirror the appeal of early spectators for witnessing an exhibition of tricks enhanced by the technical possibilities of the recording camera in the hands of Booth or Méliès, both having had careers as illusionists before becoming film directors. In the words of the latter, they fell under the category of "fantastic views," a collocation proposed by Méliès as the creator of this field, replacing the then more frequently used category of "transformation views" (2001 [1907], 140–141). While the French director credited the wide range of procedures behind creating intriguing visual compositions with being "capable of driving the most fearless person mad" (2001 [1907], 140), it did so by exerting the aesthetic of astonishment (Gunning 2009 [1989]) specific to the cinema of attractions (Gunning 2000 [1985]). In other words, these films triggered amazement to the display of the moving pictures technology being demonstrated, often with spectacular results, in front of audiences initiated in the parameters of the performance they were about to witness.

Unlike these two early films, *The Haunted House*, *Frankenstein* and *The Portrait* belong to the transitional era of cinema that extended approximately from 1906/1907 up to 1917. Seeking to explore both aesthetic and narrative developments in the transition to features, filmmakers of the transitional era approached film narrative in relation to nineteenth-century play construction. This becomes a significant aspect as it brings into discussion the dominance of stage melodrama defined by "an overabundance of <action>" (Brewster and Jacobs 2003, 19), a description aiming to reflect the succession of recognitions and reversals in the plots specific to this genre, a succession that can also be extended to horror genre. Thus, the dialectical relation that started to be gradually built between the stylistic system and a narrative one was supported by the construction of the *mise-en-scène*. More precisely, the *tableau* was adopted in film composition, understood in one of its several theatrical definitions as a deliberate placement of characters in a scene with the scope of producing a certain effect on the spectators. It became a mode of addressing the public by stylistically signalling the noteworthy narrative "situations" of the plot.

The Witch, the Monster and the Frame in Between

In a chronology that extends over the first two decades of film production in the twentieth century, the first out of the three films about to be discussed, *The Haunted House/The Witch House* brings into discussion the contradiction between early cinema and narration. Establishing the moment when one-shot films ceased to embody "an aesthetic of the moving photograph" (Gaudreault 2009, 12) can

be difficult. With periods overlapping, the transition to multiple-shot films was gradual. But film production in the early 1910s achieved a pivotal moment when filmmakers started shooting with the stage of editing in mind. Shots were required to communicate with other shots as parts of a previously planned scene (Gaudreault 2009, 11–18). This mutation has a significant impact as film narration, in the broad traditional sense of narrative art, came into being. The inquiry of early filmmakers into the narrative possibilities of what thus became cinema found inspiration in literary sources for material to be adapted on screen and in theatre for the composition guidelines to do so. But as André Gaudreault underlines, textual narrative differs dramatically from staged narrative and subsequently from film narrative.

He argues that image operates on two albeit interwoven levels, one of the showing of an image, reflecting mimesis, and one of reconfiguring it through editing, reflecting a non-mimetic form of diegesis. In consequence, he proposes the term monstration for what precedes narration, on the model of image preceding editing (Gaudreault 2009). This operation enables an understanding of the simultaneous functions of the image in narrative films. By editing, individual frames are articulated together into narrative units, with direct implications in the alteration of temporal frame. Thus, unfolding events may be perceived as occurring in the past.

In contrast, monstration is defined as "a mode of communicating a story, which consists of *showing* characters […] who *act out* rather than *tell*" (Gaudreault 2009, 69). There is a sense of presence linked to monstration, an aspect of significant importance in horror silent films that appeals to mimetic diegesis, depicting action through the gestures, poses and movement of the actors. In de Chomón's film, three characters find refuge from the storm in a house hidden in the woods, a narrative pretext to encompass their exposure to a series of supernatural experiences. The alternative translation of the title, *The Witch House* reflects the "enchanted" sense of the terms "*ensorcelée*" or "*encantada*" from the French and Spanish versions. Therefore, the two men and the woman find themselves under the power of a witch exerting her spells in an enlivened house. They experience objects moving around untouched, defying gravity or disappearing, the appearance of a spectral entity, all culminating with the atypical portrayed witch kidnapping them during their sleep. Combining the pale complexion and the fragile silhouette of a vampire with the sharp long claws and wide teeth of a human-eating monster, the longhaired creature wears what seems to be an attire suited for a female figure. It represents perhaps one of the most overlooked figures of a witch in the history of silent cinema.

The *mise-en-scène* solution of introducing this character through a painting hanging on the wall of the house is similar to that used in *The Portrait*, an adaptation

of Nikolai Gogol's short story *The Mysterious Portrait*. The longest surviving sequence of this film also includes a painting as a key element in the composition of the frame. The nightmarish core of the visual plot consists in a lifelike portrait gradually altering its appearance before eventually coming to life under the horror-stricken eyes of the protagonist. Gogol's text gives insight into this menacing figure as inciting a moral dilemma for a young painter, rather than attempting on his physical wellbeing. Nevertheless, its disturbing portrayal is created by appealing to Gothic aesthetics, signalling the pioneering of the Gothic silent cinema by de Chomón (Aldana Reyes 2017, 186).

In folk tales, the frame, more specifically that of a mirror, has long been associated with being a portal to the after-life. In these two films, the hanging pictures allow the antagonists to break their delineating limits and to even walk off, triggering the eerie suspension of normality characteristic to horror films. But on the level of the visual composition, they also carry the function later obtained in cinema through reframing, as seen in *The Portrait*. With their silhouettes being cut from the chest up, the menacing entities approach the characters as well as the audience, a substitute for the effect obtained through a medium shot. In this way, the characters' reaction to supernatural occurrences and the repulsion to their appearances manifested by the spectators is accentuated by the *mise-en-scène* in which the standard framing of the era enclosed the entire bodies of the actors. Their poses and gestures are choreographed in accordance with the screen time allotted to the antagonists. When the witch occupies the frame of the painting, signalling itself as an inciting element of the plot, the three friends avoid engaging with it by moving to the sides of the screen frame [Fig. 1–2]. In the claustrophobic space of his apartment, the young painter recedes from the menacing painting in the securing space of his bed, partially visible in one side of the frame.

Clearing the centre of visual attention to the advantage of one or the other character provides the required space for physical reactions. Horrified, the visitors of the house in the forest slip and fall, resorting to wide, dynamic gestures of anxiety. Since "posing was keyed to genre and situations, and effectively coexisted with other, more fluid, uses of gesture" (Brewster and Jacobs 2003, 106), this histrionic style of acting is no longer considered a precursor of the realistic acting style. Instead, it is an evidence of how film technology influenced styles and nuances of acting. This is more evident in the *The Portrait*, having been produced seven years after *The Haunted House*, in the way the protagonist benefits from the reduction of the framing to the advantage of pantomime in order to externalize his fear.

In a similar medium close-up framing, the monster in *Frankestein* assumes a central position in the composition of a key scene of the film. The earliest known screen version of Mary Shelley's canonical Gothic novel, it was labelled as a liberal adaptation. J. Searle Dawley's interpretation of the original plot envisions the monster as a projection of Frankenstein's most tenebrous thoughts, fading away in a mirrored reflection as the young medical student's mind is purified by the love for his bride. At one significant narrative moment, the confrontation of the monster with its reflection in the mirror leaves it appalled by the horrific appearance before his eyes. Interestingly enough, the Edison Company released a statement at the time of the premiere saying that "wherever, therefore, the film differs from the original story, it is purely with the idea of eliminating what would be repulsive to a moving picture audience" (Edison Bulletins 1910, 12).

In an apparent contradiction, this promotional article also took pride in announcing "some of the most remarkable photographic effects that have yet been attempted" in the scene depicting the "hideous" monster coming to life, "probably the most weird, mystifying and fascinating scene ever shown on a film" (Edison Bulletins 1910, 12). The result rose to the expectations, as the scene was accomplished by reversing the footage of a dummy being set on fire to give the impression of a body rising from nothingness. The shades casted by the flames accentuate mechanically manipulated movement, resulting in an impressive synaesthesia between the infernal cauldron and the artificial soul it gave rise to [Fig. 3].

The development of horror silent cinema depended on such types of filmic solutions related to composition or reframing in order to reduce the distance between repelling characters and the audience. Additional frames in the form of pictures added in the background, embedded in the narrative, oriented the gaze of the spectators to the witch in *The Haunted House* or the enlivened subject of the painting in *The Portrait*. Furthermore, compositions depleted of additional *mise-en-scène* elements, such as the creation of the monster in *Frankenstein*, supported even more deepened focus, up to the extreme imagery of the genesis of a monster. These specific scenes extracted as individual visual stances support a mimetic interpretation within the monstration paradigm. By means of diverse acting styles, they conveyed disgust through the physical action of the antagonists and fear through the physical reaction to it by the protagonists. Reintegrating them into the cinematic context they belong to exposes a pictorial complicity they develop with narration.

Pictorial Geometries of Fear

The appeal of early silent film audiences for visual pleasure seems to have been primarily tied to the "actor's assumption of poses and attitudes" which "was much more important and was important for far longer" than previously believed (Brewster and Jacobs 2003, 81). Stemming from the emphasis put on this mimetic conveying of the narrative in silent cinema, longer shots and in-depth composition were gradually developed in order to support it. Discussing the elements required to give force to the formal qualities of cinematic composition in contemporary cinema, Jarmo Valkola identifies movement, simple and slowly integrated, and an emphasis put on the grouping of the actors, differentiated from the surroundings, with light and perspective used to articulate the spatial component of the narrative (2016, 20).

Rooted in photography, pictorial stillness in moving images can be obtained by the freezing of an image, while also maintaining its connection with the rest. But strengthening the expressive meaning of a scene can also be implied through the immobility of the character, as in the case of the creation of the monster in *Frankenstein*. Reduced movement signals a gruesome process of coming to life, but it is the duration of the scene that gives sense of burdensome weight being inflicted on a body trying to detach from the partially visible cauldron. Expressive pictorial composition is fulfilled by balancing the dominating dynamics of the dummy with the fire, as flames and ashes fill the sultry surrounding space, later echoed in the lingering haunting the monster will exert on his creator as the structuring narrative element.

In a different approach, the opening scene of *The Haunted House* creates depth of field by means of *mise-en-scène*. A diagonal line in the form of a path separates the deep forest in the background and the lake in the foreground. Walking along it, the group movement of the characters expresses the search for a shelter from the storm. The next scene reveals it to be a house hidden in the forest. But before the lightning descending from heavy clouds of storm share with the audience the unusual human features of the building in the following scene, this road taken by the three friends signals a rite of passage. Through its function of delineating the space of the visual composition, the forest scenery and its reflection on the surface of the lake are of about equal proportion, foreshadowing the narrative reversal of natural laws.

While in the space of the house, an open door in the background gives little hope of escape for the three protagonists already aware of being entangled in a forest fallen under the spells of a witch. Claustration imprinted to a composition of an interior space is suggested to a larger degree in *The Portrait*. The narrative conveys a more intimate depth of field, as an easel and the board of a bed indicate little

distance between these objects and the portrait hung in the background. The easel undertakes a metaphorical function in the overall narrative by facing the painting, obscuring the divisive possibilities art may imply. The bed, on the other hand, is oriented towards the audience, with its board as a robust physical obstruction in the face of menace [Fig. 4]. The young painter constantly repeats the movement of lying in it and then rising from it as a response to his fear. The process of identification of the spectator with the protagonist reaches its most intense level with the support of this element of *mise-en-scène* by exerting the disquieting effect of a personal secured space associated with the vulnerability of the humans' sleeping stages. This specific narrative trigger is also present in *The Haunted House* and *Frankenstein* with all protagonists physically interacting with the witch or the monster while lying in their beds.

Horror and the Pictorial Spirit

In the case of the cinematic experience, interpreting the gestures and movement of the actors as integral elements in complex visual compositions is fundamental in identifying the narrative function of pictorialism in silent films. Acting, together with *mise-en-scène*, depth of field or framing become complementary instruments in creating pictorial moments potentiated by applied or implied stillness, often stressed by its duration. The ensemble of these compositional elements visually stresses associations and connotations which actively shape both the cinematic narration and its reception. They generate "the 'pictorial spirit' of the spectator's imagination" (Valkola 2016, 22) as a strategy of mental punctuation of the filmic narrative through pictorial image.

While this type of confrontational relation between audience and film is usually restrained to discussing the cinema of attractions, André Gaudreault successfully demonstrates the capacity of the kinematic image to contain a monstrative imprint while simultaneously remaining conjunct to the overall narrative. Individual image is seen as capable to sustain visual autonomy as a scene. In specifically discussing horror silent cinema, the dominance of the system of monstrative attractions can be traced along two of its defining aspects. It demanded an escalating level of spectacle, while a minimum level of narrative coherence was needed to deliver intelligible spectacular-oriented content (Phillips 2018, 45–46). While not an early film, *The Haunted House* implemented a minimal narrative constructed by means of pictorialism, proposing a visual approach of attractional descent that develops over the course of almost the entire film, ultimately leading to an open ending.

Frankenstein and *The Portrait*, while being literary adaptations, resorted to pictorial compositions due to their attractional function that supported the irrational nature of the depicted horror.

Correlating pictorialism to monstration determines a mutual enhancement of two concepts. This operation enables an understanding of transitional cinema as bearing the weight of its own dominant visual regime while undergoing a process of narrative integration. Despite joining other narrative arts, the intrinsic nature of it lies in exploring the possibilities of the visual composition, primarily by means of *mise-en-scène*. Equally indebted to photography and theatre, pictorialism becomes an instrument, on the level of both the composition and reception, in the process of monstration. The response of the audience is a significant matter in this equation when further reducing the discussion to horror silent cinema. Titles belonging to this category stress an "exhibitionist confrontation" between the image and the spectator, if we are to borrow Tom Gunning's terminology describing the specificities of the cinema of attractions (2000, 232), seen as perfected types of nineteenth-century fairground entertainment. This choice is by no means aleatory, as the absence of synchronized sound in horror silent films enhanced visual shocks. In their quest to elicit fear and disgust, pictorial compositions aimed to give voice, even if only among the members of the audience, to otherwise silent screams.

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Figure 3. Pictorial stillness conveyed by means of reduced movement of the monster in *Frankenstein* (1910) during the scene of its creation. **Figure 4**. Elements of *mise-en-scène*, depth of field and acting pictorially punctuate the filmic narrative in *The Portrait* (1915).

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Images in Suspension: *Tableaux Vivants*, Gesturality and Simulacra in Raul Ruiz's film *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*

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Abstract. The article discusses Raul Ruiz's film *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* (1978). In the closed space of the house a parallel world emerges, where the filmic hypertext is constituted by a series of *mise-en-abyme* images that explore the multiple universe of *tableaux vivants.* The article analyses Ruiz's appropriation of Pierre Klossowski's concept of *simulacra*. The structure of *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* is based upon the infinite reproduction of meaning since each *simulacrum-tableau vivant* leads to another. The author explores the gesturality of the bodies and its relevance to the use of language and sound in the film. Furthermore, he argues that Ruiz orchestrates the placement of the *tableaux vivants* in the filmic space in order to reveal the thought of eternal return.

Keywords: *tableaux vivants*, simulacrum, gesture, Pierre Klossowski, vicious circle.

Introduction: In the House of Mirrors

The film *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting (L'Hypothèse du tableau volé, 1978*) – along with Pierre Zucca's film *Roberte* (1979) – introduces Pierre Klossowski's work into cinema. The film summarizes to a large extent the main themes of the philosopher's work. Furthermore, it combines his key philosophical concepts with a close study upon Klossowski's uses of the *tableaux vivants*. The film can be characterized as an intellectual detective mystery story. A Collector has gathered six paintings by the 19th-century painter Frédéric Tonnerre that caused a scandal at the time and consequently have been confiscated by the police. His main preoccupation is to discover what has happened to the seventh painting. The main character is aided by a bodiless voice, that of the Narrator, which appears and disappears during the narration. Although we are not provided with further information on

that voice, I argue that it is a reference to Klossowski's theological themes; a spirit or a demon that frequently appears in the author's novels. The Collector presents his investigatory method orally, through a series of syllogisms that interact with the recreation of the paintings in the form of *tableaux vivants* in the physical space of the film. The investigation leads to the revelation of the scandal: the practice of an occult ceremony by a secret society.

The film, which combines several cinematic genres such as the documentary and the essay film, could be considered as a cinematic monograph on Pierre Klossowski by Raul Ruiz. The filmmaker applies what he has called the "combinatory logic" (Ruiz 2005, 113) in constructing a film of Klossowskian occurrences. Ruiz combines multiple themes that act as substrata to the film's structure, which has multiple layers. Ruiz produces a spiral of images inside images. Having as a starting point the representations of Klossowskian themes in paintings, we come across a series of *tableaux vivants* and a *roman-à-clef*, which in turn is being reconstructed into a *tableau vivant*. This filmic construction is based upon the personal mythology of Pierre Klossowski, as seen in his works: Diana and Actaeon, The Crusaders, The Immortal Adolescent, the demon Baphomet. Ruiz explicitly manipulates those themes in order to construct an original story.

In adapting Klosswoski's theoretical work as well as his personal mythology, Ruiz performs a highly experimental work which can be related to Thomas Elsaesser's continuation of the thought of Gilles Deleuze. Elsaesser claims that Deleuze has managed to claim for the image "a new kind of materiality, an existence in time beyond the ephemeral and the moment, as well as investing it with energy, with agency and intensities, in short, with something akin to a life-form of its own" (2018, 5). Elsaesser concludes that this new type of image and the consequent conceptualization of cinema escapes the preconceived notion that cinema reflects and presents aspects of the world that we live in. He, rather, claims that cinema has become a world on its own (2018, 5–6). Now, the spectator does not have access to a glimpse of an imaginary reality of the world that we live in, but she/he is taking part in a process of a world-in-the-making. According to Deleuze and Elsaesser, cinema has the capacity to create a world on its own, to be a world on its own. Hence, my point of departure is that *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* is a world that opens up to us and invites us to explore it.

Firstly, I am presenting several aspects of Klossowski's work that concern the film directly. By pointing out the details of Klossowski's personal mythology and philosophical thought, I attempt to clarify Ruiz's narration. Secondly, I am focusing on the use of sound, and more precisely of voice, in the film. The voice's role affects

the relation to the multiplicity of images that coexist in the film and creates one more layer (a sonic layer) in the narrative. Thirdly, I am conducting a micro-historical analysis of the concept of the *tableau vivant* in order to point out its functions and demonstrate how it is being used in the film's narrative structure. Lastly, I am using several scenes and details in order to demonstrate the apparent coexistence of different kinds of works: the philosophical and pictorial work of Pierre Klossowski and the film of Raul Ruiz.

The Work of Pierre Klossowski

The themes that Pierre Klossowski uses and that consequently appear in the film form a vital part of the philosopher's/painter's personal mythology. Klossowski could be characterized as a modernist and a post-modernist artist at the same time. He builds a personal mythology in which he combines a mélange of historical and literary figures that he appropriates. Jacques Henric argues that Klossowski's pictorial construction "reestablishes the link between the immense territory of the pregrammatical: the mechanisms of memory, dreams, facts and gestures take place in the limits of the human or in the pre-human. The image has a transhistorical and transnational value. It dives into a past which is more distant than that of the language. It captures the infinite and the timeless" (Henric 1989, 20). In this mixture of history, theology and literature in Klossowski's personal universe, Greek mythology (as is the case of Diana) coexists with Western historical figures (as the Crusaders). Alyce Mahon notes that "the painterly and fictional spaces Klossowski invites the spectator into are thus quintessentially modern while his erotic theatrics might be viewed as post-modern before their time in insisting that the gaze is not fixed but open to play. Klossowski's eroticism is indebted to a long history of both religious and libertine texts, from the writings of Saint Augustin to those of the Marquis de Sade. Both traditions share a fascination with dualism, and it is this fascination which fuels Klossowski's libidinous play" (Mahon 2006, 33).

Deleuze calls this unity of theology and pornography a "superior pornology" (Deleuze 1990, 282) and underlines the fact that the one reflects upon the other (Deleuze 1990, 282). It is an accomplished junction that creates the paradoxical coexistence of antithetical identities. It reunites in an extreme way various forms of thought and creates a play between their dynamic potentials. This synthesis is made explicit and is being visualized through an ambiguity of the bodies.

The Game of Images

The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting does not have an actual plot. Its story is concentrated entirely on the fabrication of images inside images. Firstly, the images inside the images are representations of paintings that have been reproduced in the form of the *tableaux vivants.* Secondly, the Collector reproduces the paintings in order to unravel the mystery that surrounds a stolen painting and its scandalous reputation in the 19th century. The key to the unraveling of the mystery is the deciphering of the gestures of the *tableaux*. The falsifying element in this narration is that the painter Frédéric Tonnerre, who supposedly painted the paintings, never existed. It is a figure that belongs entirely to Klossowski's modern mythology. The pseudo-painter appears several times in Klossowski's novels and Klossowski has even written an article analysing one of his works that is called *Judith.* One could argue that Tonnerre, apart from being a figure of reference to Klossowski's work, is at the same time his alter ego. According to Klossowski, his style is characterized by a certain realism mixed up with reverie and Neoclassicist reflections (Klossowski 2001, 120). The Collector reproduces the paintings in order to discover what occurred in the past, in order to find out the cause of the great scandal. We come across a pseudo-enactment of the past since that past never existed. The scandalous past that the Collector attributes to the paintings never existed as both the paintings and the painter are entirely fictitious. The whole film is therefore a parody of a mystery, a game of images.

Ruiz covers the cinematic space of this mystery story with many layers of fictitious creations, such as the Collector's syllogisms as well as the multiplicity of images that coexist in the mise-en-scène. The paradoxical aspect of the film lies in its use of images that contradict speech and vice versa. The Collector's speech instead of clarifying the mystery of the images creates more suspense and mystery. Furthermore, Ruiz adapts the concept of the eternal return as it has been reformulated and interpreted by Pierre Klossowski. The eternal return expresses a virtual moment in time and presents itself as a singular event. In its core, the thought of the return is non-communicable and non-exchangeable. Such a virtual moment is taking place at the end of the film. Moreover, the whole film is constructed around this idea. The world of the film reflects a fabricated arbitrariness. This unpredictable composition is formed by two different languages (i.e. the Collector's speech and the language of the bodies) that are connected to each other and that function in opposition to one another.

Filming the Mystery House. *Huis Clos* and the Multiplicity of Spaces

The diegesis of the film is entirely concentrated on the space of the house. The narration takes place inside its confined limits except for the opening shot of a cul-de-sac of a Parisian road. The 19th-century bourgeois house is an additional character to the narration in the sense that the parts of the house such as the living room, the corridors, the rooms and the garden contribute both to the masking and to the unraveling of the mystery that surrounds Tonnerre's paintings. The set is a demonstration of Ruiz's theory of the "corpus of visual opinions." "Visual opinions are the automatic sequences of images touched off by the first arbitrary image created on the basis of the abstract stimulus." (Ruiz 2005, 60.) An example of "visual opinion" is presented by the filmmaker in this way: "when we go into an unknown house, we see the living room, and on that basis, along with our impressions of the external aspect of the house, we develop an opinion about the rest" (Ruiz, 2005, 60). Such an example of "unknown house" appears in *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*. The house is presented as being a world of its own. The viewer has the impression of entering a world of mystery. The filmmaker uses a highly realistic point of view of the way in which he presents the facts and the events. Thus, the film has the appearance of being a documentary film. Furthermore, Ruiz gives a strong realistic background to the spaces that he uses. He makes us believe that these spaces do indeed hide something; they contain a mystery story whose origin and meaning we have to discover.

The impression of confinement that the house creates for the viewer produces the idea of a space which is induced with a multiplicity of possibilities. The "personality" of the house follows in many respects the gothic-story house. The large spaces, the long corridors, the doors that open and close on their own are elements that belong to the literature of the late 18th century. [Fig. 1.] Apart from the explicit reference to the symbolism of the gothic house, the black and white cinematography contributes to the mystery that surrounds both the house and the narration. [Fig. 2.] The absence of colour produces the idea of mystery in the film. We can argue that the paintings are decolourized in order to focus on their meaning. This becomes evident through the Collector's spatial movement. He conducts his investigation according to the settings of the *tableaux vivants* that are organized systematically in the spaces of the house.

The above reflections on the elements of the spatial organization of the film correspond to the characteristics of the *huis clos* film in which stories depict

characters in an enclosed space, a genre that incorporates features of the theatrical aesthetics of space. The genre has been developed extensively in the 1970s and has formed a cinematographic language of its own. Primary examples of this language are the works of Marguerite Duras. A *huis clos* film presents "characters that are isolated from the exterior world" (Bernard 2015, 25). In Ruiz's film, the setting constructs its own private geography which, in turn, enables the Collector to explore further the mystery of the story. We can perceive the different parts of the house as different layers of meaning. The choreography of the filmic spaces creates isolated settings of meaning that are expressed in a fragmented way. Moreover, the fragmented choreography sketches out each scene. Every scene in the film is related to a specific meaning that unfolds in the filmic space. This artificial fragmentation of meaning, through the representation of the paintings, appears through the differentiation and the isolation of every *tableau* in a variety of spaces. Each fragment corresponds to a *tableau vivant* attributing a different meaning to the investigation. Every *tableau vivant* exists on its own and at the same time is linked to every new one that we see as the narration goes on. The *tableaux vivants* are fragments of an ultimate *tableau vivant* that does not exist in the physical space, but is performed as a virtual image.

The Collector's and Narrator's investigation is that which connects all of the *tableaux vivants*. The Collector's movement in space results at the same time in the unraveling of the mystery. Investigation and movement proceed together. The Collector's body links together both physically and virtually the space of the film. As Bernard mentions: "the body links together the fragments in various ways. By its displacement, the body forms a movement and in a relative layout of space in relation to this movement" (2015, 25). Along with the displacement of the Collector's body in space, the narration continues, and the more the exploration of the house proceeds, the more we come across different gestures in the spaces of the house.

The Soundscape of the Film

The spatial organization of the film and the choreography of its scenes are the first attributes of the narration that compose the starting point for the Collector's investigation. It is an artificial set that is being staged for the camera. The Collector has prepared the setting in order to explore along with the camera the spatial configuration of the Ritual. Since the preparation of the set has taken place, the Collector starts a monologue that includes speculations and hypotheses concerning the existence of the paintings. The operation of the voice then is the film's second vital element. In order to explore the filmic space, Ruiz assigns to the voice the

role of a powerful narrative tool. The Collector's investigation is primarily oral. By exposing his syllogisms in an analytical way, he organizes and then assures the continuity of the narration. In this obscure and occult cinematographic narration, it is the voice that traverses space by marking the potential meaning of each individual scene. The third factor that is related to the other two and plays a key role in the film is the gesture of the bodies. Through their silent gestures, the bodies construct a language that awaits to be deciphered. In this way, each character of the *tableaux* forms his/her own language that is expressed through the bodily gestures. The three different kinds of languages, the Collector's voice, the Narrator's voice, and the gestures of the *tableaux vivants*, are interlinked and interact in a play between speech and meaning, between muteness and falsification.

The Collector's bodily image and speech are the primary attributes and characteristics that lead the diegesis of the film. In the beginning of the film, the filmmaker's camera examines, through a tracking shot, a painting. We hear the Narrator's voice and at the same time we follow the camera as it explores the space of the living room. As the camera keeps moving, the Collector enters the shot, and we hear the two voices having a dialogue with each other. The camera continues to follow the Collector as he walks through the living room surrounded by paintings. He presents his thoughts concerning the scandal that the paintings have caused. This is the starting point for the investigation.

The oral investigation along with the movement of his body in the various spaces of the house are the mechanisms of the diegesis. The second voice that is heard throughout the film is that of the Narrator. The Narrator's voice accompanies that of the Collector and it performs a semantic play of meanings. Contrary to the Collector, the Narrator's voice does not have a body. It exists in space and time in an invisible mode. The Narrator interferes throughout the film in an unexpected way, as another play inside Ruiz's narration. The Narrator's voice performs another falsification, similar to those of the *simulacra-tableaux***.** The difference is that this falsehood is both invisible and oral. The function of those two voices, the Collector's and the Narrator's, perform an open play of meanings and interpretations. As Michel Chion argues, the parodying of the voices imitate with their tone the figure of the Master-of-the-House and thus through this play they invite the spectator to participate in the game (Chion 1999, 57).

This game is being produced by the invisibility of the Narrator's voice and by its interaction with that of the Collector. It surrounds the narration with a mystery and at the same time the two voices create a parody of a mystery story. According to Chion the Narrator's voice forms an acousmatic character (Chion 1999, 57). The

acousmetre exists "neither inside nor outside the image. It is not inside, because the image of the voice's source – the body, the mouth – is not included. Nor is it outside, since it is clearly positioned off-screen in an imaginary 'wing,' like a master of ceremonies or a witness, and it is implicated in the action, constantly about to be part of it" (Chion 1999, 129). The acousmatic character is clearly defined by its ability to appear and disappear in the film's narration, since its existence is not defined by any narrative laws nor does it need to justify its presence. The acousmatic character makes its appearance in an oral way and manifests itself through speech. *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* presents two different languages, two different expressions that interact and perform a play of languages and bodies, of speech and silence.

Suspension in Time and Space: The *Tableaux Vivants*

If the *huis clos* film has an inherent theatricality due to the enclosed space that is represented in the film, the use of the *tableaux vivants* doubles the theatricality of the film. The *tableau vivant* as a practice reached its peak during the 19th century. The adjective *vivant* refers to the use of bodies in order to construct, literally, a living painting. A related Latin variation of the adjective is the word *vivarium,* "a noun that refers to a place used for scientific study" (Paz 2017, 1). Both meanings of the word are applicable in the particular study that takes place in the film. The *tableaux vivants* have been situated in space as actual representations of the paintings that have been confiscated by the police as part of a scandal. The thorough scientific study and the Collector's method of aporetic thinking affirm the aforementioned thesis, which is that the *tableau vivant* becomes a space of interpretation and of investigation. In his book, Ruiz argued that the recreation of a scene with living bodies is an attempt to recreate the original poses of the original models who sat for the painter. To reconstruct a scene is to be able to capture the tension of the original pose. That is to be able to reincarnate the physical tension of the first models. The reincarnation of the original gestures is the reincarnation of the original tension (Ruiz 2005, 51).

Apart from the physical tension that Ruiz spoke of, *tableaux vivants* are representations of original and/or supposedly original (as is the case with this film) paintings that aim to concentrate on details such as lighting and shade. With its Neoclassical aesthetic that kind of technique has the quality and the ability to reproduce a painting with living bodies. But its performance is not to exist just as a copy. Its realization is an act of imitation. "This activity of the 19th century salon can be understood as a highly perverse reproductive technique that instead of

making an original non exchangeable through the multiplication of copies, would render it absolutely singular through its corporeal actualization in 'living material'" – as Michel Goddard points it out (2013, 27). The singularity of every *tableau vivant* lies in its fragmentary representation in time and space. It is a mute representation of a painting that is being performed whilst it empowers the effects of the original. The work of the *tableau* has at its core a didactic function. It aims at underlying a meaning and a value. This is why the actors remain static. As Steven Jacobs mentions: "*tableaux* thus represent fixed moments that halt the narrative development of the story and introduce stasis into the movement of the play. During a short period of suspended time, the action is frozen at a point of heightened meaning, a point at which the actor's gestures are especially capable of expressing the full significance and all the implications of the story" (2011, 88).

The *tableau vivant* designates a space as an image in suspension. That kind of image has two designated characteristics: the temporal and the spatial, which form a complex interconnection between time and space. The *tableau vivant*, which creates a space on its own, a space within the space, reconverts the space into time. This means that space goes through a transformation. Since the characters of the *tableau vivant* are captured in a specific gesture in time, like freezing time for a specific moment they affect the space that they inhabit by transforming it into time. Anthony Spira explains that Klossowskian subjects "are always captured *in flagrante*, suspended in time, at the decisive moment, like the cliché as snapshot and also as stereotype" (Spira 2006, 67). The essence of Klossowski's temporality lies in the ephemeral aspect of the *tableaux*. This occurs because the scenes that are depicted have either a theological-mystical aspect or an erotic one that is presented in a theatrical way. In that way, the gaze of the spectator acquires an interior movement. It transcends itself from time and space in order to be captured by the space that has been opened. Jacques Henric mentions that the strategy that is applied on the spectator's gaze has a double movement since time becomes space, which becomes time again (Henric 1989, 73). It is captured gesture when the character that occurs in time in order to become space in order to become once again time for the spectator.

Arnaud mentions that Klossowski's *tableaux vivants* are intense and decisive but at the same time are fugitive and elusive (Arnaud, 1990, 163). They can exist only through the complicity of the spectator's gaze, since the decisive moment reveals the *tableau vivant* to this. In that particular moment of the gaze, it is space that implicates the viewer, making him/her an accomplice. The space of the *tableau vivant* exists as a host for the fugitive gaze. "The corporeal space, […] that reproduces

in its muteness that impenetrable gesture suggests other possible gestures and contradictions" (Klossowski 2001, 131). Time, space and vision become interlinked in the moment of the gaze; time and space possess the gaze in the space that is being opened. The image in suspension is an ephemeral spatio-temporal reality that reveals itself through its becoming simulacrum.

In order to better understand how the *tableaux* function in the narration, I am presenting them in their chronological order of appearance in the film's narration, since one leads to the other. In the below presented schema, I am following the order of appearance of the thematic scenes [see Fig. 3].

The Series of *Tableaux Vivants*

In the beginning of the film, the Collector presents his syllogisms. He appears as if he was giving an interview to someone. We never see another person in a shot nor hear a different voice. The camera is focused on him through a medium close-up. He claims that the painter Tonnere has turned the rules of painting upside down. As the Collector finishes his interview on the imaginary painter, we hear a mysterious music whilst the camera follows the Collector. Suddenly a door opens and the Collector enters it. We are being led to another room. The Collector approaches the window. He uses his binoculars in order to look at the spectacle that takes place in the garden. [Fig. 4.] A high angle shot presents the first *tableau vivant*. It is the reproduction of a scene from the Greek mythology: Diana and Actaeon. Through a series of medium shots, the filmmaker presents key elements and details of the scene. The mythological scene concerns Acteon, who has been transformed into a deer. This was his punishment for gazing at the goddess while she was having her bath. Suddenly, a mirror held by a boy reflects the sun's rays. [Fig. 5.] "Let us follow their direction" – says the Collector.

Through a tracking shot, the camera follows Diana horizontally as she moves from the garden towards the entrance of the house. The Collector enters the shot form the entrance and he is moving to the right. There we see the sun's ray that is reflected in the window of the basement. Ruiz uses a seventies zooming style in order to focus on the window. The camera zooms in and we see the window. The filmmaker cuts to the interior of the basement where he presents the second *tableaux vivant*: *The Return of the Crusader*. [Fig. 6.] The scene depicts a game of chess between two characters. They have been interrupted by the arrival of the crusader. A large shot depicts the four characters of the scene. The Collector continues with his syllogisms. He is focusing on a mirror that has the shape of a crescent. This mirror links the first *tableaux* with the present one since the ray

reflected from the garden arrives at this one. The Collector invites the invisible interviewer to follow him. Immediately after that, the camera cuts to another scene in a room. In the centre of the room there is the *Hanging Adolescent* surrounded by crusaders. [Fig. 7.] As the Collector enters the scene, we see another mirror on the right of the shot. It is a rectangular mirror that reflects a person. The Collector wants us to pay attention to the emplacement of the mirror in the scene. He moves towards the left of the scene and there we see one of the Crusaders being reflected again in a crescent-like mirror. The Collector wants us to pay attention to the light and without any interventions the lighting suddenly changes. Now, the hanging person is being illuminated while the rest of the characters are covered in darkness. Beside that person we see a crusader pointing with his index towards the ceiling. The camera performs a vertical movement towards the ceiling, where we see a mask hanging. The Collector exclaims: "There is the link with the next painting." We hear the Narrator's voice explaining his syllogism and at the same time we see the Collector moving through a dark corridor. Through the staircase, the Collector is moving to the upper floor of the house. We are being led to a large empty room. There, the Collector mentions that there is a hiatus in the series of the paintings. The only thing we see as we leave the room is another mask hanging on the wall. The mystery music reappears in the film's soundtrack and the Collector leaves the room. Now, the Collector attempts to throw light on the mystery of the disappeared painting through a novel. He sits in a chair and starts reading the story whilst at the same time we see the reconstruction of the scenes in *tableaux vivants*.

After describing the *roman-à-clef*, the Collector focuses on the thematic clue of the paintings. In a tracking shot we see all of the paintings that the collector possesses and we hear him being led to the conclusion: "We see that the story moves form painting to painting like the hands of a watch." Now, the Collector moves form the examination of each painting to the examination of the gestures of every character. In an extraordinary use of montage, Ruiz presents the gestures of the characters. We see the character of every *tableau* pointing with his/her finger into the other direction. After this, the filmmaker cuts the scene and presents the next *tableau*. The Narrator points out that: "We now see that in moving from one painting to the next, the characters are slowly completing the circle each in his own way." The Collector mentions that each one of these gestures leaves an imaginary trace. The scene finishes and the Collector is being led immediately to another room, where we find the altar of Baphomet.

As we can see from the examination of the series of *tableaux,* movement and stillness are the two predominant factors in the narration. The movement of

the Collector in the filmic space determines the continuation of the narrative. Additionally, his gaze investigates the possible meaning that the mute and immobile bodies suggest. Also, through the performative function of the voice we are able to construct intellectual hypotheses along the structural path that we follow. The fact that each orchestrated scene functions in relation to another presents a further characteristic of vision in the film: that of the *simulacrum*. According to Klossowski "the simulacrum as an imitative action is the actualization of something that rests incommunicable in itself or non-representable, that is strictly the fantasy in its obsessional constraint" (2001, 131). The function of the body as simulacrum is what creates the diffusion as well as the multiplication of meaning. It is at this point that the narration becomes obscure and creates a confusion for the Collector and the viewers. If we regard each scene separately, we cannot extract a one and unique meaning of its content. But if we think of the virtual circle that is being performed at the end of the narration, then we can conclude that the film's goal is to perform this play through the multiple aspects of vision. The correlation between the incommunicable operation of the simulacra and the performance of the logically structured argumentation of the Collector is what creates the paradox in the film.

In my opinion, Ruiz adopts Klossowski's use of the *tableaux vivants* as *simulacra*. Examining more closely the structure of *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*, we are being led to the conclusion that it is based upon the infinite reproduction of meaning since each *simulacrum-tableau vivant* leads to another, without a particular aim or goal. Even if on the surface the Collector's syllogisms seem rational or if as an intellectual strategy they produce meaning, Ruiz turns into parody those kinds of syllogisms. It is the conception of a "false infinite" (1990, 227) – as Gilles Deleuze has called it – that we can see in the images constructed as *simulacra*. Klossowski's images reject the imitative function of traditional painting only to be focused on the work of simulation. Since a false infinite is constructed, the simulacra that imitate the paintings are becoming at the same time the simulacra of simulacra. Ruiz's appropriation of Klossowski's simulacra creates a spiral that we see unfold throughout the film.

Gestures and Language of the Bodies

The spatial presence of the *simulacra* is being performed by the *tableaux vivants*. It is through the gesturality of the living bodies that the Collector and the acousmatic voice aim to derive meanings and interpretations from the paintings. As the investigation proceeds, the Collector focuses all the more on the gestures of the bodies.

"The same gestures repeated from painting to painting" – as the Collector mentions it in the form of a conclusion. What the investigation of the Collector seeks through the representation of the paintings is the gestures of the bodies; and more precisely the reconstruction of the ritual. The dramaturgy of the gestures gathers together the composition of the ritual. This occurs due to the fact that gestures "have a different value from what they represent" (Arnaud 1990, 70). The bodies of the models are placed in space in a silent mode and through their gestures they convey contradictory meanings. According to Klossowski, motionless gestures which are suspended in space provide "material for a narration that is on its own eternal and inaccessible and without ever having a decisive interpretation" (Klossowski 2001, 137). The gestures of the bodies present a constant ambiguousness. Every image implies another image and in this way the game goes on. The gestures of every figure in the film link all the *tableaux vivants* together in an interrupted whole that is composed of fragments. The silence of the *tableaux vivants* and their mute gesturing are the true objects of the Collector's investigation. The film opens up a space where a game between language and gesture, between silence and speech is being played. The Collector performs an oral investigation through language. It is through the signs of language that he tries to reestablish a form of meaning. Gestures on the other hand do not belong to the reign of signs since they are simulacra. In that sense, language tries to capture through signs something that is a non-sign. *Simulacra* exist on their own, they appear in their fragmentary form, in the form of gestures. They escape the signs of language. The Collector, in presenting the series of *tableaux vivants* and in analysing them one by one, tries to establish a form of unity. The unification of images in order to produce meaning can only be achieved through the play of language, through speech.

After the examination of the fifth painting, the Collector enters a room where two of the paintings/*tableaux vivants* are combined together: *The Arrival of the Crusader* and the *Tortures of the Inquisition*. The filmic construction connects the Collector's and Narrator's voices with the muteness of the gestures. We can perceive this in the following lines:

Narrator: *A series of paintings linked by minor details, sometimes skillfully inserted extraneously to the theme: the ray of the light in the mirror, the second mirror in the shape of a crescent. And now…*

Collector: *I would like to draw your attention to the extreme care with which the painter has placed the mirrors. So that it is really impossible to err in arranging the tableaux vivants.*

Narrator: *Is such care likely?*

Collector: What else is the painter's purpose but to draw our attention to what is reflected in the mirror when the tableau is arranged? Look, it is he one sees reflected in the mirror. But now let us consider the lighting effects. The chiaroscuro obviously is arbitrary. Why should certain figures, perhaps not the most important, be privileged and others remain a shadow? But setting aside the lighting, let us concentrate on the figures.

The Collector switches on the lights and continues: "*All is clear. Let us reverse the lighting. Let what was played in shadow emerge into the light and what was clearly visible return to the darkness.*" The Collector now looks at the gesture of the Crusader. His finger points toward the ceiling. The Collector looks up and sees the mask. He exclaims: "the mask" [Fig. 8]. The Collector and the Narrator now have the clue in order to proceed with the investigation. The narrator mentions that the mask is an element of the stolen painting and concludes, in a contradictory manner, that this painting does not exist.

As we can observe from the above, the Collector presents one of the possible interpretations of the bodily gestures. In this obscure narration that constantly escapes one possible interpretation, language and silence coexist. Ruiz constructs a play between visibility and invisibility: the visibility of the bodies and the invisibility of the inaccessible that lies in the *simulacra*-images. This association of the gaze with speech acquires the quality of the essential relation, which consists in the complicity of sight and speech (Deleuze 1990, 284). This complicity must be understood here as a disjunction between body and language. First and foremost it is the language of the bodies that guides the syllogisms that are heard aloud in the film.

The bodies perform the event for the viewer. Each network of gestures, every *tableau vivant* becomes an event. The gesture is that which is proposed as an event, which surpasses language. And that is the function of the *simulacra*: they encompass the phantasm that language seeks to define. "The body is language because it is essentially 'flexion'. In reflection, the corporeal flexion seems to be divided, split in two, opposed to itself and reflected in itself, it appears finally for itself, liberated from everything that ordinarily conceals it." (Deleuze 1990, 286.) The Collector forms his syllogisms upon the reflection on the bodies. His language then is the reflected intentionality of the gestures. This intentionality that is clearly depicted in the gesture is the actual event. "The event occurring in a state of affairs and the sense inhering in the proposition are the same entity. Consequently, to the extent that the incorporeal event is constituted and constitutes the surface, it raises to this surface the terms of its double reference: the bodies to which it refers as a noematic attribute, and the propositions to which it refers as an expressible entity.

It organizes these terms as two series which it separates, since it is by and in this separation that it distinguishes itself from the bodies from which it ensues and from the propositions it renders possible." (Deleuze 1990, 182.)

The Virtual Image

After exposing the series of *tableaux* in the space of the house, the Collector seems puzzled and resorts to a small book which is a *roman-à-clef*. This literary genre, which means a novel with a symbolic key to the story reflects real characters and real events in the form of a fictitious story. The Collector starts to read the novel. As he narrates, we see at the same time the reproduction of the story in the form of *tableaux vivants*. That technique is the ultimate narration that combines at the same time language and gestures. At first glance, the story is a typical bourgeois story that concerns the marriage of a young girl and her fiancé. Things start to become complicated when one of the guests starts to have homoerotic tendencies towards the fiancé. The more the narration proceeds, the more we come closer to the truth. The Collector finishes the story with the following incident: "That very night, the boy L. is carried off by H. aided by members of the sect and taken to their mansion in the rue de la Pompe. Promptly alerted by the Marquise, the police intervene and interrupt a strange ceremony involving young L. as both priest and sacrifice. The protagonists all find themselves in prison and are released on payment of a substantial bail. Young L. is found hanged in his cell and the talk is either of suicide or a crime." The Collector finishes his narration of the story with the following rhetoric question. "Can we accept that what lies behind these paintings is merely a novel?" "We can say that the protagonists simply portrayed the novel's theme as if it were a ceremony" – he adds.

As we approach to the final phase of the film, the Collector informs us that the stolen painting does not exist. The Collector traced the occult theme that lies hidden in all of the paintings and Ruiz's camera movement has performed a virtual circle that led from one painting to the next inside the space of the house. The paintings are compared to circles that all together lead to the sphere: Baphomet. In fact, the Collector has recreated the ceremony for the film. The paintings are the ceremony. Each gesture of the bodies in the *tableaux vivants* is part of the ceremony.

We are now being led to the conclusion that the ceremony is the concept of the eternal return (*Circulus Vitiosus Deus* according to Klossowski). The virtual circles that have been produced in the film are singularities whose actualized intentionality forms the idea of the Whole as it is (re)presented in the film. At the end what we

see is a synthesis of the different singular gestures of all the *tableaux vivants* that are represented in the film. [Fig. 9.] We see a fusion of all the characters together. A tracking shot examines now, slowly, the figures. The protagonists of the different paintings are being unified: Diana and the Crusaders, the characters from the *roman-à-clef* all become one by their placement in the same space. The fragments-singularities, which are the circles, are now an actual visualization of the sphere.

The gesturality of the bodies actualizes in every *tableau vivant* an event, since the series of the events form the Circle. This is what the end of the film reveals: that the whole narration unfolded a series of events, in a strategic manner, in order to complete a virtual circle. We have come across a series of *tableaux vivants* that at the beginning seemed as simple reproductions of paintings, only to be revealed later on that they are actual events in a perverse ceremony that was taking place in the filmic space. In other words, the filmmaker has made the viewer an accomplice of this ceremony.

Conclusion

The filmmaker disclosed in his *mise-en-scène* the mystery that proves not to be a mystery but rather a parody of a mystery story. He purposely misled the viewers by making them participate in the ritual as they followed meticulously the narration. The forming of the complete circle, which leads to the appearance of Baphomet, is the goal of the narration of the film. We could claim that the whole narration is a conspiracy of signs that become *simulacra* in order to interact with each other in a game of language and gestures.

In my article, I have attempted to demonstrate how cinema can operate as a "thought experiment" (Elsaesser, 2018). I have based my approach on the conception that the cinematic medium can perform an intellectual experimentation through the creation of a visual system. Dismantling the theme of the film, I have sketched out the references to the philosophical and pictorial work of Pierre Klossowski. Additionally, I have underlined how Klossowski's personal mythology has been incorporated into the theme of the film. I aimed at demonstrating how several philosophical concepts (such as the *simulacrum,* the eternal return) have been expressed in cinematic terms.

The Hypothesis of Stolen Painting is one of cinema's attempts to form a complete world on its own, transcending the ephemeral (re)construction of the world. At the same time, there is a paradoxical relation between the visual and the virtual that takes place through the use of the *tableaux vivants.* Ultimately, the junction

between the philosophical and pictorial work of Klossowski and the cinematic language of Ruiz points to the relation between the representable and the non-communicable. This filmic construction is able to perform its synthetic function through the interplay between the visual and the virtual.

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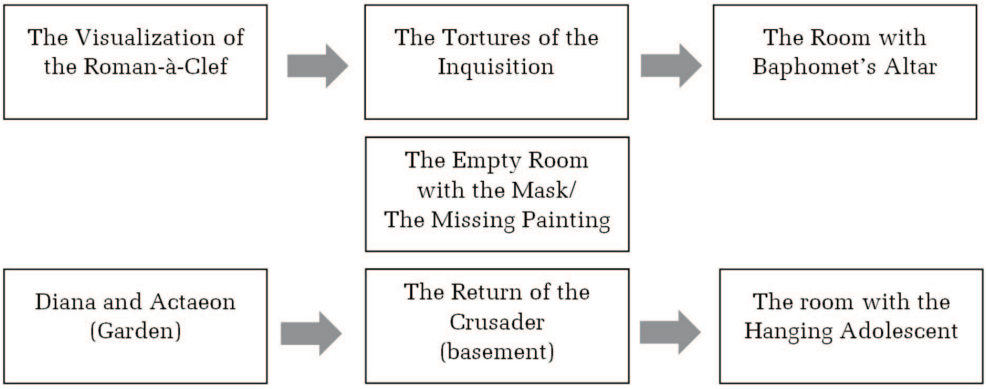

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Decoding *Tableaux Vivants*: the Metareferential Potential of Painterly References in Cinema

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Abstract. The article focuses on the intermedial relationship between cinema and painting, viewed as a self-referential process, and tries to determine various ways in which this type of signifying process can be used to "encode" various messages (within the work itself), or become an integral part of this (meta)communicative operation. Starting from a broad definition of intermedial references and continuing with a brief recontextualized detour through Gérard Genette's taxonomy of transtextual instances, the author narrows down a specific technique that exemplifies this type of "codifying" procedure, namely the *tableau vivant*. In accordance with Werner Wolf's proposed terminology, he attempts to determine the metareferential potential of this extra-compositional self-referential technique. The case studies focus on films by Peter Greenaway and Lars von Trier.

Keywords: metareference, self-reference, intermediality, *tableau vivant*, metacinema, picturality.

This paper considers the (more or less) direct manner in which the medium of cinema and painting interconnect. I shall attempt to sketch out some of the ways these types of intermedial references function in narrative cinema, and by this, I am referring to those special cases when films emulate not only the specificities of the medium of painting but also attempt to refer to specific works (in a more or less direct manner). This is by no account an exhaustive survey but an exploratory endeavour.

Painterly References as Intermedial Transformative Incorporations

Ágnes Pethő proposes two basic templates of perceiving intermediality within the cinematic medium: firstly, a "sensual" mode that brings closer the "reality" portrayed within the representations as a collection of "entangled synesthetic

sensations" (2011, 99); and a "structural" mode "that makes the media components of cinema visible, and exposes the layers of multimediality that constitute the "fabric" of the cinematic medium, revealing at the same time the mesh of their complex interactions" (2011, 99). It is on this second template that I wish to concentrate within the present article. The intent is to focus on the intermedial references to painting, more exactly, solely on those instances where the visibility of the referential link is made quite clear (as to be immediately recognized by the viewer). In doing so, my hypothesis is that such intermedial instances can be used to encode specific (meta)communicational messages, or, in any case, be an integral part of such endeavours. Thus, I shall approach intermedial references in such a way as to highlight (and, subsequently, analyse) not only their ability to connect two (or more) works of art, but also their capacity to give rise to a metareferential discursive level (via their transformative actions).

This process can be said to echo aspects of Gérard Genette's notion of transtextuality, defined as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (Genette 1997, 1). This concept (which is in turn derived from Kristeva's intertextuality) was conceived to analyse literary phenomena. As Pethő points out, it is improper to think of films as texts, when in fact they more closely resemble textures because of their inherent multimodality and primacy of synesthetic perception (visual, aural, haptic, etc.) (2011, 69). Adapting Genette's model for use in film studies can, in my opinion, still be rather useful, as long as it is not taken *ad literam*. He proposed five specific variants: intertextuality (seen as the copresence of a text within another), paratextuality (the relationship between the text and its paratexts such as a title, subtitle, preface, postface, etc.), architextuality (the relationship between a text and the genre of texts that it is part of), metatextuality (the critical relationship between two texts) and hypertextuality (the transformative relationship established between two texts). It is precisely this last variant that is of interest here. Genette defined it as: "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (1997, 5). In addressing the difference between intermediality and intertextuality, Yvonne Spielmann highlights that "where intertextuality expresses a text–text relationship, intermedia means that the reference frame of the entire system of art forms that mediates the intermedial correlation is itself included in the processes of transformation" (quoted in Pethő 2011, 39). I shall attempt to use part of Genette's insights to better understand (1) the ways in which two works of art from different mediums can be interlinked with one another, (2) how this

process inevitably implies a series of transformations, and finally (3) how these transformative operations could be used to articulate a higher-level discourse centered on the cinematic and painterly object-levels.

Jürgen Heinrichs and Yvonne Spielmann put forth the hypothesis that the cinematic medium "highlights the transformative quality of intermediality that can be found in the varying interrelationships between two or more media forms" (quoted in Pethő 2011, 29). Thus, cinema can be viewed as an ideal receptacle for all manner of intermedial exchanges. In what follows, I propose considering only intentional instances of such intermedial references.

We must first highlight the distinction between incorporating a painting directly into the film and reconstructing it through various means (hinting at it, without using it as such). In the former case, we have what Genette would have called proper intertextuality because the material painting is (re)presented in the film in more or less a direct manner. Filming a painting implies transferring it into another medium while keeping it as close as possible to the source (thus, keeping the level of alterations to a minimum), there is a certain degree of fidelity. In all other cases, when such a direct citation is missing, but the reference is still discernible, we are confronted with what one might call transformative incorporation. It would easily correspond to an intermedial variant of Genette's hypertextuality, because such an instance invites the viewer to attempt to precisely map out the alterations and transformations that the transfer process involved. This type of referencing a painting within a cinematic work, but without directly remediating the painterly artefact implies a "reconstruction" of the painting's main characteristics and components (subject, composition, lighting, etc.) using various cinematic elements. It can be done using actors, shadows, natural landscapes, various materials, such as paint, sand, paper, or it can even be entirely hand-drawn.

One of the most interesting ways by which to achieve this effect is having real actors pose as the characters from a specific painting. This transformative technique is called *tableau vivant*. Brigitte Peucker considers it as the paroxysm of the intermedial nature of cinema itself, as "a meeting point of several modes of representation, constituting a palimpsest or textual overlay simultaneously evocative of painting, drama, and sculpture" (2003, 295). This staging of paintings using real actors involves a type of embodiment of the inanimate image: "the introduction of the real into the image—the living body into painting—and thus attempts to collapse the distance between signifier and signified" (Peucker 2003, 295). Thus, this technique implies a (semiotic) exploration of the nature of painterly representation, and its relationship with cinematic representation.

This view is shared by Steven Jacobs in his historically centred study on *tableaux vivants*. He states that using this particular device, "filmmakers attempted to determine the specificity of their medium – movement was juxtaposed with stasis, pictorial or sculptural space with cinematic space, iconic immediacy with filmic duration, and so forth" (2011, 94). To sum up: the *tableaux vivants* can be thought of as a nodal point of several representational modes, thus a prime source of cinematic self-reference (and, by extension, metareference).

Painterly References as Metareferences

In order to better understand the potential metareferential uses of *tableaux vivants* in narrative cinema, we can turn to the work of Werner Wolf, who proposes a unique categorization of this type of phenomenon. In a classical semiotic framework, intermediality would be deemed as an example of metareferentiality – signs that reference other signs (Nöth 2009, 62–63) –, but Wolf deliberately alters this terminology.

In his proposed transmedial model, he deems metareference as an example of self-reference (as opposed to hetero-reference), defining it as the quality of signs (or sign systems) to "point to" themselves or other signs (or sign systems). That is to say, he distinguishes between intra-compositional self-reference (such as *mise en abyme* or metalepsis) and extra-compositional self-reference (such as intertextuality or intermediality) on the grounds that the referential process in the case of the former is directed inwards (to elements of the work itself), whereas in the case of the latter it is directed outwards (to elements from other works) (Wolf 2009, 38). Metareference is to be understood as a specific variant of self-reference. He distinguishes between the mere presence of a self-referential instance in a work of art (by which we understand any sign or configuration of signs that points to itself or the semiotic system it is a part of) and the instrumentalization of such a device as to construct and sustain a commentary on the work of art, or the entire medium – on a higher logical plane, a meta-level (Wolf 2009, 15–20). Although these alterations to the classical terminology can cause some difficulties, the benefits may very well outweigh the downsides.[1] Because of this additional focus on hierarchical distinctions between the various discursive levels, one can begin to approach all manners of cinematic instances that would otherwise not have been taken as an instance of "reflexivity" on the ground that they are not thematically linked to the cinematic process (see Stam 1992).

1 This paper will, in part, try to make the case for such a terminological shift.

In cinema studies, painterly can designate any "technical or compositional effect that results in the visibility (and non-transparency) of the 'surface' against the 'scene'" (Pethő 2011, 180). It can be thought of as a way of highlighting the formal aspects of the filmic artefact, eliciting firstly a form of medium-awareness in the viewer and then enabling him/her to reconstruct a higher-level discourse pertaining to that specific artwork or to the medium in general. Thus, these instances of extra-compositional references (which I have dubbed intermedial transformative incorporations: as exemplified by *tableaux vivants*) can become metareferential when they are used not only to link two works of art, but to create higher-level reflexive discourses.

Before we can dive into the analysis, we must consider a notion that has been intrinsically linked to metareference, namely aesthetic illusion. It is defined as a pleasurable cognitive response of the addressee of a work of art (Wolf 2013, 51–52). Aesthetic illusion is intertwined with what S. T. Coleridge famously called "the suspension of disbelief."[2] It is a pleasurable reaction to experiencing a work of art, and the basis of what makes that work's fictional representation of reality to be taken not as artifice, but (at least for a time) as a possible reality. Theorists such as Robert Stam (1992 [1985]), Christian Metz (2016 [1991]) or Christopher Ames (1997) have linked metafilmic practices to the act of illusion-breaking, following a line of thought that originated in Bertolt Brecht's theatrical poetics. This highly reflexive "other tradition" (Stam 1992, xi) is opposed to the realistic and naturalistic "transparency" of (cinematic) representation.

According to Wolf though, metareferential devices can be used either to strengthen the aesthetic illusion or to disturb it. When the illusion is shattered by such a device, the artifice becomes visible and the whole artistic apparatus becomes the subject of attention and inquiry. I adhere to Wolf's claims in saying that, while these metareferential devices can be used in an illusion-shattering manner, it is not always the case. When a painting appears within the narrative of a motion picture, it can simply be there as part of the representation of the fictional world. This applies to those instances when a film's prime interest becomes the prop-like nature of the aforementioned painting. In contrast to intramedial references (i.e. the appearance of a film within another film), intermedial references are important components to the believability of the constructed representation of that fictional universe. They not only create but maintain the aesthetic illusion throughout the entire duration of

2 Coleridge uses this famous phrase in Chapter XIV of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). The text is available online, here: *https://web.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/biographia.html*. Last accessed 26. 08. 2020.

the movie. When the prime concern is not verisimilitude (the inconspicuous nature of a painting on a wall in the background of a scene), but the fact that the mere presence of the painting within the represented world is used to highlight or reveal some aspects of the cinematic artefact (prompting a meta-awareness in the viewer), then we can call it metareferential. If its presence is blatantly foregrounded in such a manner as to violently contrast with the cinematic sequence it is a part of, or if it is used in such a way as to highlight the artificial nature of the representation, then we can conclude that its main goal is to disrupt the viewer's immersion, prompting a response/reaction to the scene (and by extension to the film as a whole).

As Steven Jacobs points out, in the context of narrative fiction films, *tableaux vivants* can be rather ambiguous: "because of their aestheticisation of immobility, they create blockages in the flow of a narrative film that result in a kind of enigma" (2011, 95). One can see that their staged and artificial nature seems almost specifically designed to potentially shatter the cinematic aesthetic illusion, but even such moments of arrest, if contextually motivated, can nonetheless strengthen the fictional world's hold on the viewer. It is for this precise reason that a case by case analysis is needed.

The following are a series of brief case studies in which I shall attempt to investigate two films which use *tableaux vivants* in order to encode or foreground the presence of metacommunicational statements: Peter Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts* (1985) and Lars von Trier's *The House that Jack Built* (2018). I shall be analysing two very different ways of employing intermedial transformative incorporations, looking at their metareferential potential, and attempting to decode their meaning.

An Intermedial Detour: *A Zed and Two Noughts* (Peter Greenaway, 1985)

Peter Greenaway has famously stated that "cinema is dead" (which is also the title of a lecture he delivered on multiple occasions around the globe[3]). What does he mean by this? He views cinema in terms of a conglomerate of mediums, all interconnected by text. Text has been, in Greenaway's opinion, the fundamental building block of cinema, not the image (as one might think). He argues that since virtually all films start their life with a written screenplay, films are nothing more than illustrations of text (Gras and Gras 2000, 173). In the same lecture, the British director claims that although cinema was invented well over a hundred years before, there have

3 *https://youtu.be/u6yC41ZxqYs*. Last accessed 26. 08. 2020.

not been that many actual films made. By this, he means image-based films, films that are held together not by the text they originated from, or by the text projected on-screen (in the form of intertitles), or by the dialogue spoken out loud by the characters represented in the image. His stance is certainly powerful, but one cannot help but question such statements coming from a director whose films abound in text (or instances that foreground the visual aspect of writing: carefully arranged rows of infinite lists or instances of calligraphy overlays). Greenaway's films can be thought of as symptomatic of the crisis of images that he pontificates about. Their idiosyncratic use of text (that, in Barthes's terms, does not anchor the images it accompanies) and unique visual style make them perfect candidates for exploring the limits of narrative cinema. Greenaway's films do not take the leap between a text-based cinema and an image-based cinema, but stand defiantly in-between, engaging (be it mockingly) with the various problems that each of them brings forth.

Greenaway's filmography abounds in instances of metareferentiality, as I have explored elsewhere (Drăgan 2017), but this paper centres upon the intermedial relationship between cinema and painting, so I shall attempt an in-depth analysis of such an instance from his 1985 feature, *A Zed and Two Noughts*.

The film is centred around the lives of two brothers who work at a zoological garden, and the various company they keep. It is a collection of interlocking narratives, each focused around one of the characters. One such side-narrative concerns a dubious surgeon, van Meegeren, with an obsession for copying the works of the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. It is on this rather odd (and some may say unimportant) subplot that I'll be focusing my attention. The entire story is presented in only 4 or 5 scenes scattered throughout the film and thus the overall effect is one of diluting its impact. On first viewing, it seems but a brief (and self-indulgent) accolade, but this is not entirely true. Brigitte Peucker postulates that "one reason for Vermeer's centrality for the art of filmmaking lies with the enigmatic image of the woman, an image that is voyeuristically explored by artist and filmmaker alike" (2003, 297). She continues by stating that "by way of this *tableau vivant* of *The Artist in His Studio*, then, the distinct temporalities of three modes of visual representation are juxtaposed: the celebrated 'phenomenon of temporal stasis' implied in Vermeer's paintings is marked by the punctum of photography, and subverted by the devolution of narrative in cinema and theater" (2003, 302). While agreeing with this interpretation, I contend that Greenaway's intermedial poetics of cinema is foregrounded in a more direct manner, using metareferential statements. What follows is further proof of such a connection between Vermeer and Greenaway, via an encoded discourse hidden in plain sight.

The scenes in question feature a series of recreations of famous Vermeer paintings (using various characters from the film). As Jean Petrolle points out in his essay on Greenaway, the specific paintings that are recreated (*The Allegory of Painting* and *The Music Lesson*) are not chosen at random. These are Vermeer's most self-referential images in his whole body of (known) work (Petrolle 2008, 160). This deliberate act of choosing such works brings to light a possible interpretation, namely that these scenes of image-making can be thought of as exploring the way in which the filmmaker constructs the cinematic representation.

This line of thought can be further elaborated. Why Vermeer and not another painter? Greenaway himself (in the introduction to the DVD release of this film[4]) cites Jean-Luc Godard, who famously called Vermeer the world's first cinematographer because of his way of manipulating light. But if the scenes in question are only supposed to be a *mise en abyme* of sorts, why does it feel like there is not much information imparted on the actual process of creating this film? I hypothesize that these scenes are but indirectly about the act of Greenaway's own filmmaking (as commentators, such as Peucker, would suggest), and in fact about Vermeer himself (more precisely, about his technique of image-making). In Greenaway's film, there is (as it has already been mentioned above) a disjunction between text (be it written or spoken) and image. Following only the text seems to lead nowhere in understanding the specificities of each story told. Another one of Greenaway's famous bold statements is that "most people are visually illiterate"[5] (introduced in his lecture and also later reused as part of his 2008 documentary, *Rembrandt's J'accuse*). So, in keeping with what is obviously a personal dissatisfaction with verbal/textual communication, in favour of an image-based system, I assume it is not beyond the realm of possibility that he would encode some messages using images (and not texts).

I suggest that these scenes that reference Vermeer's work are in fact a personal statement about the way in which this fascinating painter constructed his images. In the scene that reconstructs the famous work, *The Allegory of Painting*, we see two characters sitting in a space which is made to resemble (but not exactly replicate) the room depicted in the painting [Fig. 1]. The *tableau vivant* fills the entire space of the screen, all the main constitutive elements of the original painting having been reconstructed using the characters from this film. It is a conscious endeavour organized by the character of van Meegeren, thus fully diegetically motivated. But, I posit that the transformations operated (all the alterations to the original

4 *https://youtu.be/LnSnmx3BaT4*. Last accessed 28. 08. 2020.
5 *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKDMSuEXB88*. Last accessed 26. 08. 2020.

composition) are the ones that need to be taken into consideration: the woman (posing as the muse) is wearing a red hat (evoking another famous work by Vermeer, *Girl with a Red Hat*) as she strikes a similar pose as the one in the aforementioned painting; the surgeon dressed as the painter in the painting (presumably a self-portrait by Vermeer) is not behind an easel, but a photo camera. This latter is the most important difference.

Greenaway seems to be using this intermedial reference to the famous Vermeer painting to signal to the audience that this character is to represent the famous Dutch painter (for all extensive purposes, in this brief scene, the surgeon van Meegeren is to be taken as Vermeer). And what is this Vermeer doing? The painter is taking a photo of a girl with a red hat, a second intermedial reference to another of Vermeer's paintings, *The Girl with the Red Hat*. I posit that this second reference grafted almost seamlessly to the entire composition of the *tableau vivant* is used here (1) to signal its presence, as a disruption in the transfer process, and (2) to spell out Greenaway's own position on the famous debate surrounding Vermeer's *modus operandi*. The fact that van Meegeren, the would-be painter, standing in for Vermeer, is using a photo camera can be read as Greenaway's taking the side of those art historians and scholars who brought forth the idea that Vermeer himself made use of some sort of optical apparatus in the construction of his images (such as Philip Steadman (2002), who proposed that Vermeer used a *camera obscura*, or the artist David Hockney and the physicist Charles M. Falco, who have made similar remarks in their 2006 book, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters*). This layering of metareferences (coded by allusions to Vermeer's paintings) can be viewed as Greenaway's attempt to communicate a personal opinion (in what still is an ongoing debate on Vermeer's technique[6]).

The entire metareferential instance seems not to be directly aimed at the movie as such but at the medium of painting, which in turn directly influenced cinema (and certainly Greenaway himself, being that he was formally trained as a painter). In Wolf's words, such an "extra-compositional metareference to a field (type), of which the work in question is also a part (a token), indirectly also implies a metareference to the work in question, albeit by means of a detour" (2009, 38). In this case, this particular detour takes us through 17th-century Dutch art, but nonetheless returns to the film as such, for, as noted above, Greenaway has admitted on numerous occasions that the work of Vermeer constituted an indispensable

6 A debate that gave rise also to a hands-on approach by Tim Jenison, who decided to test some of the techniques put forth by diverse scholars, an effort documented in the form of a 2013 feature called *Tim's Vermeer*, directed by Teller.

source of inspiration. In one of the bonus featurettes of the film's DVD, the director talks openly about Vermeer's legacy in the context of his film: numerous lighting ideas being directly borrowed from the artist's works.[7]

Without affecting the aesthetic illusion, this instance of the *tableau vivant* (that contains, as I have shown, a layering of two intermedial references to two painterly works) is used to encode a double-layered message: one personal statement from the director about the artist in question, Vermeer – and the debate surrounding his particular technique; and another statement about the status of cinema in general, as indebted to artists like Vermeer, whose everlasting legacy is at all times present in the "texture" of each and every film.

The Illusion-Shattering Shot: *The House that Jack Built* (Lars Von Trier, 2018)

Lars von Trier is a filmmaker whose work abounds in cinematic experimentation. In doing so he tends to attack the preconceived notions of his audience. He employs Brechtian techniques (the set design in *Dogville* [2003] being the most evident example) in order to make the film artefact "visible" to those who watch it. His films contain a tension between the immersive qualities of the stories he tells and the distancing aspects of the way he tells them, in a way totally adhering to the idea of a reflexive cinema put forward by Robert Stam, who states that Brecht's proposed subversive *écriture* "can be employed in the demystification of any oppressive society or any reigning ideology" (1992, 212). This opposition to a kind of "reigning ideology" seems present in von Trier's 2018 feature as well, more precisely, an opposition to the general backlash that previous films of his (such as *Antichrist*, 2009, or *Nymphomaniac*, 2013) had received from critics and audiences alike.[8]

The House that Jack Built centres on the life and "career" of a serial killer, beginning with his very first instance of homicide, tracking his most accomplished murders over the years, and finally letting us see how he fails to complete his last venture – testing a device designed and constructed by him, intended to end the lives of multiple people at once. From a narrative standpoint, the movie is a frame story, with the titular Jack explaining to some unknown person (by the name Verge) how he committed some of his finest crimes. In the movie's epilogue, we find out

7 *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnSnmx3BaT4&t*. Last accessed 26. 08. 2020.

8 To name only a few examples: *https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/jul/16/antichrist-lars-von-trier-feminism*; *https://jezebel.com/i-watched-nymphomaniac-volume-1-on-demand-so-you-dont-1538905517*; *https://newrepublic.com/article/117070/lars-von-triers-nymphomaniac-conventional-sexist-film-review*. Last accessed 26. 08. 2020.

that Verge is none other than the poet Virgil from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, who has come to escort Jack to hell.

Lars von Trier appears to have made this movie not only to tell a series of disturbing accounts of gruesome murders (thus confining it to the filmic genre known as "torture porn"), but also to communicate to the viewers his personal opinion on the way in which they should approach his entire body of cinematic works – incidentally packed full of disturbing tales. This is by no means an "interpretive stretch," the director's intentions being rather evident especially in the scene where Jack, the protagonist, presents us with a montage of shots from von Trier's earlier films with the voice-over directly commenting on the aesthetic appreciation of representations of violence in art (which is in itself a nod to Thomas De Quincey's famous *On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts*, 1827, where a similar topic is discussed: the aesthetic appreciation of murderous acts). Jack refuses the assumption that fiction (and, by extent, art in general) is an indispensable tool for understanding, containing and keeping in check humanity's cruelty. He instead advocates for an artistic appreciation of the act of destruction, decomposition and even of the degradation of matter itself. To substantiate his claims, Jack cites, among others, Albert Speer's theory of the "ruin value" (1970, 56). Jensen Suther puts a radical idea such as this in direct relation with some of Lars von Trier's own controversial statements:[9] "by re-inscribing his own scandalous gesture into his cinema, von Trier begins to subject the violence of his cinema to critical reflection and, perhaps in spite of himself, to combat his own theatrical tendencies" (Suther 2019). Thus, one can see how von Trier's film functions as a sort of indirect rebuttal of the accusations that his cinema is merely an excuse to flaunt his own (repressed) violent tendencies. Whether or not this proposed nihilistic lens is indeed the "correct" way through which he wishes his *oeuvre* to be interpreted still remains open to debate. What is certain, however, is that this film invites (or, indeed, almost forces) the viewers to critically reconsider their relationship with his cinema.

I propose analysing how the director uses filmic techniques to articulate this higher-level discourse. And how in this metacommunicative act, a painterly reference in the form of a transformative incorporation (a *tableau vivant*), acts as the keystone of the entire endeavour.

Firstly, the director employs a series of Brechtian, or more specifically, Brechtian-inspired techniques (because his aim is not solely political in nature, but self-

9 He is of course referring to a 2011 incident where the director said that he "is a Nazi." (Cf. *https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/may/18/lars-von-trier-cannes-2011-nazi-comments*. Last accessed 26. 08. 2020.)

reflexive nonetheless). As Stam points out, Brecht's "distancing effect" was brought about by a series of operations, such as employing an interruptive, fractured, or digressive narrative structure (Stam 1992, 213). *The House that Jack Built* is, indeed, constructed as a frame story, thus cultivating ellipses and hiatuses in the narrative flow. There are also many abrupt halts, which give rise to entire digressive segments, in which Jack explains himself to his companion, Verge. These interruptions are present not only at the level of the voice-over, but also visually. When Jack starts to ramble on, for example, about the differences between Romanesque arches and Gothic ones, we are presented with a series of documentary-like images that have the role of visualizing (by way of diagrams) the physical and aesthetic qualities of this architectural innovation. The entire film abounds in such moments that distract the viewer from the actual story and affects the immersion, in a way adhering to what Stam would qualify as reflexivity: "art should reveal the principles of its own construction, to avoid the 'swindle' of giving the impression that fictive events were not 'worked at' but simply 'happened'" (1992, 213). The film also appears to foreground its heterogeneous medial nature in a similar Brechtian fashion. It seems to probe or dissolve the limits/boundaries of its own medium, continually referencing its palimpsestic nature. It does this by incorporating a plethora of references to high culture and popular culture alike: such as the entire reworking of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, citing the poems of William Blake, incorporating works by Paul Gauguin, Juan Gris, or children's cartoons, drawings, photos, found footage, historical news footage, musical performances by Glenn Gould, scenes from the director's own films, architectural diagrams, pop music, etc.

Secondly, I propose that von Trier resuscitates and indeed transmedially employs a long debunked notion in narrative theory, namely Käte Hamburger's so-called markers/signs of fictionality. The term was introduced by Hamburger to signify the specific ways in which a work of fiction signals its own fictionality to its readers, in other words, that there "are certain specific characteristics of fictional discourse, and that fictional discourse is ontologically fundamentally different from 'normal' or non-fictional discourse" (Bareis 2008). Gérard Genette does not contest the existence of such markers, but argues against their functionality in accurately distinguishing a work of fiction from a work of non-fiction (1993, 54–84).

I shall try to identify and ascertain how some of the narrative techniques employed could (by way of their institutionalized usage in movie-making) potentially function as markers/signs of fictionality, and how their usage might be employed by the filmmaker in a metareferential manner. Lars von Trier appears to make use of specific techniques (in a way similar to the situationists' notion of *détournement*)

in order to convey to the viewer multiple times (1) that the events depicted are not real (as opposed to the majority of narrative fiction which tries to obscure this fact) and (2) that the ideas brought up in this film are intended to be applied to his whole body of work.

One instance of such a marker of fictionality is the fact that all the episodes presented in the film are narrated by Jack in voice-over (in fact, one can argue that the film employs two narrators, given the fact that Jack is permanently interrupted by Verge). We are introduced to the setting of each murder by Jack's words, then we are left to interpret the flow of images as the direct result of Jack's enunciation. This technique of melting together the spoken narration with the sequence of images is not, by any means, uncommon, being used throughout film and TV productions (a famous example being the opening sequence of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of The Rings*, which blends these two types of narration[10]).

Another marker of fictionality might be the film's structure: on the one hand, frame stories are a staple of fictional narratives (from Chaucer to Boccaccio, etc.), and on the other, the fact that each episode (each story within a story) is further divided into chapters, each visually separated from one another by a title card (e.g. the first one is called: "1st INCIDENT").

One could interpret the direct reference to Dante's *Inferno* as a potential mark of fictionality. By using as one of its main characters a famous fictional representation of a historical figure (Verge being none other than the Roman poet Vergil/Virgil/Vergilius), as did Dante in his *Divine Comedy*, the film establishes itself as a work of fiction. This interpretation can be countered by the psychological line of thought which may posit Verge's presence as a "mere" projection of Jack's torn psyche. This may very well be the case, but I propose that the film makes use of another intermedial reference in order to highlight the artificial (and hence fictional) nature of Virgil's presence here: the reference to Eugène Delacroix's 1822 painting, *The Barque of Dante*.

Indeed, the scene in question is undoubtedly an example of transformative incorporation, by way of the technique of *tableau vivant*: Delacroix's painting is reconstructed using the characters from the film. Furthermore, the scene is comprised of just one static shot [Fig. 2], making it seem more like a painting. Lars von Trier's reconstruction can be seen as both a marker of fictionality (by which the juxtaposition of the painterly and cinematic foregrounds the latter's fictional nature), and a Brechtian "distancing effect" (by which the artificial nature of representation in general is foregrounded). This is why I consider this *tableau vivant* the keystone in the film's metarefrential discourse.

10 *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWKHhb2q-oc.* Last accessed 06. 03. 2021.

As for the transformative elements, one can clearly discern that this CGI-aided scene was masterfully crafted in order to include an enormous amount of similarities, trying its best to recreate Delacroix's painting as truthfully as possible. Indeed, the level of detail is astounding, from the virtually identical setting to each of the characters' stances completed by accurately pictural folds in their robes – a modern-day example of Aby Warburg's notion of "*Pathosformel*" (Warburg 2010), and presenting an almost identical lighting setup. For all extensive purposes, this scene seems to have been conceived not as a commentary on the painting by Delacroix, but simply to graph the two characters from the film onto the "surface" of the painting (almost akin to a metaleptical instance). This is to say that the metareferential discourse it entails, or signals, is not directed at the painting, but directly back to the film itself. In this case, the intermedial detour is considerably shorter than what we see in Greenaway's film. Thus, we are invited to compare the scene to the rest of the film and consider its place and subsequent meaning within it as a whole.

In this sense, this sequence's formal aspects are meant to stand out from the rest of the film's gritty, *dogma 95*-inspired aesthetic (mostly comprised of shaky handheld camera work and intentionally sloppy editing). It is the same composition and framing as the painting, being lit in a similar (though somewhat bolder and more direct) manner. To heighten the painterly aspect of this scene (and make the link between the two mediums even more clear) the whole scene was shot with a high frame rate and then slowed down a great deal. That is why the figures appear to move ever so slightly, while at the same time giving the impression of stillness.

Ágnes Pethő highlights that "focusing on the sheer visual pleasure of stillness means becoming conscious of the single image in cinema and experiencing its double release from: a) being inscribed within and subsumed by narrative flow, and b) from experiencing it primarily as an index of a pro-filmic reality, thus experiencing its 'imageness' as something more opaque" (2013, 68). Lars von Trier's *tableau vivant* appears to function in the same manner, at once distancing itself from the rest of the film it is a part of and rendering itself as a profoundly "opaque" moment. This arrested moment in the film's narrative flow functions as an agent of disruption.

In contrast to the other example presented in this paper (the scene in Peter Greenaway's film), this instance of intermedial reference shatters the aesthetic illusion. It does so by presenting itself in contrast to the sequences that precede it. The presence of this particular shot in a montage of shots depicting the characters' descent to hell makes a mockery of the whole scene "because the grandeur of the nineteenth-century style clashes with Jack's general lowliness" (Suther 2019). Its comical effect is used to signal to the viewer that this film should not be taken at

face value, but as a meta-commentary by von Trier himself (on himself and on the way he himself thinks his films need to be approached). This instance of disrupting the aesthetic illusion is different than his use of set design in *Dogville* (where the point was to test the audience's capacity of ignoring all obstructions put in their way in order to follow a story).

In the case of *The House that Jack Built,* it's narrative functions more or less as a stand-in for the director's entire body of cinematic works. The film constantly shifts its focus from immersing the audience into its fictional world, to making them aware of the metareferential discourse. Lars von Trier seems to use this subject matter not to explore the nature of homicide, but to encode (by way of analogy) a personal stance on his entire *oeuvre*. In rehashing the whole plot of Dante's *Inferno* alongside a couple of tales of gore and murder, he attempts to concurrently grab our attention (by way of such subject matter, appealing to both ends of the cultural spectrum) and direct it toward this discourse: a simultaneously combative and apologetic *ars poetica*. While inviting the viewer to decide whether or not to adhere to his proposed interpretative stance, von Trier's main goal seems focused on prompting a (re)consideration of his work.

Conclusions

I have tried to make the case that painterly references, more precisely transformative incorporations such as *tableaux vivants* are an indisputable way in which a filmmaker can encode metareferential (that is to say, higher-level logical) statements about their works, or the status of the cinematic medium in general. As the two examples have shown, it is not necessarily a prerequisite that such statements disrupt the aesthetic illusion of film, but what is needed in order to decode such messages is a specific insight into the general processes of image making. That is not to say that without such knowledge one could not notice the encoded statement's presence (in the case of the scene in Lars von Trier's film, its presence is disruptive, almost calling out to be considered and interpreted), but deciphering it would become rather cumbersome. The main signifying source of such transformative incorporations is indeed the plethora of differences (or, in some cases, similarities) to the painterly work referenced. This is why a technique such as the *tableau vivant* is a veritable treasure trove when it comes to encoding information in a purely visual manner, because all instances of its use necessarily entail the modification, alteration, and distortion of the source material.

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Velázquez, Wagner and the Red Skull. Intermediality and the Genesis of Meaning in a Particular Scene of *Captain America: The First Avenger*

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Abstract. In the 2011 superhero movie, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (produced by Marvel Studios, directed by Joe Johnston) the main opponent of the title character is a Nazi officer, Johann Schmidt, who turns out to be a kind of superhuman entity, the Red Skull. Throughout the movie, viewers can follow the process of him gradually leaving behind his identity as a Nazi officer, and presenting himself as the leader of the occult-high-tech terrorist organization, the Hydra. At a certain point we can see him visited by one of the scientists working for him, Doctor Zola, whom he puts wise to his plans. During the conversation a portrait is being painted of the Red Skull, but we cannot see his face, only that the artist uses a huge amount of red paint. In the background, excerpts of Wagner's operas are being played, which is very unusual in a Marvel movie. The question is, should the viewer recognize the diegetic music and notice the possible reference to the painting *Las Meninas* by Velázquez? How the detection of these intermedial references and the awareness of the act of trespassing media borders would affect the semiotic processes of interpretation? And also, how would the more precise identification of the cited materials change the semiotic modality of intermediality here? The article tries to answer these questions by interpreting the scene and the role of the references in question within the entire film through the prism of intermedial semiotics.

Keywords: superhero movies, intermedial references, diegetic music, semiotics, genesis of meaning.

Introduction. References and Meanings

Certain cultural references in the 2011 Marvel movie, *Captain America: the First Avenger* (directed by Joe Johnston) – otherwise uncommon in the genre

of superhero movies – present interesting problems in terms of intermediality. Namely, in what way exactly do the references to cultural objects of other media affect the meaning of the movie containing the reference? Are the viewers expected to recognize these references to understand the movie properly? Or do the references only convey additional information, which may modify the meaning of either a particular scene or of the entire movie, without being essential to the interpretation of the story as a whole? Or perhaps these are only "Easter eggs" created by movie makers at Marvel to flatter the vanity of their "over-educated" fans, who are able to notice them? Beyond the question of what the purpose of making such references in a superhero movie may be, it is also interesting from the point of view of intermediality studies why these are capable of serving any of the above-mentioned functions. I intend to discover some possible meanings generated by the intermedial references and I shall also attempt to reflect on the very process of generating meaning from a semiotic point of view.

Wagner and Velázquez in the Company of the Red Skull

Despite being a relatively short one (only ca. one-and-a-half-minute long), the scene in question has a vital role in the movie since it conveys a lot of information about the arch-villain character regarding his plans. Up to this point, he is known as a Nazi officer named Johann Schmidt, but we could also surmise that this is not his ultimate identity. It is already clear that his soldiers have found a magical relic called the *Tesseract*, which gives him and his organization, the *Hydra* (formerly a secret research division created by the Nazis) almost unlimited power. We also know that Dr Erskine – a scientist who is about to turn the feeble-bodied but mentally/morally steady Steve Rogers into a super soldier, a man of extraordinary physical power – had already used his formula on Schmidt back in Germany, but the serum amplified not only his physical power, but also his obnoxious personality traits, thereby creating a monster of him, a sort of evil *Übermensch*. After this, we can be absolutely sure that Schmidt is going to be the arch-rival of the positive hero (Captain America), following the conventions of superhero stories. However, at this point it is not yet clear how exactly Dr. Erskine's serum changed Schmidt, just that he became much more obsessed with power than he had been before the treatment.

Coming back to the scene in question: Schmidt is having a conversation with his leading scientist, Dr Arnim Zola, who designed the weapons which now, powered by the *Tesseract*, grant superiority to the Nazis over the Allies (or more exactly to Schmidt and the Hydra over everyone, including the Nazis, as it becomes clear

shortly afterwards). In the scene we get to know that Schmidt has found out that Dr Erskine is now working for the Americans, and becomes concerned about Erskine's work, even though Dr Zola thinks that he would not succeed "again." Accordingly, Schmidt orders that Erskine must be killed to eliminate the only possible danger which could frustrate his plans of world domination. But this is only half of the events taking place during the scene. Along with the conversation, a gramophone is playing music in the room, and there is also a third person present, a painter, making a portrait of the leader of the Hydra. One may find this simultaneous presence of two other art forms (or semiotic systems) on a diegetic level already quite unusual in a superhero movie, but the cultural references performed through them make the case even more complicated.

The end credits confirm it, too that the music played here is by Richard Wagner. More precisely, two excerpts can be heard from his monumental, four-evening cycle, *The Ring of the Nibelung* (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*). At the beginning, a scene of the cycle's second piece, *The Valkyrie* (*Die Walküre*) is played: the third scene of Act 1 with the so-called Wälse-cry (*Wälse-Ruf*) sung by Jon Vickers. A little while later, the music changes to a famous part of the Ring-cycle's concluding piece, *The Twilight of the Gods* (*Götterdämmerung*), namely Siegfried's Funeral March (*Trauermarsch*) from Act 3. According to the end credits, both excerpts are played by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Herbert von Karajan. Beyond the fact that this choice could be interpreted as acrimoniously ironic – knowing that his membership of the Nazi party was very often brought up against Karajan after the war, one might also wonder whether the particular scenes were cited here for a specific reason. Particularly since both are perfectly recognizable throughout the scene, especially the funeral march, which is one of the composer's most famous orchestral scenes; but any trained Wagnerian would also easily identify the Wälse-cry scene as well from the bars played in the movie. Though it might be a bold assumption that Marvel would have expected hardcore Wagnerians to watch their Captain America movie, it is still worth considering how it may modify the interpretation of the movie if someone realizes that the music of this particular scene already existed independently of the movie's soundtrack; even more so for we can see a gramophone playing music at the very beginning of the scene, which also lays an emphasis on the diegetic nature of it.

Mutatis mutandis, the same holds true for painting as well; we do not only see the canvas (though from behind) and the painter working on the portrait, at the very end of the scene, Schmidt explicitly asks Dr Zola's opinion about it, and the scientist considers it "a masterpiece." So the act of painting is not only diegetically shown in

the movie, but is also thematized in the conversation of the characters, drawing our attention to it. Nevertheless, the case is a little bit more complicated here, since the viewers do not see the painting at all, only the verso of the canvas. What is more, we do not actually see the model of the portrait (Schmidt) either, for he turns off the lights at the very moment Dr Zola enters the room, and when he turns them back on – presumably to allow the scientist to gaze at the picture – we can only see Zola's flattering and the painter's haunted face. The question is: where can we witness such a sight, where can we see the back of a painting, a painter, and one or more possible viewers, but neither the painting (for the canvas turns its backside towards us) nor its subject (for it is outside the picture, just in our – the viewers' – position). In my opinion, this could be considered as a quite graspable reference to the famous picture *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez, painted in 1656 (on display in the Prado Museum in Madrid). In this much analysed painting, we can witness a situation very similar to the movie scene in question. The painter and all the other figures look at us, viewers, since we are in the position of the models, namely the Royal Pair (Phillip IV of Spain and his wife, Mariana of Austria), who we can see in the mirror on the wall behind the painter (even though art historians argued that this kind of double-portrait of the King and Queen never actually existed) (Arasse 2013, 140). As a matter of fact, this reference to fine arts is not as specific as the musical ones, that is to say, while the Wagner excerpts are doubtlessly identifiable (and they are even listed in the credits), the allusion to Velázquez may also be a mere play of fancy of an overinterpreting analytic mind. Nonetheless, it can be argued anyway that at least one actual viewer (the author of this paper) considered this *mise-en-scène* in the movie a reference to *Las Meninas*. The question is, therefore, what might be the function of these references in the movie, and how this function is fulfilled from a semiotic point of view.

From Intermediality to Interpretation

As a matter of course, one must notice the references first of all to be able to attribute any kind of meaning to them. Moreover, the intermedial references can only become meaningful as intermedial references if they are perceived as trespasses of "constructed media borders" (Elleström 2010, 27). That is to say, the references in question may only obtain a semiotic function (i.e. becoming meaningful to someone in a certain context) as intermedial references once an interpreter starts interpreting them as, at least to a certain extent, alien elements in the given medial environment. In that case, their signification – or semiotic modality, to use the concept of Lars

Elleström (2010, 21) – relies on the fact that they are being recognized as *external references* functioning as semiotic signs – or *representamens* (Peirce 1998, 163) –, representing cultural objects existing outside the genre of the superhero movie as well as its fictional world, thereby making the viewers aware of another act of trespassing, namely that they are using their knowledge and experience of the "real world" for understanding the "fictional" one. Consequently, the semiotic modality of intermediality not only "involves the creation of meaning in the spatiotemporally conceived medium by way of different sorts of thinking and sign interpretation" (Elleström 2010, 22), but in our case also presupposes a reflection upon the representative capacities of the above-mentioned acts of trespassing. Thus, the intermedial references analysed here not only represent something for someone in some context, but they are also representing their own representative character – therefore they should be considered metaphors in the Peircian sense.[1]

This realization of the references' semiotic capacity, however, does not inevitably demand the precise identification of the specific cultural objects in question. In case of this particular scene, one may only become aware that the villain, Schmidt is listening to some piece of classical music, and a portrait is being painted of him throughout the scene. In this case, we could talk about systematic references (*Systemreferenzen*) here, since the references are made to another media instead of specific, individual works (Rajewsky 2005, 52–53). Accordingly, meaning attributed to the intermedial references would also proceed from values and concepts associated with classical music and fine arts in general.

For instance, one may interpret Schmidt's inclination toward these art forms as a sign of elitism, snobbery or hauteur. Many examples could be cited from movies or TV series in which sociopathic/psychopathic villainous characters are portrayed as having very developed taste in either classical music or fine arts – such as Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) listening to classical music (the Goldberg-variations by Bach) in his prison cell, Magneto doing the same (with Mozart) in the *X-Men* movies, or Superman's arch rival, Lex Luthor, who also seems to be a fan of classical music. There are also a great many number of self-centred, negative characters who collect fine art to emphasize their wealth and high social status, such as Gordon Gekko from *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, 1987) or Wilson Fisk from Netflix's *Daredevil* (2015–2018) series. Fitting into this tradition, the image of Schmidt listening to classical music and having a portrait painted of himself may also signify his aspiration to present himself as an exceptional person,

1 As Peirce states, "those [icons] which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are *metaphors*" (1998, 274.)

one being better than others (e.g. Dr Erskine tells Steve that Schmidt forced him to use the serum on him for he wanted to become "more developed").

By contrast, his rival, Captain America appears for the first time as a kind of "people's champion," a living mascot of freedom and democracy, arousing patriotic spirit in soldiers and civilians, appearing in shows surrounded by vaudeville-like elements and popular songs.[2] Therefore, from this point of view, the rivalry between good and evil could also be interpreted as a fight between the popular and the elitist, the democratic and the autocratic, the inclusive and the exclusive, the tolerant and the intolerant. The somewhat unexpected appearance of "high art" (classical music/opera and – supposedly – portrait painting) in the superhero movie may be endowed with semiotic modality through its contraposition with "popular art" (jazz-like popular songs, variety show elements, comic strip-like imagery, etc). This dichotomy makes the actualization of the above-mentioned connotations about "high art" (elitism, exclusivity, and so forth) possible by establishing a rather unambiguous semantic framework, in which intermedial references could be interpreted as symptomatic signs of the respective characters' personality traits.

What happens, however, if certain viewers are going much further in the identification of the cited material after all? How and why taking a step from systematic references toward individual ones (see above about *Einzelreferenzen,* Rajewsky 2005, 52–53) could affect the semiotic function fulfilled by these references? For instance, one could easily suppose – even without being an opera or classical music enthusiast – that the music played in the scene was composed by Richard Wagner. Firstly, because we hear a tenor singing in German and then a huge, romantic orchestra; and secondly because Schmidt is a Nazi officer and Wagner's compositions are often culturally associated with Nazism for historic reasons. Even if one does not realize the exact scenes from the Ring-cycle, which can be heard in the movie, one could attach different and actually more specific associations to Wagner's figure than to the notion of classical music in general. For one thing, the 19th-century German composer is widely known as Adolf Hitler's favourite musician, and also as an ardent anti-Semite himself. Thus, the presence of his music in the scene may arouse associations to the racist theories of the Nazis and their concept of social Darwinism, which eventually led to genocide, as it is

2 In fact, Captain America as a character was actually invented as a kind of patriotic propaganda figure – he appeared for the first time in March 1941, created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby at Timely Comics (later Marvel Comics). On the cover of the very first issue, Captain America, wearing star-spangled costume from top to bottom, punches the Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler in the face. *https://www.marvel.com/comics/issue/7849/captain_america_comics_1941_1.* Last accessed 28. 01. 2019.

commonly known. Therefore, listening to Wagner may characterize Schmidt as a person regarding himself a kind of an *Übermensch*, whose superiority implies that he has to either dominate or annihilate the inferiors. It is even more so as Wagner's music is also often associated with monumentality (thanks both to the length of his works and the huge numbers of required performers); ergo one might also interpret this citation as a sign foreshadowing the proportions of Schmidt's plans. Soon after we get to know indeed that he wants to use the power of the Tesseract to destroy all major European and American cities (including the German capital, Berlin) and take control over the whole world.

Seeing the painter and a viewer, but not the picture, one might also think of Velázquez, even without being aware of the immense interpretive tradition of *Las Meninas*. Or at least one may notice that only the acts of painting and watching are shown, but not the most essential part: the represented person himself. What we do see at first is the palette of the painter; he uses a huge amount of red paint for the portrait, and then we also see his face, which shows a mixture of abomination and horror. We already know that Schmidt has formerly been the subject of Dr Erskine's experiment, and at the very end of the scene we hear Dr Zola's flattering remark about the picture. But is it really about the picture? Since the viewer represented within the movie (Dr Zola) can only see the picture at the same time when he can also get the sight of Schmidt himself (in his real form), we cannot be absolutely sure whether his comment – "a masterpiece" – would actually refer to the portrait, or to Schmidt, as the Red Skull. Maybe art – represented here explicitly, on the level of the signifiers (Wolf 1999, 39–43) – serves not only as a mere signifier of the antagonist's attitude, but also as a complex metaphor for creativity, intellect and ambition, which could also result in destruction as well as in creation. The Red Skull and Captain America – being both Doctor Erskine's "creatures" in some sense – could come into existence thanks to the same serum. At the end of the day, we must realize that the creative invention turning Schmidt into an evil superhuman entity yearning for destruction and domination, and the one that made it possible for Rogers to become a virtuous guardian of justice, was one and the same. Similarly, the two inventor/scientist figures, Howard Stark for the Allies and Dr Arnim Zola for the Hydra both basically use their extraordinary talent to engineer weapons, though for different purposes.

In this context, "art" – appearing in the forms of Wagner's music and Schmidt's unseen portrait – can be regarded as a parallel, since throughout history artistic creativity could also be used to create beauty, while always remaining capable of spreading hatred and legitimizing oppression as well. The appearance of

intermediality in the movie scene, therefore, results in an enhanced capacity for self-reflexivity (Ljungberg 2000, 94), and also in an extended semiotic potential. In addition to this, both of these capacities and potentials seem invigorating with the more precise identification of the references. On the one hand, the problematic nature of the cited artist figures and works (such as Wagner's widely known bigoted political views along with his much less debated creative genius) for instance may remind the viewer of the problematic relations within the movie's story as well (the good Captain America and the evil Red Skull being the results of eventually the same intellectual achievement, Dr Erskine's performance-enhancing serum). On the other hand, as the story of good and evil gets more complicated, ambiguity increases as well. It also implies that meaning, the "intended interpretant" of an expression from Peirce's point of view (1998, 220) will be less definite, but more complex at the same time. It seems that the more precise identification of the intermedial references triggers changes concerning their semiotic modality as well, since the associations or evaluations attached to more specific elements of culture such as the figures of certain artists or their works vary on a much wider scale than general associations about "art" or "high culture" in general. As the number of the references' perceived details gets higher, the possible ways of thinking about them multiply as well. Therefore, these references, as *representamens*, could refer to many different aspects of their respective objects, which also means that more space is left open for the interpretant and consequently, for the meaning. To put it in another way, their connotative aspect intensifies at the expense of the denotative aspect, thereby augmenting polysemy while decreasing univocality (Barthes 1990, 6–9). What happens then if we follow this path to the even further individualization of the references and try to interpret the entire movie according to the consequences of this interaction with specific works from other media? As mentioned above, the two Wagnerian scenes are the so called Wälse-cry from Act 1 of *The Valkyrie*, and Siegfried's funeral march from *The Twilight of the Gods*. In the first one, the hero, Siegmund laments that though he is about to fight against his enemy, Hunding the following day, he is still unarmed and therefore likely to die, in spite that his father, Wälse (who is also the chief god, Wotan) promised he would send him a sword when he (Siegmund) needed it most. The words are the following (in English translation by Frederick Jameson):

> A sword, my father foretold me,
> should serve me in sorest need.
> Swordless I come to my foe-man's house;
> as a hostage here helpless I lie:

a wife saw I, wondrous and fair,
and blissful tremors seized my heart.
The woman who holds me chained,
who with sweet enchantment wounds,
in thrall is held by the man
who mocks his weaponless foe.
Wälse! Wälse! Where is thy sword?
The trusty sword,
that in fight shall serve me,
when from my bosom outbreaks
the fury my heart now bears?[3]

As a matter of fact, the conversation in the scene is also about possessing mighty weapons and about being weaponless. Schmidt literally tells Dr Zola that "[Dr Erskine's] serum is the Allies' only defense against this power we now possess. If we take it away from them, then our victory is assured." That is to say, Schmidt/the Red Skull and his side are in the position of Hunding, at least in terms of being armed, while the Allies, like Siegmund, are preparing for a decisive clash having only one faint ray of hope to acquire what is needed to fight with a chance of victory (though at this point they – unlike Siegmund in Wagner's music drama – are unaware of this). Thus, the superpowers granted by the serum to Steve Rogers (thereby creating his superheroic alter ego, Captain America) would be like Nothung, a sword pulled out from the trunk of a tree by the one who is worthy of wielding it.

Unfortunately, however, the outcome of the fight for Siegmund is not positive at all, for he gets slain in the duel – thanks to a divine intervention by Wotan, who also kills Hunding shortly afterwards. Similarly, in some sense, both the Red Skull and the Captain get killed during their decisive clash at the end of the movie. And here, the second Wagner citation, the funeral march makes things much more complicated and interesting. In *The Twilight of the Gods* this music accompanies the procession carrying the body of Siegfried back to the Gibichung Hall from the hunt on which he got slain (from behind) by Hagen, who eventually dies by drowning in the flooding river Rhine when he tries to acquire the ring from Siegfried's dead hand. In the figures of these two heroes Wagner apparently makes use of the ancient mythological

3 "*Ein Schwert verhieß mir der Vater, / ich fänd' es in höchster Noth. / Waffenlos fiel ich in Feindes Haus; / seiner Rache Pfand, raste ich hier: / ein Weib sah' ich, wonnig und hehr: / entzückend Bangen zehrt mein Herz. / Zu der mich nun Sehnsucht zieht, / die mit süßem Zauber mich sehrt, / im Zwange hält sie der Mann, / der mich wehrlosen höhnt. / Wälse! Wälse! Wo ist dein Schwert? / Das starke Schwert, / das im Sturm ich schwänge, / bricht mir hervor aus der Brust, / was wüthend das Herz noch hegt?*" Richard Wagner, *Die Walküre*, 94–98.

topos of the twins (Lévi-Strauss 1979, 26–35), though they are not literally born from the same mother, but approximately at the same time, being the descendants of the cycle's two arch rivals, Wotan and Alberich, thereby destined to struggle against each other in some way. Accordingly, one kills the other (though not in proper combat) and then drowns when trying to get the magical artefact capable of granting power sufficient for world domination. In this way, the Tesseract can be paralleled with the ring, and Captain America and the Red Skull with Siegfried and Hagen. But which one of them would play which role? The obvious choice would be that Siegfried was the Captain, and the villainous Red Skull was Hagen, the intriguer. But this is not the case apparently. The one who manages to take advantage of his rival's hybris and thereby slay him and get drowned afterwards – in one word, "the Hagen" of this story – is definitely the one who is supposed to be the "good guy," Captain America. At the same time, the "free hero," having been born against his creator's will, then acquiring the magical artefact which could provide him almost unlimited power and finally dying exactly because he is not willing to give up this power – i.e. "the Siegfried" character – is Schmidt, as the Red Skull. Naturally, Captain America in the movie does not backstab anyone, for he is portrayed as a righteous warrior, a champion of courage, honesty and decency. He does not let himself be lost in the Atlantic Ocean for he wants the power of the Tesseract to himself either, rather for he tries to save the lives of innocent people. Nevertheless, the Wagner references may still make us reflect upon our expectations about the main antagonism of the story. The motivic parallelisms with the story of the *Ring*-cycle are undeniable on the one hand, but on the other hand also confusing in regard to the outcome of the conventional superhero story. Although on the surface the movie seems to present Rogers/Captain America as essentially good and Schmidt/the Red Skull as essentially evil, their parallelism with Wagner's heroes appears to undermine our belief about the necessity of their moral choices. Although Captain America could be paralleled more with Hagen than with Siegfried, he is still neither an intriguer nor a villain in the movie. At the same time, Schmidt/the Red Skull, despite his likeness to Siegfried in many aspects, is not only portrayed as naive and overbold, but also as a selfish, unscrupulous power-monger. This may lead us to the conclusion that the dichotomy between heroes and villains is actually much more problematic than it seems at first sight, even in superhero stories.

In the case of the presumable reference to Velázquez, a similarly thoughtful examination may also result in equally perplexing interpretations. Going beyond the formal parallelisms between *Las Meninas* and the portrait of the Red Skull (i.e. we only see the back of the canvas and the figure of the painter among others, but

never the actual subject of the portrait), one may wonder whether the extremely rich interpretation history of the invoked painting could also become part of the interpretation of the movie scene referring to it. The most famous and influential interpretation of Velázquez's work is unquestionably the one by the French philosopher, Michel Foucault. The questions brought up in his analysis at the beginning of the book *The Order of Things* (*Les mots et les choses*) have remained fascinating ever since its first publication in 1966 (Foucault, 2002, 3–18). In this essay, Foucault points out that while watching the painting we see the painter watching us, onlookers, for we are in the position of his model, thereby "the observer and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange" (Foucault 2002, 4–5). That also means we – the viewers, in position of the models – "do not know who we are, or what we are doing" (Foucault 2002, 5), yet we still become part of the picture. Therefore "the entire picture is looking out at a scene for which it is itself a scene" (Foucault 2002, 15). This means that the represented subject (originally the royal pair) determines representation from the outside; therefore the picture itself could be interpreted as the pure form of representation, the representation of representation (Foucault 2002, 17–18).

If one then tries to interpret the last cut of the scene in the light of the above, first of all one may realize that in this very context, being in the position of the painter's model as an observer/viewer equals to being in the position of the villainous Red Skull. When the light is turned on, enabling Dr Zola to catch a glimpse on his super evil boss – he is actually staring at us. This all too disturbing recognition could make us remember that evil is maybe not something essentially alien to us, but at some level it may be hiding within every single person, including ourselves. The intermedial reference in which the medium of painting trespasses into the superhero movie could lead to such perplexing thoughts otherwise quite unexpected in the genre.

But one could follow this reference even further. For instance, considering Foucault's explanation of Velázquez's painting, and thinking through the scene accordingly, could bring forth even more abstract ideas. By now, the French philosopher's highly influential book – even though many argued especially against its thoroughly anachronistic analysis of *Las Meninas* – has become part of the interpretation history of the 17th-century Spanish master's painting. Therefore, the picture itself (evoked by an intermedial reference in the movie scene under discussion) could also be a reference to the philosophical theory which used it as a starting point of its argumentation. If we, then, accept that it could be interpreted as the representation of the classical paradigm of representation, as Foucault suggested (2002, 17–18), it would give yet another layer to our understanding of the movie scene.

The most conspicuous parallelism between the painter on Velázquez's picture (presumably working on a portrait of the royal pair) and the unnamed artist in the movie (painting the Red Skull in his headquarters) is the person(s) they are painting. More precisely, the quality shared by their unseen models – they both paint not the beautiful, but the powerful. The distressed facial expression of the artist in the movie tells it all – in all probability, he paints out of fear. This raises a fundamental question about the very nature of representation: is it actually about either aesthetics or truth in a philosophical sense, or rather it is first and foremost about power? Is it not the case that what Foucault labels as "classical representation" never actually reflects reality in its pure form, rather it presents only a construction, something which is designed to please the powerful?[4] Could it not be the case that the trespassing of media borders here underlines yet another inevitable trespassing: the influence of *power* (in our case the sheer capacity for physical violence) over any kind of representation? Or just as media borders are created by mere conventions (Elleström 2000, 28), maybe the borders between artistic representation and political/military power are also nothing but virtual lines drawn to reassure our illusions?

Interestingly, this problem is raised once again in the movie, for the figure of Captain America is not at all a superhero at first. Although Dr Erskine's treatment turns Steve Rogers into a possible super soldier, his alter ego, Captain America is only used as a propaganda figure, a living patriotic poster, encouraging Americans to subscribe to war bonds. Even when he is finally sent to Europe, he does not engage in real combat against actual German soldiers, just provides entertainment for the troops appearing in variety shows. He is even mocked and booed by soldiers for being a fake, not a real warrior, who puts his own life at stake for victory. It seems like the movie would even offer the possibility of a deconstructive view about the very concept of superheroes as mere propaganda figures, despite being a superhero story itself. This could also arouse the viewers' suspicion about the conventions of representation specifying the design of various things from the portraits of 17th-century absolute monarchs to media coverages of contemporary armed conflicts and beyond, whether they are also shaped mainly to serve the interests of those in charge. Could the representation of representation warn us not to trust representation without reservation? Should one always seek for the traces of power behind the conventions when one tries to interpret anything represented?

4 At this point, the interpretation of the work making the reference might relate back to the interpretation of the work to which the reference is made. Perceiving the structures of power in the relation of the Red Skull and his pictorial representation, one may also start wondering about the structures of power inherent in Velázquez's painting as well, a point which Foucault himself may have found interesting.

Naturally, these interpretations are only some of the many possible ones, which show that – in our case at least – the individualization of the intermedial references leads to a wider range of possible meanings, and that these meanings will also be more debatable at the same time. The question is: what are the semiotic grounds and consequences of this phenomenon?

Conclusion. The Expansion of Meaning: Entropy

As presented above, from a semiotic point of view, the intermedial associations may open new fields for interpretation by initiating new references to the interpretive horizon of the recipients and thus creating new connotations or new interpretants. At the same time, this proliferation of connotations and interpretants equals the proliferation of possible meanings.

Although it seems that such proliferation also goes hand in hand with the increase of the sense of disorder, Umberto Eco warns us that "certain elements of disorder may in fact increase the level of information conveyed by a message" – which holds especially true for works of art of any kind (Eco 1989, 53). The deliberate disorganization of a poetic message, in other words, its improbability in relation to a precise system of probability, makes it much more informative for its recipients (Eco 1989, 54). Unusuality and unpredictability may therefore result in a surplus of information in certain circumstances (Eco 1989, 55). Thus, according to Eco, even if it is more difficult to communicate more disordered messages, they certainly carry larger amounts of information than clearer messages, which are easier to communicate (1989, 57). Or, to put it in another way, the volume of information carried by a certain message may also be defined as directly proportional to the entropy of expression (Eco 1989, 57).

The concept of information used here, however, must not be confused with meaning; it is more like a measure of one's freedom of choice when selecting a message than one particular message (Eco 1989, 57). Another semiotician, Yuri Lotman formulates this by referring to the Soviet mathematician, Andrei Kolmogorov, stating that the "information volume" (or language entropy: H) could be defined as the sum of the semantic capacity of the language (its ability to transfer meaningful information in a certain text/artefact) and the flexibility of the language (the number of possible ways in which the same content could be transferred) (Lotman 1977, 26–31, see also Semenenko 2012, 32–33). The flexibility and variability of an artistic code therefore result in higher information volume, for they imply more freedom of choice in the process of encoding certain "artistic messages."

As for meaning, this implies that if the volume of information is determined by the flexibility of the language, or can be measured with the degree of the freedom of choice in the process of encoding, then the richness of aesthetic meaning, consequently, is determined by the flexibility of the message, and it could be measured with the degree of freedom of choice in the process of decoding. In simple terms, meaning is the number of the possible ways in which the same message could be interpreted. Which means that the more semiotic potentials (Cook 2001, 179 and 1994, 221–222) are comprised within a certain message (i.e. the higher is the number of ways in which it may become actually meaningful to any actual recipient), the richer its meaning will be. But how exactly does this happen in our case? How can the individualization of references be held responsible for the increase of entropy and the proliferation of semiotic potentials?

In my opinion, the individualized intermedial references present alternatives for similar representations from different epochs and media, thereby taking any possible interpreter to see that similar messages could have been endowed with different meanings in different medial, historic, social or cultural contexts. In one word, all of the cited individual works evoke their respective contexts, and the more these contexts get involved in our interpretation, the broader our interpretive horizon becomes. To put it in more semiotical terms, the field of the Peircian interpretant would expand, or the number of Barthesian connotations would increase (see above). As a matter of course, this extended horizon also implies that the different invoked contexts could produce different or even contradictory interpretations simultaneously. As on the one hand the number and complexity of possible meanings grow, the determination of meaning fades on the other (Szívós 2017, 265–266). The richer the meaning becomes, the more ambiguity and opacity it gets; while the clearer and less problematic it is, the more banal and platitudinous it becomes (Eco 1989, 57 cited above). This has been shown in my example, where the conventional superhero story about the clash of good and evil could be efficiently challenged in a number of ways by drawing an extended knowledge about Wagner's or Velázquez's works into the interpretation. Though the interpretations taking form as a result are all debatable (for they are inevitably ambiguous), they undeniably embrace more complexity as well compared to any interpretation ignoring these references.

Apart from the movie in question, or even intermediality, it may be identified as a general rule that in the more different contexts we examine something, the less simple and non-contradictory it will appear. The complexity and ambiguity of meanings in works of art of different media are only reflecting the complexity and

ambiguity of human experience. This may be the most important lesson intermedial references could teach us.

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The *Tableau Vivant* and Social Media Culture

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Abstract. The article aims to analyse the *tableau vivant* in social media culture by emphasizing its intermedial relation to technical visual media, particularly digital photography and film. By focusing on the living picture's specific mimetic qualities, the study traces back the *tableau vivant*'s history in a media archaeological perspective primarily regarding photography. It explores the current revival of the *tableau vivant* within social media. The article examines living pictures and the aspect of self-staging, relevant to contemporary digital culture. The *tableau vivant* develops between two polarities: a primarily analytical approach that allows a profound exploration of a particular artwork and the performative aspects of self-staging.

Keywords: *tableau vivant*, social media, photography.

A Medium Rarely Comes Alone: A Media-Theoretical Approach to the *Tableau Vivant*

Enforced by using social media, sharing platforms, and pre-installed photo apps on smartphones, we can currently observe a return of the *tableau vivant* within digital popular culture. The *tableau vivant* experienced its very recent hype during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, when an Instagram account called *Between Art and Quarantine* came up with the idea to recreate paintings at home using a maximum of three household items. As large museums such as the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Getty in Los Angeles picked up the idea, it spread globally (Walldorf and Stephan 2020).

In order to analyse the *tableau vivant* as a phenomenon of social media culture in further detail, the argument will follow a media-theoretical reading of the *tableau vivant*. By focusing on its intermedial relations – to photography in particular – the article intends to trace back current social media practices in a media archaeological perspective (Huhtamo 2011) by analysing the (re)productive power of the *tableau*

vivant as a performative act. A case study of the #*musepose* social media initiative sheds light on the *tableau vivant*'s historical roots as an educative tool, which it reactivates and modifies through digital culture. The production of *tableaux vivants* has been enabled by technical innovations such as the front camera, which is part of every smartphone. It links together the ancient fascination of mirroring the self and the reproductive pictorial power of photography.

Originally, *tableaux vivants* developed from a dialogue between painting and theatre during the eighteenth century by being staged as live performances in different contexts. From a theoretical point of view, the question is: can the *tableau vivant* be considered a medium? The media studies scholar Jens Ruchatz writes: "A medium only exists where there are also other media. In other words, something deserves the name 'medium' only if it is related to other phenomena that are also regarded as media, be it by observing them practically or discursively" (2008, 109). According to Ruchatz, only what is related to other media can be defined as a medium. The author develops this definition by confronting theatre and theatre photography, stating that "theatre is a medium when related to other media" (Ruchatz 2008, 115). Thus, its particular intermedial nature qualifies the *tableau vivant* a medium. I want to apply this basic concept to present the medium's transition to our current social media culture.

For instance, Birgit Jooss (2011) has shown that photography and *tableau vivant* practices overlap in early studio photography, which was considered the standard for theatre photography during the nineteenth century (Ruchatz 2008, 109–113). The ability to hold a pose for some minutes met the technical requirements for the long exposures required at the time. Since around 1870, the so-called *Life Model slides* were produced on demand, i.e. for magic lantern shows (Ruchatz 2003, 299). Professional actors were arranged into *tableaux* to tell a story in a series of photographic pictures. In reverse, photographs of *tableau vivant* performers were used to cut out the particular silhouettes of the postures to create specific lantern slides for projection that formed the backdrops within variety shows around 1900 (Wiegand 2016, 137).

While nineteenth-century discourses generally reflected upon photography's truthfulness concerning painting, this discussion continued in the opposition between the snapshot and staged photography – i.e. theatre and movie still photography – in the twentieth century (Jacobs 2010, 373–386). Yet, in the twentieth century, the actors had to pose for the photographer and re-enact a particular moment, which again reminds one of the *tableau vivant* practices (Ruchatz 2008, 110). By emphasizing the documentary value of photography, theatre studies

regarded staged photography rather deficiently concerning the actual performance, which it failed to preserve.

Neither photography nor film has replaced the living picture; instead, they have incorporated it. Jooss explains the transfer of the *tableau vivant* into photography as a process of reproducing the reproduction (Jooss 2011, 15; Jooss 1999, 265). A high degree of mimesis is undoubtedly an inherent part of contemporary practices. Their analysis should include, however, also case studies of particular forms of appropriation, which would take into account the creative act of translating a specific historical model into a new media format.

The Mirror and the Camera

In Western culture, theories of mimesis have been crucial for drama, literature and the visual arts. Within the latter sphere, technical instruments for producing images have fascinated people throughout times and cultures. One of the simplest of these tools is the mirror (Macho 2002, 13–26). In *Metamorphoses*, specifically in the retelling of the myth of Narcissus, Ovid describes the allure of the water surface that has become an optical device. The dramatic character of the situation in which Narcissus has succumbed to his reflection becomes clear in a short passage in which the third-person narrator gives up his role and addresses his protagonist directly (Zwettler-Otte 2012, 36–50). "Fool, why try to catch a fleeting image, in vain? What you search for is nowhere: turning away, what you love is lost! What you perceive is the shadow of reflected form: nothing of you is in it. It comes and stays with you, and leaves with you, if you can leave!" (Ovid 2000, Book III, verses 432–437.) Narcissus has fallen in love with his portrait but lacks the means to record or store it permanently. In Ovid's time, mirrors were made from polished metal. Later, executed in glass, they were as rare as they were precious. During the Middle Ages, they acquired magical properties in popular imagination. According to medieval beliefs, mirrors could catch the reflection and entrap people and animals, and even far more fabulous creatures, such as the unicorn. The mirror was also paradoxical in its symbolism: a symbol of chastity, it could also denote vanity. To warn against excessive vanity, it is one of Pride's attributes, the most serious of the deadly sins (for examples see Reidemeister 2006, 50).

In his seminal treatise *De Pictura*, Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) refers to Narcissus as the inventor of the art of painting, as he is the one who embraces the mirroring surface (Sinisgalli 2011, 46). Furthermore, Alberti tried to elucidate the mirror's image-generating quality in his theoretical work, along with offering

practical suggestions for using the mirror during the painting process. It could serve – for example – to test a composition whose weaknesses would be revealed in the reversed image. Alberti assigned the mirror the function of "an excellent judge" (Sinisgalli 2011, 69) and Leonardo even called it a "teacher" (Belting, 1994, 76).

The reflection itself became a motif in Renaissance painting. In the context of the *paragone*, different art forms competed for the most seamless representation of reality. Painting was said to create the illusion of definitively fixing the fleeting simulacrum of the mirrored image. Parmigianino's famous *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (c. 1524) is a stunning example of such a "captured surface." Although it is a painting, the work is also a three-dimensional reproduction of a convex mirror. Therefore, it contains elements derived from both the art chamber piece but also sculpture. Parmigianino's piece is realistic in reproducing the curvy mirror image's distortions faithfully and surreally by transferring this alienated version of reality into painting. Aside from creating picture-in-picture effects, painted reflections like Parmigianino's began to continually expand the pictorial space and allow the artist to put bodies or objects into the picture in different views, as Hans Belting has shown in the case of early Netherlandish painting (1994, 74–79). Reflective surfaces display the painter's virtuosity and often serve as a three-dimensional representation of the pictured person and therefore allow painting to better compete with sculpture. W. J. T. Mitchell qualifies such "pictures on picturing" (1994, 61) *metapictures* and thus self-reflexive commentaries on the nature of images or the nature of their production.

The invention of photography would eventually change everything. Whereas pictures had been created artificially using the *camera obscura* for several centuries, they also had remained ephemeral, just like Narcissus's reflection in the water. In his famous book *Magia Naturalis* (1558), Giambattista della Porta describes the use of the *camera obscura* as a theatre of marvels that allows creating various simulacra (Pantin 2007, 100). The discovery of photosensitive substances finally allowed the *camera obscura* to record those images by technical means only. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce executed the first successful experiments in 1827, and the first marketable photographic process was published in 1839 by Louis-Jaques-Mandé Daguerre.

In the nineteenth-century discourse on photography, two influential groups faced each other. One fraction was enthusiastic about the truthfulness of the new medium and celebrated the notion that thanks to it, nature was now an artist able to record itself (Siegel 2017, 29–43). As early as 1840, one year after the publication of the Daguerreotype, the writer Edgar Allan Poe not only elaborated on the qualities of the photogenic drawings by comparing them to the mirror but also emphasized the

seemingly infinite accuracy by magnifying the details using the new technique, which would exceed the functionality of the mirror. "Perhaps if we imagine the distinctness with which an object is reflected in a positively perfect mirror, we come as near the reality as by any other means. For, in truth, the Daguerreotyped plate is infinitely (we use the term advisedly) is *infinitely* more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands." (Siegel 2017, 30. Emphasis in the original.) While celebrated by Poe and his fellow proponents of photography, this level of detail served as an argument against it by critics who argued that the photographic images would thus depict excessive, unnecessary information. Many visual artists of the nineteenth century remained sceptical of photography and claimed that the artist's eye would prevail over the lens (Alloa 2013, 107–126). Denying the art-worthiness of photography had become a *topos* that came to new life within the discussion of digital photography.

For Daguerre's contemporaries, the "process was often likened to a looking glass on which the mirror image of the sitter had been frozen" (Asser 2017, 81). From a phenomenological perspective, the silvery shiny surface of the Daguerreotype can be considered to have worked like a mirror (Siegel 2017, 30). It reflected the Daguerreotypists' face when they polished the plate during preparation and those looking at it after it had been processed. It is noticeable that the Daguerreotype can represent both a negative and a positive, depending on reflection. Looking at a Daguerreotype requires dealing with both the lighting and the reflection, which means the beholder has to move it when having it in hand (which was the most common practice for casketed Daguerreotypes) or to move around when it is hanging on the wall. In retrospect, the Daguerreotype' surface appears to be an animated one akin to today's smartphone displays.

Whereas they have been visible parts of apparatuses that helped to reorganize the perception like the Claude glass, the *camera obscura* or the *camera lucida*, mirrors became gradually hidden by the black box, i.e. in the single-lens reflex camera, patented in 1861, which used the mirror to display to the viewer the picture right-side-up. The introduction of the front-facing camera in 2003 led to the most significant paradigm shift that we have been able to observe in the history of (digital) photography, by merging the function of the camera with the display that allows to observe the actual result (Ruchatz 2018, 66–69) – and eventually has become Poe's "perfect mirror." Borrowing from Oliver Wendell Holmes's characterization of photography as a "mirror with a memory" (Ruchatz 2018, 67; Holmes 1864, 129) to think about selfies, Jens Ruchatz defines the selfie as a way of "picturing the taking of a picture" (2018, 68). Accordingly, one could thus classify selfie-taking as metaphotography.

The front-facing camera only simulates the mirror image. In truth, it is an inverted camera image, which can be recorded directly as still or moving. In combination with the sharing functions provided by social networks, this multifunctional device has made today's selfie culture possible, which can be characterized by the fusion of the producer and the consumer. The display allows the photographer to control the shot, shows the pictured result immediately and offers the option to optimize it by repeating or editing it. In the following sections, I will further pursue this line of thinking by presenting how signals from the past mix with current selfie culture, resulting in a new amalgam of the old and new.

The *Tableau Vivant* as an Educational Tool for Art History

During the past two decades, scholars have not only explored the history of the *tableau vivant* but also elaborated intensively on the complex relations between this ephemeral art form and other media such as literature, painting, theatre (Brandl-Risi 2013; Jooss 1999), and (contemporary) art (Boucher and Contogouris 2019), music (Mungen 2006), photography (Jooss 2011), early cinema (Curtis, Gauthier, Gunning and Yumibe 2018; Schweinitz and Wiegand 2016), various forms of entertainment, from variety shows to festive culture (Wiegand 2016, Mungen 1998), and film (Pethő 2016, 233–256; Pethő 2014, 51–76; Jacobs 2011, 88–148; Barck 2008; Peucker 2007). The standard definition describes *tableaux vivants* as a kind of parlour game practised above all in noble circles during the nineteenth century. These games often showed off their creators' intelligence and erudition. They challenged their audience to recognize cited artworks and decode the hidden allusions of the performance that pointed to social relations within the group or personality traits of particular individuals.

As Birgit Jooss has shown, the *tableau vivant* practice correlates the emerging interest for art history. For instance, various forms of the *Künstlerdrama* presented the life and work of Raphael, Rubens, Caravaggio and other artists by implementing *tableaux vivants* (1999, 75–83). Starting in 1808, Henriette Hendel-Schütz performed a three-part programme that ranged from antique and Italian art to early German painting (Jooss 1999, 108–109). In contrast to Emma Hamilton's attitudes (Contogouris 2018, 78), Hendel-Schütz presented distinct stylistic differences of the eras and tried to outline their evolution. During the nineteenth century, these educational living pictures did not only serve taste-formation in general but informed the characterization of the stylistic traits of individual artists, different

schools and even whole epochs. Therefore, as practised by performers such as Hendel-Schütz, the *tableau vivant* is a helpful witness to the emergence of both academic and popular art history.

According to Daniel Wiegand (2016), this particular practice continues into the twentieth century. The author has argued that the staging of canonical paintings and sculptures played a crucial role in establishing bourgeois entertainment culture around 1900 (Wiegand 2016, 124–179). The *tableau vivant* programmes of practitioners such as Henry de Vry included quotes from classical and classicist works of art and famous contemporary salon paintings. They, therefore, addressed the well-educated, art-loving middle class. Camillo Borghese – one of de Vry's competitors in the show business of the time – announced a "series of beautiful 'living pictures' from all parts of the world, based on my painterly compositions of the most magnificent motifs of my art study trips […] as well as on the most outstanding works of important masters" (Wiegand 2016, 165). Through the implicit reference to the eighteenth-century tradition of the *grand tour*, Borghese advertised his living pictures to be based on what he had experienced on his travels. Appropriate to the historical context of the turn of the century, the authenticity of the programme promised by Borghese's *tableaux vivants* now extended to nothing less than a global level. Combined with electric lighting and projection techniques, the *tableaux vivants* were a significant part of the variety shows and anticipated forms of mass entertainment such as cinema.

Given that they were live events, like theatre, reports on *tableaux vivants* are mainly preserved in writing, whether of real or imagined *tableaux*. Bettina Brandl-Risi argues that transformation into narration would be the only appropriate way to record the living picture's character (2013, 146). Although I do not fully agree with this interpretation, it helps map out the difficulties of visual representation. The *tableau vivant* substitutes the absent original by reproducing it for a short period and without necessarily becoming visually reproducible itself – at least before the advent of photography. In her research, Valentine Robert (2018, 2016) has presented various medial adaptions of late-nineteenth-century history paintings and their relation to early cinema. In the "age of the technological reproducibility" (Benjamin 2008 [1936], 22) the *tableau vivant* appears as a catalyst for ever-new adaptions covering all reproduction technologies from lantern slides to film celebrating productivity of the copy (Robert, 2016). When it comes to photographic reproduction, the performative interference with reality has to be considered another remarkable feature, according to Brigitte Peucker. "A tableau vivant […] translates painting's flatness, its two-dimensionality, into the three-dimensional. By this means it figures the introduction

of the real into the image—the living body into painting—thus attempting to collapse the distance between signifier and signified." (Peucker 2007, 31.)

Photography eventually allowed the fixing and distribution of the formerly transitory event beyond the moment of its execution. Through photography, the *tableau vivant* becomes a two-dimensional picture again – a picture containing traces of the real. According to Jooss, photography implied a media shift that doubled the *tableau vivant*'s degree of reproducibility: "the re-enacted living picture – even already reproduced – became a reproducible 'new' original" (2011, 15; 1999, 265). In other words, as a hybrid between painting, sculpture and theatre, the combination of *tableaux vivants* and photography created new intermedial relations. Photography freezes the period of the performance to eternity and reduces the sculptural arrangement to two-dimensionality. While manual reproductions make the living picture disappear, photography can preserve the difference between the living picture and the model.

The *Tableau Vivant* as an Instrument for Self-Staging and Analysis

Tableaux vivants allow the participants to stage themselves as particular protagonists referring to distinct epochs and artists; at the same time, the re-enactments require an accurate analysis of the original artwork. The French artist Edgar Degas, for example, arranged a *tableau vivant* after Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *The Apotheosis of Hom*er, three decades after he had seen the iconic French painting at the Paris World Fair [Figs. 1–2]. Degas appears in the *tableau* as the protagonist Homer himself and gave instructions to the photographer who took the picture, Walter Barnes. Degas's self-staging includes not only the representation as the Greek poet Homer (as the most significant ancient storyteller) but also identifies the artist as *pictor doctus*. Furthermore, the photographed *tableau vivant* explicitly refers to Ingres, an idol of Neoclassicist French painting.

Sonja Maria Krämer has recently called into question the picture's widely recognized reading as an ironic statement (Krämer 2014, 127–128; Daniel 1998, 19; Daniel 2005, 399). Due to their particular character, containing costumes, coulisses and various kinds of accessories, photographed *tableaux vivants* are often misinterpreted by art historians as both failing to create a proper illusion in comparison to painting and meeting the indexical quality of photography only insufficiently (Rödl 2019, 142). This actual difference marks the specific hybridity between the image and the real.

The sources prove the analytical approach required for the re-enactments of works of art. In one of the many letters that Degas addressed to his close friend Ludovic Halévy (Guérin 1945, 112) – a French playwright with whom Degas seems to have planned other *tableaux vivants* (Guérin 1945, 107, 111), Degas similarly judges the photographed *tableau vivant* as he would have judged a painting and thus considers himself the author (Krämer 2014, 128). He argues, for instance, that architectural details such as the structure of the brick wall are disturbing and that a white or bright background would have helped to clarify the composition. Krämer concludes from this that any parodic effect if there is one, was unintentional. This photograph also marks a starting point for Degas's later photographic work, which would be dominated by the self-portrait, thus enabling him to act as both the photographer and the model (Daniel 1998, 89).

As a photographer, Degas would later prefer working at night by artificial lighting to hide unnecessary details. Therefore, it can be considered a synthesis of the already mentioned nineteenth-century discourse that appreciated the medium's accuracy on the one hand and criticized its abundance of visual information on the other. The *Apotheosis* helps to demonstrate the challenges of photographic *tableau vivant* practices in the nineteenth century, which did not allow the author – in this case: Degas – to keep full control of the process, as he was neither able to pose and to photograph at the same time nor to evaluate and adjust the result immediately.

Virginia Oldoini Verasis, better known as Comtesse di Castiglione can be considered an early example of a particular female artistic approach to both fields, photography and *tableaux vivants* (Solomon-Godeau 1986, 87). Robert de Montesquiou, one of her contemporaries and later biographer, characterized Verasis's life as "nothing but a lengthy tableau vivant, a perpetual tableau vivant" (Solomon-Godeau 1986, 76). In collaboration with the court photographer Pierre-Louis Pierson, Verasis realized the impressive number of more than 474 photographs (Stiegler 2019, 232–234). Various examples from this bundle reflect the medium of photography itself. One of those shows the countess sitting as a half-length figure slightly diagonally. She is masking her face partly by holding an oval *passe-partout*. In a second photograph, Verasis poses as a *Weeper* pressing a handkerchief into her face.[1] The picture frame, which is right in the centre of the composition qualifies the posing as a living picture. To comment ironically on that rectangular boundary, the countess has put her hand right on the lower part of the frame (Stiegler 2019, 232). Parts of the countess's body are just as visible as the whole apparatus, consisting of a table serving as a pedestal for both the posing countess and the picture frame. The

1 The picture can be found in Solomon-Godeau 1986, 74.

latter is set into place by a nineteenth-century neckrest belonging to the essential equipment of early studio photography and, therefore, helped keep models steady during the long exposure times. The ability to hold a pose for some minutes met the technical requirements for the long exposures required by early photographic processes. Hence, a close relationship between photography and the *tableau vivant* on both a culture-historical and structural level should be taken into consideration.

The constant reduction of exposure times during the nineteenth century led to a growing appreciation of the snapshot and simultaneously to a devaluation of studio photography. Furthermore, emphasizing indexicality became the dominant discourse in photo theory during the twentieth century, for instance, in Barthes's writings, who classified photography as evidence for the real. Retrospectively, Barthes's formula of the "that-has-been" (1981, 77) was – and still is – applied to early photography that existed under different technical and discursive conditions. In this reading, the snapshot appears as a genuine photograph in contrast to staged photography. Lewis Carroll's poem *Hiawatha's Photographing* can be read as an observation of that aesthetic shift from staged photography to the snapshot. It contains traces of both the *tableau vivant* practice and early studio photography. Written in 1887 Carroll, also a passionate photographer elucidates the technical challenges of portraying people. According to the text, the older family members mainly try to take painterly poses by imitating historical figures or referring to aesthetic theory. The father impersonates Napoleon, whereas the son performs Ruskin's "curves of beauty" and the daughter poses as a "passive beauty" (Wilsher 1979). Each verse comprises one shooting that eventually fails. Against all probabilities and expectations, the photographer only succeeds in capturing the youngest son. The latter is entirely unwilling to become photographed and therefore behaves most naturally in front of the camera. While the older protagonists point backwards in time by adhering to traditional aesthetic formulas inherent to other media like painting and sculpture, the child and the new technique merge successfully by pointing towards the future of photography. In his literary snapshot, Carroll allows photographic accuracy to conflate with the idea of the right moment.

Stillness and Motion in Cinema

Against the backdrop of cinema, the existence of the (still) image has remained challenging. In both Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Ricotta* (1960) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Passion* (1982), the *mise-en-scène* of *tableaux vivants* is crucial and serves as a metaphor for filmmaking (Barck 2008, 192–271; Jacobs 2011, 88–120; Paech 1989).

On a structural level, each of the two examples represents a film-in-film concept. In both cases, the main protagonists are directors who fail to stage famous paintings at first sight. However, the two movies differ significantly in their cinematic implementation. Whereas Pasolini uses luscious colours and music to distinguish the *tableau vivant* scenes from the storyline in black-and-white, the *tableaux vivants* and the "story" consequently overlap in Godard's case as it regards the formal level and that of the plot. Pasolini's camera remains to scan the surface of the living picture. In contrast, Godard's camera work differs from his predecessor's in that it penetrates the *tableaux* by creating new perspectives and, as a consequence, strikingly new narratives (Paech 1989, 17).

Throughout the sequence of the different *tableaux*, Godard pushes the limits of cinematic means. Whereas the first *tableau* of Rembrandt's *Night Watch* remains identifiable, already in the following Goya scene, a dolly shot explores the time-spatial arrangement of *The Third of May 1808*. Hence, it creates new *tableaux vivants* by moving through several pictures, by focusing on details, by changing the perspectives to examine the three-dimensional structure. In contrast to photography, the motion picture can capture what I would like to call the paradox of stillness. The stillness is paradoxical in that the classical *tableau vivant* implies "bringing images to life" by actors "playing" lifeless figures in a painting. Film is not only able to document this paradox but to exploit the opposition of stillness and motion for artistic purposes (Wiegand 2016, 71–72, 269–292). Caroline Chik defined the existing dichotomy between stillness and motion as "l'image fixe-animée" (2011, 249–263) by pointing to the close link between photography and film, considering the former a still and the latter a moving version of the technically generated image.

By aiming at "filming like a painter paints" (Paech 1989, 10) and thus raising the issue of the *paragone* again, Godard's gaze delves into the paintings. From inside, he visually investigates how gestures work (Paech 1989, 14), a method which refers back to Aby Warburg and beyond that to sensualist art theory. Through the posing of the *tableaux vivants*, as Joachim Paech has shown, the filmmaker is allowed to blend both painting and filmmaking. *Passion* thus represents a "metafilm" (1989, 64) that – equivalent to the concept of metapicture (or, metaphotography) – reflects upon the process of its own making.

Gustav Deutsch took the cinematic *tableau vivant* to another extreme by composing a filmic narrative out of a chronically arranged selection of Hopper-paintings in *Shirley. Visions of Reality* (2013). The Hopper paintings in Deutsch's production are revived into living pictures by the actors' performances. Monologues and dialogues accentuate the static scenes with the purpose to expand the painterly

Kairos – or the "pregnant moment"[2] according to Lessing – into temporality. The lighting and the set design, in which painting plays a central role again, recreate the synthetic character of colouring and atmosphere typical of Hopper's artistic style.

Their framing defines both film and painting, even *tableaux vivants* were repeatedly staged in frames simulating an easel painting (Jooss 1999, 152–164). In Europe, the geometrical shape became the standard for the painted picture during the Renaissance. According to the Gestalt theorist and film scholar Rudolf Arnheim, the strict limitation of the film image makes the difference from the human gaze (2002, 31–32). According to his argument, this particular finiteness serves as the condition under which film can become an art. The limited rectangular surface has to be designed by cinematic means. The spatial limitation has also been crucial for Jaques Lacan, who noticed that paintings would serve to tame the gaze due to their finiteness only (Lacan 1972, 116). Whereas the boundaries of the film image, in general, are comparable to those of a painting or photograph, the mobile camera allows entering and exploring other dimensions such as depth or space and, therefore, to dissolve the borders of the original painting by creating new images ever.[3]

Twelve chapters structure *Shirley's* storyline. Based on the piece *Western Motel*, chapter eight re-enacts the making of the painting as a photo shooting. Steven, the male photographer, remains invisible, his presence is marked by his voice only. Off-camera, he gives the typical short instructions, such as "Turn your head" or "Look at me." Several possible versions are acted out by merging fundamental operations of painting, photographing, and filmmaking. Shirley, the female character takes up different poses until the sentence "Turn your body towards me and put your hand on the bed" marks the closest approximation to the Hopper painting [Fig. 3]. The photographer's instructions are thwarted by an inner monologue of the female protagonist to subvert the gendered stereotype of the (active) artist and the (passive) muse. In her monologue, Shirley addresses the process of mirroring metaphorically: "He became a stranger to me at that moment as I might have been for him as well a woman that wanted to behave and to look like the woman he imagined for his photograph." The statement describes not only the discomfort and alienation caused by the shooting but also the interference of individual thoughts mainly regarding the imagined or the intended image.

2 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing worked out this idea in his famous *Laocoön* essay in 1766 by addressing the relation of literature and visual arts (Jooss 1999, 49).

3 The new technical media challenged the question of what an image is. The aesthetic of the image's boundaries was also put into question in Verasis's photos mentioned earlier. The carved golden picture frame and the cardboard frame mark the border between the picture as something to contemplate about in order to differentiate it from the rest of the world.

Social Media and the Return of the *Tableau Vivant*: #Musepose

Unlike in Degas's times, when the practice of the *tableau vivant* most often had to rely on manual reproductions and memory and visualized something absent, the omnipresence of the smartphone led to both a stronger presence of photography and an acceptance within the institutions; therefore, staging *tableaux vivants* on-site in art collections and museums, right in front of the originals has become a common practice. Unsatisfactory recreations can be monitored in real-time via the mirroring screen surface and corrected on the spot. Smartphone users who create living pictures in museums thus have to compete more directly with the model.

Museum pedagogy has seized on the possibilities afforded by smartphone cameras to turn the outdated medium of the *tableau vivant* into contemporary "edutainment." It has developed specific social media campaigns out of it, like #*musepose*, launched by the Getty Museum in January 2015 (Chan, Westover and Williams 2015), in a kind of reactivation of the *tableau vivant* as art-historical education seen in the nineteenth century, as mentioned above.[4] Apart from this particular project, similar re-enactments of artworks appear regularly within social media. Within the original project, #*musepose*, visitors were invited to create individual works in the style of *tableaux vivants* and share their results immediately and globally on Instagram with the particular hashtag. To run a successful social media campaign, the level of effort has to be relatively low so that spontaneity can be privileged: participants do without the costumes and stage settings that were essential components of the *tableaux vivants* of the past. In general, each posted photograph appears as an entity within the grid structure typical for Instagram.

A closer examination of the posts reveals two common characteristics. Firstly, participants of the action prefer figurative works. Secondly, they chose pieces in which eccentric facial expressions or gestures – with references to daily life – play a role. Due to these features, works from the eighteenth century profit from this new economy of digital attention.

The visual arts from the eighteenth century were influenced by the modern sensualism expounded by Diderot and others: a discourse exemplarily manifested – for instance – in Franz Xaver Messerschmidt's physiognomic studies. Despite being expressively exaggerated, his *Character Heads* (1777/1783) – a series of busts showing different kinds of grimaces – seem to encourage imitation by the visitors especially [Fig. 4]. At the Austrian court for which Messerschmidt worked, facial

4 Labels next to the pieces encouraged the visitors to strike a pose, take a selfie and to share it.

expressions had to be actively controlled, and in response, the artist developed an interest in depicting less controlled outward displays of inner discord. This interest made him ripe for rediscovery in the twentieth century by scholars such as Ernst Kris. Unfortunately, he pathologized the character heads by assuming that their author had a personality disorder (Kris 1933). More soberly, they can be interpreted as a transfer of physiognomic studies from two-dimensionality into the field of sculpture. Thus, they also stand in the tradition of *paragone*, the competition for the superiority of the art forms.

The French artist Charles Le Brun (1619–1690) was central to Messerschmidt's work. As early as 1668, Le Brun had systematized the primary emotional expressions intending to create a decodable system that could serve as a guide for artists. His *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions* appeared posthumously in 1698 (Le Brun 1702). The treatise was distributed widely throughout Europe and had a strong influence on the eighteenth century's sensualistic art theories and artistic practice. Subsequently, the ability to adequately depict an inner movement became an absolute requirement for painting. Messerschmidt eventually transferred Le Brun's images of facial expression into sculpture. As the precursors of today's standard emojis, such images reappeared in instructional books and photographic albums made for artists' education. Today, museum visitors seem to associate Messerschmidt's bust [Fig. 4] entitled the *Vexed Man* with emojis such as the confounded face, as comments on one Instagram post show. Recognizability, the life-size and the sculpture's haptic quality likely all facilitate the visitors' ability to imitate.

The age, ethnicity and gender of the *museposers* vary, as does the number of participants in any given imitation. The composition, the chosen perspective, the degree of variation and interpretation, and the performative and photographic execution quality also differ. It is noticeable that the photos posted under #*musepose* show individuals primarily. The fact that group scenes form a minority of the posted photos and that the reproduced originals are present in the picture prompts the question: to what extent does the definition of the *tableau vivant* remain applicable for this contemporary phenomenon? Although it appears to be modified, the *tableau vivant* practice remains discernible. Unlike the classicist living pictures that represented something absent, one feature of #*musepose* and beyond that selfie culture, in general, is that the original work of art becomes a part of the picture in most cases and is thus also an actor. Although most of the examples are executed in a rather traditional way, collaboratively by a photographer and a model, my argument is that this kind of shot is nevertheless immanent to – and explainable by – selfie culture. The latter enables the participants to reproduce the original

through embodiment and document this act of representation before the work that they are embodying. Moreover, it builds on previous experience gained through producing selfies by re-enacting conventionalized poses and facial expressions such as the duck face. Through photography, the *museposers* enter into a complex dialogue with the original, which combines two opposing processes: one directed introspectively by documenting the individual aesthetic experience and the other extravertive, by addressing the audience by sharing the result on a platform. As already shown, the *tableau vivant*'s history fluctuates between the aspects of self-staging and analytical approach. Both conditions represent fleeting moments that were unrecordable in the past. Moreover, by transforming a rather casual gesture of photo documentation into a metaphotograph, the external performance of the *museposers* may adhere to the concept mentioned above of selfie reflexivity. In one remarkable example, a *museposer* imitates Messerschmidt's *Vexed Man*, albeit with open eyes [Fig. 5]. The virtual button of the front camera requires him to look at the display while taking the shot.

Each of these mimetic acts potentially becomes a model for new strategies of imitation. Angela Krewani argues that digital communication is based on digital feedback processes and digital loops. Thus, "the self and the represented self turn into a recursive mediated structure" (Krewani 2018, 97). I would like to elaborate on Krewani's information-theory based explanation regarding the feedback loop's perception primarily as a visual phenomenon that continuously activates the mimetic drive, i.e. the impulse to imitate. The images posted with the hashtag #*musepose* do not only address the general public accessing the images digitally but also serve as a model for individual adaptions. Hence, particular motifs and compositions are constantly repeated. The social interaction significant for the *tableau vivant* practice of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has shifted to the virtual space. On social media platforms, the individuals generate their actual network that becomes evident in the number of followers, likes and comments.

Art institutions feared that dwindling visitor numbers would result from digital platforms and high-resolution scans of their collections, but the exact opposite has manifested in recent years. The images imitating images and selfies on such platforms as Instagram have led to rethinking museum policy in recent years. More expressive forms of appropriation are now replacing contemplative forms of art enjoyment. The impulse to document the individual experience visually that has accompanied the growth of social networking, to provide digital proof of one's experience seems to be compulsive and is continuously branching out into different genres, subgenres and trends. Moreover, selfie culture allows visitors to appropriate

the artworks, at least in a figurative sense. The specific forms of appropriation and empowerment discernible in trends such as #*musepose* invite us to examine not only the extent to which contemporary *tableau vivant* practice is indebted to the historical but vice versa, how current phenomena could inform on the past. With a view on these present practices, we can observe that the *tableau vivant*'s never-ending story results in constant need for actualized forms of appropriation according to changing technical and social conditions.

What is more, if we consider selfie photography as a self-reflexive practice, this brings to the fore the self-consciousness immanent to the *tableau vivant*. Apart from popular culture, the *tableau vivant* remains a relevant phenomenon in the arts. It has experienced the first wave of revival during postmodernism (Halimi 2019) and is facing the second one in contemporary digital culture. The obvious co-existence of still and moving images that can be traced back in media history, according to Chik (2011) characterizes the latter. During the state of exception caused by the pandemic, staging *tableaux vivants* even became a possibility for appropriating the absent original within the digital sphere in its neoclassical sense again.

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Ephemeral Social Media Visuals and Their Picturesque Design: Interaction and User Experience in Instagram Stories

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Abstract. This article examines the temporality of ephemeral visual posts to social media with an emphasis on Instagram stories. Drawing on theories of the spectacle, it is my contention that interaction and user-experience design, as it pertains to social media platforms, highlights the contemporary conditions and motivations in our society of abundant visual consumption. This article investigates what it means for a social media user to attend to such time-related visual experience. Throughout this piece, I critically survey the relationship between ephemeral Instagram stories' popularity and the high speed temporality of the social media sphere with emphasis on the digital "picturesque." Perishable daily sharing on social media reflects a contemplative glimpse into a personal lifespan presented as an object of mass appreciation. I examine how ephemerality as a component of design impacts online sociality through the picturesque visual mode. Contemporary boredom and competitive engagement in high-technological communication networks inform how we might direct digital publics to find alternative pathways to sociality.

Keywords: picturesque, contemplation, contemporary boredom, Instagram, temporality.

Introduction

Monthly active users of social media are expected to exceed 3 billion people in the year 2021 (Chen and Cheung 2019). Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram are among the leading social media platforms worldwide (Clement 2020b). These online platforms enable "persistent channels of mass-personal communication" and they facilitate the "perceptions of interactions among users" and derive "value primarily from user-generated content" (Carr and Hayes 2015, 49). Social media as a medium reclaims "a chaotic atemporality mixing the past

with present and the future" (Jurgenson 2013a) while allowing a permanent archival capacity and instant chatting opportunities based in "real time." Social media seems to put an emphasis on "an assumed inevitability of recording most everything forever" (Jurgenson 2013a). Yet recent developments to various social media platforms including Snapchat and Instagram have also facilitated ephemeral recordings in addition to the permanent and enduring posts that we have become so used to. These sites "allow an individual user to share content for a limited time with auto-deletion" (Khalil and Najaf, 2019), aka temporal sharing. This ephemeral content includes Snaps or My Story in Snapchat, Instagram Stories, YouTube Stories, as well as Facebook statuses and WhatsApp Statuses. Temporal visual posts are less filtered than the usual newsfeed and assumingly reflect an authentic claim besides their focus on the presence of the present instead of memory captions.

Time is an inherent factor in social media use. Duration is a specific component of visual posts for users of social media. In this article, I will explore the temporal design structure of ephemeral visual posts and their spectacle traits by examining viewer attentiveness. I argue that ubiquitous production in social media also provokes competition to attract and hold viewers' attention. Indeed, social media ensures a peculiar contemplation time to viewers. Boris Groys has named this contemplation in the social media sphere as "cool contemplation" (Groys 2011)." Such contemplation defines active engagement that paradoxically does not evolve into a profound judgmental process and comprehension. Therefore, social media use entails looking but not seeing in a genuine sense.

Yet, different kinds of interaction designs can motivate alternative approaches to contemplate and interact with the posts that have been shared. The stillness of perishing visual posts imposes a different standard of appreciation in conjunction with modern boredom that Martin Heidegger connects with the drive for technological change (Heidegger 1996). Social media is known to be a pass-time activity that connotes with escapism from daily life. The picturesque mode of seeing is escapist as is the safety found in the pastoral scene, while dominant power, aka the city awaits there beyond the hill (Robinson 1988, 75). As such, the picturesque landscape "draws us in" to a retreat enabling "a broader, safer perspective, an aestheticizing distance" (Mitchell 2002, viii). Social media engagement has been generically correlated with mediated voyeurism. Visual posts capturing individual lives can be visualized by the followers of the user's account through the platform. This mediated voyeurism creates companions in a daily life made up of ubiquitous connectivity. But more importantly, the visuality of social media provides refuge as a way of "filling in time" (Hand 2016, 117). Throughout this article I will focus on Instagram stories and

the ways these stories mediate in picturesque manner. Ephemerality has become a central part of social media and the public sphere. Each portion of shared content has an exhibition time – it is available for up to 24 hours, while photos and videos disappear after a limited time interval, variable among platforms. I aim to provide a theoretical framework of the picturesque as it is found in social media in order to better understand our historical practice of both exhibiting and viewing. In doing so, I undertake Instagram as a tool of the spectacle in relation to visual aesthetics that arranges the way the user senses and experiences the sensible. As such, I explore how the interaction design of time-related visual posts confronts the scarce attention span of the modern human and contemporary boredom.

Theoretical Methodology

The format for design of user-experience and interaction in social media vis-à-vis contemplative attitude is relatively under-analysed. I analyse this peculiar contemplation mode in digital public sphere through temporal subscripted structure of such visual posts. As methodological framework, this article adopts a theoretical analysis of the visual spectacle through the time-sensitive interaction of Instagram stories. I explore ephemeral media use as practice while focusing on the design structure of "visual engagement" (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). The structure design of interaction and user experience provides information on how the spectacle of social media has been envisaged to proceed as such "the ability of an image to attract, involve and engage with users" (Valentini et al. 2018, 365). In order to accomplish this, I will construct my theoretical study drawing on previous qualitative and quantitative research on ephemeral social media interaction and user experience projections. The visuals mentioned in this article do not form a representative sample, yet they exemplify picturesque applications of ephemeral social media. I analyse the interaction design centred user experience of Instagram as it causally mediates between the participants' world, which is represented and the audience's world, where representation is consumed. This article does not seek to explain what exactly happens when one consumes ephemeral social media content but aims instead to explore the structure of interaction and user experience design. Deriving from practice theory, I acknowledge social media posts/receipts "are necessary elements and qualities of a practice in which the single individual participates, not qualities of the individual" (Reckwitz 2002, 250). Indeed, the time dynamics for the production and consumption of social media posts corresponds to how power works in the broader media sphere. I contend that the choice for interaction

and user experience design for social media gives us clues about the conditions and motivations of our speedy society of high-technological communication.

Instagram: An App for "Cool" Contemplation

Contemporary image culture is defined by communication technologies that provide ways for subjects to engage with "systems of conventions and techniques such as narrating, editing, composing, lightning, sequencing" (Manovich, 2016, 18) and other visual traits and qualities. Instagram provides a digital space for users to engage with visual creativity. At the same time it "maintains and cultivates existing relationships as a social network site" (Sheldon 2008; Sheldon et al. 2017, 644). Instagram, among other social media platforms, offers specifically image related posts that prioritize the users' own performance and appreciation of visual aesthetics to facilitate their involvement in digital publics.

Instagram was launched as a photo-sharing platform in 2010 and bought by Facebook company in 2012. The Instagram app, one of the most popular social networking apps worldwide, permits its users to edit and share self-authored still and moving images. What makes Instagram unique is that Instagram presents a more polished, aesthetically driven, and hence well thought-out sharing practice in comparison to Snapchat (Kofoed and Larsen 2016). Leo Manovich (2016) asserts that Instagram's image culture reflects "a rich cultural and historical context, including histories of photography, cinema, graphic design, as well as contemporary social media, design trends, music video, and k-pop," while its users, a "young global generation are connected by common social media platforms, cultural sensibilities, and visual aesthetics" (Manovich 2016, 4).

Contemporary digital contemplation necessarily distinguishes itself through the specific design of interaction and participant experiences. Instagram offers several different ways of forming and engaging with DIY visual media spectacle for its users. Instagram is primarily a mobile-only image taking, editing and sharing application. Instagram users can see their feed, profiles, and comments via desktop, but they cannot post without mobile phones. The posts in the newsfeed are automatically stored in the profile account of the poster. Instagram stories which are temporary content do not appear in the user's feed and are not visible in the poster's profile account (Javed 2019). However, a temporary Instagram story can also be stored in the poster's profile as highlights, which are stored permanently and will not vanish after 24 hours, but this does not happen automatically as with other posts. Followers cannot duplicate a post running in the newsfeed or Instagram story unless an

exterior application intervenes to allow such features. Instagram conjugates with the conceptualization of networked publics that primarily enable public communication amongst followers in contrast to Snapchat, which prioritizes private mediation.

Indeed, time scarcity and the overpopulation of information in social media means that not every post is guaranteed to be thought through in-depth or even seen in the newsfeed. An ideal interaction design to be used for the digital public would eventually transform the current sociality precepts "from its current state to a preferred state" (Zimmerman, Forlizzi and Evenson 2007, 493). Contemplation, in a traditional sense, signifies thoughtful observation and meditation. According to Groys (2011), "cool" contemplation derives from the lack of time to engage with a comprehensive account of the object of appreciation. The central question is how a single visual post can become contemplative and if so what kind of contemplation design it is. Interaction design aims to provide an enjoyable user experience. As such a user-centred design process for an application involves "considering who is going to use the interactive products, how they are going to use them and where they are going to be used" (Preece, Sharp and Rogers 2015, sec. I). As Manovich explains, the Instagram user frequently expresses a particular sensibility of "being in the scene pathos" (Manovich 2016, 135) as well as a communicative mood established in the way that s/he arranges the posts (Manovich 2016, 77): "personal, emotional and moody" (Manovich 2016, 106). Thus, this study attends to design exploration (Fallman 2008, 7–8) in order to contribute to current societal needs of communication.

Experiencing Time through Social Media in a High-Speed Society

When time is at a scarcity, social media posts appear as a symptom of boredom. The precarity conditioned by contemporary capitalism indicates not only the instability of working conditions but also the scarcity of time. We do not have much time to attend to anything in a comprehensible manner in our speedy daily lives. PEW research states that home usage is ubiquitous among smartphone owners and that both young and old are similarly prone to using their phones while in a car or on public transit (85% of younger users and 79% of older users did so), as well as in a community space such as a park or coffee shop (Smith 2015). Our leftover time, such as the time spent during daily commutes is mostly consumed by social media activation. As Susan J. Matt articulates in her interview with Sean Illing; smartphone applications, including social media, promise "constant companionship, fulfilment and excitement, instantaneous entertainment and variety" (Illing 2019).

Visually abundant social media has become the new agora for an international public at the edge of the dilution between the public and private sphere, where the boundaries between work-, home- and leisure-time have disappeared. Among the motivations to use social media, scholars have identified "social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing and surveillance and knowledge of others" (Alhabash and Ma 2017, 4; Whiting and Williams 2013). For many, social media provides something to do to pass a given imposed duration of time. One of the primary motives for using Instagram is escapism along with social interaction, archiving, self-expression and peeking. Here, escapism includes "to escape reality," "to forget about troubles," "to avoid loneliness," "to get what I want without much effort," and "to relax" (Lee et al. 2015, 554). The mismatch between the subject's time; the user of social media, and object's time; bus travel duration, has been nullified. The user cannot control the commuting speed yet can rule the newsfeed scrolling tool.

A vast number of social media users have easily become objects of surveillance, attention, and contemplation. As Groys suggests, more people are interested in image production today than in image contemplation (Groys 2011, 15). He goes on to argue that the "easy access to digital photo and video cameras combined with the global distribution platform of the internet has altered the traditional statistical relationship between image producers and image consumers" (Groys 2011, 12–15). Sheldon and Bryant contend that Instagram users focus more on personal identity and self-promotion as well as surveillance in the sense of knowledge gathering about others and documentation of life events in addition to displaying creativity such as photographic skills rather than connection with other people (Sheldon and Bryant 2016). Thus, surveillance is the main motivation for Instagram usage (Alhabash and Ma 2017). Shared photos are used firstly to talk about images as conversational resources, to communicate visually with a focus on visual modalities, and phatic interaction between users for the sake of visual connectivity to confirm and strengthen relationships (Kofoed and Larsen 2016).

Social media pass-time activities prevent the intervention of boredom. However, in addition to be "bored by something," Heidegger (1962) introduces the notion of profound boredom as becoming bored with. This profound boredom does not proceed in relation to specific objects or events (Heidegger 1962). For instance, one can become "bored by downloading speed" and then engage with social media in the meantime. But profound boredom designates the state where nothing any longer appeals. "A positive refusal that presents an emptiness by which we do not expect anything from our surroundings, by which the world has fallen dead"

(Hammer 2004, 282). Thus, although social media can be diverting, it also belongs to an 'information overload' conditioned by the omnipresence of technology. Virilio attributed capitalist workloads with expectations of constant communication. Speed addresses a paradoxical phenomenon in which the technological development that enables the greatest extension of mass participation also magnifies control over the public of the high-speed society (Virilio 2005). Virilio asserts that this never-ending instantaneous communication is arrhythmic and because of that it terrifies the habitants of the accelerated reality (Virilio 2012, 27). Constant anxiety rises from stimulation of this threshold. Thus, social media can provoke indifference for the user who is bored of society's unsatisfiable high-speed demands. Indeed, users who are scrolling social media newsfeeds fulfil the daily expectations of a constant connective mode. Social media engagement is part of our contemporary temporal routine. When multitasking and constant immediacy are the requirement, "the time we're allowed to concentrate exclusively on one thing is progressively diminishing" (Rosa and Scheuerman 2009, 1–2). This is because we are constantly being interrupted by a stream of incoming news and messages. The habitant of this high-speed society notices that s/he is not in charge of time but rather subject to time and even kept in limbo. Thereby, social media use can also provoke a profound boredom, a kind of acknowledged boredom, for its wanderers. Contemporary high-speed society does not experience time. Neither work nor home nor leisure can make one experience time. According to Heidegger, to find something to do in order to pass time does not mean that time passes any more quickly, but rather that it becomes completely annulled and thereby one does not notice time passing (Heidegger 1996, 99; Misek 2010, 779). Thus, as Michael Hand (2016) puts forward, such focus on "now" and the constant movement among distractive tasks and events do not allow us to experience an authentic connectedness through time, namely the Heideggerian "presence of the present" (Heidegger, 1996). In the same vein, Kracauer associates the lack of boredom with absence from ourselves (Kracauer 1995, 331–334). Following this path, if boredom is being alone with oneself then it is authentic as it appeals to "the conscious self-coming to terms with Being in the World, and within one's own experience" (Ladly n.d., 145). iTime designates the user's monotonous, passive relationship to a culture of "speed and immediacy" and fractured relationships (Hand 2016, 117). This designates a kind of homesickness in the sense of being exiled. It follows that boredom is an unacknowledged homesickness that constitutes the perquisite of philosophy (Hammer 2004, 282).

There is a decrease in time devoted to image contemplation in the social media spectacle, where we experience a bombardment of posts. Daily social media use is

part of our communal activities but even in archival mode posts to social media can remain unnoticed by the audience, who are simultaneously facing shortages of time and attention span. Consequently, the visuals posted to social media do not correspond to genuine contemplation. Posts to the newsfeed roll rather than temporal stories seem to be more inviting of contemplation because the spectator has more time to concentrate on the post if she/he desires. However, the aesthetic component of Instagram posts must compete with the networks' features because a photo can disappear down the stream, largely unnoticed (Jurgenson 2013b). Such unpopular posts, although archived on the poster's profile account, would be unlikely to be absorbed by the commonsensical historical process. Although liked, or commented on, or stored by captioning such active engagement with visuals in social media does not guarantee acknowledgement. As Groys explains, the "cool contemplation" of time-based media simply consists in "the permanent repetition of the gesture of looking, an awareness of the lack of time necessary to make an informed judgment through comprehensive contemplation" (Groys 2011, 100). Thereby, time-based contemporary art presents for the viewer "wasted excessive time that cannot be absorbed by the spectator" while it erases the difference between *vita* active and *vita* contemplative (Groys 2011, 100). Here, social media use as a contemporary performative act designates a kind of cool contemplation as users engage in active participation via the internet. Yet, such active engagement does not extend to generating understanding although it does not define passive spectatorship. As such, profound boredom emerges by acknowledging the inauthenticity of the social media roll as a worldly, everyday life experience, aka the loss of Being-there (Dasein) (Ladly n.d., 145–148).

Social media newsfeed, temporal posts like Instagram Stories deserve a closer examination of their role in adding value to the image in the era of increased visual abundance (Duin 2018, 11). Launching in August 2016 after 6 years of its release as an app in 2010, Instagram stories gathered 500 million daily active users (Clement 2020a). Stories run at the top part of users' Instagram newsfeed. When clicked on, Instagram stories appear on the full screen for 15 seconds. Here, users can move back and forth to previous and following stories in chronological order. Users can also stop the running of stories through by holding their finger on the image. The succession of stories does not need the viewer's command. This is in contrast to the newsfeed, where the viewer can watch stories without an extra move including interaction. These temporal stories combine videos and moving image features with photos of "still images and create a slideshow gallery" (Khalil and Najaf 2019, 163) that constructs an Instagram profile story. The temporality of ephemeral media is

used to visually exhibit the self to the viewing followers. Ephemeral stories intensify our relationship with the self while they are at the same time perishable, and thus, non-static content. In a sense, such posts aim to compensate for fading subjectivity in a high-speed society.

The Picturesque in the Ephemeral Visuality of Social Media

Social media entertains through diversion and thus does not provide a view from a distance. The social media spectacle as a prevention against boredom, a visual pass-time activity seemingly contrasts with the picturesque mode of seeing. Picturesque aesthetics have been generically connected to nature, natural settings and object in the sense that "the term 'picturesque' was often but not always applied to books of landscape views" (Helsinger 2002, 120). The picturesque seemingly provides a safety found in the pastoral scene, a break from the unnaturalness and extravagance of the court (Robinson 1988, 75). Yet, ephemeral visual posts on social media project another, nevertheless parallel kind of spectacle. The temporal features provide a pause so that the spectator reaches the post despite the fast running flow of information. Thus, the escapism that the ephemeral spectacle entails conjugates picturesque conventions. Such a conception of the picturesque enables the spectator to be settled across the incommensurable wilderness of high-speed society. Landscape, as the primary subject matter of the picturesque aims for "the evacuation of verbal, narrative, or historical elements and the presentation of an image designed for transcendental consciousness" (Mitchell 2002, viii). According to Kant, aesthetic contemplation proceeds from a disinterested engagement and therefore permits universal communication (Kant 2008). Picturesque visuality is contemplative in this sense because it allows space for the spectator to look beyond the self.

Social media's limiting posts to a temporary lifespan affects the user's experience in formulating the posts as well as how they can be seen and how they gain meaning. Social interactions on Instagram stories are mediated through the visualization and interaction with the story shared by the users. Any view of an Instagram story automatically sends a notification to the story's producer that the story has been viewed, while such a connection does not leave a trace. For instance, when a user visualizes ephemeral content, he may react or comment on the publication as well as send a message to the owner of the shared content. In comparison to the bombardment of visuals in the newsfeed, the mass appreciation of temporal stories increases the visibility of the posts. In a case study of Instagram stories, for 83%

of participants the temporariness of this shared content is a motivational factor once the stories change frequently (de Souza Silva et al. 2018). As such, users of Instagram stories affirmed that they like to see who will express a reaction to their posts before the expiration time (de Souza Silva et al. 2018, 44). Ephemeral posts create attention and hence awareness in visual abundance while creating a sense of urgency for users to check the platform in hopes of not missing any content (Khalil and Najaf 2019, 164). In this sense, temporal media is not historical, yet more connective thanks to its authenticity claim.

The authenticity claim firstly derives from the fact that the preparation of ephemeral posts demands less planning, staging and editing, which is different from permanent content. Thus, the use of temporal stories consumes less time while maintaining engagement between the participant and the audience (Chen and Cheung 2019; Khalil and Najaf 2019). Users are more confident sharing content that does not appear in the main content feed, while they are experiencing a feeling of authenticity (Xu et al. 2016; Bayer et al. 2016). Social media participants report that they are using this platform mainly to share their great moments with friends and to see how these friends react to this shared content (de Souza Silva et al. 2018). In claiming authenticity, these posts allow the audience to experience particular yet not specifically grandiose moments of life. Such experiences are able to claim authenticity precisely because perishable posts stand against the assumed historical register that "document[s] series of events to suggest that something occurred rather than nothing at all" (Petro 1993, 78). The ephemerality of the image offers an "aesthetics of fluidity and impermanence: the format of the platform constantly changes, contributions do not last, and identities created through the app are a 'liquid self'" (Verstraete 2016, 108). These stories mark a break with archival personal story-making while promoting a sensible yet intelligible spectacle of a glimpse. More importantly, in contrast to the brief duration of the spectacle, ephemeral profile stories reflect a pause between the self and its experience. They mediate a momentary yet contemplative visual to the viewers. The temporal feature of these stories constitute a glimpse of an alternative self-narrative that is generally defined as a lifespan process beginning in early childhood and extending to old age, as well as a process that holds societal expectations. Unlike a series of fixed categories adding up to a proper social media profile, such selfies exhibit the presence of the present experience of self-contemplation, a glimpse of thought, and not an eventful practice in visual mode. Thus, "being in the scene" pathos eventually communicates having distance and being conscious of how social reality is constructed (Manovich 2016, 136). In comparison to Instagram stories, another

perishable media post, livestreaming, does not constitute a pause in viewing. Livestreaming does not reflect such a picturesque stance because it emphasizes "real time" and the "nowness" of the spectacle. Consequently, livestreaming does not form an alternative temporality to high-speed society because it prioritizes active spectatorship rather than a contemplative understanding and deliberation. The priority of "real time" does not facilitate an experience of the "presence of present moment" but is based on tracking with the newest visual appearing on the flow. Therefore, livestreaming as a form of interaction design devaluates contemplation of the visual.

The specific visual spectacle of temporal stories contradicts the fragmented everydayness conditioned by the obligations of high-speed immediacy. The picturesque view similarly mediated the pastoral refuge at the edge of the city line. Thus, authenticity derives from recognition of time and the finding of one's Being-there in these posts. Selfie image is a matter of "self-manifestation, self-design and self-positioning in the aesthetic field;" therefore, it obviously fails to invite disinterested engagement, yet it appears to be our contemporary form of self-contemplation (Groys 2011, 34–38). These temporal posts generically present a point of view shot of a momentary part of user's everyday life. In fact, viewers begin watching stories by pushing on the story producer's image which runs in a list along the top part of user's newsfeed without any means of pre-viewing the visual posted. Followers are limited to watching the Instagram Story, skipping it or commenting on it in order to start a private conversation. The entire mobile screen as frame secures the observer's safety in another place for surveillance. While posting Instagram stories, users can add textual captions such as time, location, temperature and emoji as well as a thematic hashtag [Fig. 1].[1] The story delivers "context," in other words, the information about the surrounding situation, with an emphasis on encompassing features (Bayer et al. 2016, 4). Such Being-there visuals reclaim a break in the flow of the high-speed connective mode that engages not only the post producer but also the indeterminate viewer among followers. Therefore, it mediates thought of the self in a moment of time in a disinterested manner. Here, mediated voyeurism is not simply based on an imitation of reality. The visual of the Instagram story is selected by the producer to be commented on and then shared for public view and communication. The visual image, among others, can be of protagonist's view fitted to be perceived by the producer and would-be-spectator. For instance, the exemplary visuals in Figure 1 reflect such self-contemplative features not only because they refer to stillness without eventful progression but

1 All of Instagram stories seen in the figure are public stories with public view.

also because they project its producer's thinking and hence the contemplative mode of its own momentary narrative.

Fixed media, such as painting, sculpture, and photography are considered to reflect a presence because they typically prioritize depiction rather than the re-creation of movement (Westgeest 2015). Thus, the viewer reflects an experience of the still as a pause in the flow. Thereby, in addition to the urgency of the audience to see otherwise missed content, the short but un-interrupted viewing time offers an extended spectacle. In that sense, such temporality remedies the poor condition of the attention span. Therefore, image production can take a break and image contemplation can proceed. In the case of Instagram moving stories, the movement of the visual persists. However, the ephemeral feature of posts as much as the limited duration of the story only offer a glimpse of movement without progress or event. Although the moving stories of temporal posts exhibit the display of a succession of images without a pause, the brief lifespan holds the attention of the viewer through redoubling the act of watching. Such stories do not inform the viewer about the background context. Thus, a glimpse of movement puts demands on the viewer's imagination beyond what the visual perception permits. Goswamy (2014) has defined ruminative viewing for Indian paintings with a cyclical time reference as such, "each work of art comes out of a particular time and always, consciously or unconsciously, references it" (Goswamy 2014, section IV), and claims that each culture has its own specific time reference. The self-focus inherent in ruminative thinking is assumed to take on peculiarity in the details of the visual story post among the vast digital culture of social media. The temporal and spatial isolation of the visual from the broader narrative of social media does not guarantee the consumption of these visual details. Yet, it attests to the importance of the post and the act of seeing rather than looking. Indeed, contemplation derives not only from the act of noticing the image but also from the process of deliberation. Atkinson's study of comics states that both the quality of the image and its presentation render visual thought possible in the way of making the eye continue to be intrigued (Atkinson 2012, 67). Similar to the presentation of comics' frames to the viewer, the presentation of the Instagram moving story presents a contemplative pause due to early interruption of the movement. For instance, one of the Instagram moving stories seen in Figure 2 captures a taxi trip, the other a fun game among friends. The design of these Stories features a sudden start and end, which aims to set in motion the spectator's participation through the viewer's imagination of the story's complete setting. The faint memory of the story watched is envisaged to leave a trace on mind. The viewer combines this trace in their imagination with the elements of

this visual glimpse. Thus, the Instagram moving story drops into the stillness by the sudden cut which arrives at the end of 15 seconds.

The time dimension of the Instagram stories' experience design imposes an awareness of time. The culture of social media has a specific sense of viewing culture. For instance, Instagram stories differ from the archival mode of social media newsfeeds in the sense of its contemplative pause for exhibiting and viewing visuals. Newsfeed scrolling practice differs from stories moving forward and backward through left-right direction. The viewers have more control on their own time of appreciation on the newsfeed as they scroll down. Yet the posts of still image and moving images do not have any duration unless they attract the spectator's attention. Laura Mulvey argued that the eruption of the still is a radical break on new technologies giving the spectator control of the viewing process (Mulvey 2007, 135). The spectator of social media assumingly owning full control of viewing newsfeed in Instagram just follows the rule of speed and respectively performs the habit of scrolling down the visual news mostly without "time to stop, look and think" (Mulvey 2007, 135). The reduction of movement for the viewer facilitates contemplation, thus, stories whether still or moving images of 15 seconds exhibit no change or movement without event. Without the skip move, the viewer has no choice but to wait until the Instagram story ends and watch how the story proceeds. Generically, the spectator seems to control newsfeed, although such control does not attract the spectator's attention due to the flow of ubiquitous social media production. In that sense, contradictory to what Mulvey envisions for digital technologies to enable the viewer's full control for thoughtful contemplation, the high-speed temporality of the digital public does not permit such agency unless design intervenes. Instagram's ephemeral stories encompass the screen for a short time, without an easy get out. The contemplation time has been co-directed by the viewer while she/he selects the story that pops up through the images posted by the account holder. But more importantly, this viewing time of Instagram stories has been decided collectively namely by both post sender and receiver. Thereby, such semi-loss of control marks a radical break on the spectator's technologies of social media practice.

In this vein, ephemeral stories have drastically transformed social media viewing culture because they do not only dictate the time needed to view them but also the time to contemplate visuals. Spectators of stories tend to be accidental witnesses of one's self-contemplation, whose duration is not in their control. The view of self-contemplation is picturesque in the sense that "the standard picturesque landscape is pleasing because it typically places the observer in a protected, shaded spot (a 'refuge')" (Mitchell 2002, 16). The spectator's passive interaction secures their contemplation in

some sense. Generically, social media does not permit the user viewer/view producer "to add to the image" (Bellour 2007, 123). However, features such as Instagram stories can work as a stop in the high-speed immediacy reign. Thus, the temporality of these posts presents a shift in the nature of spectatorship in social media.

The Picturesque Online

The self-image construction invites both the post producer and the viewer to view the self. Here, picturesque aesthetics consists of the temporal contrast of the ephemeral visual post vis-à-vis everyday life in a high-speed society. Boredom coincides with "both too much and too little, sensory overload and sensory deprivation, anxieties of excess as well as anxieties of loss" (Petro 1993, 81). Once the graphic artists had to arouse minds held by information overload and boredom (Lyotard 1999, 40), now any active participant of social media must also stimulate others in order to be interacted with. Thus, the picturesque landscape locating the self in nature mediates the looking at the self there holding on yet fading along a digital layout of high-speed communication.

The interaction and user experience design of temporal stories differs from other social media features in the sense that the duration of contemplation is not completely directed by the viewer. In a way, a 15-second Instagram story, if it is watched from the beginning to the end, is much longer than a short look at a given image in the newsfeed or on livestreaming. The authenticity of such ephemeral posts coincides with its focus on the momentary gaze of one's experience. Yet such a view illustrates a glimpse of thought rather than the sensible representation of reality as the viewer witnesses the poster's contemplative gaze directed towards the self. Thereby, it offers an intelligible mode for the viewer by granting time that is isolated from the speedy flow of instantaneous messages. Thus, it is not only the post's short lifespan of 24 hours but also the limited duration of 15 seconds which extends visual appreciation and hence adds value to the image.

This escape from high-speed society can eventually become insecure. Here, the picturesque refuge of social media consists of virtues of such perpetual contrast that they can eventually provoke a sensory response back to the bored viewer. In that sense, the picturesque frame renders the sublime a loss of self in the high-speed immediacy which is compromised with the temporal system. As Robinson argues, the picturesque is a position of the one that "packs a lunch and good book to set out for just a day of ease on a hillside looking back to the city" (Robinson 1988, 75). Thus, "the picturesque is subject to the dominant power beyond the hill" (Robinson

1988, 75). The picturesque can even be illusory for Robinson (1988) because it enables such a break to stimulate and energize the subject. For instance, the visual experience of Instagram stories can be relieving for users otherwise suffering from profound boredom and hence remedying indifference regarding what the high-speed society offers. From this angle, the picturesque on social media can distract its users through disorienting them to societal temporality. Such disorientation can serve to naturalize the very same high-speed society.

The temporal contrast that the visuality of ephemeral social media provokes is stimulating. Such need for a contemplative pause as it relates to the online spectacle illustrates the symptoms of our high-speed society's inconsumable presence. The interaction design centred on user experience of Instagram stories offers time to the viewer to contemplate. The spectator not completely controlling the viewing duration can involve themselves in the experience of various temporalities that exist beyond one's own. Indeed, the longevity of the popularity of such temporal spectacle, namely stories, in social media depends on its embodiment of the picturesque view. However, the increase in ephemeral story features in every social media platform and in the number of its users would eventually decrease the stimulation potential of such features. Until this point, the ephemeral media of self-contemplation stand still against the bombardment of social media posts and offer a picturesque refuge.

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Figure 1. Captions of Instagram stories.

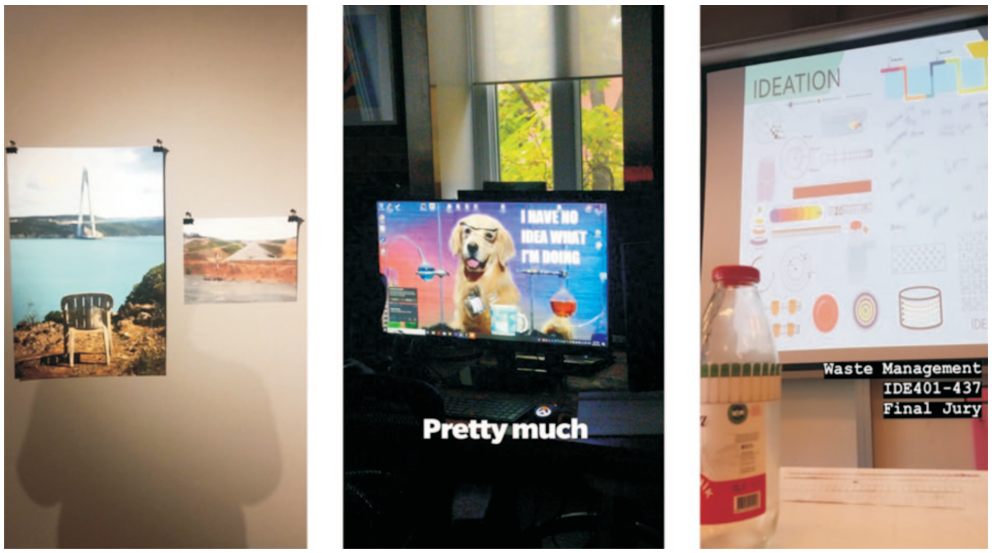
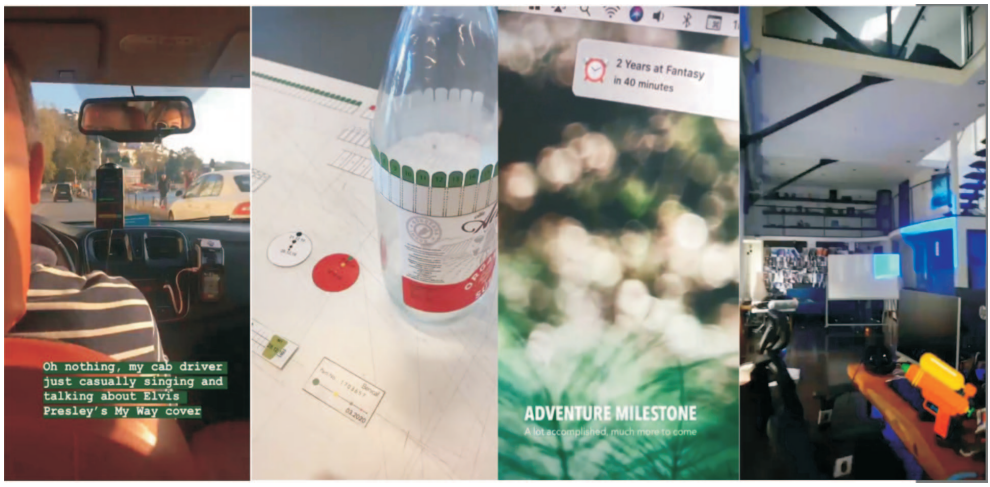


Figure 2. Captions of randomly selected Instagram moving stories.



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