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Uncanny Intermediality

Essays written following the international workshop, *Uncanny Intermediality*, organized between 20–21 October 2022 within the framework of the Exploratory Research Project, *Affective Intermediality, Cinema between Media, Sensation and Reality*, supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS – UEFISCDI, Romania, project number PN-III-P4-PCE-2021-1297, PNCDI III.

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Uncanny (Inter)Mediality and Photo Futures

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Abstract. This article explores how uncanny feelings may derive from ways in which a medium operates, from its mediality. Consistent with the main source of uncanny feelings identified by Ernst Anton Jentsch and later elaborated on by Sigmund Freud, tensions between the inanimate and the animate are at the centre of the exploration. Such tensions, the article proposes, are implicitly or explicitly intermedial. The malleability of photographic imagery boosted by the computational revolution remaking photographic technology and practices allow for ever more forms of hybrid mediality in which intermedial tensions operate. The proliferation of such tensions suggests that we are likely to see more uncanny mediality in the time ahead. Our uncanny future may further be strengthened by the increasingly autonomous operations of machine learning algorithms that in part relocate agency from humans to machines.

Keywords: uncanny mediality, medium specificity, intermediality, machine learning, photography, GIF.

When the American singer and musician Prince died in April 2016, fans circulated a number of photographic GIFs online.[1] I was especially struck by one.[2] In this, Prince seems so alive – full of flirtatious vitality. The GIF seemed, miraculously, to bring the dead Prince back to life. But gradually, as the GIF kept looping his movements, I came to sense something less pleasant. The joy in seeing his lively gestures gave way to a feeling that the repetitions undermined his spontaneity, his liveliness. It was not so much because I started imagining that Prince had meticulously rehearsed his Casanova routines in front of a mirror,

1 This article is based on my talk, *Uncanny (Inter)Mediality and PhotoFutures*, at the conference *Uncanny Intermediality* in Cluj-Napoca, 20–21 October 2023, organized at Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania by Professor Ágnes Pethő. My talk drew and expanded on my previous article on uncanny mediality, *The uncanny mediality of the photographic GIF* (Fetveit 2018).

2 The GIF featuring Prince can be accessed here. *https://giphy.com/gifs/justin-prince-26AHrsRVKw5lDjRba/fullscreen*. Last accessed 27. 08. 2023.

moves that now had become trite. A more deadening sense of repetition appeared to emanate from the operations of the medium of the GIF itself.

The relentless exactitude of the algorithmic repetitions, little by little, seemed to eat away at his liveliness, compromise his agency, and threaten to turn the charming Prince into a mechanical puppet. Forced by the algorithm to repeat his moves, they just keep being duplicated. Sensing this, we may come to ponder: do his gestures come from an impulse within himself, or do they instead arise from some external force that animates him? These observations awakened my interest in how a medium, given its logic of operation, may come to evoke an uncanny feeling. That is, they inspired my interest in what I call uncanny mediality – a phenomenon which, as we will see, to a great extent derives from intermedial tensions. Before moving on with the argument, given that the concept of uncanny mediality is not commonplace, a clarification may be useful. While I take mediality to refer to the characteristics of a medium in terms of the ways in which it operates, I take uncanny mediality to refer to aspects of such characteristics that are liable to elicit uncanny feelings. Thus, an interest in uncanny mediality represents an interest how a medium, by way of how it operates, comes to elicit uncanny feelings.

Repetition is Deadening

The deadening effect of repetition should not surprise us. Repetition without variation may indeed be deadening. This was dramatized in the Greek myth of Sisyphus more than 2500 years ago. Punished by vengeful gods for his trickery, Sisyphus ended up having to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down again each time – forever. The Ancient Greeks considered this a horrible punishment. It hardly seems less horrible today. Thus, it should not surprise us that Dante based his Inferno on eternal repetition of acts relevant to the sins of those punished.[3] Even if life is full of repetition, life itself, the very idea of liveliness, is intimately connected to variation, to difference. Exact and relentless repetition therefore threatens to suppress the spark of life. It can leave us feeling stuck, still alive – yet not fully.

When watching the flirtatious Prince in the wake of his death, spectators were likely to appreciate the GIF's power to recall his liveliness. The deadening effect

3 Nietzsche also pondered the horrors of eternal repetition in the form of having to repeat every instance of our lives. In contrarian fashion, he claimed to embrace with delight the fate of having to eternally repeat his own life down to every detail (1974, 341).

of the repetition may have been less apparent to many. It may be felt, though, as a slight unease. This unease may loom in the background, a bit like we sense the bitter edge in a gin and tonic. It may be subtle, even absent for some, poignant or even disturbing for the sensitive. This bitter edge is the uncanny. In the case of GIFs, I believe we only find uncanny mediality in those involving photographic material, moving as well as still. This may indicate that the uncanny mediality of GIFs in part stems from their photographic mediality. In fact, as we will see, the photographic medium has been haunted by uncanny mediality from its inception. Beyond this, the medial operations of GIFs themselves tend to dramatize an intermedial tension between two major forms of photographic materials – that of photography proper and that of the moving image. That is, it sets up an intermedial tension between still and moving images, and by further implication, a tension between deadening stillness and lively movement. Moreover, such an intermedial divide also appears to be latently lodged within the mediality of still photography, which precisely is premised on the stilling of life, the freezing of movement, yet at the same time, some latent potential for reanimating what is stilled in the viewer's imagination. Before exploring that further, let us examine: what is the uncanny more precisely, and how does it resonate with the medial logic of the photographic GIF?

The Uncanny

The German psychiatrist Ernst Anton Jentsch has offered one of the most pertinent characterizations of the uncanny. In his 1906 essay on the subject, he notes the following: "Among all the psychical uncertainties that can become a cause for the uncanny feeling to arise, there is one in particular that is able to develop a fairly regular, powerful and very general effect: namely, doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate – and more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one's consciousness" (1997, 8).

Jentsch invites us to imagine a trip out in the forest. As you sit down on a felled tree trunk to rest and take some refreshment, you suddenly sense something strange underneath you. Is the tree trunk moving? Is it not lifeless, but in fact animate, alive? Is the tree trunk a snake? The uncanny shock triggered by such a realization is unsettling, but it recedes as you come to establish with certainty what is real. The ripple effects from the shock, though, may linger. Yet, according to Jentsch's conception, an uncanny feeling may develop more fully in situations

that do *not* raise alarm, where the uncanny feeling may lodge at the back of our consciousness, safe from the urgent scrutiny we grant snakes posing as tree trunks. When we offer it no more attention than we do the (aforementioned) bitter edge of a gin and tonic, the uncanny may fester undisturbed.

The principle Jentsch has outlined may operate in multiple cases. Uncanny feelings, according to Jentsch, may arise from watching someone experience an epileptic seizure, or from encountering automatons, that is, human-looking robots. Jentsch also mentions wax figures so realistic we may confuse them with living beings. He therefore advises moderation in art as to "the absolute and complete imitation of […] living beings" (1997, 10). In 1970, the Japanese robotics researcher Masahiro Mori rearticulated Jentsch's advice into operational principles for an uncanny valley applicable to animation.

Mori (2012) noted that our warm feelings towards a robot tend to increase the more it comes to resemble a human, until these warm feelings take a dip as the robot reaches what Mori estimates to be a 75-95% resemblance. He labelled this dip the uncanny valley. Consistent with Jentsch's conception, Mori also finds that observing an ill person may evoke uncanny feelings, a human corpse even more so, while a zombie (which are mostly encountered in fiction films) is likely to trigger very strong uncanny feelings.

Many of Freud's observations on the uncanny elaborate on the principles and examples that Jentsch provided thirteen years earlier (although Freud paradoxically claims Jentsch's conception of the uncanny to be misguided). With curious relevance for the current exploration of uncanny mediality, Freud, building on Jentsch, observes that uncanny feelings may arise when we get the impression that "that automatic, mechanical processes are at work" in humans (1971, 226).

Freud also draws on Otto Rank's book *Der Doppelgänger*, written in 1914 (published in 1925), which addresses mirrors, shadows and guardian spirits. Freud writes: "the 'double' was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death,' as Rank says; and probably the 'immortal' soul was the first 'double' of the body […] The same desire led the ancient Egyptians to the art of making images of the dead in some lasting materials. […] But when this stage has been surmounted, the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (1971, 235).

With curious prescience, Freud's summary of Rank's ideas anticipates not only major contributions to understanding the relation between photography and death. It also presages the uncanny powers social media now hold over many

users, the ways in which such media may impinge on and even compromise the agency of users through addicting them to nurture their digital doubles, in the service of boosting attention for their digital Doppelgängers, and thereby, for the social media companies that secure the brunt of the profit from these efforts.

Freud goes on to unfold the uncanny potential in the double by introducing us to one form the "uncanny harbinger of death" may take: "In Ewers's film, *Der Student von Prag* (1913), which is the starting-point of Rank's study on the 'double,' the hero has promised his beloved not to kill his antagonist in a duel. But on his way to the duelling-ground he meets his 'double,' who has already killed his rival" (Freud, 1971, 236, note 1). Again, agency is eroded. Thus, the student cannot hold to his promise. A version of himself is out there, acting in his name. It is not merely doing things the student cannot control. It also, in effect, seizes control over the student's life.

The Ontology of Photography

I noted that the uncanny mediality of GIFs in part may stem from its photographic mediality. In fact, photography is mired in uncanny mediality from its early years. Karl Dauthendey addressed the compelling realism of the first Daguerreotypes by noting that: "in the early days, people […] were startled by the vividness of the figures and believed that the tiny little faces […] who appeared on the image could see them too" (Dauthendey cited in Benjamin 2015, 69). Dauthendey's account of how spectators in the first years of photography had the impression that the people portrayed in the images could return their gazes touches on a lasting uncanny quality that still haunts photographic mediality.

Almost 100 years later, André Bazin praises the unique power of the photographic image to make those photographed present to spectators. He goes as far as to write: "the photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it" (Bazin, 2005, 14). When Bazin writes that the photographic image is "the object itself," he comes close to reporting what, according to Dauthendey, early spectators felt as they were startled by the vividness of the tiny little faces. Thus, both Dauthendey and Bazin come to relay the experience of looking at a photographic portrait as eerily similar to looking into the face of a real person. Bazin draws inspiration from Jean Paul Sartre's phenomenology when he indicates how, for spectators, the photographic medium on some level withdraws from our experience and allows us to perceive the person photographed rather than their mere portrait. Sartre suggests that such

a process involves a faint animation when he notes that, "if that photo appears to me as the photo 'of Pierre,' if, in some way, I see Pierre behind it, it is necessary that the piece of card [the photograph] is animated with some help from me" (2004, 19). By suggesting that the photographic medium somehow withdraws from the experience, so as to weaken the boundary between the animate model and the inanimate image, Bazin and Sartre implicitly point to uncanny potentials along similar lines as relayed by Dauthendey.

We should also note that Bazin, echoing Rank, construes the photographic image as a defense against death. Bazin does this through his notion of the mummy complex, which embodies a desire to eternalize, whether it be by means of the mummy, the sculptural, the painterly, as well as the photographic portrait. Ironically, this "defense against death" also proves potentially deadening. Many who are not so comfortable being portrayed by a camera know this all too well. But no one has probably described it in a more compelling manner than Roland Barthes when he accounts for the process of being photographed. Barthes eloquently demonstrates that the animation of the people portrayed in the mind of the beholder, noted by Dauthendey, Sartre and Bazin, has its parallel in a form of a de-animation integral to being photographed.

Accounting for the process of being photographed, Barthes writes: "once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes. I constitute myself in the process of 'posing' […] I transform myself in advance into an image […] I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it" (1981, 10–11). Barthes's phenomenological description of the process of being photographed reveals a medial operation in which his agency is enlisted in the service of the photograph so as to have him transform himself into an image before the camera shoots him. In effect, he freezes himself before he is frozen by the camera. Paradoxically, the camera mortifies him in its attempt to eternalize him.

Barthes also suggests that the medial logic of photography may somehow appear to awaken the dead, an observation especially relevant to the Victorian tradition of post-mortem photography: "in the case of photographing corpses […] if the photograph then becomes horrible, it is because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive […] by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive" (1981, 78–79). Thus, photography, compensating for freezing and thereby de-animating a living face is also capable of re-animating faces, and thereby even having us assign life to someone who is dead since we conjecture that only what is real can be photographed and that a real person is also alive. The horror of such

an uncanny medial operation is well effected in this Victorian photograph of a daughter with her parents seen in Figure 1.

Due to an uncanny mediality rarely observed in photographs, the dead daughter in the middle looks more sparklingly alive than her ghostly-looking parents. While the corpse was perfectly stilled when the photograph was taken, her living parents were not. The absence of effective neck braces that could lock the subjects' heads into place, to compensate for an exposure time longer than a fragment of a second, prepared the ground for this uncanny reversal.

The transformative power of photography, its ability to turn "living beings into things, things into living beings," in the words of Susan Sontag (2005, 75), was also celebrated by the surrealists. They were deeply fascinated with the photographic work of Jean Eugène Auguste Atget, especially with his mannequins, which seemed eerily alive.

The Eerily Alive Mannequin

Kevin Burg and Jamie Beck sought to develop a sophisticated GIF suitable for marketing. A Cinemagraph, which they labelled the fruit of their pursuits, seeks to bring life to a photographic moment through inserting an element of movement in an otherwise still image. It features a hidden looping point so as to conjure a moment lingering on forever, a "perpetual present," as Bering-Porter (2014, 188) calls it, a frozen space-time paradoxically moving. Its mediality, its medial logic, is premised upon having the still image pitted against the moving image so as to create an impossible image, a medial oxymoron that invites a lingering conflict in our sensorium between the way we see moving images and the way we see still photographs. The result is transfixing. Cinemagraphs illustrate how the intermedial tension between the medialities defining still and moving photographic images respectively, can provide ample potential for uncanny mediality. Tipping its hat to the surrealists' fascination with Atget's mannequins, this Cinemagraph featuring the fashion model Emily Ratajkowski fingering her ripped jeans may be among the most uncanny GIFs produced.[4]

In this GIF, the conflict between stillness and movement is intensified by making the human body the arena where these conflicting medialities are pitted against each other. (If no body part had been moving, and only a curtain in the background had been blowing in the wind, the uncanny effect would largely dissipate.) One part

4 See the GIF of Emily Ratajkowski fingering her ripped jeans here: *https://annstreetstudio.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/emily-gif-final-980.gif*. Last accessed 27. 08. 2023.

of the model's body is moving while the other parts remain still. Her moving left arm invites viewers to expect that other body parts move too. But alarmingly, they show no signs of life. If we attempt to normalise her stillness, akin to the stillness of a photograph, her moving arm becomes eerie, uncanny. Vexed in irreconcilable medialities – she cannot move, yet she moves – we struggle to harmonise the intermedial tensions between de-animation and animation.

The medial uncanniness effected is furthermore complimented by the ways in which uncanniness is thematised. This involves the obsessive-compulsive fingering of her ripped jeans paired with her blasé attitude. "Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist […] feet which dance by themselves […] all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them," writes Freud, "especially when […] they prove capable of independent activity" (1971, 244).

The model's obsessive-compulsive fingering may testify to a potentiality for what Prince called joy in repetition, but joy is impeded by boredom. She is stuck in an empty time confluent with her blasé expression. This GIF sells jeans, and the fashion model's jaded attitude echoes the deadened look of the mannequin meant to guide the attention to the clothes on display. The directness of the model's gaze, however, also carries a dare to the observer, perhaps to enter the picture and help her with the itch she seems unable to satisfactorily scratch.

However, it is also possible to see her disjointed appearance as grotesque, even ridiculous. Curiously, mechanization of the human body may not elicit only uncanny feelings. It may also invite laughter, whereby the uncanniness is subdued. A case in point is Charlie Chaplin's hilarious colliding of the living body with the machine in *Modern Times* (1936). Interestingly, the comedy appears subdued when his out of control automated eating machine is remediated in this GIF.[5]

Perhaps this is because the comic effect in the original film scene rests on balancing Chaplin's lively vigour against the mechanisation forced on his body by the machine. The uncanny mediality of the GIF unsettles this balance. It suppresses Chaplin's liveliness by means of the jerky motion of a radically low frame rate combined with the unremitting repetitions of the GIF. Comedy gives way to uncanniness, but, as much to plain cruelty as the man's ability to stand up to the machine is depleted.

By pitting movement against stillness, machine against body, technology against human – the GIF appears well-poised to allegorize the fundamentally

5 Here is a version of the GIF based on an excerpt from *Modern Times* (1936) in which Chaplin is pounded by his out of control eating machine: *https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1229821-gif*. Last accessed 27. 08. 2023.

fraught relation we have with technology – our desires to embrace it, as well as our fears of the ways in which it reduces us to props in its own machinations.

Uncanny Intermediality and the Computational Remaking of Media

While many GIFs are mere moving image snippets looped by a rudimentary algorithm, GIFs like the Cinemagraph featuring Ratajkowski is, as we have seen, partly premised on a computational remaking and combination of previously irreconcilable medialities. The malleability of digital imagery has in recent years been boosted by the advent of a series of new technologies based on deep learning. This involves generational adversarial networks (GANs) fueling StyleGAN which drives the website *This Person Does Not Exist*, a website which generates images that are close to indistinguishable from photographic portraits.[6] The uncanny truth alluded to in the name of the website, however, is that those portrayed could not have been photographed because they do not exist beyond their StyleGAN-generated portraits. GANs also support so called *deepfakes*, many of which are premised on animating a camera-based recording of one person with movement data from another. An audiovisual file can thereby be produced that displays a person engaged in conduct that never took place. Beyond such technologies, Generative AI systems trained on sets of images with text captions, like *Imagen*, *DALL-E*, *Midjourney*, *Adobe Firefly* and *Stable Diffusion*, which are commonly used to generate images from textual prompts, have also produced images that human eyes cannot discern from photographs. The computational remaking of photographic imagery effected by these developments is likely to involve further intermedial tensions that can energize uncanny mediality in various forms. A case in point is offered by the genealogy service, My Heritage.

Deep Nostalgia

According to My Heritage's website, their GAN-based technology, *Deep Nostalgia*, is able to: "animate the faces in your family photos with amazing technology."[7] The system is tailored especially for deceased family members. Once again, we have a mediality capable of bringing life to the dead. My Heritage acknowledges

6 See: *https://thispersondoesnotexist.com/*. Last accessed 27. 08. 2023.

7 See the My Heritage Deep Nostalgia website: *https://www.myheritage.com/deep-nostalgia*. Last accessed 27. 08. 2023.

that their technology is not merely "fascinating, but a bit uncanny […] Some […] consider it magical, while others find it creepy."

They seek to avoid ethical pitfalls by not allowing the dead to speak and by delimiting the technology to offering strictly curated actions the dead can perform. Animating the living through user-generated actions and allowing them to speak would risk aligning the technology with deepfakes notoriously able to portray people saying and doing things they never said or did.

Instead of life, however, it could be argued that *Deep Nostalgia* merely grants a few pre-scripted moves to be mapped onto the family member, turning the dead into a marionette dolls executing the commands My Heritage has deemed suitable. The looping repetition of strict predefined scripts awakens the dead inside a virtual straitjacket reminiscent of the limited set of moves early automatons were consigned to execute again and again. Death by repetition is thereby implicitly programmed into the liveliness on offer.

When My Heritage, after a while, sought to expand the palette of moves, such as the modestly blinking eyes, look to the side, and the faint smile on the lips, the expansion seemed not to address the uncanny quality of the animation. Instead, realizing that the honourable moves designed to invoke veneration for the dead more than liveliness had limited appeal for younger users, My Heritage sought to spice up the animation by adding funky music fitting new moves. This made the animation somewhat less uncanny, the dead could seem more "fun," even ridiculous bordering on grotesque.[8]

The animated loops Deep Nostalgia produces are suspended in an intermedial tension between the mediality of the still photographs they originated from and the looped moving image operating akin to a GIF. A fundamental uncertainty as to whether what we see here is animate or inanimate, and over whose agency operate to animate the dead, looms over this curious mediality and ensures its uncanny character.

Deep Nostalgia, much like deepfakes, draws on the tradition of motion capture, whereby movements from someone or something is captured and mapped onto the depiction of another individual or object. Thus, motion capture at its very core is premised on an operation which is eerily close to a major source of the uncanny described by Jentsch as well as by Freud. They are both concerned with the sensation that a body moves in ways that we come to perceive as resulting from external forces seizing control over its movements. Thus, we come to doubt

8 An illustration of this "special animation" can be seen here: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJ7Jn1Zp58o* Last accessed 27. 08. 2023.

that the body movements originate from internal forces and suspect that they instead originate from something external. It is on this principle that epileptic seizures can appear so uncanny.

An even more scary overtaking of bodies from external forces is well known within religious practices. Two divergent models tend to be in play. Bodies can be taken to manifest the Holy Spirit thorough speech and body movements seemingly controlled by an external force. Speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) is a phenomenon in which the chosen body becomes a medium through which the Holy Spirit makes itself present to the congregation. It is a common practice within Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, for example. In the Pentecostal tradition, the focus is mainly on the speech, emanating from vocal cords guided by the Holy Spirit to fluently articulate a natural language unbeknownst to humans. The accompanying body movements – movements that seem at least abnormal for a person to perform in church clothes on a peaceful Sunday morning, including jerking, flailing, dancing wildly, jumping high or rolling on the floor – lend credibility to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the flesh of a chosen believer.

A darker presence manifesting a similar logic can be found in cases where evil forces are thought to seize control over unwitting human bodies. This idea has inspired practices of exorcism through which demons, evil spirits, even the Devil, is extricated from the human who has been possessed. Such conceptions and practices are well-suited to both charismatic religious practices and to horror movies, and, of course, a combination of the two (e.g. *The Exorcist* franchise which celebrated its 50-year anniversary of its first film with the theatrical release of *The Exorcist: Believer* on 13 October 2023).

Evidently, a key challenge when using motion capture in film production is to produce an impression of a full integration of the bodily movements with the character so that the impression of an external force overtaking the body of a character does not arise even if this is technically what happens. To the extent the integration succeeds, the bodily movements seem to naturally originate from the internal forces of the character being portrayed. Of course, the plot of a film may also involve the idea that external forces are overtaking the movement of a body. The integration may in such cases deliberately be made to lack credibility in ways that suggest external forces are operation in stealth fashion.

The project of My Heritage may be seen as part and parcel of a more general project concerning cultural heritage at present. In the teaser for the newly established podcast Libraries and Museums, it was stated that "digital is breathing

life into the old cultural heritage institutions."[9] The institutions are not merely breathing life into themselves, however, they also seek to breathe life into the heritage objects they collect and display. When the resources of the computational remaking of photographic imagery are mobilized to colorize, enhance and animate image collections, just as private collections can be enhanced by My Heritage, more uncanny mediality awaits us.

The biblical metaphor used here for what "digital" brings to cultural heritage work comes close to positioning the human as the creator of life, a trope met with warnings of hubris throughout cultural history.[10] The Greek myth of Prometheus comes to mind. Famous for defying the gods, not only by stealing fire from them and giving it to humanity, an act instituting human technology, knowledge and science, but also (in one version of the myth) for creating humanity from clay.

A recent gift from Prometheus is precisely the powerful new computational technologies remaking media, in part by animating them in powerful ways, not only according to human-guided insights, but increasingly by autonomous processes that machines are teaching themselves. This agency, now executed by agents partly beyond human control, that in part may animate the inanimate, are set to remake media in ways that effect and energize intermedial tensions tailored to proliferate uncanny mediality. Our uncanny photographic futures may further be strengthened by the increasingly autonomous operations of machine learning algorithms that in part relocate agency from humans to machines.

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9 See: *https://podcasts.apple.com/no/podcast/announcing-the-microsoft-libraries-and-museums-podcast/id1542728476?i=1000500902814*. Last accessed 27. 08. 2023.

10 Genesis 2:7 states that: "LORD JEHOVAH God formed Adam of the dust from the soil, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and Adam was a living soul."

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Figure 1. Victorian era post-mortem family portrait of parents with their deceased daughter. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

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Uncanny Colours of the Past. Phenomenological Notes on Remediation and Colourization of Black-and-White Footage

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Abstract. The article analyses the problem of colouring black and white archival footage in *Spain in Two Trenches: The Civil War in Colour* (*España en dos trincheras. La guerra civil en color*, Francesc Ecribano and Luis Carrizo, 2016), which was made by digitizing and colouring more than 450 surviving films of the Spanish Civil War. The analysis focuses on the kind of affects and perceptual mechanisms which might ensue from the colourization of archival black and white footage, and on the justification of the use of colour to authenticate an event that has already happened. At the beginning of the paper, the author briefly reviews the approaches of the increasingly close relationship between mediatization and memory, then focuses on the justification of colourization in the light of the Spanish documentary and compares it with issues of perceptual realism. In the final part of the analysis, the author examines the historical consequences of the reconfiguration of the past in colour.[1]

Keywords: colourization, remedialization, perceptual realism, found footage films, media ecology.

One day, as I was scrolling through Instagram, a photo of a seaside with a colourful cavalcade of sunbathers and beachgoers caught my eyes.[2] First, I noticed the woman standing with the grey umbrella and the boy with the green swimsuit, and then I started to look at the crowd of people swimming on the beach. The sight of the lady in the yellow hat became suspicious to me and I scrolled down to the caption of the

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2 *https://www.instagram.com/p/CmNF6BjMMVJ/?hl=en.* Last accessed 25. 08. 2023.

picture: *A crowded beach in Atlantic City, New Jersey, photographed in 1908*. For a few seconds, the colourized photo uploaded to Instagram really deceived me with the addition of realistic colours, depth of field and shading: the bustling crowd in the colourful image blended effortlessly with the millions of other photos uploaded at the same time to the photo-sharing platform. More and more advanced digital colouring techniques allow us to see many (moving) image representations of our history in colour that were only seen in black and white before: a portrait of Abraham Lincoln (1862), Jean-Claude Monet in his garden (1899), a Navajo man dressed as a mythical hero (1904), American soldiers on the battlefield in World War II (1942)[3] – it now seems that almost every corner of our past can be coloured. In addition to colourized photographs, the last decade has seen an increasing number of documentaries featuring colourized footage of historical significance, such as *They Shall Not Grow Old* (Peter Jackson, 2018), *Warsaw Uprising* (Jan Komasa, 2014) and *Auschwitz Untold in Colour* (David Shulman, 2020). But the final result of colourized photographs seems to be (still) different, albeit slightly, from colourized moving images. In my view, the realism of the former is superior to the latter: while in a still image the technique of colour, contours, depth of field and shading can be more easily executed and the result is "believable," in the case of motion pictures the not fully authentic colouring can disrupt the spectator's cinematic experience.

In what follows, I will analyse the problem of colouring black and white archival footage in *Spain in Two Trenches: The Civil War in Colour* (*España en dos trincheras. La guerra civil en color*, Francesc Ecribano and Luis Carrizo, 2016), which was made by digitizing and colouring more than 450 surviving films of the Spanish Civil War. Although the film is composed of archival footage, it was "shot" in 2016 through the addition of colour and rearrangement. In the film, the archival footage was digitized in 4K and modified using rotoscoping and masking techniques: the filmmakers first isolated the elements seen in the scenes and then animated them. The filmmakers were also able to select a large number of shots because at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War journalists and photographers were already using 16mm film cameras and the lighter Leica IIIa, which allowed much greater mobility – and so a large number of moving and still images were taken during the Civil War. Although my analysis focuses primarily on this film, I will attempt to make more general statements about the phenomenon, justification and problems of documentary colouring.

3 *https://historycolored.com/photos/9883/top-15-most-popular-colorized-photos-of-2022-instagram-edition/?fbclid=IwAR1Nw8BtajHn_97mNiidu1FwGtKqK_0IUL0a9-GGLx7ui0pHJzsk8GWNO44*. Last accessed 25. 08. 2023.

The methodology of my analysis is based on Neil Postman's concept of media ecology, by which he means the study of the media environment (the structure, content, and impact on people) and "how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value" (Postman 1970, 161). My analysis does not attempt to provide a holistic explanation of the problem of digital colouring, but rather focuses on certain aspects of it: since rapidly developing colourization technologies are producing an increasingly diverse range of photographic and filmic results, my analysis is not intended to be a detailed examination of the whole, diverse field.

Mediatized Past, Media Memory, Remediation

"The digital does rupture and utterly reimagine and replace the twentieth century's imaginings, aspirations and technologies of memory" – Andrew Hoskins's (2018, 6) observations on the changing conceptualization of memory and the experience of time brought about by digitalization point precisely to the fact that the social and cultural framework of memory in our time has become much more uncertain and looser than in the previous century. Since the "second memory boom"[4] the role of the media has become increasingly dominant in the field of memory studies: alongside the initial concept of a mediatized past, new subfields have emerged that no longer consider media as ancillary but make it the central object of their analysis and a fundamental part of memory, such as media memory studies or digital memory studies. Although the different schools of memory studies do not always make compatible claims, they share a common starting point: that by the 21st century, our past, our history and even our present have become fully mediatized. Through the various forms of recording, editing and archiving, we store pieces of our history in a mediatized way: not only can we look back and listen to material recorded by the media invented and developed in the 19th and 20th centuries (photography, radio, television, internet), but we can also use them to re-present events from earlier times. It can now be stated without reservation that the media and historical events are inseparable: to understand the past, it is essential to examine how history is represented in media, since

4 In the twentieth century, the dominance of the media began to increasingly define the social and individual framework of memory. "The start of the second memory boom thus marked a convergence a new public will-to-remember with the technologies that gave such remembrances their archival form, including the dominance of the institutions of Big Media and state with relative control over access to and dissemination of the public archives of heritage, museums, broadcast and other media content" (Hoskins 2018, 7).

"memory as such is constantly renewed by the media and technologies (and the metaphors) of the day – in this way it is always 'new' – as well as through these same media reflexively shaping a reassessment of the very value of remembering and forgetting under these conditions" (Hoskins 2016, 15). The phenomenon Andrew Hoskins calls the "connective turn" ("the immediacy, connectivity and volume of digital data and information" [Hoskins and Halsted, 2021]) could lead to a new approach to history and an ontological turn in the study of memory. "It has re-engineered memory, liberating it from the traditional bounds of the spatial archive, the organization, the institution, and distributed it on a continuous basis via a connectivity between brains, bodies, and personal and public lives. This opening up of new ways of finding, sorting, sifting, using, seeing, losing and abusing the past, both imprisons and liberates active human remembering and forgetting" – Hoskins writes (2018, 1–2). In the last decade, the idea of memory as a process and not as fixed has inspired approaches such as "prosthetic memory" (Landsberg 2004), "multidirectional memories" (Rothberg 2009) or "travelling memory" (Erll 2011).

I consider one of the main intersections and common points of these approaches to be an earlier concept that Hoskins created in the 2000s, the new memory. The theorist argues that in our social milieu defined by digital recording technologies and media, we need to rethink the basic concepts and claims of memory studies that have been used for decades. He believes that we can no longer consider the representation of a particular historical event as secondary, but rather make the mediatized representation itself the primary object of experience. The concept of new memory points to the transmediation of collective memory, to the changed medial conditions, and to the rupture in our relationship to the past in the late modern era (Hoskins 2001). The real stake of Hoskins's analysis is to point out that this kind of new memory does not only imply that a given (historical) event is now mediatized and manipulated, but rather that he sees the individual medium as a "site of the production of the 'original' memory" (Hoskins 2001, 340). In his view, representation is no longer secondary to the actual event, but it precedes that: we store information about the past in our minds almost exclusively in mediatized forms. It is this medial primacy that distinguishes the new memory from the old: it is not the historical event that we remember, but the mediatized form of the historical event: the mediated content is the event itself.[5] In other

5 "To this end it is critical to recognize that a new ontology for memory studies is needed that is cognizant of media, and not as some partial or occasional or temporary shaper of memory, but as fundamentally altering what it is and what is possible to remember and to forget" (Hoskins 2018, 7).

words, mediatization is not secondary to the experience, but part of it, and the further we are from an event, the more its role is enhanced – our access to the world is primarily through these mediated channels. Furthermore, it is crucial to state that the media are not seen as an external tool or "container" to help store human memory, but rather as an intertwining of the two: Hoskins sees memory as a "dynamic trajectory of hyper-relationships" that can no longer be separated from the means that act on it or create it (Hoskins 2016, 18). However, it is important to clarify that in the context of contemporary user culture, this shift in digital culture is not an absolute opposition to the past.

It is not only that; with the development of television and the spread of social media, more and more images of the world around us are being recorded, shared, broadcast and archived in one way or another by different media, but that this mechanism also works backwards in time. As John Whiteclay Chambers and David Culbert note: "the public memory of war in the twentieth century has been created less from a remembered past than from a manufactured past, one substantially shaped by images in documentaries, feature films and television programs" (Whiteclay and Culbert 1996, 6). The focus of the authors' analysis is the extent to which contemporary culture is defined by fictional and documentary images and perspectives of the world and how these affect our perceptions of reality.[6] In other words, we do not only store the present as the past, but also constantly re-archive the bygone events. Technological advances have made it possible to store more and more memory, thus, in a sense, we can speak of a "saturation of memory." On the one hand, the continuous recording of our present creates an unprecedented amount of visual documentation of the world around us,[7] but for the purposes of my current analysis it is more important to focus on the mediatized representation of the past. Pierre Nora's analysis from 1989 is not yet about the digital conditions of today but it is a study of memory in general. In this essay, he already named memory archival

6 Similarly, Vivian Sobchack argues for the medial malleability of the past, focusing less on the novelty of twentieth-century events and more on the "novel technologies of representation" that has made visible events never seen before. Thus, the occurrence of an event and its representation have become increasingly simultaneous: the theorist argues that the time required to "become history" has been shortened: history is no longer happened "before" us and "after" us, but "history is happening now." And with the extensive mediatization of our lives, our image of history is transformed as well. By this, Sobchack refers not only to the immediacy of live broadcastings, but also to the continuous use and transformation of archival recordings in the present, and thus to the modification of their meaning (Sobchack 1996, 4–5).

7 Hoskins later refers to this phenomenon as "grey memory:" "And that brings us on to the notion of 'grey memory:' the sense that a conscious, active, willed memory is obscured in the digital era." "Grey memory" is "a kind of shapeless and diffused memory in which the world around us slips out of focus as compulsive digital recording and sharing of the present becomes more important than experiencing it" (Hoskins and Halsted 2021).

even though it was then identified as modern memory: contemporary memory. He writes that memory "relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image" (Nora 1989, 13). He argues that the vocation of memory is rather the continuous preservation of the present, which is passing away at every moment: thus, "[memory] has been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstitution" (Nora 1989, 13).

What Nora identifies as memory is in fact a vast repository of material that would be impossible to remember or recall even in fragments. In accordance with this, Hoskins argues that since the end of the 20th century to archive is to "no longer require the need to remember it:" the theorist believes that "the contestation of memory has shifted from memory to the archive itself" (Hoskins 2001, 344). This role of the archive has always been present in cultural theory, but what is new is that digital archives can be identified as a data set: it is the time of the archive that is changing, i.e. as if digital archives hold the absolute promise of accessibility.

Therefore, the stakes of my article are related to the claims associated with the "third memory boom," i.e. the belief in the knowability of the archive: "if we look hard enough and wide enough and long enough, the truth will surely (and must) be found" (Hoskins 2018, 4). What does this new turn of memory mean specifically for the study of archival footage, and how can we approach from this perspective those contemporary found footage films which are using old footage, often of historical significance? To explore the problem of colourization, it is worth focusing briefly on the issue of the remediation of archival footage first. In her book *Remediating Transcultural Memory*, Dagmar Brunow argues that archival footage both exemplifies "the media specificity of memory" and raises the problems of adapting and modifying memory (Brunow 2015, 4). The theorist uses the remediation concept of Astrid Erll, which refers to the re-representation of events on different medial platforms. In her view, remediation can, on the one hand, contribute to the stabilization of our cultural memory by repeating or creating certain narratives of the past, and on the other hand, its reappearance in a new context can also destabilize it (Erll 2008, 393). The techniques of representation and archiving of the 1970s were already good examples of the construction of narratives of the past, since confrontation and public reckoning with the world war and other disasters were made possible primarily through the audiovisual media of the time (Hoskins 2018, 6).

Brunow uses Aleida Assmann's terms "storage memory" and "functional memory" to analyse the phenomenon of remediation: to bring archival images

to life, it is necessary to remediate and circulate them on different media platforms (one of the means of doing this is, for example, the digitization of analogue recordings). In this way, old material can become part of functional memory: Brunow thus identifies the archival condition with storage memory, and remediation with functional memory, because "what is not continuously remediated, will soon be forgotten" (Brunow 2015, 15). Referring to the theorist Stuart Hall's assertion ("The past cannot speak, except through its 'archive'" [Hall 1991, 152]), he argues that dealing with archival material in a cinematic sense can be understood as an "act of remembrance," which he also attributes a performative character, since he conceives remembrance not as a constant, stable state, but as a process. This approach also implies a reformulation of the phenomenon of remediation. In Brunow's view, in earlier discourses on remediation, the medial material in the public space had a secure meaning, which had been displaced by its re-mediation and its meaning superseded by a new layer. However, Brunow argues that in this case it is important to point out that archival images, photographs, film footage, etc. should not be ascribed an inherent meaning, an essentially true character, or an original meaning, but that these medial traces are "the result of a set of practices within a specific discursive framework. Each new dissemination creates new meanings. Thus, photographs (and the same goes for archival film footage) are polyvocal, 'multiaccentual'" (Brunow 2015, 150). Brunow quotes Stuart Hall who says that "no such previously natural moment of true meaning, untouched by the codes and social relations of production and reading, and transcending historical time, exists" (Hall 1991, 152).

The perception of re-used archive footage could be approached in a film-phenomenological way through Jaimie Baron's concept of the archive effect. This term refers to the viewer's realization that the footage was shot in a different era to his or her own (Baron 2014, 19). However, *Spain in Two Trenches* reduces the sense of temporal distance that the archival effect induces by colourizing the black and white footage,[8] which is now perceived as almost abstract, and thus "contemporizing" the shots. One of the main concerns of my analysis is how this documentary – which focuses specifically on remembrance in the present – is organized into a particular form of archival material, and how the viewer's perception of the familiar footage is altered by the effect of the remediation.

8 Cf. A viewer's comment on the video called *The Early 20th Century Seen in Real Color*: "Historic photos in color simply feel more 'real' to me, than black and white ones do." *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsN2PBhYMPI&t=390s* Last accessed 03.02.2023.

Layered and "Free-floating" Colours

Why do we need colourization to create the illusion of "liveness"[9] and to authenticate historical documentary footage, i.e. what makes colour footage more authentic for the contemporary viewer? If we would like to approach this problem from a perceptual point of view, we should first look at it from the problem of realism. On the one hand, it could be argued that our perception is influenced by technology, by changes in media configurations, and that black and white moving images may appear abstract to the contemporary viewer. In my view, one of the aims of the colouring was to create the illusion of increased spatiality, since this property of moving images that can best blur the distinction between simulation and reality. This issue was already a priority at the time of the advent of colour film, since, as Friedrich Kittler notes, after the introduction of stereo sound and the widescreen, colour was "able to deceive the three-dimensionality of ears and eyes" (Kittler 2010, 207). In the context of spatiality and photographic authenticity, David N. Rodowick uses Stephen Prince's concept of perceptual realism, which focuses on the production of cultural norms of representation. In Rodowick's view, if we deem an image to be real based on our everyday perception, we will thereby judge it to be representational in nature – "representation is defined as spatial correspondence" (Rodowick 2007, 102). Rodowick quotes Stephen Prince, who draws parallels between everyday perception and the representational modes and codes of images: "A perceptually realistic image is one which structurally corresponds to the viewer's audiovisual experience of three-dimensional space. Perceptually realistic images correspond to this experience because film-makers build them to do so. Such images display a nested hierarchy of cues which organize the display of light, color, texture, movement, and sound in ways that correspond with the viewer's own understanding of these phenomena in daily life" (Prince 1996, 32). (However, it is important to note that Rodowick's and Prince's claims are not mutually compatible, the two theorists are not making assertions that are consistent with each other. Although Prince's concept is very important for Rodowick, since it allows him to capture and analyse the kind of realism whose essence is that "real is what is *like* the real," Rodowick emphasizes not the spatial

9 In one of *ranker.com*'s articles featuring colourized historical photos, users cannot only view the modified images, but also vote under each photo: "Vote up the old pictures in color that make you see the event, person, time, or place completely differently." *https://www.ranker.com/list/colorized-historical-photos/mallory-weiler?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=creepy&pgid=1011190218967434&utm_campaign=colorized-historical-photos&fbclid=IwAR2_Miro9NSk0hcnHvrp2L6_ZRLdc1lkAn-3mTz3utl3F_v4336F58Kx5g8* Last accessed 28. 08. 2023.

information but the weakening of continuity in the analogue-digital shift. This is because the indexicality that characterizes analogue photography, i.e. the fact that the photograph develops a kind of continuity with its subject, is weakened in the case of digital image.)

If we take this theory of correspondence as a basis for analysing reactions to rare colour footage of historical events, the users' opinion that Jaimie Baron examines in relation to National Geographic's *WWII in Color* (Vincent Kralyevich, 1998)[10] can be more easily explained. In Baron's view, the footage does not offer new information or a "radical revision" of the black and white moving images we have seen before: the films do not promise intellectual understanding but an affective sense of presence. According to the theorist, colour in this case serves to suspend temporal disparity, and thus the viewer feels closer in time to the events he or she sees. If we look at the footage of *Spain in Two Trenches* from this point of view, we are dealing with a kind of "artificial proximity:" the filmmakers attempt to satisfy the viewer's affective desire for presence by artificially endowing the scenes with spatiality, thus reducing temporal disparity. This, of course, cannot be attributed to the explicit intention of the filmmakers, but it is a consequence.

If we look at the problem of spatiality in the case of the Spanish film, we can notice that we as spectators are not only disturbed by the result of the added colours – that, despite the intention of the artists, the colours seem to be added afterwards and not really "realistic" or lifelike, but in places the shots seem to lose their depth, the people and objects in the background become papery: as if there is only height and width, without depth, as if the spectator's sense of depth of field would be lost. [Figs. 1–2.] In my view, in technical terms the change in depth occurred because the colourization also modifies the depth of field: while in some of the original shots the depth of field seemed to be small (meaning that it could have been shot with a f2.8–5.6 aperture), the colourization made it larger. The reason, I believe, is that the figures in the background, originally blurred because of the small depth of field. Their shapes are made vivid by the strong contours the colouring gives them, so that the figures in the background now have strange blurred–sharp borders. (The colourization in the film gives the effect of having changed the shots from a large aperture to a smaller [about f16].)

10 "Seeing things in color that I have always seen in black and white before somehow brings them closer to home – it makes it easier to identify with the people. For me, this helps bring more immediacy to the stories my stepdad told me about his experiences in that war." "It is very different to watch WWII movies in color. Most of us are accustomed to the black and white scenes that are so very familiar. World War II in color is rather chilling. To see the war, its graphicness, its horror, even the mundane, in color you get a more realistic view" (Baron 2014, 165).

However, because the shapes in the background of the black and white footage are not originally sharp, the colourized version will not produce a sharp image in all its corners, but rather as if we were looking at superimposed images – with an effect similar to that of a fold-out book or cut-out cardboard figures. In this way, although the colourization serves to increase the sense of spatiality, the technical solutions mean that the colour remains layered in most cases.[11]

This kind of layering can be reminiscent of the stencilled colour solutions of the early film era. In my view, colours never cease to be "added:" they never become part, essence, constituent of the objects seen in the shot (since they are essentially black and white), but exist on the surface of the picture plane, as patches of colour. An interesting parallel can be drawn with the observations of Jacques Aumont, who, in relation to the early stencil-coloured films, argued that "hand-painting or stencilling […] tends to produce patches of colour floating in front of objects and blurring their shape. This 'free-floating' colour becomes more or less independent of the objects 'behind' it, which is rather eery. If we think about this phenomenologically, we might wonder how we can even identify the colourless objects behind these floating colours. […] On a perceptual level, colour generally seems to possess an independent material existence, more or less detached from the objects represented in these films" (Aumont 1996, 53–54). Based on Aumont's concept, we can therefore consider colour as a separate level, and we can think of it as a temporal layer.

The approach of colour as a temporal layer can also be explained in terms of Hoskins' concept of the "presentness effect:" this term describes the effects of television, through which electronic media (primarily television) manipulate time and space to assemble various elements of the past into "living" material. This kind of chronologically perfected stream is the opposite of the fragmentary, discontinuous nature of human memory – so the electronic media give us the impression of always having the most recent version of the past in the present. As Andreas Huyssen writes: "all representation – whether in language, narrative, image, or recorded sound – is based on memory. *Re*-presentation always comes after, even though some media will try to provide us with the delusion of pure presence. But rather than leading us to some authentic origin or giving us verifiable access to the real, memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation" (1995, 2–3). If our claim is that in the Spanish film the colour was intended to amplify a sense of presence or presentness, then it can be argued that ideally, the use of colour can also function as a means of

11 Livingstone (2019) calls this a "perspectivally flattened space."

becoming the Assmannian living memory cited earlier. By bringing archival material into the present and with the layer of colour the directors give us the illusion of the "most recent" version of the past. I will return to the problem of the phenomenologically accessible past later.

Functions of Colouring and Its Phenomenological Consequences

As we have seen, colouring can be seen as a spatializing tool, which theoretically increases the sense of presence in an affective way and enhances those perceptual processes of the viewer that are linked to perceptual realism.[12] In what follows, I will briefly examine the types of impressions and effects produced by colouring.

At first glance, the colourization of the film can be interpreted as a desire for realism, but the striking, garish and, in many cases, floating layers of colour[13] on the figures do not fully achieve the sense of indexicality. Therefore, the shots could be perceived as losing their indexicality rather than becoming more "real:" the people and places in the footage are both actualized by being saturated with present-day colours and fictionalized by the striking, glaring colours. In this case, at first sight one might claim that the footage has become fake, that the directors' presentism has obscured the realistic representation of the original shots. However,

12 However, Rodowick points out that this perception of realism is medium-dependent, therefore changes over time. In his view, the ontology of our time is no longer photographic, characterized by indexicality and causality, but videographic: "the perceptual norm for the vast majority of spectators is videographic. It may be the case that contemporary spectators also 'want' the videographic as the will to a new electronic, rather than photographic, ontology" (Rodowick 2007, 109). Rodowick thus argues that our vision is fundamentally determined by the media configuration we live in, as it determines the norms we look for in previous techniques.

13 Gilles Deleuze classifies the "colour-image" as a kind of "any-space-whatever," which he does not consider symbolic or referential, but as a form of perceptual affect. "The colour-image does not refer to a particular object but absorbs all that it can: it is the power which seizes all that happens within its range, or the quality common to completely different objects. […] Colour is the affect itself, that is, the virtual conjunction of all the objects which it picks up" (Deleuze 1986, 118). The colour-image, in Deleuze's interpretation, is able to reorganize and transform movement and to create a state of dream, magic or strangeness by suspending its narrative functions: that is, colours rise up beyond the actual situation of the film narrative, and the characters, objects and the whole situation are merged into a collective, virtual movement of pure affect (Tasevska 2020). Of course, Deleuze's theory cannot be clearly paralleled with the colourization techniques of the Spanish film, since, as a documentary, even if it appears as a highly edited story, the typology of movement-images (perception-image, action-image, affect-image) cannot be applied to it. In analysing the effects of added colour, however, I believe that Deleuze's observations on temporality can move the subject of our study in an important direction: according to the philosopher, the colour-image emerges as a cinematic stoppage that interrupts the narrative continuity of the film and signals a temporality that exists beyond the diegesis (Deleuze 1989, 182–184).

if we compare this problem with Rodowick's claims about videographic ontology, i.e. the medium-specific, altered receptivity and perception of contemporary viewers, we can also argue that *Spain in Two Trenches* functions less as an imprint of the past than as a reinterpretation of the past in a contemporary context. This way of representing the past satisfies the needs of the viewers of our present time. As Beja Margitházi notes in the case of another sharply coloured film (*Warsaw Uprising*), the post-colouring, noise and synchronous sounds are made "for a contemporary audience, living in a new media environment, marked by speed, never ending entertainment and hyperstimulation on the senses" (Margitházi 2018). Therefore, the audiovisual modifications of these films can be approached as a response to the demands of the contemporary audience.[14]

A similar argument is made by Tom Livingstone, who suggests that the modifications of archival material do not necessarily prompt the viewer to question the footage's historical authenticity, despite its obvious alteration and manipulation. "'the colourized archive,' provokes little anxiety with regards to the truth content of the archive, despite the normative thrust and re-significatory impact of colourisation. […] colourisation updates the archive, but not to the technical standards of photorealism. Rather, colourisation updates the archive to the epistemological context […], wherein a media-contingent historical consciousness is undergoing a process of digital retroaction" (Livingstone 2019). On the loosened relationship between found footage films and indexicality, Desmond Bell argues that the archive ceases to be a signifier as soon as it is organized into a film format. "The found footage film does not seek to offer the immediate, indexical access to the past promised by the original photographic sources from which it is assembled. For in the found footage film the images are all mixed up. Combined together under a montage principle, they establish a different sort of relationship with the past to the denotational claims made for the individual photographic image" (Bell 2004).

In the case of *Spain in Two Trenches*, I would also add the explanatory function to Bell's remarks: in this film, in addition to the palpable ideological position of the extradiegetic narrative voice, which is typical of voice-of-god documentaries, the viewer's attention is directed by other audiovisual means, thus going beyond the status of found footage. This explanatory function is provided by the colour treatment, and within this, we could distinguish further categories. One of the most striking techniques in the film is highlighting and directing attention. This is particularly noticeable in scenes where flags are presented. In each case, the

14 In her analysis of *They Shall Not Grow Old*, Eszter Knopp (2020) makes similar observations.

filmmakers use strong colours to emphasize the affiliation of the armies, thus determining the direction of our gaze in the archival footage. Another function of the use of colour can be homogenization. [Figs. 3–6.] In several crowd scenes, although the figures in the shot pass each other in bright light, we can observe that they do not cast any shadows on each other in the coloured shot. Similarly, the colour of the uniforms is indistinguishably homogenous: the play of light and shadow almost disappears from the film, and the figures often merge into a large mass. In contrast to this, a third technique, individualization is emphasized in a few cases in particular: the shots of military leaders, people of higher rank, who are mentioned by name, are more meticulously coloured and more highlighted from their background and from the environment around them. In my view, these functions and effects are related: although it is possible that the detailed separation, which is likely to be challenging to implement, has not been carried out because of technical difficulties, the striking colour of the flags, the grouping of fighting civilians and soldiers into a homogeneous patch of colour, and the highlighting of the leaders by colours, provides a clear message without the need for an audio narration.

Perhaps the function that most subverts the status of archival footage is the immersive effect. In several scenes of the film, we see colourized sights that could be described as fairytale-like: the azure sky, the silky green grass, the golden yellow hay all provide an inviting scene to be immersed in. Thus, it is precisely the indexicality of the original footage that is tested by transforming the scenes of battle into pleasant landscapes for the viewer. This problem can also be approached from the perspective of Prince, who argues that digital effects are becoming more and more seamlessly part of the indexical image and in this changed perceptual environment a rupture occurred between the two types of realism: referentially and perceptually realistic images. "Referentially realistic images bear indexical and iconic homologies with their referents. They resemble the referent, which, in turn, stands in a causal, existential relationship to the image. A perceptually realistic image is one which structurally corresponds to the viewer's audiovisual experience of three- dimensional space. Perceptual realism, therefore, designates a relationship between the image or film and the spectator, and it can encompass both unreal images and those which are referentially realistic" (Prince 1996, 32).

Thus, in the case of *Spain in Two Trenches*, I distinguish two possible spectator behaviours. On the one hand, the footage loses its original, photographic, indexical character by becoming manipulated: despite the filmmakers' efforts

to use historically authentic colours, the strikingly bright colours are distanced from the original colours of the figures and objects. However, perceptually we can consider them to be realistic to some extent, since we also perceive our surroundings in colour in our everyday life – but of course, it should be added that the colourized shots are too striking in this respect as well, and the modification of depth of field affects the perception of spatiality. On the other hand, if the latter question is analysed in terms of the fact that this film – as mentioned above – was made for contemporary spectators in a new media environment, from a perceptual point of view the scenes can be described as, if not entirely so, realistic. These two types of viewer behaviours may arise from the recognition of the archival nature of the footage – even if only hypothetically, let us assume that a viewer does not notice the colourized nature of the film (hypothetically, because the striking nature of the colouring is difficult to lose sight of). Since on the narrative level it is not conveyed to the spectators that these scenes are colourized and were originally black and white shots, the hypothetical viewer may believe that they are looking at an indexical document – the manipulation becoming invisible to them. According to this, we could interpret the intention of the filmmakers as an attempt to erode the archival effect. However, in the other case, if the viewer recognizes the manipulative effect of the colourization, the sense of temporal disparity could also trigger the archival effect. However, the colourization creates a kind of double spectatorial consciousness: we know that the colours were added later, yet we feel the footage closer to our present and to ourselves compared to watching it in black and white. Thus, the reception of colourized images is a matter of comparison: different modes of reception may emerge depending on whether we perceive the scenes as rather part of the past than of the present. Nevertheless, if we focus not only on the visuality of the coloured footage, but also on the narrative explanations on the auditory level and see the date written over the images, these obviously help the spectator's orientation in time. However, it is precisely these signs that create a kind of paradoxical spectatorial state: since we know from the dates and the narration that colour filming was not yet widespread at the time of the original footage, we still accept the colourized moving images as approximately authentic on a perceptual level. The case is further complicated by visual clues, which prove that the footage is old: in many cases, there are still some visual noises and small scratches that have been preserved in the footage. Despite the presence of colour, the viewer can often get the feeling that the footage is old: as if the archive images had not ceased to appear old. This kind of double play – to perceptually evoke

a sense of realism, while at the same time the same footage bears the marks of time – can thus evoke a particular sense of time in the viewer,[15] which can also evoke the atmosphere created by the medium-specific noises (Blos-Jáni 2018). The "old" look can also be interpreted as a style, or rather as a set of stylistic features: through colourization, the film shows past events as present – the visual noises and scratches of the shots only "evoke" the past, the stylistic features of footage from the past. From this point of view, we can also conclude that the digital can only present the past as a simultaneity.

Make the Imperceptible Perceptible: "Presentification" of the Past

The issue of "bringing the past closer" has come up several times during my analysis. The problem of the phenomenologically accessible past and colouring as a means of authentication evokes further questions of historical approaches. So far, I focused on the reasons why the spectators may feel closer the coloured footage on a perceptual level, as a next step, following the numerous comments on the Internet that advocate colouring. I will analyse the kind of views of history colourization can strengthen, the way they can be approached critically and linked to the phenomenon of remediation.

While watching colourized black and white footage, a frequent reaction of the audience is astonishment: upon seeing coloured footage, spectators feel much closer to the historical events in time. For example, in the comment section of a YouTube video, *The Early 20th Century Seen in Real Color*, one can read: "Makes me think... what's 100 years? That's nothing... it's such a short time. This was practically yesterday."; "I love how modern, yet timeless it looks! [...] Historic photos in colour simply feel more 'real' to me, than black and white ones do."; "The pictures of her truly seem as if they could have been taken yesterday, dispelling our conceited belief that we are somehow different, even 'better' or 'more evolved' than those from a hundred years ago"; "Those photos makes the present and past seem so interconnected. Instead of being a distant shadow in the past it drives home that she was a person just like you and me."[16] As can be observed from these

15 Although a different example in terms of genre, there is an interesting parallel with Hlynur Pálmason's film, *Godland* (*Vanskabte land*, 2022) in terms of its "old" appearance. In this contemporary film, the viewers can see artificially added visual noises, and the film's aspect ratio is also reminiscent of the format of old films, but the sharpness of the figures and objects on the screen clearly indicate that the film was made in the present.

16 *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsN2PBhYMPI&t=390s* Last accessed 02. 08. 2023.

examples, the effects of colourized footage are usually twofold: on the one hand, the representation of a given, well-known historical event in colour becomes a new experience for the audience, and on the other hand, colouring seems to erase the seemingly unbridgeable distance between past and present, giving the illusion of continuity, unbrokenness and unproblematic accessibility of the past. The latter is connected on one hand with the arousal of a sense of presence and the problem of the mediatized past mentioned above, on the other hand, it is also motivated by more general problems of historical perception.

The accelerated and transformed archiving practices and the changes in function they bring along through technological processes have a profound impact on the way we view and relate to our past. After the third memory boom period, in the era of full digitization, the remediation of archival materials is having a radical impact on our approaches to history. As Hoskins notes, "the digital does reveal alien and unpalatable memories, but it also transcends the time of now and then, reconnecting, reimagining and reconstituting the past as network, as archive, as present" (Hoskins 2018, 5). In other words, in the contemporary remedial context, archival materials are not only present in a repeated way, but they offer themselves to us in a presentist way, as if they offer us a representation of the past and also create it in a present tense, placing it in the context of the present. The colourization technique of the film also confirms this hypothesis: although they offer representations of the past, the digitization of the analogue footage and its subsequent colourization transforms the parameters of the past in favour of present consumption and perception. The coloured closeups of Franco and Hitler offer a new and different visual experience: through colourization techniques, the characters in the archival footage are transposed to the spectators' present.

The complexity of this kind of presentism lies in the fact that the "presentification" of the past is both intentional and hidden. On the one hand, we consider a well-made coloured film as one that gives us the impression that we as spectators are more immersed in the spaces presented by the film and that we feel closer to ourselves what we are seeing in a way we have not experienced before – as if the filmmakers had done nothing, because we are not distracted by the constructedness of the footage. However, what can be identified as presentism in *Spain in Two Trenches*, is the trace of the colour functions listed in the previous chapter (fictionalizing, homogenizing, individualizing, immersive effects, etc.), since these refer to the presence of the creators, not the presence of the object itself. But since the filmmakers' aim is to represent the object, their need to go beyond mediatization appears: the presence of the object should overshadow the presence of the creators.

Our present time is also changing under the influence of (re)mediatization and digitalization: according to Andreas Hepp, we are living in a period of "deep mediatization," in which "digitalisation and related datafication interweaves our social world even more deeply with this entanglement of media and practices. Given the significance of media today as a defining part of the specific character of our social world, we can understand the present stage of mediatisation as one of 'deep mediatization'" (Hepp 2016, 919). In the case of *Spain in Two Trenches*, we can thus speak of a "digital hijacking" (Hoskins 2018, 6) of old footage: the translation from analogue and the perceptually realistic images may be a consequence of an era that has remediated both past and present, and subverted the status of archival material. In this way, the colouring can be understood as a digital reimagination of the past: the act of taking the spectator closer to the events of the Spanish Civil War and the actualization and accessibility of the presence of the past can all be understood as effects of this contemporary medial-memorial environment. Furthermore, the audience no longer necessarily demands that archival materials remain untouched and unaltered: as I wrote earlier about the evidential value of old footage, and as Livingstone notes in relation to *They Shall Not Grow Old*: "the epistemic formation modelled by the film is one in which photorealism and digital manipulations have a symbiotic relationship in almost every image we see" (Livingstone 2019).

Given the technical context, the reconfiguration of the past by colouring seems almost inevitable in contemporary consumer culture. But in some ways, colourization has an illusory effect on the way history is viewed and approached. By actualizing the past, by bringing it into the present, the film seems to imply that through colourization the human experience of earlier periods can be made accessible. Indeed, the comments quoted above evoke similar feelings: the black-and-white shots, complemented by colour, give the audience the illusion that there is hardly any difference between our present and the lives of people from a hundred years ago. The idea of an unbroken, continuous link between past and present[17] is problematic in several ways: on one hand, immersion in the past

17 Although in this analysis I focus primarily on the phenomenological causes and consequences of colouring, I also consider it possible to analyse this problem from a broader social-theoretical, epistemological perspective, including a historical approach following the French Annales school. For instance, against the idea of an unbroken, continuous relation between the past and the present, Michel Foucault considered it a priority to make the circumstances of the past visible to understand and critically evaluate the present. In his view, the past is never directly given and evident to us, we cannot subordinate it to our own present – to do so is to create a false continuity: "'Effective' history differs from traditional history in being without constants. […] The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the

presupposes that there is a kind of reciprocity between us and the spectacle – as viewers, we can immerse in the same perception as the subjects of the past, that is, we can perceive the world in the same way as they did and, in turn, they would perceive the world in the same way as we do. On the other hand, if we believe that there is an unimpeded continuity between the lives of people from the past and of our own, we are questioning history itself by perceptualizing their past and our present as the same time. Through colourization, our perception of time is radically confused, as the filmmakers attempt to make the imperceptible perceptible: not because it is sensually impossible to feel it, but because it is past, and therefore, not directly and continuously accessible. Thus, the coloured footage is fake, not because it distorts historical facts, conceals certain events, or misrepresents war heroes, rather, its falsity is due to the fact that it does not deal with the discontinuous nature of history, meaning that it makes the past unproblematically narratable through colour.

Thus, interpreted in the context of the colourized documentaries and the reactions of the viewers, there is a conceptual difference: spectators who experience the past through seeing the colourized footage are affected by the footage on a sensual level rather than on an intellectual level. Therefore, the assertion that colourized documentaries "bring us closer" to the past is perceptually true: although certain details become more recognizable in the footage, it does not reduce our distance from history or past events, nor does it serve our intellectual understanding of them. Instead of the presumed stance of these films – that the past can be accessed unproblematically through the use of colour – I believe they primarily satisfy the eyes of the viewer socialized in a new media environment on a perceptual level.

While in 1986, MGM Entertainment's plan to digitally colourize many of its earlier black-and-white films was vociferously opposed by a range of Hollywood directors, actors and film critics, there are hardly any objections to colourized versions of historical events nowadays. The vehement opposition of the film professionals forty years ago was triggered by the fact that they did not want to "transform a monochrome movie into a digitally re-made spectacle" and "destroy the visual pastness that could embed original black and white films within the tissues of cultural and aesthetic memory" (Grainge 2018, 202). The demands of the

past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. Knowledge, even under the banner of history, does not depend on 'rediscovery', and it emphatically excludes the 'rediscovery of ourselves.' History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being […] knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" (Foucault 1977, 153–154).

anti-colourization lobby are now almost inconceivable: according to the reactions of the public, the popularity of colourized documentaries seems to be increasing. In my analysis, I have made an attempt, albeit not exhaustive, to present some aspects that may point to the justification for colouring old footage. In my medial and phenomenological examinations, I focused on the particularities of the mediatized environment surrounding the Spanish film and the mechanisms of memory that are being transformed by digitalization. Subsequently, I analysed the peculiar, non-realistic visual world of the film in the context of everyday perception. To conclude, I have pointed out that while *Spain in Two Trenches* may carry the effects of the surrounding mediatized environment, the film itself can also shape the views of history of its audience. The implication that the past and present can be seamlessly bridged may make spectators feel as if people who lived a hundred years ago would be "within arm's reach" of them. In my analysis I argued that although the past may indeed seem more accessible from a sensory and phenomenological point of view through colouring, we should not lose sight of the thresholds, boundaries, discontinuities that exist between the time of the coloured figures and our own present. Although every corner of history can be coloured today, the gaps between our present and the past cannot be filled with colours.

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Figure 3–6. *Spain in Two Trenches: The Civil War in Colour* (*España en dos trincheras. La guerra civil en color*, Francesc Ecribano and Luis Carrizo, 2016). The homogenizing and attention-directing effect of the film.


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The Uncanniness of Intermediality. Joanna Hogg's Eerily Self-Reflexive Cinema

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Abstract. The article argues for the relevance of the concept of the uncanny for a nuanced approach of intermediality. It identifies specific areas where the uncanniness of intermediality appears and examines Joanna Hogg's three autobiographically inspired films, *The Souvenir* (2019)*, The Souvenir Part II* (2021)*, and The Eternal Daughter* (2022) from this point of view. The analysis does not offer a psychoanalytic reading of these films but focuses on aesthetic configurations that enable the affective performativity of intermediality in conjunction with particular strategies of reflexivity, and unravels the ways in which, ultimately, all these films speak about the uncanny, mutually haunting relationship between art and life. Blurring the line between fiction and nonfiction, Hogg depicts the paradoxical nature of (post)trauma and the emotional turmoil of mourning feeding into artistic creativity. *The Souvenir* films revolve around the loss of a lover in her youth and weave together different styles and resonances across art history and many mediums. They reveal memory, imagination and palpable reality folding over in an uncanny and aestheticized construction of space and time. *The Eternal Daughter* presents a scenario of caring for her dying mother, and brings to the fore the tropes of the haunted house, ghosts and doubles, which were latent figures of the earlier films as well.[1]

Keywords: intermediality, uncanny, affective metalepsis, Joanna Hogg, reflexivity.

"Haunted places are the only ones people can live in."
(Michel de Certeau 2011, 108)

Intermediality and the Uncanny

From a phenomenological point of view, the performativity of intermediality hinges on the perception of in-betweenness. Intermediality always involves

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the perception of one medium not in itself but in relation with other mediums: mediums incorporating, reflecting others, mediums morphing into others, or even more strangely, appearing as if being suspended in a state of liminality and ambiguity. Sensing this in-betweenness is something that unsettles the viewer in a way that can be very hard to define, leading to sensations that may actually drift into the territory of the uncanny.

In many ways this affinity between the concepts of the uncanny and intermediality is uncanny indeed. Echoing keywords recurring in all definitions of intermediality, Nicholas Royle writes in his comprehensive book on the uncanny that it "has to do with strangeness of framing and borders, the experience of liminality" (2003, 2). This idea goes back to Ernst Jentsch, who closely associated the uncanny with "the feeling of uncertainty" ([1906] 1997, 9) involving the oscillation between what is known and unknown, between the animate and inanimate, alive and dead, natural and artificial. Sigmund Freud, arguing partly against Jentsch, approached the uncanny from the direction of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's definition as "the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" ([1919] 1955, 224), and explored the connotations of the polysemy of the German word *unheimlich* (the negation of *heimlich* / "homely," but also meaning "secret," "locked away," and "inscrutable"). He emphasized its occurrence as the return of repressed memories that feel strangely familiar. Accordingly, Royle notes that the uncanny may appear as "a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context. It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home" (2003, 1). In this latter sense (though not directly connected to Freud's ideas), it became central to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who identified the perception of one's essential unhomeliness in the world as the main characteristic of modern life. He considered that the uncanny is not just a momentary feeling traversing our existence, but "from an existential-ontological point of view, the 'not-at-home' must be conceived as the more primordial phenomenon" ([1927] 1996, 177) of being thrown into the world.

Following Heidegger, the idea of uncanny reverberates through much of postmodern philosophy and cultural studies concerned with questioning the distinction between reality and fiction (Cixous 1976), the various aspects of "the troubled interface between history and memory" (Jay 1995, 27) as well as

thinking in terms of a "hauntology" instead of ontology and of the essential spectrality of all mediums (Derrida [1993] 1994, 63), exploring the "uncanniness of the ordinary" (Cavell 1988), or the architecture of unhomely urban spaces (Vidler 2000), and so on.

All these major discourses of the uncanny deal with issues that could be discussed in connection with intermediality, yet there has been surprisingly little research into their potential productivity concerning the scholarship on intermediality.[2] We might also be deterred from pursuing this by several meta-theoretical essays which have pointed out that beginning from the 1990s (Jay 1995) the uncanny has turned into a "homeless concept" (Masschelein 2003) adopted by so many strands in contemporary theories of culture that it "becomes an insidious, all-pervasive 'passe-partout' word to address virtually any topic," a word that "affects and haunts everything" (Masschelein 2011, 2). Nevertheless, uncannily, intermediality might actually be one of the most relevant areas of aesthetic and media phenomena where this "unhomely" concept is most at home.

There are several specific areas where the intersection of intermediality with the concept of the uncanny may prove especially germane. I will outline merely some of these briefly below.

a) Intermediality produces the sensation of mediums being dislocated, of being out of place (e.g. in cinema, instead of the accustomed experience of moving images on the screen, we may see an eerie resemblance with painting, a page filled with writing, a space of theatre, dance or installation art, a series of photographs, a collage of textures, a computer screen, and so on). In these apparent displacements we may have the impression of something familiar (*déjà vu*) returning in an unfamiliar frame. This may feel like a repressed form that resurfaces (for example, the "photographic" or the "graphic unconscious"[3] within the film), "an 'otherness' or an 'interworld' that is suddenly revealed to us but resists total unravelling" (Pethő 2020, 185).[4] Or we may feel that a more or less subversive intrusion has taken place, as the other medium, another art form

2 A notable exception is Hajnal Király's book on Manoel de Oliveira's films (2022), which was launched during the *Uncanny Intermediality* workshop organized at the Centre for Cinematic Intermediality and Visual Culture of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (20–21 October 2022). The workshop itself was a step intended towards filling this gap in the scholarship on intermediality by initiating a debate on the possible intersections between intermediality and the uncanny. Most of the essays published in volume 24, 2023 of the journal *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* have been written following this event.

3 See Ropars-Wuilleumier's (1982) famous analysis of the instances of writing and poetry in Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (*A bout de souffle*, 1960).

4 These quotations are from an essay (Pethő 2020) in which I discussed the uncanny effects of cinematic images resembling dioramas, combining effects of stillness and motion, 2D and 3D.

disrupts our sense of familiarity with the cinematic flow of images, often leading to a puzzled reaction from the audience.[5] This may resemble and therefore reflect on the way "locked away" memories or fantasies re-emerge and the way traumas are processed, creating an uncanny fold between past and present.

b) Conspicuous intermediality always constructs a fragmented view of the world (e.g. in documentary and essay films)[6] and an unhomely fictional world in the case of narrative cinema. It constructs a heterogeneous spatial mixture consisting of an intermedialized cinematic space marked by the emphatic presence of other mediums, one that is built of architectural, theatrical, painterly, or cinematic elements in the film and for the film,[7] in a manner that can feel unnatural and strange. When this is made even more complex by adopting fragments of familiar, real or fictional places already infused with personal and cultural significance and emotional value,[8] this may bring about an ambiguity whether we are looking at something real or imaginary, leaving the viewer with a sense of uncanny liminality.

c) The "uncertainty" that Jentsch described is a key element of the intermingled sensations of intermediality, in which mediums are reframed, transposed or imitated, often in a *trompe l'oeil* manner, and where quite often the ambivalence in the perception of mediums (e.g. a picturesque shot looking literally like a picture) is doubled by the fluctuation between the awareness of beholding art (a lifeless representation, an inanimate product of technology) and looking at life itself. Thus, intermedial techniques may interfere with the "transparency" of the images and the illusion of reality in cinema on a scale that ranges from an almost

5 Radu Jude's experiments with the use of photographs instead of filmed images in *The Dead Nation* (*Țara moartă*, 2017) or *The Exit of the Trains* (*Ieşirea trenurilor din gară*, 2020) are good examples of provoking such a reaction from viewers who consider that the slideshow-like films presented in a cinema are not really films at all.

6 This is the case not only in the type of intermediality when we have a visible collage of mediums, but also, for example, in the prolonged long takes and photofilmic (or painterly) tableau shots of slow cinema, in which we are always invited to watch a part of the visible world sliced out by the frame of the shot for a very long time before moving on to contemplate yet another fragment. This fragmentation is to a certain extent the reason why such films lend themselves so easily to a transposition onto the form of multiscreen installation art.

7 Examples may include Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (*Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant*, 1972) using a stage-like set with Nicolas Poussin's giant painting looming in the background, Michelangelo Antonioni's spaces featuring intrusive architectural elements of urban spaces becoming abstract and strange (as a reflection of existentialist angst) through cinematic framing and de-framing, Lars von Trier's background projections in *Europa* (1990), or the more extreme, minimalist theatrical set of *Dogville* (2003).

8 Pedro Almodóvar's installation-like set in *The Human Voice* (2020) filled with his personal objects and artworks from his home produces such a mixture of a gaudily artificial and uncannily personal space.

imperceptible, uncanny tilt of the natural towards the artificial to a complete shift towards the extremely stylized. The self-reflexive revelation of the processes of multiple mediation (showing, for example, that this is a film being made with actors on a sound stage using specifically designed scenery and props) does not remove the feeling of uncertainty but often reveals an uncanny interpenetration of art and life and cultivates an ambiguity between affective immersion and aesthetic distance.[9]

All of this does not mean that intermediality always necessarily conveys impressions of uncanniness (it may also create quite pleasurable forms of beauty, for example), but merely that, facilitated by its particular phenomenology and enhanced by certain aesthetic configurations, intermediality has the potential to appear as something uncanny. Looking at the emergence of the uncanny through intermediality, however, may always bring insights into the ways in which an intermedial aesthetic may still appear affective, poetical or unsettling, capable of highlighting the experience of in-betweenness in our times defined by the familiarity and ubiquity of hypermediacy and media hybridity.

Trying not to overexpand the elasticity of the term by keeping in mind the cluster of ideas sketched above, this essay argues in this way for the relevance of the uncanny for a nuanced approach of intermediality by examining the aesthetic strategies through which uncanniness and intermediality become associated in the cinema of Joanna Hogg. The reason Hogg's films prompt such an association is that they have created a unique stylistic template, which mystifies the viewer with its contradictory effects. They combine rigorously composed tableau images with improvised dialogues, provoking a contemplation of pictures and, simultaneously, an identification with situations presented in a natural, relatable manner, creating in this way an unresolved tension between emotional engagement and distantiation. Her work invites therefore theoretical concepts and approaches that dwell on these tensions.

Inspired by her own life, her three interconnected films refine this template through a pronounced intermedialization, a multiplication of various kinds of images, and a metafictionality with many twists. *The Souvenir* (2019) and *The Souvenir: Part II* (2021) reflect on the shocking death of her lover at the start of her coming of age as an artist, while *The Eternal Daughter* (2022) addresses the anxieties of the mature filmmaker regarding the imminent death of her mother. In each case, love and loss materialize in a world of ghosts through a sophisticated

9 This was the case of von Trier's *Dogville* and Almodóvar's *The Human Voice*, too, mentioned earlier.

use of intermediality.[10] Hogg depicts feelings of mourning and painful memories feeding into her own artistic creativity, presenting how imagination and reality fold over in a therapeutic self-reflexivity. In what follows, I propose to unravel: a) the uncanny construction of a liminal, intermedial space together with the emergence of equally uncanny temporal folds within a narrative of trauma and remembrance; b) the manifestations of an uncanny, affective metalepsis, inviting us to rethink "affective incongruity" (Plantinga 2010) on many levels; c) the strange relationship between art and life thematized through strategies of reflexivity and doubling as well as through the metaleptic gesture of entering pictures.

The Architecture of an Intermedial Space and the Uncanny Folds of Time

In one of her most memorable installation works, Agnès Varda built a house repurposing the celluloid film stock of her unsuccessful movie, *The Creatures* (*Les Créatures*, 1966), in order to transform a painful memory of failure into a positive act of artistic creation.[11] The significance of this gesture of transformation was later reinforced by her autobiographical essay film, *The Beaches of Agnès* (*Les plages d'Agnès*, 2008), which included the artwork in the final scene. Here, as a conclusion to the recollection of her life's journey, we see Varda standing in this small cabin made of translucent filmstrips furnished with a pile of film-reel metal boxes, confessing that it makes her feel like she lives in cinema, and that cinema "is her home." In Hogg's autobiographical films there are many parallels with Varda's gesture of recycling her own film as "building material" for a new work and as a space of self-reflection epitomizing the process through which she rethinks all her joys, failures and tragedies as subjects of her art.[12] In dealing with a her

10 Acknowledging this feature of her latest works, the retrospective of her films organized by the Pompidou Centre in Paris, from 16 to 20 March in 2023, was titled *Histoires de fantômes* (*Ghost Stories*).

11 There were in fact two versions of this installation. The first was titled *The Cabin of Failure* (*La Cabane de l'échec*) and was exhibited at the Fondation Cartier in 2006, then Varda simplified it and renamed it as *The Cabin of Cinema* (*Cabane du cinéma*) for the Biennale de Lyon (2009–2010), thus asserting more emphatically her rejection of failure and her idea of reusing the outmoded medium of film for a new artwork as an homage to cinema.

12 The film used for Varda's celluloid hut, *The Creatures*, has many parallels with Joanna Hogg's *Souvenir* films. Although appearing within a very different context, the ideas and the fragmented, hybrid style (alternating black-and-white and colour-filtered images) have many similarities. The film is about a writer and has a convoluted science fiction plot about the way in which ideas take shape in art. It also involves an uncanny chess game in which people are transformed into mechanical puppets moved around on a chessboard as an allegory both of the human condition in modern times and of the writer's manipulation of the characters he

own traumatic memories (and including pictures from an abandoned film project) in *The Souvenir* films, Joanna Hogg creates, in the same way, an ambivalently "homely" cinematic world using her own archival images and personal objects that, nevertheless, strikes the viewer in many ways as strangely artificial.

The Souvenir recounts her early days as a film student when she had a complicated love affair with an older man (named in the film as Anthony), who was arrogantly seductive, secretive, and turned out to be a heroin addict, eventually dying of an overdose and thereby causing considerable shock to the young woman enthralled by him. *The Souvenir Part II* deals with the aftermath of his death, and shows the young filmmaker coping with grief and using the shocking experience as inspiration for making a film. In one of her interviews (Aguilar 2019), Hogg confessed that she began to work on her film not by writing a script but by making watercolour sketches. Watercolour became an inter-medium, or interim medium – disappearing in the process of the actual filming – meant to articulate a set of "ideas" (perhaps moods and feelings that come with memories) that would later become the movie. Its pre-cinematic use aptly foreshadowed the film's theme of vulnerability and its emphasis on visual texture instead of narrative. One might spot its traces, however, as a kind of repressed medium resurfacing in shots of blurred splashes of colour filling the screen [Fig. 1], or in the recurring soft focus photography of nature, and images of clouds. The method is also representative of the whole process of intermedial transfers that we see in the film, in which images are continuously transposed from photography, painting, and literature to cinema. Even at a later stage of the development of the film, as the cinematographer David Raedeker recalls, "there was no fixed script for *The Souvenir* – we were working with quite a loose synopsis of around 25 pages, interspersed with beautiful photographs and poems" (Mutter 2022).

The *Souvenir* conjures up memories through Hogg's personal archive of pictures and weaves them through a dense network of art references. The tragic love story is evoked by using an extremely heterogeneous texture of images, making use of her old student films, photographs, combining both analogue and digital technologies. Beside the inserts of her archival images, the *Souvenir*

invents based on his experiences. Roger Ebert likened Varda's film to Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (*L'année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961), and wrote that it showed "how fantasy, reality and style are simultaneously kept suspended in the mind of a creative writer," suggesting that "as people living in time we are constantly creating our lives, just as a novelist creates his story." (*https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/les-creatures-1969*. Last accessed 17. 09. 2023.) Hogg's films also explore the theme of artistic creativity reshaping and transposing life onto art, and involves characters, which sometimes seem uncannily lifeless.

was shot just like Hogg's old footage on Super 8, 16mm and 35mm film (often slightly underexposed) and in 16mm and 35mm mode shot by various kinds of digital cameras (see Prince 2019). These different picture formats give the viewer the impression that this is a film literally made of pictures.[13] [Figs. 2–3.] Gilles Deleuze wrote that "cinema does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world" (1989, 68). Here, however, there seems to be no "world" outside these images. Space itself appears as an architecture designed to compose pictures and as an architecture composed of pictures. Both *Souvenir* films were almost entirely shot in a rented old airplane hangar in Norfolk used as a sound stage in which Joanna Hogg meticulously reconstructed the apartment she rented in London as a student, using furniture and objects she still owns. Not unlike *Last Year at Marienbad*, a movie similarly staged in an enclosed space populated by art, the flat in *The Souvenir* also features a large surface covered with mirrors, which extend and fold the space onto itself. Mirrors always erase the wall and substitute it with pictures, or more precisely, in the case of the visual arts, they break the space up into multiple picture planes. In Deleuze's words, such duplicitous, crystal-like images unite "an actual image and a virtual image to the point where they can no longer be distinguished" (1989, 335). [Figs. 4–5.]

And while the inside of the apartment appears as a hall of mirrors layering image over image, the outside is also a picture. To create the period-accurate vistas visible through the windows, Hogg's photos from back in the day were digitally stitched together and projected against transparent screens surrounding the set.[14] In this interior, in which photography is remediated to produce "a kind of ghosting of its surfaces," or transform it into a "dolls house" (Quinlivan 2020, 148), windows literally open onto other images and introduce an unobtrusive collage effect. [Figs. 6–7.] Laura Mulvey interpreted "rear-projection's clumsy visibility" as something that smuggles a kind of Brechtian distantiation effect into mainstream Hollywood films highlighting cinema's materiality in accordance with the modernist aesthetic of film, and thus creates "an unusual paradox, almost a clash of cultures, within a single sequence" (2012, 208). Hogg's artifice of *trompe l'oeil* offers a less "clumsy," and almost imperceptible, yet conscious engagement with clashes resulting from medially different layers of images, and

13 Davina Quinlivan sees "the slow and precise unspooling" (2020, 142) of a series of photographs in the introductory sequence of the film as a means to engage the viewer from the very beginning "more actively and self-critically with the image" and its "objecthood" (2020, 144).

14 See how it was made here: *https://www.thelocationguide.com/2019/09/joanna-hoggs-the-souvenir-based-at-raynham-hangars-and-shot-exclusively-in-norfolk/#*. Last accessed 17. 09. 2023.

its uncanniness can be more closely associated with occurrences in the visual arts and not in the movies shot in film studios in the Golden Age of Hollywood.[15] This way of juxtaposing photography and film much rather recalls the art historical tradition of views framed by windows or other architectural elements appearing like pictures hanging on the wall in the background of the figures [Figs. 8–9], which inspired Mark Lewis in making his single channel film installation, *Rear Projection (Molly Parker)* (2006).[16] It could also be compared with Cindy Sherman's photo series from the 1980s, entitled *Rear Screen Projections*, in which the projected backdrops consisting of ordinary street images seem to haunt the human figures in the composite pictures.

Such an intermedial space fosters ambiguities and accommodates the juxtaposition of fiction, memory and reality as the viewer registers the inherent tensions of pictorial hybridity. The minutely recreated space of Hogg's erstwhile flat is in this way visibly an uncanny replica, a space that is both real and imaginary. The mirrored wall, as well as the overlaying of photography and film, accentuate the spectrality of the space. The reconstructed flat becomes a haunted house, with figures becoming their own ghosts in the mirrors, and with characters embodying people from the past, moving around and shown through the filter of the visible technological mediation of a variety of photographic lenses.

In many ways, *The Souvenir* is also the descendant of Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), consisting of individual photographs narrating a time travel made possible through a vivid emotional connection to the past. Victor Burgin wrote that Marker's film reverses the myth of Orpheus: instead of passing from light to darkness, *La Jetée*'s protagonist does the opposite, he goes to the land of the dead and finds the "object of his desire in a sunlit world of living ghosts: alive in their own time, dead in his own" (2004, 93). In *The Souvenir*, we see a similar journey with an added gender reversal of the myth: here we have a woman going back to her time with her now dead lover, inviting us on a journey to a hellish experience in the past through luminous pictures and a spectacularly intermedial art. This image-world mixing old photographs, analogue film formats with crisp

15 Her director of photography revealed in an interview that "Joanna loved the air of theatricality and artifice it created, as she likes to play with perceptions of reality in a slightly Brechtian way" (Prince 2019).

16 When this work was first exhibited at the FACT (Film Art and Creative Technology) Centre in Liverpool, its catalogue explicitly drew attention to the influence of such paintings (e.g. Hans Memling's portraits). For an analysis of Lewis's use of back projection, see Mulvey's keynote lecture delivered at the conference on *The Picturesque*, held on 25–26 October 2019, at the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, *https://youtu.be/cEtbSmpA2m0?list=PLDesrDcatwbaGiIK2Fkg3gH44hIDp6P4H*. Last accessed 17. 09. 2023.

digital frames conveys a disjointed time, where the past seems to be revived in the present, yet still preserves a ghostly quality: appearing at the same time, dead (in the eerie stillness of the photographic vistas in the windows) and alive in the dramatic scenes of the film. The old image formats emphasize the pastness of the depicted events, but the digitally shot scenes weaken this impression, especially given that the references to the 1980s through costumes are rather vague. (They were "kept as subtle as possible, nothing obvious or specific," confirms the film's cinematographer in an interview, Prince 2019). The entire production design suits both past and present with its restraint and use of spaces that might look the same as they did years ago. This contributes, along with the mixture of images, to creating a dreamlike atmosphere. In this case, we have not only the past haunting the present, but also the present evocation wiping away some of the visible marks of the past. "Encounters between humans and pictures generate affective temporalities in which specific temporal structures are consistently joined to specific emotional states," writes Benjamin Anderson (2022, 159), according to whom, melancholy (or nostalgia) derives from the realization of the separation of the past from the present, while the overlap of distinct temporalities result in an "uncanny encounter."[17] Despite tinges of melancholy in certain scenes, *The Souvenir*'s collage texture creates an affective temporality that veers towards an uncanny encounter between past and present. This becomes even more pronounced through the added metafictional levels of its sequel, *The Souvenir Part II*, as we will see in the third part of this essay.

The Eternal Daughter, which is a loosely connected sequel to the first two films, offers another strangely entwined temporal structure, folding both future and past over the present. Once again, the film addresses the trauma of losing someone we love. This time, we see Joanna Hogg's alter-ego protagonist (who was merely starting her career in *The Souvenir* films) at the same age as her at the time of making the film and the narrative reflects on the terrifying prospect of the death of her real-life mother in the not so distant future. Jacques Derrida described the emotions involved in friendship in this way: "the difference between the effective and the virtual, between mourning and its possibility, seems fragile and porous. The anguished apprehension of mourning […] insinuates itself a priori and anticipates itself; it haunts and plunges the friend, before mourning, into mourning. This apprehension weeps before the lamentation, it weeps death before death" (Derrida [1994] 2005, 14). Derrida's words apply not only to friends. Being past middle age

17 See, for example, the phenomenological description of such an "uncanny encounter" with the visibly repainted, colourized old photographs and film footage in Kamilla Simor's article (2023).

and faced with the reality of her mother's (and her own) mortality, Hogg confronts the same emotional situation with added intensity. Driven by this "apprehension of mourning," Hogg imagines in *The Eternal Daughter* affectionately caring for her frail, dying mother.[18] The film unfolds a kind of ghost story inspired by Rudyard Kipling's short story entitled *They* (1904) written following the death of his daughter, in which the fragmentary and supernatural narrative becomes the writer's way of dealing with her loss.[19] The novella, reminiscent in some ways of the literary style and painterly imagery of the Pre-Raphaelites, is accompanied by a poem, *The Return of the Children*, suggesting an eternal connection between parents and children reaching beyond the grave.

In Hogg's film, the two women and their faithful dog arrive at a country manor transformed into a hotel to spend a few days together. It is night, late autumn, trees with bare and twisting branches are enveloped in thick fog along the narrow road. The hotel is eerily empty, with long hallways and dark staircases dimly lit by a bluish-green light, with no other guests in sight. [Figs. 10–12.] The sound of wind, the creaks in the old house blend with notes from Béla Bartók's music for strings and percussion repeated with different instruments. In the course of the film, we learn that the manor used to belong to the mother's family and by the end, it turns out that the mother may already be dead, and the filmmaker daughter has been talking to none other than herself, communicating with a ghost, while trying to write a screenplay, the images of which may have materialized in front of our eyes. *The Eternal Daughter* presents an immersive, multisensory space visibly borrowed from Gothic fiction and horror films. It is a space haunted by the past (by the painful memories of the mother revealed in the dialogues), by the present anxieties of the daughter regarding the future, as well as by the future itself (the death of the mother), which – we realize – is either imminent or has already happened in the film, in a disconcerting fold of time. The direct invocation of the haunted house trope appears both as a means for visual stylization that elevates the story into abstraction and universality, and as a powerfully symbolic image of the soul populated by Hogg's most personal "ghosts." At the same time, it becomes a self-reflexive metaphor for Hogg's fascination with atmospheric space and architecture seen according to Gaston Bachelard's concept of a "poetics of

18 Although Hogg's mother was alive at the time the film was shot, sadly she died when they were editing it (see: Sims 2022), transforming the "apprehension of mourning" into actual mourning. Thus, the film does not merely foreshadow what is going to happen but it also reflects on what happened in real life.

19 In a direct reference to Kipling's story, Hogg shows us the book Julie is reading in a close-up with the title and text clearly visible on the page.

space" ([1958] 1994) as "a vessel of memory and feeling" (Williams 2014) that became a hallmark of all her previous films.[20]

Thus, by creating something comparable to Baroque *trompe l'oeil* in the rear projections of *The Souvenir* films, by (re)using various kinds of images to build an intermedial space, and by heavily relying on genre clichés in the process of forging an ambivalently sensuous pictorial language to communicate personal experiences, Hogg also effectively scrutinizes the relationship between fiction and autobiography, the role of mediation in an artistic expression that remains at its core, despite all its "borrowed" elements, deeply personal. In what follows, I propose to further unravel this uncanny duality manifest in the viewer's oscillation between emotional distance and immersion that Hogg induces across many layers of the films.

Oscillations between Empathy and Abstraction

Although each of the different types of images in *The Souvenir* films was deliberately chosen to fulfil "a different emotional function," as the film's cinematographer revealed in an interview (Prince 2019), the various formats did not only serve as inflections of the pictorial form intended to match the emotions of the characters, to create mood, and to confer affective intensities to the scenes, the various image formats also "brought a variety of textures to the look" (Prince 2019). This carefully crafted "look" of the films (with the ensuing hybrid, intermedial space and entangled temporality) engages alternating positions of spectatorship in a process that we could regard in terms of an affective metalepsis, i.e. a shift between viewpoints with different affective affordances. This "look" foregrounds either the haptic-sensorial or the optical-abstract quality of the images, facilitating in turn the viewer's empathy or creating an aesthetic distance. This duality may remind us of the typology of the art historian, Wilhelm Worringer, who, at the beginning of the 20th century, distinguished between the art of empathy and the art of abstraction. Thinking in terms of a psychology of style, he wrote that "whereas

20 See the "poetic" use of the holiday villas of *Unrelated* (2007) and *Archipelago* (2010) accommodating entangled human relationships, or the depiction of a modernist building as the main character alongside the two artists who live, work, and dream in this space, using and literally embracing it in *Exhibition* (2013). In a short film commissioned by the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 2023, Hogg confesses that she always becomes attached to places: "they become who I am" – she says. (The film – later identified with the title, *Présages* – was originally produced as part of a series of video confessions made by artists answering the question: *Où en êtes-vous?/ Where Are You?* See: *Où en êtes-vous Joanna Hogg? https://youtu.be/8A9Hv1ieAdk*. Last accessed 17. 09. 2023.)

the precondition for the urge to empathy is a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world, the urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest" (Worringer [1908] 1997, 15). Supporting this idea, intermediality appears in Hogg's films as a strategy through which cinema absorbs abstracted forms from other arts as a means to convey a traumatic experience, retaining all the complexities and ambivalences of this experience. At the same time, however, her films also demonstrate Worringer's idea that sometimes a strong impulse to abstraction "becomes a lively impulse to empathy" ([1912] 1920, 38), in which, "it is not a question […] of a harmonious commingling of two opposing tendencies, but of an unclear and to a certain degree, uncanny amalgamation of them" ([1912] 1920, 47). This also corresponds – using Freudian terms – to an intertwining of *cathexis* (investing pictures and objects with emotional intensity) and *decathexis* (a withdrawal, an emotional detachment). These films offer such "uncanny amalgamations" not only through old and new image forms but also through the many art references and parallels enabling both empathy and abstraction, emotional investment and withdrawal.

The title of the film, *The Souvenir*, borrowed in many languages from the French word "souvenir" (meaning "memory" or "to remember") signifies "an item of sentimental value, to remember a person, an event or location," and is a clear indication of its major theme connected to a specific memory. It is also the title of a Jean-Honoré Fragonard painting, *The Souvenir* (c. 1776–1778), a physical art object reproduced in the films, and an image which allows us to connect emotionally to Julie, the fictional version of the young Joanna Hogg. Fragonard's small painting shows Jean-Jacques Rousseau's eponymous protagonist of his sentimental novel, *Julie, or the New Heloise* (*Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761), in a scene in which, having just received a letter from her lover, the enamoured young woman carves his name into the bark of a tree. It is this painting that her lover took Hogg to see in a luxurious art collection, and that he later gave to her in the form of a postcard, the same way we see it in the film [Fig. 13]. The picture is thus a real-life, tangible and emotionally invested souvenir for Hogg attached to events re-enacted in the film, while, on a symbolic level, appearing as an intermedial *mise-en-abyme* reflecting on the film's topic, it may also remind us that the whole film can be seen as a gesture of "engraving" affectionate memories into pictorial form. At a time when real English castles feature as backdrops for historical romances, or when set designs meticulously reconstruct the past in popular TV series which entertain through their mastery of illusion, Hogg's *Souvenir* seems to undermine the authenticity of her own autobiographical

account through all kinds of subtle forms of artifice and fictionalization. Instead of using the actual Wallace Collection, for example, despite the emphasis on the significance of this location, we see the reproduction of the Fragonard painting displayed in a recognizably different place (Holkham Hall), perceived in this way as a site of fictional storytelling. The style of Fragonard's painting, nevertheless, resonates intensely with the scenes showing the lovers in the film, indicating both a high degree of self-conscious artistry and a deep connection with the painting transgressing the fictional context created in the film. Julie appears repeatedly in pink garments [Fig. 14], and her infatuation with Anthony is rendered suggestively by images, which emphasize what Michael Fried identified as the key elements of Rococo, "intimacy, sensuousness and decoration" (1980, 71). The antique French bed (owned by Hogg in real life) that we see in her room ornately framing her figure [Fig. 15] acts as a further connection to Fragonard, some of whose paintings display in such decorative settings explicitly and frivolously erotic scenes. [Figs. 16–17.] The way the camera shows partially in soft focus the panting, rosy-cheeked Julie while making love, immerses the viewer into a haptic, cinematic equivalent of this Rococo sensuousness [Fig. 18].

Anthony is brought back to life through associations with similar characters in art. As the brooding, mysterious dark man, he is a clear descendant of the type of hero embodied by Mr. Rochester from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Jane Austen's arrogant Mr. Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), or Lord Byron himself (see Anthony's long Romantic tailcoat embellished with silver buttons that he wears quite anachronistically in Fig. 14, as well as his turban in another scene). He dresses Julie to match his own fantasy in a Pygmalion-like fashion just as Alfred Hitchcock's leading man transformed the woman played by Kim Novak in *Vertigo* (1958), and this manipulative side of him is shaded even darker by ominous quotations from Béla Bartók's opera, *Bluebeard's Castle* (1911) in the soundtrack. There is a dreamlike trip to Venice with Julie dressed in a grey two-piece suit resembling Kim Novak's. The sumptuous décor of a dark palazzo where they stay, Julie's gorgeous evening gown sweeping up the stairs to the La Fenice opera house evokes the famous set of Visconti's *Senso* (1954), a film in which a man exploited a woman who was likewise blindly infatuated with him.

At the same time, rather incongruously, certain scenes remind us of the distancing effects of Michelangelo Antonioni's style, with figures enframed and separated by doorways, spaces built of stark, geometrical forms, lines and flat surfaces that we often behold in abstraction after the characters have already left. The repeated opening and closing of the shining metallic lift doors outside Julie's flat looks like

the mechanical movement of the aperture of a giant camera shutter around the characters who are in this way literally entering or leaving the picture [Fig. 19].

The artificial, diorama-like space of the apartment in scenes in which light floods and oversaturates the room emphasizes further the quality of pictureness for the viewer who may find that the images of these spaces look like Jeff Wall's light boxes, illuminated from within [Fig. 20]. They also highlight the same apparent paradox that Wall's photograph, *Adrian Walker, Artist. Drawing from a Specimen in a Laboratory in the Dept. of Anatomy at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver* (1992) presented for Michael Fried (2008, 37–43), namely the juxtaposition of what he famously called the realistic mode of "absorption" with elements of "theatricality" in the staged picture the subject of which is aware of being displayed as an object to be looked at by the viewer. Hogg dwells on the tension between these two modes, through exaggerating the elements of artificiality while also insisting on filming the characters in absorptive poses, that is, deeply immersed in what they are doing, and even defiantly turning away from the camera which does not offer a counter-shot or join their points of view, thereby clearly preserving an impenetrable self-containment of the pictures. [Figs. 7, 20.]

These loosely connected "painterly vignettes" which create a highly fragmented, elliptic narrative through a "rhetoric of omission" (Buckland 2022, 2) in the film have puzzled many viewers and critics. There are major events that we are not allowed to see, we witness some conversations between characters, but scenes and dialogues break off abruptly. Warren Buckland has examined more closely Hogg's narrative techniques, and has identified in *The Souvenir* "the specter of the cinematic narrator, a hidden or covert narrative agent outside the storyworld but embedded in the textual-discursive level that ultimately narrates the story" (2022, 2). In his view, the "specter" Hogg creates is a kind of impersonal (not anthropomorphic) cinematic narrator, "a ubiquitous, underlying, implicit, abstract (non-spatiotemporal) entity" (Buckland 2022, 3) which is clearly at odds with the autobiographical content of the film, and separates the implicit narrator and the real author. "Hogg depicts Julie from the outside, mainly detaching herself from Julie's point of view," in a manner that is "merely photographic," thus, frustrating the viewer who would have liked to know more about Julie's state of mind, remarks the critic, Richard Brody (2019). In the same vein, Adrian Martin notes that "Hogg asks us to float, to drift through the images," and sees in this the influence of Chantal Akerman, as "Hogg captures the endearing, everyday 'flatness' of things" (2022).

Furthermore, Honor Swinton Byrne portrays Julie in a manner that places her performance in-between acting and non-acting. Hogg harnesses the full potential

of this duality. Teaming her up with the professional actor, Tom Burke as Anthony, their on-screen relationship aptly foregrounds Julie's naïveté through Swinton Byrne's lack of experience, revealing at times, "more uncontrolled and therefore honest gestures," as Miguel Gaggiotti (2023, 221) writes in a detailed analysis. The camera is both "a relentless observer exposing the performer's awkwardness with merciless precision" and "feels like a confidant that offers Julie company and attention" (Gagiotti 2023, 223). Thus, Swinton Byrne does not revive the past of Joanna Hogg's life in a polished performance, but re-enacts it in a strange mixture between sincerity and self-consciousness. The empathy with the characters who reveal little about themselves in the disconnected scenes and elicit no particular sympathy through their situation of privilege is substituted with the possibility of identification with real frictions, silences and private gestures resurfacing through the unscripted dialogues. The unreliability of memory to access this traumatic past is also effectively bypassed and replaced by the authenticity of the present-day improvisation of the dialogues between the actors/non-actors in the film. Ultimately, however, it is the manifold use of intermediality that fleshes out the characters to a certain degree through the wide array of inter-art associations as mentioned before and enables the viewer to perceive them in an affective environment through the different picture forms.

At the end of *The Souvenir* we have yet another intermedial intervention, a quotation of a poem by Christina Rossetti (*Song*: W*hen I Am Dead, My Dearest*, 1848) that creates the most touching moment for the viewer. We see Julie working on her film school project, and as we listen to a young actress reciting Rossetti's verses, the camera singles out Julie in a Caravaggesque high contrast of light and darkness. She turns to the camera, and looks straight into the lens, her fixed stare becoming a conduit for the emotions flowing through the poem. The lines in which, by conjuring up a vivid image of nature, a dead lover urges the one who mourns to "be the green grass above me / with showers and dewdrops wet," to go on living instead of grieving, echo far beyond the end of the first film across *The Souvenir: Part II*. Just to remind us, in this second film, immediately after we see Julie returning to her empty flat, Hogg cuts in a sequence in black-and-white with an actress reciting a fragment of the poem looking straight into the camera. [Fig. 21.] *Part II* actually begins with brightly lit images of petals gently fluttering in the breeze, and the repeated inserts of soft-focus shots of flowers, berries and leafs, which foreground their photographic texture and static enframing in shots detached from the narrative, as well as the airy, atmospheric long takes of nature in Julie's walk across the grassy, wildflower meadow (as opposed to

the theatricality of the scenes in the apartment and in the film sets) seem to paraphrase Rossetti's poetic imagery. Nature's exuberance becomes in the sequel to *The Souvenir* an uncanny sign of the haunting memory of Anthony's death.[21] [Fig. 22.] The poignant resonance of this poem carried from one film to another is typical for Hogg's method of engaging the viewer emotionally through something "outside" cinema, through the invocation of the other arts. This invocation of poetry (just like that of the old image forms) happens in this case much in the spirit of the idea articulated by Alain Badiou, who believed that cinema offers "a retrospective nostalgia for the time when real arts existed" (2023, 19).

The "outside" of cinema is drawn into the film also through the protagonist in another way. Julie emerges as a multiplied double for Joanna Hogg: a fictional character (enriched by all the possible reminiscences of painting, literature, photography and film), who at the same time appears as herself, Honor Swinton Byrne, or, more likely, merely her own double as an actor/non-actor. In addition, through the widely available external reflexive discourse on these films (i.e. the many interviews with the director, cast and crew) most people are aware that this is the real-life daughter of Hogg's close friend, Tilda Swinton. This makes her a less believable stand-in for the young Hogg (as compared to having been embodied perhaps by an unknown professional actress), but nevertheless makes her an authentic representative of Hogg's personal world, of her own life after her doomed romance with Anthony. Her inclusion is therefore also a subtle reminder of the retrospective viewpoint over the events presented in the film. This manifold liminality integral to Julie's figure in the film aligns with Hogg's overall strategies of self-reflexivity in which she insistently probes the ontological boundary between art and life.

"This Is Not a Film." The Strange Loops of Joanna Hogg's Reflexivity

The relationship between art and life is addressed most challengingly by a series of images repeated and reinterpreted in *The Souvenir*. In yet another correspondence with Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, in which a man is haunted by an image the true meaning of which is revealed only in the end, the film includes the variation of

21 In his review of *The Souvenir: Part II*, Adrian Martin does not connect these images of nature to Rossetti's poem, but observes how they seem to be detached from the film's concrete narrative temporality. According to him, Hogg goes against the convention of using such shots as "punctuating sequences to mark the passage of time," and "makes it impossible to tell how long anything takes in this story" (2022).

a picturesque shot that remains somewhat enigmatic until the very end when its origin is finally revealed. The same tableau, a kind of moving photograph of a landscape and sky, captured in different weather conditions, framed in a planimetric composition, appears three times accompanied by Julie's voice over reading from what we assume are Anthony's letters to her. [Fig. 23.] The image is like a canvas for the pictorial rendering of their emotions, repainted as their relationship evolves to mirror their inner turmoil. It is both an image of absence, a view unfolding through recollection (and, as such, a marker of death) and a symbolic image sealing the connection between the protagonists. We perceive it as an imaginary landscape belonging to the inner world of the characters with no concrete reference in the diegetic world. Its true uncanniness, however, emerges quite unexpectedly in the last scene, when we see the doors of the huge aircraft hangar slowly sliding open in a way that resembles the opening of an eye, and revealing that this is in fact not a subjective vision but concrete reality, i.e. a glimpse of countryside outside the film set. [Fig. 24.] Thus the fictional film set gives way to the actual set where *The Souvenir* was filmed, and in a metaleptic gesture, Julie steps out into the "real" world outside the hangar. The slice of the countryside in the open doorway is already familiar to us from the image that "haunted" the film in the manner of *La Jetée*. The scene is also similar to the famous doorway shot from John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) that is repeated in many variations throughout that film becoming an emblem of the threshold between civilization and nature, life and death, known and unknown, order and chaos.[22] Hogg's ending inflects the same visual motif through the contrast of the tiny figure standing in the huge opening into a majestic, almost operatic scene. While the picturesque images we saw earlier seem to occur in a flow-of-consciousness manner, the framed landscape in the final shot corresponds more to Roland Barthes's Brechtian understanding of the tableau which he describes as "a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view" (1977, 70). Such a tableau is intellectual, Barthes writes, "it has something to say" (1977, 70). In this case, balancing passion with intellect, the image of the opening of the door (suggesting an awakening), along with the image "cut out" of the narrative, challenges the distinction between fiction and reality. The memory

22 *The Searchers* presents a highly disturbing journey into chaos to bring back a woman from a fate deemed worse than death by the protagonist, and just like in this film, most of the traumatic events happen off screen, while scenes unfold against a breathtakingly picturesque landscape.

of the landscape tableaux (and the comparison with the iconic image from *The Searchers* in case it occurs to us) reinforces our perception that Julie does not only step out into the "real world" here, she also steps into another picture.

The image itself is the reversal of the photos projected in the windows [Figs. 6–7], which were standing in for reality: here the enframing of reality takes the place of the picture, and points out not a threshold to step over, but the possibility of doublings, reversals and folds. This final moment is emblematic for Hogg's cinema, in which life and art are not viewed on different ontological planes, but in a strange state of comingling. If the first *Souvenir* film is about the traumatic memory of her lover's death abstracted through intermediality, *Part II,* in which a film is made about the events of the first film, is a more direct and complex thematization of auto-fiction. The third film, *The Eternal Daughter*, addresses again the intertwining of fiction and reality in a more disguised self-reflexivity, through its ghost story twist suggesting the possibility of watching an imaginary movie unfolding from the script that the middle-aged Julie is writing in the film, this time about the fear of losing her mother.

Traditionally, when viewers are invited to watch a film being made in front of their eyes, there is an illusion of reality around the embedded fiction. We see the concrete world in which the filmmakers work. The artificial construction of art is presented in the context of what appears to be reality. Hogg's metacinema offers no such clear duality in any of these films. Her method is similar to René Magritte's canvases [Fig. 25.] in which reality and representation can be reversed and merged within a continuous uncanny fold. In *The Souvenir: Part II* in the scene in which Julie comes in through the door of the airport hangar used as a sound stage, she does not only resume her film school activities, she literally steps back into a multitude of pictures. Entering this space, she walks by a series of mirrors scattered around the set, her figure being immediately multiplied by the reflections in the mirrors, only to arrive in front of a giant painted background filling the frame. The reflections of Julie in this hall of mirrors, reminiscent of the famous scene in Orson Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), signal the multiplicities embodied by the actor/non-actor/fictional character that were already present in *The Souvenir*. Furthermore, the scene alludes to the *mise-en-abyme*-type repetitions, which create a vortex-like structure in this second film.

Julie's film in *Part II* effectively remakes all the major events in the first movie, she directs young actors to re-enact what we saw before, suggesting that the first film was the real life equivalent of what is now being remade as fiction in the second. [Fig. 26.] Nevertheless, beside the reconstruction of Julie's apartment

(which itself reproduced Hogg's own place as a student in the first film) as a film set, when she is not working on her film, we also find Julie living in the same artificial space with the *trompe l'oeil* rear projections. We see variations of parts of the first film on two narrative levels, both as a film within the film (directed by Julie with her film school colleagues) and in Julie's private life, as she attempts to start new relationships. See, for example, the scene of her making love in the same ornate bed in which we saw her with Anthony, only this time instead of the charming atmosphere of Rococo erotica, and her rosy, blushing face in close-up, the room is dark, the sex is rough and there is talk of menstrual blood making the scene in every way the opposite of the seductive experience from the previous film. In a strange loop, the last scene in *Part II* actually reproduces the beginning of *The Souvenir*, with the party of friends in the dimly lit apartment and with Julie talking to a tall dark man exactly the same way she met Anthony. In the very last images, we see not Julie's but apparently Joanna Hogg's film crew outside the walls of the apartment built on the set, and hear the director's final instruction of "cut," wrapping up within her movie the world of filmmaking surrounding Julie's life as well as Julie's own film in a Russian doll-like fashion. Whereas the first film centres on the elusive Anthony, the second film focuses through this *mise-en-abyme* construction, metalepsis and doublings on the enigma of Julie as Joanna Hogg's double caught in-between life and art (clearly suggested by the introductory multiplications of her figure in the mirrors).

The eerie doublings continue in *The Eternal Daughter*, by presenting Julie as a middle-aged woman and filmmaker, embodied this time, by Tilda Swinton, who played her mother in *The Souvenir* films, and who has a double role here, portraying in this film both Julie and her aging mother. Her skillful acting ensures that we perceive the full uncanniness of doubling, of seeing two people in conversation, but at the same time, the breaking down of the boundaries of the self through the assumed, internalized gestures of the other. [Fig. 27.] Beyond the elements of grief horror, the film deals in this way with not only apprehension and death (of one's own observed in the inevitable finitude of the life of one's parent) but also with the deeply intimate and uncanny identification, the exchanges or ghostly hauntings taking place between mothers and daughters, that one realizes especially in a retrospective self-analysis. Hogg sets up an uncanny symmetry in the mother's painful memory of going through a miscarriage and the daughter's fear of losing her mother as well as in the way in which the mother worries about the future of the daughter who is childless, but who, in a reversal of roles, cares for her as if she were her child. Furthermore, there is an unsettling impression

of uncanniness in the seamless fusion between the familiarity of the situation and emotions (the memory of spending a few days together with one's mother in a hotel and the intimacy of both real and imagined conversations) and the distancing effect of the perceived artistic contrivances. In the same way as we can see the haunted manor as a metaphor for all the emotionally charged spaces in Hogg's films, we may find this doubling symptomatic for the uncanniness of the merger between memory and imagination, as well as between strangeness and familiarity that we see at the heart of Hogg's autofictional cinema. Nicholas Royle writes that according to Freud the uncanny "has to do with a sense of ourselves as double, split, at odds with ourselves," and adds that "it is impossible to think about the uncanny without this involving a sense of what is autobiographical, self-centred, based in one's own experience" as well as "a sense of ghostliness, a sense of strangeness given to dissolving all assurances about the identity of a self," concluding that "the uncanny is thus perhaps the most and least subjective experience, the most and least autobiographical 'event'" (2003, 16).

This ghostliness of identities in transcoding personal experience into art appears the strongest in the screening of Julie's graduation movie in *The Souvenir: Part II*. Beginning with the painted and animated image of a striking (Rococo) pink curtain (resembling a vulva) that reminds us of René Magritte's characteristic curtains [Fig. 28], this film within the film is titled, like the first movie, *The Souvenir*. However, despite suggesting with the title written in the same typeface a strange loop connecting this film to the first *Souvenir* film, it should be called perhaps: "This Is Not a Film." Firstly, because this is clearly not the film we saw being rehearsed and shot (which attempted to recreate and reflect on the film that Hogg actually did make, i.e. *The Souvenir*), but an entirely different, eerie and theatrical, surrealist dream summary of the first film [Fig. 29], signalled from the very beginning through the symbolism of the curtains. Secondly, what we see is, paradoxically, a short film that could have been made in the past, but was not (as it recalls the style of Hogg's first film that she did make, but not on the subject of *The Souvenir*), and therefore it appears as the product of a present-day reflection, of an affective time travel.[23] As such, it is yet another manifold amalgamation of fiction and reality. It is a self-pastiche of Hogg's first short film made in 1986, titled *Caprice* featuring a young Tilda Swinton (credited at the time as Matilda Swinton) absorbed by the fake glamour

23 The credit sequence of this graduation film nested inside *The Souvenir: Part II* reveals for the first time that Julie's family name is Harte, indicating perhaps through the homophony with "heart" that this is an alter-ego character with whom the author embarks on an emotional, self-reflective journey.

of a women's magazine. In the original film, Swinton steps into an enchanted world through the magazine's giant cover image and passes through sets unfolding something like the *Alice in Wonderland* of a modern woman whose image is being remodelled by fashion, advertisements and the movies. In the fictional graduation movie from *The Souvenir: Part II*, Swinton's real-life daughter slides her hand into a magnified version of Fragonard's painting, *The Souvenir*, and enters another cartoonish world that imitates in many ways the style of *Caprice* while representing key moments of Julie and Anthony's story and hinting at some of Hogg's key cinematic influences. [Fig. 30.] Julie's red shoes that magically lift her in the air and transport her into the realm of fantasy resemble not only Dorothy's ruby slippers from Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), but also remind us of Hogg's old favourite, the tragic story from *The Red Shoes* (1948) directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, in which the titular shoes symbolize the fatal attraction of art for a young ballet dancer who is torn between her love for a young man and her passion for dancing. Unlike Powell and Pressburger's heroine, however, who cannot reconcile life and art, Hogg shows us through the surreal sequence of Julie stepping into the picture, and walking into a heavily stylized world, the way life finds its way into art.

According to Adrian Martin's astute observation, the fictional graduation film runs for exactly eight and a half minutes, and could therefore be a "cryptic homage to Fellini" (2022). Seeing it as such a gesture of cinematic homage might be appropriate as Hogg indeed revisits the same questions regarding the connection of life and art in a dreamlike final synthesis and in a multiple *mise-en-abyme* structure that distinguished Federico Fellini's modernist masterpiece. The series of painterly and theatrical tableaux that Julie passes through offer not only a summary of *The Souvenir* film, but also foreground the contrast between the search for emotional involvement and the eerie effect of artificiality which define Hogg's affectively intermedial cinema. Julie's leap into the painting is emblematic for this cinema in which a conspicuous tableau composition becomes a place of entry into a pictorial space opening up in-between different arts and, at the same time, an uncanny passage between life and art.

Short Conclusion. Hogg's Intermediality and the Homeliness of the Uncanny

In the three films discussed here, *The Souvenir*: *Part I* and *II*, as well as *The Eternal Daughter*, Joanna Hogg delves into her "locked away" traumatic memories and

fears. The films unravel a densely layered multimedial "fabric" using a variety of image forms, and references to literature, painting, music and films through which Hogg continuously draws both on her experiences of life and on her own experiences of the arts, suggesting their inseparability. Bringing the often hidden "impurity" of cinema to center stage in this way supports Alain Badiou's idea that cinema does not start with a void to be filled like Stéphane Mallarmé's famous blank page, on the contrary, it always struggles with "the infinity of the visible, the infinity of the sensible, the infinity of the other arts" (Badiou 2013, 227).

The collage effect of mediums and the fragmented, vignette style narrative blends the impression of the real and the imaginary, and unfurls temporal juxtapositions of past and present. It also offers a puzzling blend of the personal and the conceptual, in which the immersion into the evoked, recognizable reality on screen, into the subjective space of memory (or fantasy) and the empathy with the characters is both facilitated through certain techniques (e.g. through improvised dialogues, atmospheric use of *mise-en-scène* or pictorial styles, etc.) and thwarted by the perception of an artificial constructedness, which induces aesthetic distance. The uncanny doublings, the *mise-en-abyme* structure and recurrence of scenes or images only highlight this ambivalence.

One of key issues about art that is directly addressed in *The Souvenir* in the discussions around Julie's plans for making a film about Sunderland is the question of authenticity. Abandoning this early project about a poor, working class environment for an extremely stylized, surreal movie, however, does not simply mean that Julie (and accordingly, Hogg) has merely swapped "Ken Loach for Ken Russell" (Martin 2022). The short film within the film offers a reflection on the emotional "souvenirs" of Hogg's youth from the point of view of a much more mature artist who conceives these films to sketch her own portrait of an artist in the making by embracing the seemingly antithetical qualities of the distancing, objectifying as well as the confessional or healing potential of art. The films suggest that authenticity in art is not contingent on realism or political commitment but on the manner in which a creative artist ultimately recognizes that regardless of style, art is not a mere imitation of, or an intellectual reflection on life, but a part of life. For an artist, art and life are in many ways inseparably and indeed uncannily interlinked.

In *The Souvenir* films, Hogg creates a cinematic space replicating meaningful venues from her past by using personal objects invested with affective value and snippets of her past frozen into pictures. In *The Eternal Daughter* she imbues a typical location for her own family background with a sense of unease and strange

familiarity through motifs and stylistic effects of Gothic fiction and films. The auto-fictional narratives of all these films unfold within artificially created spaces haunted by memories and by a variety of artistic mediums. Nevertheless, as Michel de Certeau reminds us in his book on the everyday practices of appropriating space, we need to acknowledge that "haunted places are the only ones people can live in" alongside the "many different spirits hidden there in silence" (2011, 108). In this sense, Hogg merely amplifies this ghostly composite nature of our lived environments. Furthermore, Hogg's self-reflexive cinema may often seem unwelcomingly fragmented, disconnected and abstract, but by way of unravelling multiple (and multiply mediated) layers of fiction and reality to bring her own world's hidden "spirits" to light and come to terms with them, it also gestures towards what Heidegger described as the "counter-turning" (*Gegenwendigkeit*) of the uncanny in which "the departure from the homely […] turns counter to itself and becomes a way of seeking and attaining the homely" (Whity 2021, 790). Hogg daringly experiments with intermediality enhancing narrative techniques and motifs that infuse her art with uncanniness and does not mitigate its inherent tensions in order to draw attention to the mutual hauntedness of life and art.

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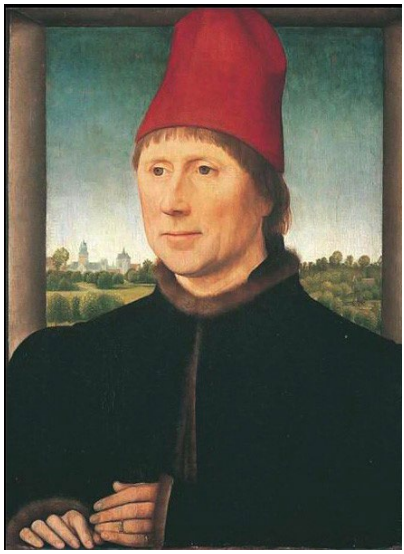

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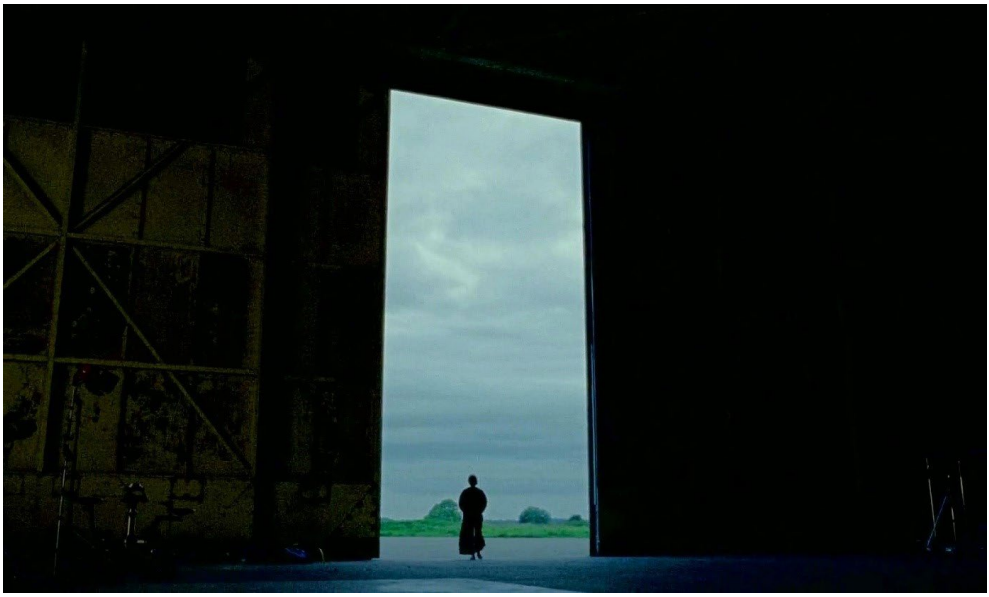

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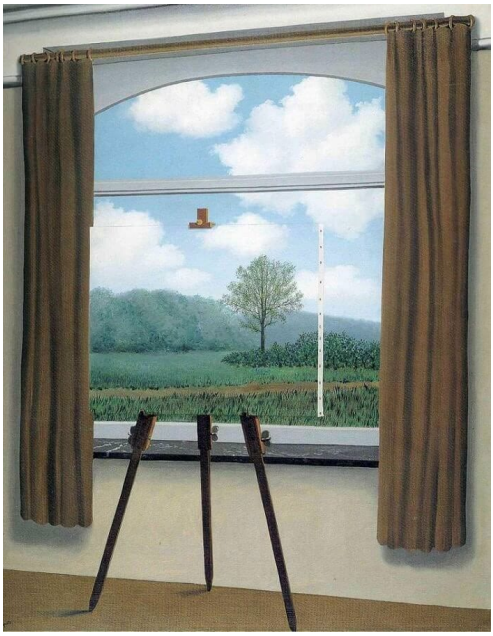

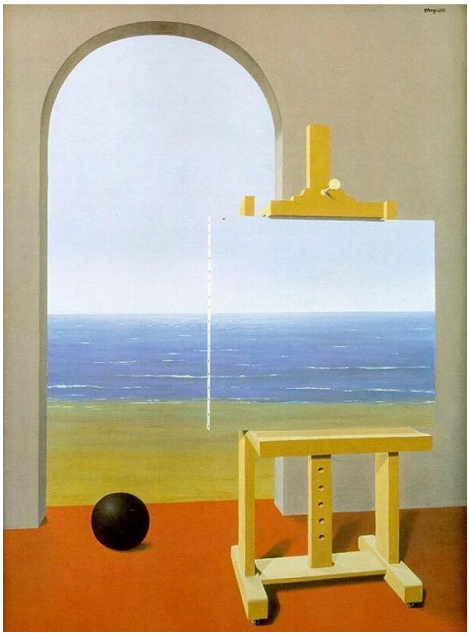

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Filial Care and Familial Postmemory. On the Uncanny and Affective Intermediality of Analogue Media Use in Recent European Documentaries

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Abstract. Found footage filmmaking, or "archiveology" (Russell, 2008), has become a contemporary mode of understanding the collective past. At the same time, in some recent European documentaries we have a more intimate, personal use of archival (and animated) images. They construct two-strand narrative structures showing both the trauma of losing a parent and the excavation of the unresolved traumas of those ailing and passing. In *Us against Us* (*Noi împotriva noastră*, Andra Tarara, 2021) the director/daughter initiates a highly reflexive video dialogue with her schizophrenic father. *Fragile Memory* (*Крихка пам'ять*, Igor Ivanko, 2022) is a grandson's story about a former cameraman affected by Alzheimer's. Postmemory and post-generational trauma work is in the focus of Aliona van der Horst's films like *Love is Potatoes* (2017), in which her own mother's emigration story is recovered through intermediality, or *Turn Your Body to the Sun* (2021), in which the digitally manipulated archival footage accompanies a woman's quest for her father's repressed memories. These are all medially hybrid films, which rely on the affordances of intermediality, and which combine present day footage with images from personal or public archives. Archiveology becomes in these films an affective tool in caring for family, and a reflection on the precarity of life and memory in general.[1]

Keywords: found footage, photography, familial postmemory, affective intermediality, uncanny.

Introduction

There is an identifiable tendency within contemporary documentary cinema, where the filmmaker makes a film in an autobiographical mode as a son or daughter,

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grandchild or relative of a person belonging to a different generation than his or her own. Within these films the director fulfils multiple roles: he or she is the first person narrator of the autobiographical act, but also functions as a subjective entry point into a story other than his or her own, resulting in a kind of a crossover between performative and participatory documentary modes. Moreover, with the recent boom of archiveology fuelled by extensive digitization, these types of documentaries have become more and more reliant on archival images stemming from personal or family archives, leading to new forms of medial hybridity. The examination of the selected examples aims at a better understanding of this new type of medial hybridity in European cinema closely related to issues regarding self-representation, postmemory and embodied viewing. Intricate inscriptions of the self produce reflexive narratives and also complicated interplays between life and representation, which calls for the Rancière-ian emancipated spectatorship. According to Jim Lane "reference [to the real world] in these documentaries functions in a bifurcated flow in which the self and external historical events compete for representation" (2002, 32).

Jim Lane, in his book dedicated to American autobiographical documentary covers more than just contemporary confluences between autobiography and documentary, as he also presents historical connections. Different types of subjective documentary techniques are presented, from a more classical autobiographical representation to a contemporary reinterpretation of the role of subjectivity. This tendency can be related to several issues that stirred debates in documentary theory, such as the outbreak of subjectivism in the documentary landscape, identified by Michael Renov in the films of the 1980s and the 1990s (2004, xxii). Among others, Laura Rascaroli and Julia Lesage have convincingly argued that there is a strong link between the foregrounding of subjectivism as a filmmaking strategy within the documentaries, and a growing awareness in terms of class and gender debates from the 1970s onwards (Rascaroli 2009; Renov 2004; Lane 2002; Lesage 1999).

Thus subjectivism is as much related to the shift to the autobiographical, as to the critical deconstruction of the authoritarian voice of the documentary narration, which can be seen according to Anette Kuhn as a move toward a specifically feminine mode of cinematographic writing. Lesage argues that: "unlike social-issue documentarists working in a realist mode, (many) women artists do not presume to represent a continuous stable identity or a cohesive self. Rather they pursue an epistemological investigation of what kinds of relations might constitute the self, using as a laboratory their own consciousness (Lesage 1999, 311).

According to Lane (2002, 26) the return of the subject, of the "enunciating I" is not a nostalgic one, or its main focus is not the construction of a coherent identity through representation, instead it is a rather decentered subject, and the films become sites of instability or revision rather than coherence (see: Renov 1989, 4). Arguably, the emergence of this type of subjectivity in documentary is as much related to cinema's digital turn and its relation to the real as to gender or postcolonial issues. "The relationship between self and cinema and other media remains a preoccupation in the self-portrait documentary" – writes Lane (2002, 129), which, according to him, can take the form of the family portrait or of the self-portrait.

The transmission, the diffusion of embodied experience through mediation is also what Marianne Hirsch theorizes in *Generations of Postmemory* (2008), ideas which add a new layer to the importance of the filial relations in family portraits or filmic autobiographies. In Hirsch's seminal article a distinction is made between two postmemory transmission structures: the familial and the affiliative one: the first one being intergenerational and vertical, while "affiliative postmemory would thus be the result of contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation combined with structures of mediation that would be broadly appropriable, available […] Familial structures of mediation and representation facilitate the affiliative acts of the postgeneration" (2008, 114–115). Thus, postmemory works are not merely about identity, they are also about a type of mediation that challenges authority and direct transmission, which according to Hirsch is best grasped in the way a photograph (both as an indexical sign and affective presence) is part of this mediation. The selected documentaries viewed as family portraits conceived in the autobiographical mode, do present fragmented stories about filial postmemory, but at the same time, the viewer is intrinsically drawn into a process of affiliative mediation. The forementioned hybridity mediates more than just genealogical memory, the subjective, affective POV of the narrating self and the affective use of media calls for an embodied viewing.

In the article entitled *To Narrate or Describe? Experimental Documentary beyond Docufiction* Erika Balsom builds a new framework for the return of the referential and the observational in contemporary art's documentary impulse. By doing so she formulates a critique of the current state of the art of the documentary "understood as a fatigue with postmodernist textualism," (2021, 181) yet the postmodernist assault against objectivity and authenticity still persists. According to Balsom, images are not conceived "as much as traces but as products of representational conventions, a picture constituted by the play of codes" (2021, 182). Instead of

documentary's dependence on the indexical claim, contemporary documentary is expected to "reinvent itself on the new groundless ground of hybridity," to more "sophisticated approaches to questions of truth" (2021, 187).

Through the selection of films to be scrutinized I propose to revisit the status that photography and analogue media in general, hailed as the prototypical index in this kind of docu-hybridity. What happens to Roland Barthes's idea that the noeme of photography is the "this has been"? What is the role of the analogue media inserted in the digital imagery of a contemporary documentary film? Are they reappropriated in order to achieve an archive effect, a temporal, metaleptic leap into the past? Are they used to perform an ontological statement, or are they viewed as merely images that produce medially a different type of reality?

In the essay entitled "*Analogue:" Conceptual Connotations of a Historical Medium*, Sara Collahan argues that the so-called digital turn opens the possibility of tapping into analogue photography as a conceptual and cultural sensitivity distinguishable from the technique. Collahan (2018) suggests that the notion of the analogue offers a useful way of thinking about media in terms of ontological and conceptual possibilities, by focusing not on what it means to shift from one medium to another, but what it means to evoke a medium as conceptual content. She proposes a method of analysing relations between media, that one does not just consider the relation between old and new media, but specifically the way these are used as already theorized media-conceptual clusters in a specific set of photographic practices at the turn of the twenty-first century. The analogue can be understood as a figure that mobilizes the classical definition of the photograph as objective, truth telling, indexical, but within the context of a contemporary digital media culture its material, auratic and mystical aspects are also highlighted. In order to entangle the different media relations when "analogue media" is represented, inserted in a contemporary video, an intermedial analysis needs to be carried out.

The Materiality of the Analogue and a Metaphor for the Human Mind and Body

In *Fragile Memory* (*Крихка пам'ять*, Igor Ivanko, 2022) the materiality of nitrate based negatives found by the grandchild-director are brought to the fore as a forthright analogy with the mental and bodily state of the grandfather [Figs. 1–2]. The decaying nitrate substrate of the film negative become analogies of the ageing body and ailing memory of the grandparent suffering from Alzheimer. As the former cameraman is not able to recognize the faces captured in his photographs,

fails to recognize his wife or daughter, the film negatives cannot perform their role as an imprint of memory: faces are blurred, fading, disintegrating surfaces which cannot perform their function as an index, as a pointing to reality [Figs. 3–4]. The films render the decaying images both as inserts performing metaleptic leaps, and both as intradiegetic objects in recurring scenes with the grandfather watching his recently digitized negatives on a laptop screen. He cannot remember, he cannot answer the questions of his grandson. These images can be said to exemplify the materiality of the analogue photographic technique; although non-decipherable as imagery, what they show and bear witness to is the passage of time and the decay and loss resulting thereof. The material decay becomes an analogy of the aging person who is gradually losing his identity, he is alive but his personhood is not accessible, just as frail and precarious as the material mortality of the photographs. This conceptual analogy about the ephemeral character of photographs is famously described by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* also: "even if it is attached to more lasting supports, it is still mortal: like a living organism, it is born on the level of the sprouting silver grains, it flourishes a moment, then ages ... Attacked by light, by humidity, it fades, weakens, vanishes; there is nothing left to do but throw it away. Earlier societies managed so that memory, the substitute for life, was eternal and that at least the thing which spoke Death should itself be immortal: this was the Monument" (1981, 93).

The inserts made from the disintegrating photographs enhance this "living organism" character through a very subtle digital manipulation of the still surfaces: there is a very discreet, slow dynamic zoom in to the surface of the photograph. Definitely not intended as a fake panoramic camera movement, the slow zoom in-s function here is less to mobilize the immobile images a la Ken Burns, but rather to generate a 3D effect of the material stratification of the decaying images. The result is reminiscent of the way microscopic images of biological samples are reproduced in documentaries, or recall the visualization of the in uterus development of a fetus when small particles are shown as floating in a thick liquid substance. This digital rendering of the materiality of the analogue is an instance of intermediality which paradoxically foregrounds the sensuality of a surface, as a living organism with the aid of digital tools.

Analogies between the mental state of a parent and of home videos taped on VHS cassettes are made evident in the Romanian film entitled *Us Against Us* (*Noi împotriva noastră*, directed by Andra Tarara, 2021). The director visits her father, turn their cameras on each other and film their conversations in which they discuss schizophrenia, their memories, and their personal relationship to

filmmaking. The film consists of statements of two vulnerable people, the father forced to live with a mental disorder – and a daughter who had to grow up without a father. In the process of recording their video, they try to understand each other while revealing their inner thoughts and feelings. The original home videos made by the father are easily recognizable by their low resolution and some electronic noise as a footer on the image. The videos are presented as the memories of the father which the daughter finds hard to relate to. The film consists of metaleptic leaps from the home videos as media of memory to present day images filmed simultaneously by the father-daughter pair, visually also reminiscent of the precarious aesthetics of home videos. These recent images are shown in split screen [Figs. 5–6]. – which can be interpreted either as a postcolonial stance, where the monoperspectival home videos of the father are rewritten by the split screen embracing the multiplication of perspectives, and the daughter becomes visually an equal filming partner and an equal party in communication. The splitscreen can also be seen as a rendering of the mental states of the father suffering from schizophrenia. By embracing low resolution, rawness and the disorienting dual view as a main stylistic choice – the film sensitizes the viewer, creates a space for empathy and acceptance towards this illness [Figs. 7–8]. This intention is reinforced verbally in the discussions about what it is like to undergo clinical treatment for schizophrenia in Romania, as the father expresses his disagreement with the way he and his condition are handled by the healthcare system. The personal becomes political in a subtle way. The digital video capitalizes upon the home video style: it captures the personal, intimate character implied by the analogue VHS, and also captures the idea of the analogue set of connotations that stem from its material substrate.

The Temporal Distance Assumed by the Analogue

A frequently evoked symbol of the photographic process is that of freezing a moment, and that of the analogue in general is that of being a trace, an imprint. Photographs and other type of analogue images are conventionally used to visually represent past tense. Within the context of the filial narratives about parents and grandparents photographs are being used often as diegetic objects to signal generational gap and the temporal distance of the parents' life story, or become substitutes for those already gone. Within this filial-generational narrative context analogue images are also present as metaleptic leaps, as inserts displaying a variety of media, designating temporal leaps. These type of inserts

are photographs in *Fragile Memory*, home videos in *Us against Us*, but an idea of pastness can be conveyed through other type of analogue media such as drawings and other handmade images. The distinction between diegetically present and inserted analogue media can be observed in Aliona van der Horst's film *Love is Potatoes* (2017). As the daughter of a Russian woman who left her country in order to leave in the Netherlands and as a director who tries to deal with her mother's unspoken reasons that led to emigration, Aliona van de Horst undertakes several journeys to Russia to take care of her mother's heritage, a sixth of the surface of a small village house. Filmed in participatory and observational style, the director is an actor participant who finds letters, personal belongings and photographs related to her mother and her the five aunts [Figs. 9–10]. Several scenes show the director searching for explanations in private letters, getting in physical contact with the objects that had become mere memorabilia of the past, and are seen as litter by some of the family members. The photographs and the letters become catalysts of the epistemic search, but the director chooses not to use these indexical documents as illustrations of the past. The past is understood phenomenologically, as coming alive in the present, in the imagination of the filmmaker by reading the letters of her mother and by spending long periods of time in her ancestor's house. The imagined past is presented in the film in the form of animated inserts that perform not just a temporal leap, but also a leap to the inner images of the daughter. Although obviously not indexical, and loosely related to the iconography of the Soviet propaganda (images of Stalin, the use of the colour red), the animation invokes the idea of the analogue through the hand drawn, 2D style, imitating wood carved imprints [Figs. 11–12].

Despite severing the head of the hydra of indexicality – i.e. avoiding the evidential use of photography and other media, the metaleptic jump into the world of animation preserves the markers of materiality, by using highly abstract, yet haptic images. Through these conjunctions the film mediates the traumatic experiences of Russian women under socialism, but also positions the filmmaker as a woman who takes care of this past as postmemory, through collecting and archiving not just images but also producing haptic postmemory objects, such as her film. This is the reversal of the mother-and-daughter roles that Patrizia de Bello (2007) described in her theoretical work on photo albums: in the era of analogue photographs usually mothers assumed the role of the family archivists who used the photobook as a site for family identity construction, but also designed it as a haptic object.

Reproduction and Manipulation of the Analogue with Digital Tools

Aliona van der Horst's film *Turn your Body to the Sun* (2021) is not an autobiographical one, but it tells the story of a female protagonist, a Ukrainian emigrant performing a similar quest into her family past. As an allegory for the phenomenological quest, the daughter, Sana embarks on a long train journey to Ukraine, following the path of her father, a former Soviet soldier who was captured by the Nazis, and in consequence he was sentenced to a brutal work camp by the Stalinist regime. He survived the camp by writing letters to an unknown young girl, who became his wife after his liberation. Their daughter, the protagonist of the documentary tries to understand what made him the silent, reserved person she knew as a child, through his diaries, various personal and public archives, and registries. Throughout the journey Sana can be seen reading letters, browsing through documents, she even finds photographic evidence backing up her father's story in a journal. Yet, within the metaleptic leaps into the past, the film refrains itself from the evidential use of indexical media again. A distinct space is created for the visualization of the processes of postmemory: Sana is pictured in a black box-style screening room, where newsreel images about the life of unidentified Soviet soldiers from the Second World War are screened in the background. The gallery space with no seats, without the conventional distance between the space of the viewer and the screened image – signalled by the seats in this environment allows for a different contact between the image and the beholder. As Sana watches the images in the dark, she merges into the image of the screen, sometimes her body becomes a surface to be screened upon. During one of her interactions with the screened images she tries to capture the images with her hands, literally performing an allegory about the wish of getting in contact with the past [Figs. 13–14]. The newsreel footage contains visceral images like images of hunger, of the dead, or images of full nudity, capitalizing upon the analogy between the nude bodies and the body of the 16mm film. These are not singular bodies, the faces of the unknown persons become collective representations of any soldier.

Sometimes the 16mm newsreel footage about soldiers fills the screen, it is slowed down and fragmented into close ups. These inserts surprise us with the combination of these already conventional techniques with digital colourization and digital image corrections. The shortcomings of the digital manipulation are made visible, there are variations in sharpness, images become legible, then disappear again in a blurry blind field and even falling apart into pixels. These

failures of the digital enhancement render these images ambiguous, their visibility becomes frail, their faces become uncanny, reminiscent of deep fakes [Figs. 15–16].

In *Turn your Body to the Sun* not photographs, but analogue film fragments are screened and become spaces of projection – within this film the character of Sana is the one who projects her longing for his father in these picture, but virtually it could activate any viewer's screening. By renouncing traditional tropes of authentication, such as evidentiality, particularity and also the materiality of the analogue Aliona van der Horst opens up the found newsreel image not just to narrative elaboration but also to a contemporary culture embracing the digital, AI tools for maybe less information and confirmation but offering new possibilities for affective connection.

The leap between the present and the past, between the first person docu-footage and the archival images result in poetic, essayistic visuals, and create incongruous moods on the level of spectatorship. While the personal archiveology becomes a narrative stimuli for the filmmaker immersed in his/her own story, they also elicit "another kind of empathy" with a wider, collective appeal for the viewer. Within this context the haptic visuality of archival images become "lures to feeling and thought" (Marks 2015, 173), sites for meta-communication and abstraction, and call for a "reflective spectatorship" (Plantinga 2019).

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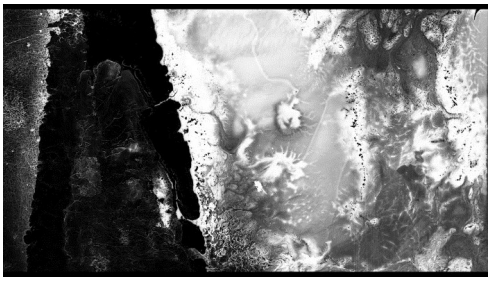

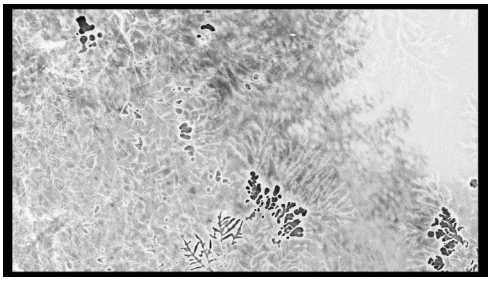

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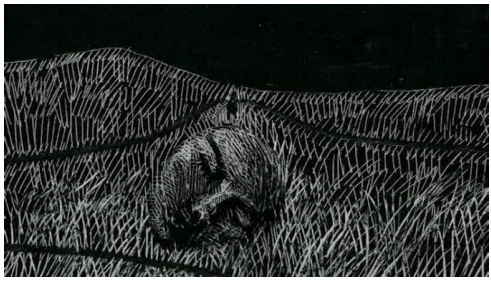
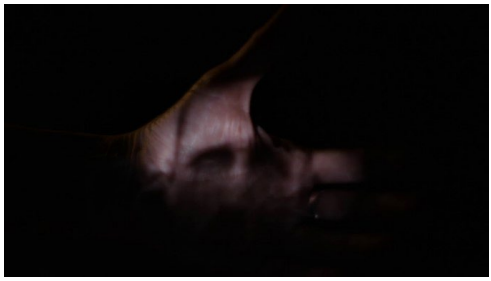



Figure 13–14. Images to be grasped and held in the hand in *Turn Your Body to the Sun*.

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The Crisis of Care and Uncanny Intersensuality in Sally Potter's *The Roads Not Taken*

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Abstract. In a world experiencing an ongoing crisis in healthcare, the value of caregiving has become marginalized, the work of carers undervalued and pushed into invisibility. Sally Potter's film, *The Roads Not Taken* (2020) brings into the domain of the visible the toil of in-home care of the mentally ill, an instance of a "quiet crisis buried in individual lives" (Bunting 2020, 5). *The Roads Not Taken* as an illness narrative of a former writer, now suffering from dementia, being taken care of by his daughter, conveys a liminal case of despaired effort to reach for the Other, in an emotionally immersive manner. The paper explores the film's uncanny sensations of in-betweenness, with special focus on the unhomeliness and heterotopia of the vulnerable male body, trapped between disconnection from the present and mental journeys into the past, traversing sites across geographic and spiritual borders, captured in intimate close-ups that invite "cinempathy." The female figure of the caregiver emerges as a site of negotiating between self-sacrifice and self-care, between the deep-felt compassion of private caregiving and the objectifying impersonality of public care services, while just missing a work opportunity, thus experiencing the contradictions of capital and care (Fraser 2016). The film foregrounds unspeakable pains, entangled emotions and unbridgeable gaps, and subtly points at profound anxieties around the care crisis of our times (Dowling 2021).[1]

Keywords: care crisis, illness narrative, (e)motion crisis, uncanny intersensuality.

Introduction. On Illness and Care

Released at the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, Sally Potter's feature film, *The Roads Not Taken* (2020), attempts at a cinematic exploration of the state of mental

1 This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization in Romania, CNCS - UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-PCE-2021-1297, within PNCDI III.

illness. It embraces a relatively simple storyline but all the more far-reaching in depth and affective engagement. Of autobiographical inspiration – drawn from the filmmaker's own experience of observation and care of her younger brother's case of early onset dementia – it sketches, through one single day, the relationship between a mentally ill father, a writer of Mexican origin and his daughter taking care of him. During this day, Molly (Elle Fanning) tries to take her father Leo (Javier Bardem) to the dentist and to the ophthalmologist, while Leo has minimal contact with reality, living in his past memories. During the turmoil of the day, Molly stands the trials with exceptional patience, defending her father against prejudices and objectification experienced at the public healthcare institutions, while she loses an important work opportunity. In this way, the film engages to represent not only the trauma of illness but also the trauma of care (Ureczky 2020), balancing the focus between the demanding condition of the ill father and the caregiving daughter's concerns, trapped between entangled priorities. The emotionally charged closure after the exhausting challenges of the day shows Molly's split self – the viewer can see her doubled figure, one remaining at the father's bed, the other leaving the room – testifying to the unsolved conundrum posed by the private crisis and drama of care.

Though fully resonant with the muddle around care during the Covid-19 pandemic, when a lot of public and scholarly attention was paid to narratives touching on the topic of illness at both individual and community level, Sally Potter's *The Roads Not Taken* received mixed criticism, reviews praising its sensitive engagement with the painful topic of the gradual loss of one's integrity but at the same time contesting its rather flat execution, without "fully fleshing out any of her characters" (Algieri 2020); qualifying it as being a substantive "chamber piece" but sometimes "reaching for ideas and moods it cannot fully encompass" (Bradshaw 2020).

I would like to argue in this essay that, albeit the admissible scantiness of Sally Potter's project, a more in-depth look at its sensitivities can be taken regarding it not merely as a representation of illness but also as an approach raising the issue of social perception of the state of illness, contextualized in the contemporary crisis of care as well as in Sally Potter's affective cinepoetics pervaded by an intense preoccupation with the Other. To this end, the analysis of the film will, first and foremost, draw on theoretical discourses on the crisis of care, connecting to insights of biopolitics and medical humanities. Secondly, it will place the relationship of the patient and caregiver in the ampler frame of the poetics of the Other encountered in Sally Potter's cinema, with special focus

on care as affective engagement, at the intersection of cognitive psychology and film phenomenology. And thirdly, but not the least, it proposes to investigate the ways in which the affectivity of care finds expression in the language and texture of the film, pre-eminently in the employment of universal cultural codes alongside with an uncanny intersensuality.

In the Context of the Crisis of Care

The biopolitical regime coined by Michel Foucault in the 1970s as "somatocracy," i.e. "a regime that sees the care of the body, corporal health, the relation between illness and health, etc. as appropriate areas of State intervention," albeit being "in crisis, since its origins [in the 18th century]" (Foucault 2004, 7), has slipped into a profound crisis by the late 20th and early 21st century. Crisis has lumbered along in the First World on grounds of the ever deepening "contradictions of capital and care," in the sense that "the logic of economic production overrides that of social reproduction, destabilizing the very processes on which capital depends – compromising the social capacities, both domestic and public, that are needed to sustain accumulation over the long term" (Fraser 2016). Political theorist Nancy Fraser points at the paradox that the economic thrive of capitalist societies relies on the activity called "care," "affective labour" or "subjectivation," sustaining human subjects as natural and social beings, much of which is carried out in the form of non-waged activity that falls outside the frame of the market (Fraser 2016). This phenomenon with all its corollaries has been widely discussed in the medical humanities – and beyond – as "the crisis of care" (Bunting 2020, Dowling 2021).

Emma Dowling breaks down the crisis of care to several aspects: in today's societies, an increasing number of people are unable to sustain their physical and mental health as well as a sense of self-esteem against all sorts of pressures that fall upon them; caregivers are unable to carry out their activity in a satisfactory manner and in dignified conditions; the material conditions for providing care have fallen behind or have become precarious; there is an ever larger gap between care needs and care resources (cf. Dowling 2021, 6). She comments on Fraser's picture of capitalism as "an economic system that is left to its own devices – its system logic of constant market expansion in pursuit of profit – 'eats its own tail' by devouring the social capacities needed to sustain the economy, with no view to maintaining or replenishing them" (Dowling 2021, 11).

As part of the all-encompassing global crisis of our times, the crisis of care has come to imply that the value of caregiving has become marginalized, the

work of carers undervalued and pushed into invisibility: "while everyone needs a nurturing and caring environment throughout their lives, caring activities are some of the most undervalued and invisibilised activities of all while those who perform them are some of the most neglected and unsupported people in our societies" (Dowling 2021, 26); "what lies at the heart of the crisis of care is a history of invisibility" (Bunting 2020).

In First World societies, where citizens form part of a normative, medicalized system of care, old age as well as mental or physical disabilities qualify as deviations from the norm of economic productivity (cf. Ureczky 2020). In parallel, the aging society poses increasing demands not only upon the institutional system of care, but also upon the informal network of care, involving family members and extending upon non-waged forms of "labours of love" (Bunting 2020). Contemporary cinematic representations of the crisis of care, such as Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (*Moartea Domnului Lăzărescu*, 2005) or Michael Haneke's *Amour* (2012) provide a critical approach to this ever deepening *crisis*, term that "has become one of the key concepts for the understanding of the early 21st century" (Kalmár 2021, 1–2). These films – and many others in a great generic and representational variety – shed light on the cultural perception of age and illness as betraying the most about culture itself, as Sally Chivers points out, with reference to Simone de Beauvoir (Chivers 2011, xii). As Martine Beugnet formulates in line with Nancy Fraser, "in the context of a late capitalist culture old age is a disease, equivalent to the categories of low consumer value and low productivity; a social stigma that is acutely reflected in its status in terms of representation" (2006, 4).

The representation of mental illness forms a distinct thematic area of the "silvering screen." Stories representing the loss of the sense of self, such as in *Still Alice* (Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, 2014), *Elizabeth is Missing* (Aisling Walsh, 2019) or *The Father* (Florian Zeller, 2020) are some of the most painful, since the loss of the core of one's personal integrity is immense not only for the sufferer but also to those around, connected and involved emotionally. As Sally Chivers notes, "witnessing a relative become demented has its physical horrors, but also equals witnessing a loss of cultural memory, of family history, and ultimately of a past as well as of a future" (2011, 60).

Sally Potter's *The Roads Not Taken* (2020) brings into the domain of the visible the toil of the care of the mentally ill, an instance of a "quiet crisis buried in individual lives" (Bunting 2020, 5). The mentally absent father lives in parallel memory segments but fails to communicate with the present, his physical immobility is accompanied by mental journeys into the past. One "road" leads

to past scenes of his discordance with, and separation from, his lover, Dolores, in Mexico. It turns out later in the film that beyond their separation, they are inextricably bound together by the trauma of their lost child. The other one takes him back to a Greek island where he used to flee to sort out his writing crisis and where it turns out that he has left his family. His dysfunctional bodily presence in the space of his home while mentally traversing sites across geographic and spiritual borders emerges as a heterotopia, calling forth a sensation of longing for other places and times, signalling his unfulfilled sense of belonging. Mental illness emerges as a state of uncertainty that turns home into an uncanny space haunted by memories. It is a condition when one experiences "how familiar and intimate places can suddenly become strange and disconcerting" (Avery 2014, 10). It is a state in which one's sense of belonging and the emotional connections with others are profoundly compromised. His past as a Mexican emigrant reinforces his sense of homelessness; his internal insecurities about the border between the present and the past, reality and unreality perceptibly emerge from his past dilemmas around border crossing and choosing roads that lead to a new country. Thus, his mental illness and his cultural foreignness are represented as being essentially interlocked, unveiling a layered sense of unhomeliness arising as "a crisis of spatial boundaries" (Avery 2014, 5). In this sense, Sally Potter's film touches on anxieties related to cultural identity, noting in an interview that "there's many more Latinos and African Americans with dementia than there are white people, because of the excessive levels of stress for those populations" (Pape 2020).[2] Leo's – and also the chosen actor, Javier Bardem's – Latino cultural belonging also raises the gender aspect of mental illness. Leo's case is one of exposed male vulnerability, which goes against stereotypical representations of the strong and unflinching character of the male hero. He comes from a culture that is more allowing in terms of expressing emotions, but at the same time it is a macho culture. The display of the vulnerable, traumatized male body becomes thus an accented representation of masculinity in crisis, which is, at the same time, an opportunity to step from a flat to a round image of (male) humanity.[3]

Mental illness requires special forms of care. The film presents a case of in-home care, in which several – female – characters are involved, pointing at the gender dimension of care. Since "the vast work of care, both unpaid and paid, still

2 A scientifically supported statement, see Marquez et al. (2022).

3 Leo's memories of past roads, taken and not taken, outline a labyrinthine pattern that can be read as a visual mapping of his masculinity in crisis. He becomes a "labyrinthian man," a "figure of entrapment" – term that György Kalmár (2017) uses for formations of masculinity in post-communist Hungarian cinema.

predominantly falls to women" (Bunting 2020), ineluctably, theoretical queries into care highlight the gender aspect of care crisis, whereby "capitalist societies created an institutional basis for new, modern forms of women's subordination" (Fraser 2016), leading feminist activists to claim "care as the prerogative of a specifically feminist care ethic" (Dowling 2021, 25). In *The Roads Not Taken*, female cargivers turn up in distinct qualities: the nurse, Xenia (Branka Katić) represents the formal, paid form of in-home care; the ex-wife, Rita (Laura Linney) has broken bonds with Leo and only provides distant, impersonal(ized) care accordingly; therefore, all "services" not covered by the two fall upon the daughter, Molly, who does not only care for but also cares about the condition of her father. She pleads the case of family members involved in caregiving, with all subjection and self-sacrifice it entails.

In her volume *Labours of Love. The Crisis of Care*, Madeleine Bunting distinguishes several forms of care: "it may require expert knowledge and skill, it may entail insight, creativity and empathy, but equally, it may be routine and repetitive" (2020). The form of caregiving practiced by Molly is one based on insight, creativity and empathy, skills required to the full when Leo has to be assisted during the day outside home, has to be taken to medical examinations. Her gentle, devoted, intimate form of care, attentive to all flickers of emotion and ready to overcome all obstacles encountered on the "Homeric journey" to the dentist and ophthalmologist, is confronted in the film with the soulless, objectifying treatment of the disabled, old patient by institutional medical care. Her profound affection, however, is challenged when her role as a caregiver gets entangled with her role as a young professional at the beginning of her career. During the day, she is bombarded by her boss's phone calls requiring urgent response to a work order, which she cannot provide, leading to her emotional collapse by the end of the day. She cannot even refer to the caregiving work she is involved in, as it would seem too insignificant an excuse, her inner conflict directly illustrating the invisibility and marginalized position of care in the contemporary Western culture.[4] The closure of the film offers no solution: trapped between self-care and self-sacrifice, her own life and her duties as a caregiver, Molly is consumed by "the roads not taken," no viable alternative pops up for

4 As the housecleaner from Sally Potter's *Yes* (2004) recites in theatrical iambic feet: "They think that those of us who clean are small somehow, in body and in mind, we fall out of their line of sight invisible, we work our magic indivisible one from the other, we're a mass, no soul, no rights to speak of, just the basic role to play in keeping their lives looking good." Her voice functioning as a sort of metatextual chorus in the diegesis of the film, accompanied by emphatic direct address, shifts focus on the hidden, unspoken dimensions of care.

her in between, she has to transgress her own boundaries. She is torn in half, one side of her choosing the path of her own self-interest, while the other staying in the bond of magnanimnous care.

Cinempathy and the Care for the Other. Sally Potter's Ethics of Cinema

Sally Potter's cinema ultimately relies on the recognition of the essential role of care in sustaining human existence, with special focus on the care for and care about the Other as a journey towards the Self. Beyond its medical reference, care, involving empathy and devotion, emerges in her films as an ethical stance that paves the way between humans, irrespective of gender, class or cultural differences. In the scrutiny of the most varied social and interpersonal relations that Sally Potter's films are involved in, it is care that pleads a chance to overcome the obstacles in a journey of radical commitment to, and profound understanding of, the otherness of the Other.

Across their thematic and generic diversity, her films are engrossed in questions like: Can passages between the *I* and *Thou* be ultimately traversed? Can the Other be reached out without prejudice and domination? Can bridges be built across spiritually, socially, culturally coded differences? Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Vivian Sobchack defines intersubjectivity as a "reversible structure of empathy and sympathy between our own embodied subjectivity and other body-subjects" (2004, 311). At Sally Potter, the desire for the Other arises from passionate devotion. Sobchack claims that "actively – passionately – expansive, it [passionate devotion] expresses our desire to enfold other subjects and objects (and often the world itself), to know their materiality and objectivity intimately and, indeed, to embrace their alterity as our own)" (2004, 288–289, emphasis in the original). Sally Potter's vision of intersubjectivity is deeply influenced by Martin Buber's[5] relational concept: "So long as I remain in relation with my *Thou*, I cannot experience it, but can only know it in the relation itself. 'In the act of experience *Thou* is far away'" (Buber 1937, vii).

Sally Potter's films emphasize the processuality of the endeavour: the journey toward the Other leads through crisis and exasperation, and implies change and transformation in which the spectator is also involved, being "offered the

5 In *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997), Sally, the filmmaker-protagonist involved in a passionate encounter with Pablo, the Argentine tanguero and the art of tango, reads Martin Buber's famous book entitled *I and Thou*, an overtly reflexive signal in the film marking out possible directions of interpretation.

opportunity to be transformed" (Mayer 2009, 13). The filmmaker herself regards transformation as standing at the core of her cinepoetry. She says: "transformation is a key word in my films. There's an invitation to ask the questions: 'What do you see in other people, do you really see in them what they are? Who are you, what are you really?' You're not a fixed given. Take up the pen and write your own life or self-description: abandon it or explode it. You can change. That leads to the broader political principle: whole societies can change. It's an anti-despair way of thinking. Nothing's fixed, everything's impermanent, everything's in flux. We can influence events. Choice is involved – perhaps not a complete choice – but we can be part of the transformation at least" (Potter in Mayer 2009, 1).

As compared to earlier films, such as *The Tango Lesson* (1997) or *Yes* (2004), in which, despite the inscrutability of the Other, the ways leading to emotional and spiritual communion, to the utopian state of becoming one, to true intersubjectivity, leads through what Sobchack calls the "passionate devotion" towards the Other, in Potter's latest feature film, *The Roads Not Taken*, the journey towards the Other darkens. The relationship between the ill father and the caregiving daughter, the struggle for connection across boundaries set up by mental illness, offers a much more sombre picture of reaching out for the Other, balancing on the brink between life and death, devotion and self-sacrifice. The condition of mental illness transforms the I and Thou relation into a liminal case, where listening to the Other has to be effected beyond the boundaries of habitual communication. Here, the scrutiny of intersubjectivity is perceptibly driven by the desire to look at human relations when natural expectations of normalcy are not met. The one-day journey across spaces of the present reality, interlaced with distant spaces of memory, is but an account of frustration, failure and pain. The spectator is invited into just one single day of taking care of a mentally ill person whose condition cannot be expected to improve. In this way, the film becomes a sensitive work committed to raise the viewer's empathy, in the spirit of Sally Potter's overarching poetics of "cinempathy."

Robert Sinnerbrink (2016) defines cinempathy as "a cinematic/kinetic expression of the synergy between affective attunement, emotional engagement, and moral evaluation that captures more fully the ethical potential of the cinematic experience." The term opens cognitivist and phenomenological perspectives upon the relationship between ethics and cinema, inviting to examine the role of affect and emotional engagement in forming the spectator's ethical experience. As compared to traditional approaches to the relationship between ethics and cinema, investigating "1) ethics *in* cinema, focusing on narrative content,

including dramatic scenarios involving morally charged situations, conflicts, or actions; 2) the ethics *of* cinematic representation, focusing on the ethical issues raised by elements of film production and/or audience reception, […] 3) the ethics of cinema *as* a cultural medium expressing moral beliefs, social values, or ideology," (Sinnerbrink, 2016, emphasis in the original), current trends of film theoretical thought have been rethinking cinema ethics, beside Cavellian and Deleuzian approaches, in terms of phenomenological and cognitivist approaches that extend the focus of analysis to the ways in which affects, emotions, perceptions relate to the ethical experience as well as to affective-emotional responses to ethical issues emerging in cinema. Sinnerbrink conceives of cinempathy as a concept that invites not only the ethical dimension of the cinematic experience *per se*, but also the implied affective dimension, including both sympathy, i.e. feeling for somebody, and empathy, i.e. feeling with somebody, "the capacity to imagine and respond emotionally to another, while maintaining a discernible self-other distinction" (Sinnerbrink 2016).

An approach to cinempathy as manifested in Sally Potter's *The Roads Not Taken* allows the shift of focus from the minimalist stance of the (illness) narrative to the affective excess conveyed by the images. What is impressive and emotionally involving in the film is the intimacy of care, Molly's empathy and patience as she tries to connect to Leo's affected cognition, to synchronize with his sporadic moments of presence and to elicit his cooperation. Molly's emotional involvement in the bumpy process of care entails the spectator's emotional involvement, realized in a series of intimate scenes that can be regarded as "scenes of empathy." Carl Plantinga (1999, 239) regards as "scenes of empathy" those scenes "in which the pace of the narrative momentarily slows and the interior emotional experience of a favoured character becomes the locus of attention." During such scenes, "we see a character's face, typically in closeup, either for a single shot of long duration or as an element of a point-of-view structure alternating between shots of the character's face and shots of what she or he sees. In either case, the prolonged concentration on the character's face is not narrated by the simple communication of information about character emotion. Such scenes are also intended to elicit empathic emotions in the spectator" (Plantinga 1999, 239). Béla Balázs already draws attention to the affective quality of the close-up: "good close-ups radiate a tender human attitude in the contemplation of hidden things, a delicate solicitude, a gentle bending over the intimacies of life-in-the-miniature, a warm sensibility. Good close-ups are lyrical; it is the heart, not the eye, that has perceived them" (Balázs 1952, 56).

The opening close-up of Leo's face in the sickbed and numerous successive separate or joint close-ups of the protagonists create direct access for the spectator's empathy and sympathy [Figs. 1–4]. Extreme close-ups always signal an intimate connection, or at least an attempt at it, as Molly constantly tries to provide emotional security for her father from up close and seeks to make out his fragmented muttering. She is the one who prepares Leo's way to the dentist and the ophthalmologist, who assists him all the way through the disruptions, in the form of impressive close-ups as she is picking up on Leo's mode of perception, whether it comes to teach him to keep his mouth open or to take off his peed trousers. Although she mostly fails to follow Leo's thoughts as they skip from the present moment to distant times and spaces, close-ups enlarge her immense effort to stay connected, with all its underlying emotional intensity. The bodily proximity created by close-ups, accompanied by a moving camera that penetrates into the characters' intimate sphere, invites the viewer straight into the protagonists' physical, mental and emotional space. We get access to Leo's mental images, thus the film facilitates for the viewer a deeper understanding of the represented mental state than for Molly, who does not have access to them. In this way, the viewer's empathy is activated in multiple ways, being allowed to "be there" and to feel for both the patient and the caretaker from close range.

Close-ups also find their way into the evoked memory segments, indicating the timeless immediacy of bygone life episodes such as the one when Dolores tries to convince Leo to commemorate the All Saint's Day with her [Fig. 5]. Leo and Dolores's past storyline that gradually unfolds in parallel with Leo and Molly's present day and reveals the deep trauma that marks their lives, the loss of their child. Leo refrains from going with her as he cannot cope with the pain; their emotional conflict is rendered in a spectacular sequence of shots starting from the couple's extreme close-up in bed to long shots showing Leo alone, outdoors, brooding into the distance, at a loss which road to choose [Figs. 6–7].

Universal Cultural Codes

In order to amplify the general human condition in Leo's individual case, Potter's film resorts to universal cultural codes. The most salient one is carried by the film's title. By hinting at Robert Frost's famous modernist poem *The Road Not Taken*, which has become a slogan, the film addresses the poem's dilemma of choosing from among divergent roads whose end point is not yet visible at the moment of choice, neither can it be known where the other road, the one not

taken, would have led to: "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, / And sorry I could not travel both / And be one traveler." The film's title, imbued with the underlying Frostian hesitation and even allowing the assumption that the film is a possible screen adaptation of Frost's poem, connects to the alternate past realities Leo's mind skips to from the present. It is revealed that his entire life is but a series of regrets, remorses escapes and failed connections to reality,[6] which also finds its way through in his dementia apparently caused by a stroke. The illness that has befallen in one's life entails an obsessed self-scrutiny and taking stock of the appropriateness of decisions made throughout one's life. Leo used to be a writer; now he is a mere body from the perspective of the present. He cannot communicate his alternative realities to his environment; what is the most painful is that the area he was the most active in – mental work – is primarily affected. Making visible for the viewer what is invisible for the environment, his past realities in which he meanders in his almost catatonic immobility, is also a manifestation of cinempathy, a subtle way to channel understanding and raise compassionate empathy toward the ill. "The Roads Not Taken" also become meaningful with reference to Molly: forced into the role of caregiving, she misses a work opportunity that might be crucial for her career, would mean perspective and a possibility of stepping out of the forlorn struggle with illness.

Yet another implied literary reference is the topic of Leo's writing project evoked in one of his past memory scenes – "a man who is trying to find his way home and faces many obstacles along the way" – which, albeit abstract and general, still, it might equally be a possible summary of the *Odyssey*. If the *Odyssey* comes into the picture, the association being reinforced by the Greek scenery, then Leo also turns up as a contemporary embodiment of Ulysses, all the more that the single-day narrative forming the basis of a much more complex structure relying on intercut flashbacks, juxtaposition of parallel worlds and montage with stream of consciousness effect may be a distant cinematic echo of the Joycean, and also Woolfian, modernist experimental prose poetics. Leo asks a girl reminding him of her daughter what ending he should choose to his book: after twenty years of wandering, should the hero return to his family? The girl says, it is too late. Archetypal images of the sea and Leo rowing the boat in despair amplify his effort to make the right decision. Next he is found in the boat paralyzed, between life and death. "In the sea I died," he tells Molly later [Fig. 8].

6 Implicitly, the film also connects to the topic with a long tradition, the relationship between the artist and reality, to the question whether reality is an obstacle or art leads trough, is born out of, reality, as also touched upon in Christian Petzold's recent film, *Afire* (*Rote Himmel*, 2023).

Another cultural code is borrowed from Romanticist painting, staging Leo with his back to the viewer, looking at a distant landscape or out of the window frame, suggesting his being simultaneously there and elsewhere, being part of the image and also outside of it, as a distant contemplator of his own life. In one of these, the bridge is not only the symbol of cultural separatedness, as a Mexican, but also his permanent self-imposed separation from the beloved, the self-exile and self-torment imposed by his ego [Figs. 9–11]. And thirdly, the film draws on biblical references. At the emotional climax of the film, when Leo leaves home at night and gets lost, he is assisted by homeless immigrants, who wash his feet [Fig. 12]. The (also) symbolic gesture connects to the mandatum, Christ's humble act of washing his disciples' feet on Maundy Thursday. The ritual gesture that belongs to the Christian cultural sphere is carried out by non-Christians, suggesting that it is only the Other who can really understand the Other and reminding of the universal basis of humanity beyond cultural belonging or religious conviction. In this way, the strangers' spontaneous and intimate manifestation of care, implying bodily touch, connection, rises at the level of ethical gesture, which "opens the sphere of *ethos* as the more proper sphere of that which is human" (Agamben 2000, 56). The gesture of care manifested by the Other is praxis "that has its end in itself" (Agamben 2000, 57), suggesting solidarity at the margins of society. Through the performative power of this unprompted gesture, the cinematic image reiterates the gesture of care, thus becoming an image that cares and promotes compassion. As Sally Potter says in an interview: "the word compassion is very important to me, the kindness of strangers, we're living in a world where that as a value is increasingly diminished. So anything one can do to sort of remember that inherently we do have that empathetic compassion for others is a good thing to remind ourselves of" (Pape 2020).

Uncanny Intersensuality

Besides the employment of universal cultural codes, the entangled modes of illness and care are carried out with sensitive cine-choreography characteristic of Sally Potter's filmmaking practice. Her film is also experimental in that it attempts at rendering the anomalous perception of reality through the lens of the mentally ill protagonist, simultaneously with the way the environment perceives and judges his anomalous behaviour. Leo's mental jumps into the past are effected by resorting to direct inter-sequence cutting, smoothly interlaced along visual, auditory elements and other perceptual impulses that trigger the

avalanche of Leo's memories. Whether a body posture, the direction of the gaze or the indistinguishable sounds of the city, there are precise links between the erupting memories and the currently lived moment all along the film, resulting in an interwoven thread of parallel universes. In this "dance" of images alternately connected to the present and the past, the boundaries between distinct temporalities become fluid, suggesting that Leo's capacities of making distinction between them have become compromised. "Everything is open" in his mode of perception, as he says in the opening scene.

The accent is laid on the representation of his altered perception, suggested by the contrast between sharp and opaque images [Fig. 13]. The latter not only indicates the subjectivity of perception but also releases haptic visuality as a distinct way of sensing the world. Laura U. Marks says about the difference between the optical and the haptic: "Optical visuality requires distance and a center, the viewer acting like a pinhole camera. In a haptic relationship our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface. When this happens there is a concomitant loss of depth – we become amoebalike, lacking a center, changing as the surface to which we cling changes" (2002, xvi). Leo's orientation is led by signals of the past that he seems to randomly recognize in the present; in his way of perceiving things, the sense of distance necessary for orientation seems to implode. His gaze is turned inwards; he actually moves in his inner world, among sights and sounds that awaken distant impressions; the insecurity with which he moves in the spaces of the city is, again, reflected by close-ups that enlarge his figure but diminish the visibility of the surrounding space. By restricting the domain of the visual, other modes of perception are amplified, resulting in the uncanny overall effect of intersensuality, that is, "a higher dynamics of perception and a particular complexity of reception" (Dávid 2008, 92). The sylization of colours – the sharp pink and orange of the rooms evoked by memories – reinforces the emotional purport and subjectivity of perception. In this way, the film becomes a dialogue between distinct perceptions, an attempt at connection of disparate realities, in Mark's terms, an attempt at touch of surfaces of different materiality. In its preoccupation to show the imperceptible, the entangled consciousness of the mentally impaired, it grows into a lyrical poem of rhythmic connection and separation, of unspeakable pains, entangled moods and unbridgeable gaps.

The affective representation of mental pain finds a way of expression in Potter's film in the anxiety of perception, the strangeness of sensing the reality and the turmoil of bodily experiences. Leo's mind and body are trapped in between the reality and perception, presence and absence, here and elsewhere, and he

has hardly any means to communicate this sensation of in-betweenness. The uncanniness of his struggle with his painful memories is revealed: "The uncanny is when the other, the absolutely alter, erupts into your space" (Marks 2002, 32). Reliving his memories related to major decisions while literally lost in his current life, he is in desperate search for home – a spiritual home that would be, in his condition, an arrival in the "here and now." It turns out towards the end of the film that he has returned from the Greek island, he has given up his writing plans for the sake of her daughter. His book could also have ended differently. In a fragmented but cathartic conversation between the two, Molly is impressed to hear about the fact that her father was capable of bringing sacrifice for her, so she – at least one part of her that remains at Leo's bedside – feels rewarded. Thus, home finds a definition as intersubjective connection, a moment of fulfillment, of being capable of entering the Other's skin, of transcending one's point of view and seeing what the Other sees, feeling what the Other feels. In line with Potter's poetics, that is "a way of feeling knowing and knowing feeling, through an interrelation of Self and Other" (Mayer 2009, 229). Still, Molly's other part leaves the room, responding to the call of her own life; actually, she experiences her father's dilemmas, she is in search of the right road, her life choices also get tangled up. By doubling Molly's figure in the last scene, the film does not fully dissolve the protagonists' pains and predicaments but maintains an uncanny sensation of in-betweenness [Fig. 14].

Conclusions

Arising from the filmmaker's personal experience of observation and involvement, *The Roads Not Taken*, not only an illness narrative but also as a testimony of the crisis of care, represents a productive encounter of the affectivity of care and the affectivity of its rendering through universal codes and intersensuality. The literary, painterly and biblical codes transcend the inscrutable, unspeakable depths of individual human pain into the universal language of symbols. On the other hand, along its low-key attunement meant to emotionally involve the spectator, it relies on the capacity of intersensuality to generate feelings, creating an affective realm through cinempathy and cine-choreography. The film's stake is apparently the balancing between reality and its perception, between the universally human cultural codes and the highly personal domain of intersensuality. The tensions arising from this contribute to the portrayed uncanny sensations.

The film's "scenes of empathy" disclose an entangled relationship between the patient and the caregiver, imbued with affection and pain, devotion and

frustration, pointing at the contrarieties of social productivity and care as the invisible and undervalued affective labour. In this project, the sensitive presence of affective close-ups emerges as a form of care in itself, an expression of the filmmaker's social engagement towards the ones marginalized by illness and homage to the ones involved in the strenuous process of care. An organic part of Sally Potter's "heartrendingly austere" (Christie 2009, x) cinema, *The Roads Not Taken* creates multiple passageways in-between the self and the other, the corporeal and the spiritual, emotional involvement and detachment, creating a layered space "between-the-images" (Bellour 2012) that medially foregrounds the manifold sensations of in-betweenness and feeling "other" of the protagonists, caught in-between mental, physical states and private realities. By way of its affinities hollowed out through cinempathy and uncanny intersensuality, Sally Potter's film, created as a humble gesture addressing the contemporary "silvering screen" (Chivers 2011), contributes to the legibility of old age and disability in the public imagination. At the same time, her work also takes a position as regards the profession of cinema: distinctly from the Hollywood production and star system thriving under the illusion of perfection and agelessness, *The Roads Not Taken* is an affirmation of growing old, "contesting the dominant cultural meaning of youth" (Chivers 2011, xi) and openly assuming the challenges of its cinematic representability.

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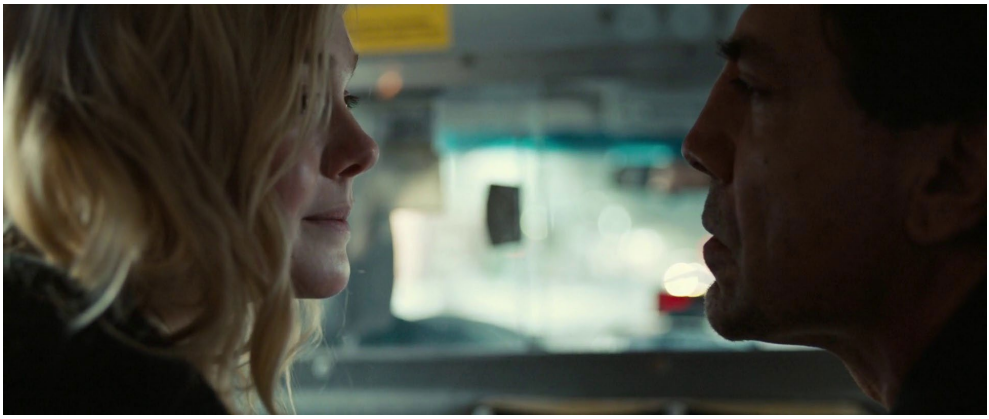

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Rural Landscapes and Affective Encounters in Radu Muntean's Film, *Întregalde*

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Abstract. The paper discusses Radu Muntean 2021 film, *Întregalde* focusing on the representation of rural landscapes and the encounter between different social classes. The film marks multiple displacements within the director's oeuvre, epitomized as "the chronicler" of the middle class in contemporary Romanian cinema. The spatial displacement from middle class urban spaces towards mountain and rural areas and the shift from the distant picturesqueness of landscape to the experience of landscape as dwelling, as inhabited and sensed environment mediated through textural images enables unsettling embodied, affective encounters both with the natural environment and between different social classes. In this way, the film addresses the question of class differences and lays bare the socio-economic inequalities between the urban middle class and the countryside without reducing rural characters to clichéd figurants in a picturesque or sombre countryside decorum. The film's critical reflection on a form of occasional humanitarian aid and middle class philanthropy does not relativize the concept of charity, altruism and help but rather points to the growing gap of social inequalities (and the crisis of care) in the context of contemporary capitalism.[1]

Keywords: Radu Muntean, *Întregalde,* rural landscape, affective landscape, affective encounter.

Întregalde – a Film of Displacements

In Radu Muntean's 2021 film, *Întregalde* a group of well-off urban middle class volunteers combine their off-road trip (branded as "Xtreme Adventures") with distributing humanitarian aid in a rural area in the Apuseni Mountains. Three of

1 This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS - UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-PCE-2021-1297.

them, Maria, Ilinca and Dan meet an old villager, Kente Aron, who turns out to be suffering from dementia, and they try to help him to get to a sawmill. Their car is stuck in the mud and they spend the night in the forest trying to move the vehicle and find the old man. *Întregalde* is the first of Muntean's films in which middle class characters spend the entire diegetic time in natural and rural areas. This (spatial) displacement from urban spaces towards the rural, from the capital to small, dispersed villages entails that middle class issues are addressed in relation to other social classes and class differences. Why can this displacement be considered a relevant shift in Muntean's cinematic oeuvre?

Considered "the chronicler of middle class Romania"[2] (Rogozanu 2014), Muntean locates the diegetic world of his films in urban spaces, often interiors (the filming location usually being Bucharest) in which middle class problems and conflicts are tackled and isolated in a self-enclosed frame of reference.[3] In *Tuesday after Christmas* (*Marți după crăciun*, 2010) among the professional middle class characters (bank employee, lawyer, dentist) the only conflict that arises is a marital emotional problem (Rogozanu 2014, 97). *Boogie* (2008) manages to point to the inner fractures within the post-1989 middle class (Rogozanu 2014, 96), however, the socio-economic status of the three former classmates who accidentally meet at the Romanian seaside is so different that it questions the adequacy of the term "middle class" itself (Boogie, the title character is a small entrepreneur, one of his friends washes dishes without work permit in Sweeden, the other is an employee at a tourist agency.) In *One Floor Below* (*Un etaj mai jos,* 2015) the suspicion that the murderer of a young woman might be one of her neighbours (who is presumably also her lover) turns a Bucharest condominium, the urban middle class home into an unpredictable, unhomely space. The narrative of *Alice T.* (2018) – constructed from a (male) perspective that appears biased or unempathetic towards the subject – evolves around the unwanted pregnancy of a teenage girl and the way she, her adoptive mother and the family react to it. In these films, social classes outside the urban professional middle class are represented through characters who are

2 In his insightful study, Costi Rogozanu (2014) aptly considers Muntean the "chronicler of the middle class" in contemporary Romanian cinema, admitting, however, that not all of his films address the question of social class and class differences in an equally complex manner.

3 I will use the term "middle class" for methodological reasons, although I am aware that the concept of middle class is questioned in contemporary sociological or social anthropological approaches: "the middle class is rather a loose conglomerate of people »somewhere in the middle«, a set of different elements in a common category, where the individual components occupy different, sometimes explicitly antagonistic class positions" (Éber 2022), such as capitalists and workers, entrepreneurs/employers and employees, managers and functionaries. It is beyond the aim of the present article to address this undoubtedly important question.

vaguely sketched marginal figures or extras without a distinct voice and with little effect on the plot of the film (e.g. the young sex worker in *Boogie*, the car-technicians in *One Floor Below*).

Regarding the complexity of addressing the question of class differences and that of middle class in particular, *Întregalde* is closer to Muntean's second feature and first auteur-film,[4] *The Paper Will Be Blue* (*Hârtia va fi albastră*, 2006), in which he tries to capture the events of a chaotic night during the 1989 Romanian revolution following a small military unit of four soldiers and a lieutenant in the streets of Bucharest. According to Florin Poenaru, Muntean's film "manages to coherently articulate the confrontation between different antagonistic class positions" (e.g. the wealthy intelligentsia, the modest lieutenant and the peasantry), perfectly capturing "all the class contradictions constitutive of the communist regime as such, which will later affect the dynamics of the post-1989 transition" (Poenaru 2014, 169).

In the context of Muntean's oeuvre, *Întregalde* marks multiple displacements: a spatial displacement from urban middle class spaces and cityscapes towards natural and rural landscapes conceived by the film as lived, sensed, inhabited environments. The spatial displacement enables an ambivalent affective encounter both with the natural environment and between urban middle class and rural characters. The film also marks a displacement regarding the politics of representation: from self-enclosed middle class issues to more complex class relations, from constructing working class characters as almost invisible figurants to granting them voice and some kind of social visibility.

From Picturesque Distance to Affective Encounter

The title of Muntean's film is the real toponym of a small mountain village and devotes almost all of its diegetic time to rural, mountain landscapes and outdoor places, performs not only a spatial displacement from the urban to the rural but also a shift in the cinematic representation of landscapes and more broadly of the rural as a layered social space.

Cinematic landscape that "has inherited the archives of landscape painting, theatre decor, panoramas, illustration, photography" (Natali 2001, 107) can be addressed not only as an aesthetic category, but also as a social one, as "a

4 *The Rage* (*Furia*, 2002), Muntean's first feature is an action movie, a genre narrative intended to become a "Romanian commercial film" that turned out to be a "collage of pop clichés" about the Bucharest underworld. The director himself considers his film a "compromise" (Rogozanu 2014, 91–92).

lived, inhabited, environment," as "dwelling" revealed by the filmic narrative[5] (Lefebvre 2011, 76). Landscape can work not only as a picturesque spectacle constructed by a detached[6] aestheticizing/landscaping gaze, but also as a sensitive cultural medium of various social, political, economic and ecological relations, of conceptualizations and ideologies of nature, history and regional or national identity (cf. Natali 2001, 107).[7]

Drawing on phenomenological and social anthropological approaches, affective theories rethink the concept of landscape as a lived, sensed environment (that affects and is affected by those who inhabit it), and at the same time reinsert landscape into intertwined ecological, sociocultural, political, economic processes in which landscape can be experienced in its continuous becoming. These theories conceive landscape in terms of how "people attach themselves to and detach themselves from place," of how they "define themselves and their relations to the world" (Berberich,Campbell and Hudson 2013, 314; 313). This relationality may be manifest (among others) in the atmosphere of a landscape as an embodied, affective experience (arising between the perceived environment and the perceiving subject) in which "the aesthetic, social and geocultural potentials are simultaneously present" (Dánél 2016). Far from being immaterial and naively individualistic or romantic, affect – that is unsettling, aleatory, located in the body and the senses, tied to place and to the social – is emphatically political "permeating every layer of everyday life" (Berberich–Campbell–Hudson 2013, 314). Thus, the "attention to affective landscape relations as a form of 'worlding' has specific political implications to do with how the land/world is 'used,' defined, represented, apportioned, exploited" (Berberich, Campbell and Hudson 2013, 315).

I argue that the filmic representation of landscape as dwelling, as inhabited and sensed environment imbricated with the social often entails a displacement from the opticality of the long-shot landscape towards an inter-sensual, affective landscaping / land-shaping[8] both through filmic strategies of creating a more textural,

5 Cf. "If narrative is that which can serve to conceal the film landscape, that which renders it fragile, it may also be, in the final analysis, that which confers to it its specificity and its true depth." (Lefebvre 2011, 76.)

6 Cf. "The picturesque requires a dissociation from the actual consequences and realities of what appears. Literally, the picturesque depends on providing views and scenes to a spectator from some privileged vantage point." (Townsend 1997, 370.)

7 As the cultural geographer Denis Crosgrove argues, "landscape is not merely the world we see" […]. Landscape is a way of seeing the world" and can work as "visual ideology" (Crosgrove 1984, 13, 47).

8 Cf. Tim Ingold argues that 'scape' in the word landscape "comes from Old English *sceppan* or *skyppan*, meaning 'to shape'" which is not only a visual practice but also a mode of shaping the land in the most literal, material sense of the word (Ingold 2011, 126).

embodied, acoustic-haptic cinematic experience and through various practices and relations between (human or non-human) characters and landscape within the diegetic world. In this way, an affective cinematic landscape is encountered both in its perceptual and social entanglements.

In Muntean's film, the rural landscape is located as multiethnic and multilingual through toponyms, names, dialects and accents that impregnate each other. This accented acoustic verbal landscape of *Întregalde* resonates with the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Transylvanian region: the mixed acoustics of names and accents cannot be approached within a monolingual or homogenizing framework. Kente Aron, the old villager tells the urban visitors stories with Hungarian characters ("ungurul"/ "the Hungarian"), and pronounces his own name both with a Romanian and with a somewhat Hungarian accent. Even if he speaks only Romanian in the film, both his name and his accent incorporate imprints of Romanian and Hungarian language and a possible double ethnicity. The name of the long-deceased Balaş, the owner of the abandoned sawmill is pronounced (and written) in Romanian but it also evokes the Hungarian name Balázs, and the fact that two Roma characters use alternately both the Romanian and the Romani language, is incorporated into the film as an organic part of this heterogenous accented verbal environment.

In one of the first sequences of the film, the mountain landscape of the region is framed as a picturesque scenery with scattered old wooden houses, with late autumn or early winter vegetation and lowering clouds. The long shots imply an optical distance and a detached, aestheticizing gaze: the rural landscape is staged as a visual spectacle ripped off the everyday practices of inhabiting it. [Figs. 1–2.] The picturesque panorama with hills, mountains and fog is captured through a panning shot that produces a slowly enfolding horizontal landscape and seems to be complicit with one of the protagonist's (Maria's) attempt to take a panoramic photo with her smartphone. [Fig. 3.] This landscaping gaze produces images that resemble the visual codes of touristic brochures or stock photos of the region dispersed on various transmedia platforms, in which the countryside is cut out of its social context and the material conditions of rural life, being assigned to the realm of the picturesque. In the first scenes of *Întregalde*, we see that the urban visitors with humanitarian aid also use the rural-natural environment as a setting for their off-road adventure and eventually for testing their cars. The spatial practices of off-road adventure and the panoramic photos display a spatial and visual ideology in which nature and rural landscapes are appropriated as a picturesque photographic theme and a suitable backdrop for off-road trips.

However, when their off-road vehicle is stuck in the mud and they spend the night in the forest looking for Kente, the old villager who has unnoticeably left, the self-confident urban protagonists are satirically placed in both darkly humorous and tense scenes and dialogues with an impressive collection of Romanian curse words. The nocturnal forest reveals a non-anthropomorphic transformative agency, it turns into a multisensory environment with changing weather and uncanny sounds from unidentifiable sources. Once the familiarity and the illusory optical-spatial mastery of the off-road ride, the GPS-mapping and panoramic photography are disturbed, the landscape becomes unfamiliar and unhomely.

When enacting the unhomeliness of the nocturnal forest and the uncertainty, frustration and fear of the urban visitors, the film cleverly subverts the conventions of thrillers or even horror films. It uses the narrative-cinematic "requisites" of the uncanny – such as spending the night in a forest that slowly turns unfamiliar, looking for an abandoned ("haunted") sawmill, driving away in a foreigner's car, hearing noises –; nevertheless, the unhomely atmosphere created through these "requisites" never actually turns uncanny but continually shifts back to a more familiar, realistic or comic[9] register.

According to Tim Ingold, whose anthropological-phenomenological approach has been inspiring for affective theories of landscape, "to enter the wood, and to find ourselves surrounded on all sides by trunks and branches, is not just to undergo a change of focus, from distant to close-up, but to experience a radically different perception of the world. […] To perceive the wood from within is to become immersed in these ongoing entanglements of life" (Ingold 2013, 86). He contends that "it is, paradoxically, in the depths of the woods that the world opens up most fully to our perception, for it forces us to cast aside the illusion, to which people in high places are prone, that the world we inhabit is spread out like a mosaic beneath our feet, with its forms and patterns already impressed upon the physical substrate of nature. As the philosopher Henri Lefebvre has written, this means abandoning the pretence that we are witnessing a scene that is given all at once, as a spectacle" (Ingold 2013, 88).

The forest surrounding the urban visitors ceases to be a picturesque spectacle or a visual pattern to be viewed from a privileged vantage point: it is sensed in its living, unpredictable, haptic materiality, it becomes tactile, slippery, textural.

9 To quote Freud who conceives the uncanny as something familiar and old that has been estranged, repressed and has become unhomely (*unheimlich*): "even a real ghost […] inevitably loses any claim to arouse even feelings of fright when the author amuses himself by ironizing it (Freud [1919] 2003, 158).

The optical and spatial detachment give way to a more immersive corporeal closeness to the forest, the spatial orientation in the mud or among the trees shifts towards the tactile, the audible, the olfactory. The characters' appropriative relation to the environment – used as a photogenic setting for off-road adventures – is temporarily destabilized and de-hierarchized.

The affective (inter)sensuality of the film can be grasped in the way the visual regime of the moving image resonates with the displacements of the relations to landscape within the diegesis. With the loss of orientation and of the apparent optical control and with the change of location from the height of the mountain to the middle of the forest, the picturesque landscape shots that require optical distance are gradually displaced towards more textural (medium) shots, towards the haptic, the audible, the atmospheric, offering the viewer an almost corporeal, multisensory experience of the nocturnal forest. The "eyes of the skin" (Pallasmaa, quoted in Ingold 2013, 88) are "tuned not to the discrimination and identification of individual objects but to the registration of subtle variations of light and shade, and of the surface textures they reveal" (Ingold 2013, 88). In the scarce light of the torches, breath becomes visible and tactile in the air, the ground covered with fallen leaves unfolds in its textural materiality [Figs. 4–5]. Even in the absence of close-ups, the lack of visibility foregrounds the phenomenology of the cinematic experience that engages the whole sensorium and not only visual/optical perception.

Through Kente, the old villager's figure (played by the magnificent amateur actor, Luca Sabin), the film displays a different relation to nature: landscape is revealed by the narrative as dwelling, perceived in its sensorial and social entanglements. Kente's local knowledge and personal experience of the forest makes it a more familiar, inhabited environment in which he is able to orient himself along the corporeal coordinates "not so far, not so near" ("nici aproape, nici departe"). Kente is not a faceless, clichéd folkloristic entity: his accent, his corporeal presence, his eruptive, talkative, unstoppable mode of telling stories, his non-professional acting oscillating between directed and spontaneous gestures pierce through the film. It is him, the old villager who personalizes the encounter with the urban volunteers trying to find out their name and to endow them with a face. His knowledge is not only a spatial one, but a professional one as well: he used to work as a forest woodcutter according to his own (unconfirmed) story told to the urban visitors. For him, the forest also belongs to the social reality of forestry work in which woodcutting or, more precisely, rarifying the trees ("răritură") as a kind of land-shaping / land-scaping is a way to "wrest a

living from the earth."[10] In a metaleptic fold, the film acknowledges[11] the actual professional knowledge of the amateur actor in Kente's role by incorporating his personal, authentic experience of forestry work into the diegetic world, which foregrounds the mutual imbrication between the natural and the social, as well as between profilmic reality and cinematic fiction.

Affect can play a role in opening up and reconfiguring preestablished structures of thought and feeling "through an attention to the details of everyday life […] and the subtle response to its sensed and lived landscapes" (Berberich, Campbell and Hudson 2013, 315). In *Întregalde*, the affective relation to landscape, the sensing and being in the middle of the forest engenders unsettling, embodied encounters both with the environment and with the other in which previous patterns of orientation are displaced. The communication and cooperation among the three urban characters shatters, resulting in a both somber and hilarious avalanche of blame and curse ("eşti handicapată?" meaning "are you retarded?"). The affective encounter temporarily reconfigures the relations among the characters of utterly different social backgrounds: from condescending, objectifying gestures of otherizing the rural, there is a displacement towards ambivalent bodily proximity in the reluctantly shared space of the car, where the urban middle class volunteers and the villager literally breathe in and warm one other.

As discussed above, through Kente's presence, through the corporeality of his accented storytelling and his way of living the forest, landscape is reconceptualized as a sensuous and inhabited environment: it is perceived as dwelling imbricated with the social in multiple ways. Towards the end of the film, the snow-covered morning landscape appears to be framed again as a picturesque long shot [Fig. 5]. The slightly shivering image viewed/filmed from an embodied perspective is, nevertheless, unframed by the montage of sound, by the dialogue between two approaching villagers, Kente and Voicu. Their words are loudly and corporeally anchored into their quotidian reality, which interrupts the aestheticizing, decontextualizing effect of the picturesque. ("Oh you stink!"; "You wander off because you are not right in the head.")

10 Cf. "Medieval shapers of the land were not painters but farmers, whose purpose was not to render the material world in appearance rather than substance, but to wrest a living from the earth." (Ingold 2011, 126.)

11 See the interview by Iulia Roşu from 2021: "the 'megastar' from Radu Muntean's film: a 79 year old villager who has not heard of Simona Halep." (Translation by the author.) *Libertatea. . https://www.libertatea.ro/entertainment/megastarul-din-filmul-lui-radu-muntean-un-satean-din-apuseni-de-79-de-ani-care-a-vazut-pentru-prima-oara-o-camera-de-filmat-3687370*. Last accessed 24. 09. 2023.

(Un)framing Charity and Care

Discussing the representation of precarity in contemporary Romanian and Bulgarian cinema, Christian Ferencz-Flatz highlights that "critics from the Left often accused contemporary Romanian cinema of catering exclusively to the ailments of the middle class, while taking note of poverty only as an object for the moral tribulations of the well-off" (Ferencz-Flatz 2022, 144). He rightfully considers that there is a sort of "cliché narrative of visitors from the West (or in a slightly different version: from the big city) arriving at some remote rural part of Romania […] only to be shocked, amazed, or bemused by the striking signs of deprivation around – again a motif treated with no intention of tackling underdevelopment, inequalities, or the wretchedness of rural life per se, but only for facile gags or to add atmospheric bleakness to genre narratives" (Ferencz-Flatz 2022, 145).[12] How can Muntean's *Întregalde* be regarded in this context? Reflecting on certain forms of middle class charity and philanthropy as well as on urban middle class perceptions of the rural, can Muntean's film address rural life outside the framework in which it is only a picturesque or sombre scenery extracted from the complexity of socio-economic conditions?[13]

I consider that *Întregalde*, without relativizing the concept and the actual necessity of charity and philanthropy, critically points to different concepts of help and care as well as to the social and economic inequalities between urban middle class condition and rural life in the context of contemporary capitalism. Help and charity are thematized by the characters themselves in the diegetic world, but, in an equally relevant manner, the film itself operates with multiple concepts and forms of help performed by various characters. In this way, the

12 Ferentz-Flatz's examples are *Ryna* (2005) by Ruxandra Zenide and *Câini* (*Dogs*, 2016) by Bogdan Mirică.

13 In the reception of the film, the answers are divergent. According to Rogozanu, Muntean's *Întregalde* addresses the socio-economic gap between the urban middle-class and rural Romania in a subtle way, pointing to the alienation of the middle class that – as "the winner of the last thirty years of neoliberal capitalism that contributed to the growth of social inequalities" – displays in the film a sort of "philanthropy mixed with urban cynicism" (Rogozanu 2021). Zsolt Gyenge considers that "the film is about the immeasurable, unbridgeable gap between the urban elite and the countryside: the urban fans of off-road vehicles use even charity to follow their passion and the lofty gestures of condescending aid become unavoidably stigmatizing despite the intention of the participants" (2021). Andrei Gorzo while appreciating Muntean's film, considers that the film's approach to the question of altruism is sophistic with a "seminar-at-faculty-of-philosophy vibe." He argues that the changes the world has gone through since the beginning of the millennium made clear "that, if we are to live on this planet, we are pretty much dependent on each other," and that is why "decorticating »altruism« in a test tube seems slightly passé" (2021, my translation).

subject positions of the provider and the receiver of help are not exclusive or preestablished on a vertical axis.

At the beginning of the film there is a short and unsettled debate among the characters (one of them, Radu, is played by the director himself) about the actual relevance and benefit of their own occasional humanitarian aid: what if a tablet or a laptop given to a child only alludes to the possibility of a different life without engendering actual social change? Without homogenizing the urban middle class attitudes towards charity, the film lays bare both condescending ways of perceiving the rural other and more empathetic, approachable forms of help or philanthropy. Despite their well-meaning gestures of distributing aid, Ilinca and Dan otherize the locals and in this way their help becomes a condescending act that does not acknowledge the other's subjectivity. They depersonalize the villagers by calling an old woman with a wounded and bandaged hand Hellboy and naming Kente through the dehumanizing metaphor of the penguin (due to his elderly way of walking), then through the not less objectifying name of Forrest Gump. These names from mainstream Hollywood movies attached to the locals through a cynical, classist gesture also point to the gap between the cultural/verbal register of the urban visitors and the old villagers (who probably know neither Hellboy, nor Forrest Gump). Maria, on the contrary, attempts to turn towards the locals with more empathetic affective gestures.

The film is not complicit with the objectifying perspective of some of its middle class characters. A modality to counter the depersonalizing representation of rural characters living in precarious conditions is to construct nuanced, complex figures with a distinct voice and to acknowledge them as subjects. The film makes the voice of the old villager heard: his wordy, accented storytelling and his valid local knowledge reveal a specific subjectivity and agency enabling the viewers to transcend any objectifying form of pity and to relate to him empathetically.

One of the film's merits is that it works with multiple notions and forms of help. Rural characters are not represented only as passive recipients of charity and aid, but also as providers of help when the urban off-roaders are themselves helpless. In this way the verticality and inequality coded in the relationship between help-provider and help-receiver (the latter presumably experiencing some kind of deprivation) is more levelled, the villagers are enacted through their gestures of help and hospitality.

Through introducing the figure of the Roma characters who help the two women with their stuck car, the film lays bare racist preconceptions about the Roma minority. It first exposes the two female protagonists' classist prejudice and

suspicion which is not exclusively related to the two Roma characters' ethnicity but also to their masculinity and social class ("they are all drunk here"), only to gradually invalidate these preconceptions: the two passers-by offer real help.[14] Later in the film, the women refer to them without mentioning their ethnicity ("unu' cu fii-su"/ "some guy with his son," "nişte oameni"/ "some people").[15] Through this shift from prejudice towards an encounter in which the Roma characters are not reduced to ethnicity codes only, the film challenges – in this case, middle class but otherwise more general, systemic – racist preconceptions about the Roma minority. It may be inferred from the dialogue, that the Roma characters did not get aid packages on a previous occasion because the mayor of the village did not include them among the recipients. Thus, the inner hierarchies and the discriminatory practices within the rural community also become visible.

Muntean's film addresses the rural predominantly from the perspective of the urban middle class (and it rarely reverses the focus for a more layered, multifocal approach), nevertheless it points – through Maria's attention and gestures – to certain modes of the validation of the other's subjectivity. Maria's gesture to save Kente from freezing might be considered an act that only settles her own conscience according to her own standards of philanthropy. Nevertheless, by responding to him without reducing him to his dementia or by asking for his help (even if this help is insignificant) she acknowledges the old villager's subjectivity and dignity. When they finally get to the village, Maria accompanies Kente and watches as he is fed and washed by his neighbour, an old woman (played by his real-life wife) who cares for him in the absence of relatives. (The film vaguely alludes to the fact that she might inherit Kente's house in exchange for her care.) In this scene, Maria's well-meaning but slightly awkward help is shaped by her quasi by-stander, voyeuristic position, by her bewilderment, cluelessness in front of the corporeal and social vulnerability of the old man. On the one hand, the scene may be viewed as staging the vulnerability of the old body through a somewhat exploitative gaze:[16]

14 According to one of the Roma characters, the old Kente would be homosexual (which is not confirmed, neither invalidated later); what may be of interest here is the way the Roma man's harsh words display an ambivalent mixture of disdain and acceptance: despite his sexuality, the old Kente still remains part of the local community. As Andrei Gorzo aptly argues, the Roma character's words lay bare an "indefinable combination of contempt" mixed "with a kind of blunt acceptance of homosexuality as a reality, as a fact of life" opening up "a provocative perspective not only on the old man's sexuality, but also on that world, which, we are suggested, may have its own complexity" (Gorzo 2021, my translation).

15 This is why it is hard to explain the decision to translate a sentence in which there is no trace of the word Tarzan ("Lasă, Ili, că ne salvează nea ăsta.") into the following: "It's ok, Ili, Tarzan will save us." The example is taken from the translation of the subtitles of the film available on Netflix.

16 See Victor Morozov review of the film (2021).

the camera records the naked body in medium shot exposing the old man as he is washed and scolded, infantilized by his carer. On the other hand, the scene marks a point where the satirical, black-humoured tone of the film withdraws; the viewer – echoed in a way by Maria's by-stander position – is confronted with the sight of an old, vulnerable body and with a form of non-professional, domestic care that is coded in the film and within that rural community as female (reproductive) work. The well-meaning but occasional gestures of middle class philanthropy that offer temporary relief are juxtaposed with the daily quotidian practice of care. This form of care – that may incorporate even depersonalizing gestures – is in this case an ambivalent assemblage "of affective intensities of attention […], compassion, tensions, discrepancies, contradictions, disappointment, loss, sadness," even "psychological harm" (Dragoljovic–Broom 2018, 154–155). The domestic care is also an example of how this task is transferred to families or local communities,[17] and how the lives of the elderly may become marginalized or disposable in the context of contemporary capitalism.

In the film, doors and windows [Figs. 7–8] might appear as means of framing and aestheticizing poverty in an appropriative way, but these frames also mediate a sense of inaccessibility: the growing gap of class differences between urban middle class and the rural world around. When the voyeuristic camera is shut out of the house, we see Maria's departure only as a reflection on the glass of the door, superimposed on the image of the old man locked in his room (to prevent him from wandering away). [Fig. 9.] This layered interstitial image of the glass as both transparent and reflective works not primarily as a bridging threshold, but rather as a site revealing the social distance between the two worlds. The door framing the old villager confined in his house becomes an unsettling image of corporeal and social vulnerability.

Conclusion

Întregalde marks multiple productive displacements within Radu Muntean's oeuvre. The spatial displacement from middle class urban spaces towards mountain and rural areas enables an ambivalent, embodied, affective encounter both with the natural and rural environment and between different social classes. The detached picturesqueness of landscape enfolding in long shots shifts

17 As Nancy Fraser, one of the committed critics of the global capitalist crisis of care highlights: amid growing inequality "the globalizing financialized capitalism of the present era" "promoted state and corporate disinvestment from social welfare. Externalizing carework onto families and communities, it has simultaneously diminished their capacity to perform it" (Fraser 2016).

towards the experience of a lived, inhaled and inhabited environment imbricated with the social and mediated through textural, atmospheric images. Even if its predominantly middle class perspective does not enable a more complex enactment of the rural (in which the focus is reversed), the film stages nuanced encounters and lays bare the socio-economic inequalities between the urban middle class and the countryside avoiding the reduction of rural characters to clichéd, voiceless figurants in a countryside decorum. In the last scenes of the film, the darkly humorous, satirical tone gives way to the unsettling image of the vulnerable old body and to a domestic form of care in a quotidian context affected by the crisis of care that contemporary capitalism constantly (re)produces. The fact that the film critically reflects on a form of occasional humanitarian aid and middle class philanthropy does not relativize the concept of charity, altruism and care but rather points to the growing gap of social inequalities this occasional aid cannot bridge. At the end of the film, the off-road vehicles return to their base in a snow-covered landscape but the disquieting image of the old woman with the wounded hand and that of the old man locked in his room remain with the viewer. These images of corporeal and social vulnerability elicit not only spectatorial reflection but also emotional and affective engagement lingering in the viewer's memory long after the film is over.

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Ritual as Intermedial Interjection in Ritwik Ghatak's *The Cloud-Capped Star*

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Abstract. The experience of the cinema of Ritwik Ghatak (1925–1976), one of the most unusual filmmakers from South Asia, raises a significant issue, of how ritual can be considered a potent medium to have an intermedial effect within the complex mediality of cinema. The authors examine his film, *The Cloud-Capped Star* (*Meghe Dhaka Tara*, 1960), and show that in order to reach the "screaming point" of his "epic melodrama," Ghatak borrowed form a forgotten ritual a fragment of a ritualistic song to become the experiential core for the experience of the film. The recurrent refrain of the song, at times the abstracted melody from the song creates a space of uncanny in-betweenness, contrasting positions of anthropological distance to a forgotten ritual with an imaginative yet guilt-ridden, painful projection of the secular self, being a part of that ritual itself.

Keywords: intermediality, Ritwik Ghatak, uncanny, ritual and cinema.

Prologue. A Personal Experience

In the latter half of 2022, an opportunity arose to take an intensive course on the works of one of India's most important film authors – Ritwik Kumar Ghatak (better known as Ritwik Ghatak). The structure of the course allowed the very rare privilege of examining his films closely together with fellow participants for an extended period. Each of the chosen films took two days or roughly ten-twelve hours of close watching. This was the first opportunity for many of the participants (of various ages, identities, educational, and professional backgrounds from various parts of India) including us to slow down the experience of watching a

film – to extend the experience of "watching" the film and "listening" to the film well beyond the duration of the respective films.

In such an extended viewing, certain elements of the *The Cloud-Capped Star* began to come to the fore that were not available to us before. Along with the unique experience of the collective viewing engagement, a few questions also began to form – about the intermediality of cinema and the possibility of not-so-obvious, fleeting, yet memorable impressions ensuing from its particular form. More precisely, it was the slowed-down experience of a specific cine-musical piece in the film, rendered through epic-melodramatic construction, and the refrain of the same cine-musical piece both within the intra-medial space of the film and the extra-medial space beyond the film that has prompted to pose the question how the relationship of ritual and cinema can be articulated through the uncanny aspect of intermediality.

The Director

Let us begin by introducing Ghatak, his cinematic worldview, and some of the stylistic tendencies of his cinematic works. Between his birth in 1925 and death in 1976, his life was marked by one watershed moment, the independence of India and the partition of British India (1947) into two political and three fragmented human geographies, i.e. India and Pakistan having East and West segments. East Pakistan later got separated to form another country, Bangladesh (1971). In terms of actual rupture, two cultural-linguistic spaces were the most affected, Bengal in the eastern part and Punjab in the western part of India. Having experienced the partition trauma of the split of Bengal and the loss and violence that followed – which became the ever-expansive backdrop to his art practice, culminating in the famed partition trilogy – *The Cloud-Capped Star* (*Meghe Dhaka Tara*, 1960); *E Flat* (*Komal Gandhar*, 1961); and *The Golden Thread* (*Subarnarekha*, 1962). This singular experience of trauma erupts outside the socio-political to assume a central existential dimension in his construction of a unique cinematic universe that leads Adrian Martin to ask, "has there ever been a filmmaker so intensely, single-mindedly focused on every conceivable variation of rupture, abandonment, fragmentation?" (Martin 2014, 206.)

The mainstream Hindi and Bengali cinema of the time focused on India's "project of nationhood" (Paz 1998, 73). This was undoubtedly a requirement of the time that created exciting cinematic processes, but Ghatak took another path in his "melancholic investment in the ideal of a unified Bengal" (Sarkar 2011,

274). In his work, by articulating the form of "epic melodrama," he develops an image of loss, anxiety, and the injustice of partition, which in turn, creates the space for postcolonial disillusionment within the domain of cinema.[1]

The Film

"At the primary level, [in a film] there could be a story of laughter and tears, of joys and sorrows of life. If we go deeper, we find directions, depending on the philosophy and consciousness of the artist. If someone goes even deeper, the temporal feeling cannot be expressed in words. At that moment he reaches the doorstep of something unknown, unknowable." (Ghatak quoted by Rajadhyasha 1982, 50.) These words, which might seem like a step towards the exploration of the uncanny within cinema, may work as a passageway to lead us to the film under discussion, *The Cloud-Capped Star*.[2] This quotation gives us a hint of

1 Bhaskar Sarkar uses the term "deterritorialized auteur" (D'Lugo 2003, 111) to explore Ghatak's longing for a lost ideal. Centered around the geographical location of united Bengal, Ghatak launched "a critique of the disavowal of heterogeneity and the illicit desires that motored a totalizing postcolonial nationalism. As he stated explicitly, 'the engulfing uncertainty, the fracture that I see – the roots are in the splintering of Bengal' (Ghatak 1975, 9, translation by Bhaskar Sarkar)" (Sarkar 2011, 274). We must consider the theoretical possibility the term "deterritorialized" opens up from the philosophical perspectives of Deleuze and Guattari (2005 [1987]), which can often be located at the formal level in the fractured, dislocated, truncated nature of positioning of intra-filmic artefacts. Reading into it further, Ghatak's filmic structure can be seen as deterritorialization, where his cinematic practice deterritorializes itself from the nationalist films of the time to reterritorialize within a network of phenomenological and metaphysical discourses, at times raising the issue of being and becoming "a refugee" due to different human conditions of enforced migration.

2 The film's narrative revolves around one family, after the violent partition of the country, being uprooted from then East Bengal (now Bangladesh), and currently living in a refugee colony in West Bengal, in the suburbs of Calcutta (now Kolkata) fighting and finding ways to survive through dire poverty. Although this family of six, parents and four siblings and their interrelationships create the skeleton of the narrative, the life of the narrative is dependent on the eldest daughter and the second child of the family Neeta. She becomes the sole bread-earner for the family. Through her support and sacrifices, the family finds a way to stability. Be it her elder brother Shankar's musical inspiration or her young, playful sister Geeta's hopes and dreams of a happily wedded life, or her youngest brother Montu's passion for sport, all the possibilities of happiness come at the cost of Neeta's self-sacrifice. In shouldering the responsibilities of the family, Neeta accepts everything with a smile: her mother's constant cynicism or her father's sudden inability to support the family because of health reasons (due to which she has to stop her education midway). Although there is a person in Neeta's life who loves and wants her, Sanat, she is unable to marry, as the whole family is solely dependent on her. Amidst of this turmoil, a shattering event takes place. With the support of her mother, her sister Geeta marries her lover, Sanat. Protesting this event her elder brother Shankar leaves to learn music. Soon after her younger brother has an accident at his factory. These events after events drain her both emotionally and physically. She contracts tuberculosis and separates herself from the house. Towards the end, her elder brother Shankar finally returns and discovers that she is ill. He takes

how the format of epic melodrama dovetailed with the concept of ritual may help in understanding the uncanny within the phenomenon of intermediality. Ghatak comments on his cultural compatriots as "epic people" ([1963] 2000, 21), who enjoy the sprawling telling and retelling of the known epics and myths whose narrative intrigues are already available to us. More than the "what" of the narrative, the "why" and "how" influence us more. Keeping this in mind, Sarkar provides us with an intriguing definition of epic melodrama: "epic melodrama is being posited here as a form that enables contemporary cultural negotiations of persistent metaphysical questions, without shoring up the foundationalist fictions that pretend to be definitive answers. Neither of the two terms – epic, melodrama – is a mere qualification for the other, nor are they simply additive: their interaction produces a new aesthetic category. A comparison with the historical epic, and with melodrama, might help establish its formal and functional contours" (Sarkar 2011, 266). The melodramatic within the epic works as a grounding force that situates the epic scales within a contemporaneous social interaction, shifting the focus from the determinate to the performative, and thus places the already established resolutions of the epic format within the chaotic negotiations of the present social situations. The grandeur of distance that the form of epic provides is brought down to the intricacies of the immediate. The body is inserted in the expanded sensibilities of epic through melodrama, and the epic expands the melodrama beyond the mere concerns of the quotidian. To Sarkar, the question of the metaphysical and the epic is intertwined and always already present in the form of melodrama. In this oscillation between the epic and the melodrama, the uncanny may begin to manifest.

The Song

With this basic narrative backdrop in mind, the cine-musical piece that is to be discussed can now be brought to the fore. Let us begin by providing a short translation of the song. The original song is a longer piece, but the section provided below is what is used in the film.

আয় গো উমা কোলে লই
Āy go uma kole lôi
Come, Uma, I take you to my lap,
গলায় গাঁথিয়া জুঁই

her to a sanatorium in the hills, fulfilling at least one of her desires – seeing the hills once again.

Galāy gnāthiyā jnuii
I make a garland of jasmine around your neck.
তুমি কি মা দুখিনী পরানী গো মা তারিণী
Tumi ki mā dukhinī parānī go ma tāriNī
Your mother is saddened.
যাও গো ঝি জামাইয়রে ঘর
Jāo go jhi jāmāiyer ghôr
Go, my daughter, to your husband's house
শূন্য করি মোর ঘর
Shunyô kôri mor ghôr
empty my home.
দুখিনী মা রইবে কেমনে
How will your sad mother live
Dukhinī mā rôibe kemône
তোমায় বিদায় দিয়া গো
Tomāy bidāy diyā go
after parting from you.

The song, now appropriated as a folk song is supposedly part of a lamenting ritual, within the socio-religious custom of Gourīdān[3] In the present-day secular world, the song hints at a forgotten past along with a mythical one. On the mythical level, the song is connected to Goddess Durga, the most revered and beloved goddess in the Bengali cultural context. As the myth goes, she is the daughter of the Mountain Himalayas and lives in Mount Kailasa with her consort Lord Shiva. Once a year, around autumn, she returns to earth to visit her paternal home with her family for only a handful of days. Autumn becomes a time for the

3 The literal translation of the term is giving away Gourī, where Gourī is Goddess Durga's name for her younger self. In that social practice, it was customary for the parents of certain higher caste Hindu families to marry off their girl child several years before even attaining puberty, by her eighth year the latest. The responsibility of carrying out the custom did have immense consequences for the world of beliefs, if it is conducted successfully, it is a matter of sacred virtue (puṇya) for the family including the souls of the dead ancestors. If otherwise, it would be a matter of profanity and sin (pāp) for the family, again linking the souls of the living family and the dead predecessors. With the gradual secularization initiated from 19th century under the colonial influence of British rule in India, the practice of the custom becomes something of a distant, seemingly un-connectable past, even for the generational descendants of those families. At the same time, in doing so, the wedding would be the last time a daughter can see her own parental family, as she will belong to another afterwards and the return to the paternal house was not seen as a virtue. With this localized meaning, the song is no longer about a mythical world and gains a larger social perspective.

ritualistic practice of ecstasy and melancholy with the arrival and the departure[4] of the goddess. This return of the goddess (the biggest festival of the year for the Bengalis) is where the imagination of the sacred feminine is combined within domesticity. Within the span of those four to five days, the ecstasy of her arrival and the pain of her departure is performed collectively. "Uma," as mentioned in the song, is the name of her younger pre-wedded self.

Sung from the perspective of a grieving mother (literally Goddess Durga's mother, but an emotion shared by all mothers), who is singing this song the day after the wedding of her daughter when her daughter is about to leave for her husband's house, the wording of the song, especially the first verse, where the mother asks the daughter to come to her lap for one last time, hints at the fact that Uma is a very small child, one for whom sitting in the lap of her mother is still suited. This in turn accentuates the pain of the almost forgotten practice of Gourīdān. In this moment, the ancestral pain (existing in the memory realm) of giving away a loved child and ritualized mourning for the mother goddess Durgā (existing in the performative realm of folk customs) morph onto the body of Neeta, who becomes a visual source for the audience to merge the various rituals of painful "giving away" into one temporal moment – the cinematic present.

The experience of this temporally entangled moment (where the audience is perpetually in the flux between many temporalities, unable to be stabilized in any one of them, in the process of constant becoming) has a sense of uncanny in it. It is almost the same sense that we feel while practicing various performative aspects of a ritual. There comes a point of transcendence, where a sense beyond the words is felt and this sense in turn, connects us in the present, with all those who have felt the same across time whenever this ritual was performed in the past or even in the future when this ritual will be practiced. The anthropological distance between generations is closed and accentuated into one present that is felt within the subject and at the same time beyond the subject. The way ritual, and also cinema, through their temporalities, hold and morph time and movement within its intermedial fold, takes us towards these sensations and experiences of the uncanny. Even before we have entered the specific usage of

4 The term used for this ritualistic departure is Visarjan, a sense of which is hidden in the word "bidāy" in the verse of the song. It is a little different from the English word departure where the agency lies with the one departing. In case of Visarjan, it is unclear where the agency lies and the one departing and the one saying goodbye are both bound by the larger act of departure and it is that act that holds the ultimate agency, which both sides must follow. It has the connotation of "giving away" a person, before which the will to depart becomes a lot less important. Thus, the term itself holds a sense of violence within itself that is also prominently hinted at through the verses of the song.

the ritualistic sonic element within the cinematic fold, we see that the usage of the words and sounds of a song within the cinematic medium is already opening up possibilities of the uncanny for us. The combination of ritual and cinema provides us with unique phenomenological possibilities.

It is important to be aware of the multi-modal Janus-faced positioning of the song, one towards myth, another towards domestic emotions of familial separation with the possibility of melodramatic excess, one towards the social custom as a fossilized relic of history, another towards the epic possibility of a nostalgic longing towards an amorphous sense of past. Ashish Rajadhyaksha makes a distinction between the forms of myth and epic against the backdrop of cinema, specifically the practice of melodrama by Ghatak beyond its usual rhetoric: "both myth and epic, forms which are in constant tension with the one closed, the other open-ended, are directly related to history. Both forms are comprehensible in terms of the tradition that they evoke. The difference is that myth seals off a configuration of images from their material base, while the epic achieves a synthesis of form, a unity of perception that is the first step towards the overcoming of the fragmentation of our social sensibility" (Rajadhyaksha 1982, 11).

Here melodrama has been elevated from its seemingly banal, nearly negative connotations and turned into a term connected with a form of melodic-performative cinema emerging from a way of living, whose cultural specificity also creates cultural seclusion in terms of immediate understanding for the viewer.

The First Shot

In the structure of Ghatak's film, the larger arcs in terms of both form and narrative, the micro-movements within that arc, the graphical and visual weaving with the aural elements add to the creation and maintenance of this epic melodrama. Deeply aware of the presence of myth and its mnemonic performance in the quotidian Bengali cultural experience, Ghatak unfurls those myths into a performance of epic gestures. A relevant example of this is the very first shot of the film [Figs. 1 and 2]. It is a wide shot of a series of large trees next to a body of water. The arching figures of the trees are the dominant graphical element of the screen. The first movement we notice is at the bottom right corner of the frame where a few bicycles move past, after which we notice a figure clad in a white saree coming towards the camera. This figure is Neeta. In the largely dark grey frame, her white saree makes her noticeable, despite her figure remaining minuscule compared to the large presence of the tree. Visually it almost seems like the trees have given

birth to this figure. Raymond Bellour in his analysis of this film also pays close attention to this shot. His gaze is remarkably and refreshingly different when he begins by noting how the above-mentioned trees take up all the time in the "world" as well as the space in the frame (Bellour [1992] 2004, 1). Despite being the first shot of the film where the audience has no information about the film yet, according to him, the construction of the shot is trying to already hint at and push out "beyond itself, beyond the inside of an order of which it is a part, an order proper to the organic power of a cinema that for convenience sake can be called 'classical,' but that everything draws towards the harsh regime of 'modern' ruptures" (Bellour [1992] 2004, 1).[5] This reading opens up a very interesting fold within the body of the film, where the film, from the very beginning, is implanting certain re-visiting possibilities within itself.[6]

The aural arrangement of the shot is also interesting, we hear a voice performing a few notes, before becoming a musical piece, in this moment of poignant emptiness where the music can be anything, we have a moment of pre-creation, pre-personal, pre-cognition, and an array of synesthesia-rich affects. These few notes are to prepare the voice for the music that is going to arise. At this moment the music has the possibility of becoming any music. Both the aural and the visual create a possibility of connecting this shot to a sense of beginning, a sense of birth beyond the literal beginning of the film. Throughout the film, Neeta remains the epitome of the nurturing, maternal, caring figure. In this shot, it almost seems as if nature herself has nurtured and created her.[7] The *mise-en-scène* of this shot

5 Although Bellour has given an in-depth study of the film, in the usage of the term "classical," inadvertently, he has revealed a problem of cultural cognition that binds the cinema of Global North. The formal assertion of epic melodrama is not only related to the South-Asian cultural perspective, rather it speaks of a cultural mapping of cinema in the global south. From the position of the global north, this perspective may remain unattainable, which in turn would appropriate the construction of the form of epic melodrama with the convention of "classical."

6 This re-visiting may or may not take place in terms of actual re-viewing of the film. It could also be in terms of remembering the first shot with the memory of having finished watching the film. Bellour probably wanted to hint at this when he wrote, "There is the film we see. The film we retell, talk about. Then the film we critique, the film we analyse. These come afterwards. But there is also the film we accompany" (Bellour [1992] 2004, 2). Pethő, while reflecting on the post-cinematic intermediality, speaks of "a kind of 'expanded mediality' through which the sensations, experiences traditionally linked to one medium, become perceptible in another medium' (2020b, 176). Extending this thought we propose that instead of intermediality being between multiple mediums, it could also be within the same medium, in this case, the film where the experience and memory of a segment of the film, or a medium within the film gets accentuated intra-medially at certain junctures within the film. The same fragment is made to interact, collide, converge and diverge from the whole in various temporalities.

7 In the context of Indian myth, there is an abundance of characters who are considered to be born from and nurtured by various elements of nature. Seeta (born from the earth), Draupadi (born from the sacred fire), and Shakuntala (nurtured by forest after being abandoned at birth)

immediately nudges the unsuspecting audience to create a connection beyond the immediate, almost at an archetypal level. This shift also playfully hints at the presence of the uncanny in the experience of the film from the very beginning, as the cognitive, meaning-making faculties of the audience shift between the immediate impessions, the ancestral knowledge and the collective unconscious. From here Neeta's journey begins step outside of the mythical into the epic, the epic of the contemporary.

The Recurrence of the Song

The song *Āy go uma kole lôi* can be understood within a complex mythic-social-temporal-ritualistic world. It is a song of ritualized pain that can reach epic tragedy, on the one hand, and express an intimate, personal pain of loss, on the other. It becomes a ritual artefact in the non-ritualized context of the cinematic universe of Ghatak, as well as an example of a cinematic configuration of "self-ritualizing." André Gaudreault (2004, 59), in his exploration of "narrative mediatics" explores whether there is a "thought" that precedes the medium through which it may be expressed. Also, he claims that expressions begin from an "encounter with opacity." In doing so, he hints at an unattainable uncanny that presupposes any formation of medium, also by extension, in the supercharged points of intermedial collision, where the multiplicity of mediums become more than the sum of the parts, is also one such opaque area where uncanny lies. Here we hear a striking similarity with Bruce Kapferer. Kapferer says, "consciousness is a refraction from reality, built from images and their light, the image being part of the matter of the real. […] Consciousness and its source – the image – is apart from humanity, originally external to human being" (2013, 41). It is the human being that comes into consciousness through the light of the image that emerges from and is integral to the real. There can be no subject/object duality but only an ever-present oscillation, "a differentiating continuous emerging, merging, reemerging" (Kapferer 2013, 42). With these ideas in mind, the song then becomes a process of expressing the uncanny, through the intermedial fold in the body of the film created by suturing cinema and ritual. This process in turn gives us a possibility to experience that moment when human being is born into the pre-existing consciousness through image.

are a few of the names that come to mind immediately in this context. For an audience who is familiar with these mythical narratives, even if the opening shot may not become very evocative at the very beginning, it creates a possibility of associations and creating connections that are difficult to articulate in words.

Although the perspective of the song is that of a grieving mother, it is not the character of the mother we are introduced to in the film. Despite, not being portrayed as an utterly negative character, the "mother" in the film is marked by the inability of providing a safe and nurturing mind-space for Neeta. At points of extreme clashes, when the perpetually alone Neeta is about to break, this song arrives, almost as if, from the perspective of the mother nature that seemingly gave birth to and gave away Neeta to this world in the opening shot. So, with each presence of the song, we feel this uncanny presence of another, archetypal mother figure who cannot be seen, but only sensed. In doing so, the connection between Neeta and Uma, the goddess, also becomes more palpable.

This song comes at four junctions of the film, within a similarly conceived structure:

– a dominant music track, embodying the turmoil of the sequence, just before the micro-climax of the sequence appears;

– followed by the dialogue that builds the body of the micro-climactic point;

– the sonic artefact appears; often it has another dialogic moment or musical moment within it that creates a shift in the experience of the song;

– the denouement of the scene begins and the emotive scales are being brought back down to prepare for the next sequence.

Although, in the second appearance of the song, the dialogic moment follows the song and not the other way around, yet, compared to all the other presences, this is a common practice of placement that may be traced in the film.

The song first appears, as a music piece (without the verses) when there are only fifty-one minutes left of the film. Narrative-wise, a lot of events have taken place that have collectively crushed the spirit of Neeta.[8] Although the musical arrangement of the song has a sense of grief deeply embedded within it, the way the verses immediately open up an array of intermedial impulses remains hidden. In this placement (1:16:01 – 1:17:26), when Geeta informs Neeta of the fact that

8 With her father's deteriorating health and subsequent inability to continue with his job, Neeta had to leave her studies to become the sole bread-earner of the family. Her brother has taken up a job in the factory, but he is aloof to the emotional needs of Neeta and her elder brother Shankar (with whom she is the closest). The final straw in this series of unfortunate events takes place when Neeta's partner Sanat decides to marry her sister Geeta. Her mother, out of the fear of losing the only bread-earner of the family, supports this match silently and allows Geeta to take away Sanat from Neeta. As on the day of the wedding, the preparations are underway and Neeta silently is continuing with her duties for the wedding, her mother comes to tell her, in an apologetic tone, that she did not want this to happen. Neeta sits up, almost in a jerking movement, before changing the topic. This dialogic moment becomes her silent protest. All her willpower is invested in pulling herself together to go through this strenuously painful moment. Her mother's words nearly break her for a split second. At this moment, we hear the tune of the song.

she is marrying Sanat, a dominant non-diegetic musical vocal piece is introduced that embodies Neeta's internal turmoil. In the next shot (a new scene) the non-diegetic is replaced by the ritualistic music of weddings. A pause is introduced, after which the conversation between Neeta and her mother takes place [Fig. 3], followed by the sonic element. Soon after, in her interaction with her father, possibly one of the only people who acknowledge the nearly inhuman sacrifice she has done and continues to do for this family, he bursts into a monologue. The eruptive quality of the monologue contrasted with the wailing music creates a unique tension, beyond the scope of the immediacy of the visual [Figs. 4 and 5].

The second time the song appears within roughly sixteen minutes of its first appearance as music.[9] Here although the verses are audible, it is important to study their construction a little closely. At 1:33:24, the sequence begins with a dissolve. Neeta is alone, framed by a window. From the very first frame of the shot the song starts. This is quite an unusual placement of a musical structure, but one that is repeatedly used by Ghatak. With almost the first frame of the shot, the song appears as well. This creates a striking experience disrupting the seamlessness of viewing.

In this shot, Neeta is alone, her gaze upwards, and she begins to cough [Fig. 6]. In the backdrop, the song finishes the first verse clearly, "come to my lap, Uma." Interestingly, the second verse is the only one in this song that gives a dominant and specific image – that of a young girl wearing a garland of jasmine around her neck. Ghatak chooses to play with this word (jasmine) here and the rendition of the song was done in such a way that the exact words become somewhat unclear. It is quite intriguing to notice that in this way the only section of the song that could have provided clarity in terms of image and taken us closer to all the allegorical insinuations discussed before has been left unfinished and somewhat ruptured. Also, the mode of rupture is very interesting. It is not done through a technological distortion of the sound, but rather with a specific mode of vocal

9 In the meantime, Sanat and Geeta have wed, Neeta's youngest brother Montu has been hospitalized due to an accident at the factory, which puts Neeta under even more economic stress. Her own health has started to deteriorate. Already it has been hinted that she has contracted tuberculosis. She is afraid to get tested as if she actually becomes sick and loses the job, the family would be destroyed. Under these circumstances, she begins to cough up blood and decides to separate herself from the rest of the family so that they do not get infected. In one such secluded moment, when she coughs up blood and realizes that it is time for her to separate herself – the song begins. As the song continues and her mother sees that she has moved to the outer part of the house with her belongings and her beloved photograph of her and her brother from their childhood. Neeta's mother, unaware of the sickness, suspects something is wrong and goes after her to question her. Neeta refuses to let her know anything only making apparent the chasm that now exists between the two.

intonation that has the element of wailing in it. By doing this and withholding the specificities of the image within the verse, Ghatak at the same time maintains the tonal quality of the structure and opens up the uncanny as an integral part of the work. The song was rendered with certain modes of sonic mediation, as if it is part of a forgotten memory itself, particularly distinct yet not clear enough, having the quality of an auditory dream.

From the third verse, another element of sound is introduced. As Neeta coughs uncontrollably, the other piece of aural structure spirals in and fills the environment to the extent that the song is not even clearly audible anymore. This piece is created with the sounds of cricket with a few sets of clean notes. Within this aural structure, Neeta notices that she is coughing up blood and at that moment, she could not deny her disease any longer. The added sound structure fades and the song continues. She leaves the room with her belongings, her long white saree trailing behind her [Fig. 7], she looks back at the house for a moment and continues on her way. Although the travel is from the main structure of the house to the outer structure – spatially a very small distance, it almost immediately creates a connection with perpetual leaving. After this, the voice trails off[10] and the music continues (1:35:05 – 1:37:07).

This mode of finer scrutiny of the elements of the film can demonstrate that the song's positioning itself is always within very specific emotional moments, where the climactic events have passed, but the trailing tension has not subsided yet. The denouement to the next situation has not yet started. The song holds within itself an array of emotional ranges by avoiding giving the audience the luxury of being able to experience any specific emotion, it creates a phenomenological condition of the uncanny, where the experience is unsettling, there is an uncertainty of emotions towards what is happening on the screen. The song,

10 Interestingly, the exact dialogues of this scene will seem nearly incomprehensible to an audience outside the cultural milieu. As neither of them directly asks or answers anything. Neeta's mother comes into the outhouse and questions Neeta why she has moved here. Neeta refuses to answer. She states the time to listen has passed. She asks her to leave. In the meandering and alluding manner of speaking, the reason why Neeta holds back from her mother who is trying to reach out may not be easily understandable. This particular emotive point has a name in Bengali – 'abhimān.' There is no exact English translation for this word. In fact, the word changes its meaning in other Indian languages as well. This inability of translation signals a vast cultural-cognitive gap. It is an implosive emotional state, where one painfully restrains from an emotional outpour and takes refuge in silence. The pain here does not occur from any event but from a sense of betrayal where a loved one fails to sense the cues and fails to support and comfort the other in their emotional pain. It is a hypersensitive emotional vortex that we notice in Neeta in the scene. It is her "abhimān" that refuses her to open up. The performance of this emotion plays a role in the form of epic melodrama and becomes an example where the contemporary sensorium of the melodrama is pushed towards an untold sense of something greater.

the visual placement of the song, the way the shots are taken, and the way the dialogic moments within the song are marked, all of these come together in an uncanny way. Epic melodrama as a form of cinema, where this proliferation of a multitude of complex emotions can take place, prepares cinema to be a potential generative site of the "uncanny."

In the third appearance of the song, the film has almost reached its end. Things seem to go better for the siblings. Geeta is expecting her first child, which will help to bridge the chasm between her and Sanat. Montu has returned from the hospital awaiting recovery. Also, the financial compensation he is about to receive from the factory will definitely help the family. Most important of all, Shankar who left for Mumbai in protest of Geeta's wedding to Neeta's partner Sanat has become a well-known name in the world of classical music and has now returned to visit home. Their mother, now relishing her newfound and long-coveted stability, sees that her children will realize her dream of a two-storied house. The days of their misery seem to be over. In the midst of all these, Neeta seems to have vanished, as if she has no part in this progress of the family. With her disease, she has slipped into oblivion. Shankar breaks the silence, goes and visits her, and to his shock discovers that Neeta has contracted tuberculosis. He plans to arrange for her treatment and take her to the hills.

That night father[11] comes to talk to Neeta. He empathizes with the pain Neeta has been carrying alone within her for so long. He sees how in her success in bringing stability to the family, she has reached her end. In an epic gesture [Figs. 8, 9, 10, 11], he frees Neeta from her responsibilities. He asks Neeta to leave, to abandon the responsibilities that bind her, to liberate herself from the expectations surrounding her that subjugate her. Neeta smiles [Fig. 12]. This is

11 The father figure as a character needs a special focus here. It is a character who registers continual shifts. In the beginning of his arc, he was almost a comic character. His idiosyncrasies seemed to put him at a distance from the quotidian of the world, also probably providing some relief to the struggle of the family. Slowly as the film progresses, we begin to see him as a compassionate, loving man, one who not only empathizes with Neeta, but also accepts that inadvertently he became a part of the problem and pressure that continues to crush Neeta. His compassion shifts to guilt and in an epic gesture, right before the third appearance of the song, when Shankar reveals to the family that Neeta has contracted tuberculosis, he calls out, "I accuse." Although at a surface level, this may seem as his accusation towards the others. But when Shankar retaliates by asking who he accuses, the father's head hangs deeply down to his chest, another gesture where he posits himself within guilt, by being unable to protest when he could. Thus, it may not be a surprise that the third and most poignant appearance of the song takes place in the presence of the father. The character of the father resembles the father figure in the ritual of Gourīdān. When he urges Neeta to free herself from the binds of the family, Neeta also replies in a very intrigued whispering voice. He urges her to break free. He relieves her from the bindings of love that drained her of her life. We almost sense the Janus-faced duality in the construction of the father where he seeks separation for Neeta out of love, empathy, and care for her.

the shortest, yet the most dominant presence of the song (1:57:01 – 1:58:22). This time when the song appears, it is slightly different from the previous presence. The second verse is once again not very intelligible. But interestingly, this time the second word of the verse is challenged in this rendition. The word where the omission begins, "gnathiyā" contains a specific and direct image. It is a verb that is used especially in terms of making a garland, stitching with a needle a garland of soft flowers around the fragile neck of a young girl. This contains an element of violence by contrasting the softness of the neck and flowers with the definite act of passing a needle through the flowers to make a garland. Once again this is done by a vocal technique that adds to the grieving tone of the song. Also, this is the first time that the last two verses are introduced. They are about Uma going to her husband's house leaving her paternal home bereft. Neeta embodies this leaving as she literally runs off into the stormy night with nothing but the photograph of her and Shankar from their childhood, her most prized possession. The song ends abruptly with the shot of her leaving [Fig. 13]. In this quick omission of the immediate violence of action, the audience is deprived of an easy association. This leaves the audience entangled in the experience of a Deleuzean assemblage. Here the physical treatment of the piece, the inherent qualities of both cinema and ritual, and the rich network of mnemonic implications are gathered in a singular context where one is constantly becoming the other (and thus not ever being a part of the whole, but always creating the whole with the internal exchanges) producing the affective.

The fourth and final appearance of the song takes place after her brother has returned from visiting her in the sanatorium of Shillong hills. As the shopkeeper asks Shankar about her, he does not reply. That silence itself indicates that Neeta is lost forever. As he is about to return home, he sees another woman[12] in the street, the same age as Neeta, walking towards her home. At this point, another music track is playing, they smile at each other. Until this moment the shot did not allude to much more than meeting someone who had reminded him of Neeta before. Soon after the straps of her sandals come off, and she bends down to fix the straps, as it happened with Neeta almost at the beginning of the film [Fig. 14]. The song begins here again. By now, the song's transformation into a ritual within the film has been complete. Many small memory interactions take place here in a short span of time. Let us try to list them out:

12 This woman has been introduced in the film twice before. Once when Shankar mistakes her for Neeta in a playful, slightly embarrassing manner, and once when Neeta had to give up her education and had to take up a job there was a short interaction between her and this woman.

– This event of the torn sandal took us back in time to when at the beginning of the film, Neeta had the same experience.

– By now, since the song has gained an experience of its own, it almost single-handedly adds unseen, emotional layers to the shot.

– This is not a connection between Neeta and this woman, but there is a temporal affinity created between all women who sacrificed, continue to sacrifice, and will sacrifice themselves for the crushing needs of their families. This connection draws out into a forgotten past and an unimaginable future.

– The same sound arrangement takes place here as it did at the second presence of the song, where Neeta discovered that she was coughing up blood. The shock, desperation, defeat, and helplessness of Neeta are transferred onto Shankar's observer presence now. This adds to the circular motion of the song in the arc of the narrative of the film.

– The song has become an image by its own rights now and after the screen fades to black at 2:06:26, the song continues till 2:07:05 on the black screen.

These elements together attest to the way the song has transformed from a piece of music to a piece with a ritualistic purpose during the film.

The Screaming Points

Towards the end of the film Neeta's scream, "brother, I want to live" ("dādā, āmi bnāchte chāi") echoes around the hills that the camera viscerally, violently pans through. At this point, the film embraces the form of epic melodrama to leave the discursive path and step into an experiential one. In Neeta's scream, we all scream, cry, react through our bodies. There is a feeling of pure uncanny here emerging through the bodily experience of the film. This experience of the uncanny may be connected with Sobchack's recognition of the body of the film as a "sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities and agency" (Sobchack 2004, 2). In this way, epic melodrama becomes "a filmic mode of stylistic and/or emotional excess that stands in contrast to the more 'dominant' modes of realistic, goal-oriented narrative" (Williams 1991, 2). Sarkar's words attest to this as well, "film conjures up a cinematic sensorium that blurs the archaic mind/body polarity, engaging audiences in its complex, synaesthetic modalities" (Sarkar 2011, 5).

There comes a point in a ritual practiced by generations when the visceral leaves behind the rules and norms, in the profundity of the moment of experience. In the same way, this profundity of the experience of the "screaming point of the

film" also comes through the ritual associations of the song. Ghatak's decisive borrowing of the musical piece of a forgotten ritual, a fragment of a ritualistic song as the experiential core of the film makes the song itself a ritual in practice.

This song is placed within a chiaroscuro of familiarity and unfamiliarity, unlike the usual experience of music in cinema, where the music is strategically placed at a distance from words or dialogues for clarity. There is something that remains unreachable in the exploration of these mediums (cinema, song, and ritual), there is an invisible, yet palpable animation between these mediums that resists articulated discourse.

Michel Chion also offers the possibility of reading the musical pieces becoming placed between two screaming points of the film. The first screaming point may be considered, after the wedding (we have been introduced to the tone of the song at this point and not the verse) of Geeta, Neeta asks Shankar to teach her a song. Shankar teaches her a song by Nobel laureate poet and composer Rabindranath Tagore – "the night when my doors were shattered by the storm."[13] On a metaphoric level, there may be a relationship between Neeta's internal struggle and the song. But the song can be read also as the first screaming point for Neeta [Fig. 15]. Although this screaming point is not physically visible as a scream, the song holds the same power. To borrow from Chion, it is not so much the sound of the scream that renders it a screaming point, but rather the time it occupies in the body of the film. "It occupies a point in time but has no duration within. It suspends the time of its possible duration; it's a rip in the fabric of time. This scream embodies a fantasy of the auditory absolute, it is seen to saturate the soundtrack and deafen the listener. It might even be unheard by the screamer." (Chion [1947] 1999, 77.)

The second scream in this film is much more palpable as it is not only placed at a culminating point of the film but coincides with Neeta's actual scream [Fig. 16] as she shouts, "brother, I want to live." The ellipse that follows is not a cinematic tool, but a necessity to enact the deafening quality of the scream – a scream that can swallow the visual space, time, and movement and there is no other way than to open up a new sequence after a certain amount of time has passed. This screaming point is interpreted by Chion in a unique way, where he says that the man's shout has a bestial identification with the totemic animal, whereas the "woman's cry is rather more like the shout of a human subject of language in the face of death. The screaming point is of a properly human order. […] The man's

13 Translation by the authors from the original song, *Je rāte mor duārguli bhānglo JhôRe* by Rabindranath Tagore. Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1982) gives a salient reading of not only this song, but also the significance of the selection of this song.

shout delimits a territory, the woman's scream has to do with limitlessness. The scream gobbles up everything into itself – it is centripetal and fascinating – while the man's cry is centrifugal and structuring. The screaming point is where speech is suddenly extinct, a black hole, the exit of being." (Chion [1947] 1999, 78–79.)

The Uncanny Sound

Between these two already uncanny treatments of voice, the song, through its act of repetition acquires the position of a ritual that prepares the audience to travel from one screaming point to the other, it almost becomes a cinematic example of Lyotard's figural – "an unspeakable other necessarily at work within and against discourse, disrupting the rule of representation" (Lyotard [1971] 1977, 3). In this disruption, as the uncanny rises from the ripples of the rituals on the body of the film, Pethő's salient understanding of intermediality as "figuring the infigurable" (Pethő 2020a, 37) becomes palpable. In this practice of intermediality, the song becomes a process of exploring the uncanny. Inspired by Denis Vasse's (1974) method of speaking about the voice as an object, Chion speaks of a kind of voice that is not relegated to the backdrop of the visual rather it has the possibility to "wander the surface of the screen" (Chion [1947] 1999, 4). Here, the strength of cinema as an intermedial space comes into play once again. Although the sound in cinema may have been inspired by the already existing musical mediums in the world (for example, the synchronous voice may have theater as its heritage, the source of the music might be opera or concert or even vaudeville). Added to the cinema, it does not become a part of it. Rather, the song (with its unclarity, and tonal wailing) becomes a container and a performer of the uncanny that could only be possible in the play of intermediality.

As Adrian Martin aptly captures Bellour's idea: "if there is a 'power intrinsic to the interval' (in all its senses) evident here, that is because the film allows a 'readability of the interval between shots' as well as a readability of 'the work which operates a transformation of the interval' (Bellour 2000, p. 125)" (Martin 2014, 216). Bellour and Martin's "interval" seems to be a parallel to the concept of intermedial in-betweenness.

Ritual, Cinema, Intermediality

As we have proposed ritual and film both as playfields of intermediality, before we study their intertwined nature and how the uncanny emerges from the in-betweenness of these two, we may take a moment to explore these three categories on their own.

Ágnes Pethő (2020a) with her continued inquiry into the modes and means of intermediality poses an important question, whether a film is an intermedium itself or whether it is a domain, an environment for intermediality to play out. Since the beginning cinema has hosted within its body multiple mediums and those mediums have been transmuted into a part of cinematic medium itself, therefore it would not be accurate to look at cinema simply as a collection of various mediums (Pethő 2020a, 12). Gaudreault (2002), on the other hand, argues for the identity of the medium, as something that may be understood by intermediality.

Before delving into the questions further, it might be useful to study the intermedial possibilities of ritual. Ritual is in itself an assemblage of multiple becomings and multiple embodied gestures, practices as knowledge-making. Anthropologist Bruce Kapferer[14] (2013) argues for seeing cinema as a ritual. While accepting that the metaphysics of ritual is by itself unique and far-reaching in terms of historicity, Kapferer proposes that cinema concretizes ritual possibilities in its body and thus helps grasp ritual as a medium better. The reason for this connection is not in their technical, formal similarities, but rather in their functions as understanding the "human" at the core of philosophical thoughts. In the centrality of the practice of time and movement in ritual practice and cinema, they are far more closely associated than the relationships drawn with metaphor, drama, or theatre. Kapferer contends, "ritual anticipates cinema" (2013, 61). In other words, ritual is always, already cinematic in its dynamic. What cinema achieves through its art, those potential has already been anticipated by ritual.

Here we would also like to draw on another similarity between the domains of ritual and cinema – that of the performance. Although the knowledge and memory of the performance of a ritual may exist, the ritual does not exist by itself. It is brought to life through performance. Cinema, if we draw from Edgar Morin

14 Kapferer's own work in this regard is curious. He uses the Deleuzean framework of movement image and time image to understand and explore a Sinhala Buddhist anti-sorcery rite Suniyama from Sri Lanka. It is quite unique that the theories of cinema also help open up the medium of a conventional, practice-based ritual. In doing so, isn't his body of research becoming an example of intermedial practice itself? His work becomes thus the bridge of intermediality that connects the seemingly disparate fields of cinema and ritual.

([1956] 2005), also may be seen as continually coming into being by practice. This is not only the practice of the creator but also the practice of the audience. With each viewing, between the audience and the screen, the cinema is re-performed and re-born. This similarity draws our attention to the performativity of intermediality, where intermediality is also seen as always, acting and doing, instead of merely being. Yvonne Spielmann (2001) notes that in the system of intermediality, the other systems of art forms that are in the intermedial relationship go through a process of internally embedded transformation. This extends the idea of performativity to the relationship of various mediums.

Ritual and cinema both embed the intermedial possibility within themselves by re-performance, re-enactment, re-visit, and re-experience. Intermediality then seems to be the term that can embody, refer to, and build upon the oscillations between the two.

Image, Consciousness, Uncanny

What happens to the idea of images, when it is no longer "an abstract concretisation, a figment of the human imaginary, human through and through, beginning and ending with humanity as in Hegel's famous night of the world,' but, rather, and following Bergson, is the enduring and generative light of the world. Consciousness is not with human beings alone and is already everywhere a potentiality, immanent in all matter" (Kapferer 2013, 42). When both the "screen-brain" and the space of ritual become the birthplace of the emergence of consciousness, intermediality is no longer between two mediums, but two historicities, two modes of understanding temporality and movement, and two unique maps of convergences and divergences. In this multimodal vortex, the concept of uncanny may be articulated. Beyond the immediate reach of discourse, a new "real" emerges through the intermedial correlation between ritual and cinema. It is this amorphous, yet deeply experiential moment that is being referred to as uncanny here.

In *The Cloud-Capped Star* we have found that the uncanny emerges in the following ways:

a) The uncanny repetition: Neeta's continuous binding herself to the crushing responsibilities, stepping towards the sacrificial altar without any redemption. Neeta is questioned at various points, especially by her brother Shankar, as to why she does not protest against all the things that happen to her. Her reply is that she feels "mad" for her family. Another very strong reaction comes from her

through the performance of "abhimān," as we discussed before. This "abhimān" is erupting emotions from a position of love that takes her to the altar of self-sacrifice. The relationship with the familial, the passionate maddening love, the never-ending sacrifice – all of these take Neeta towards the ritualistic sacrificial altar, yet redemption through sacrifice is not available to her. In this never-ending ritual without any absolution, there is an exploration of an uncanny repetition.

b) The uncanny of the sonic ritual: as we have discussed, there is a complex connection in the film with a forgotten ritual as a coarse belief system thrust upon the hierarchical social system. A mythical goddess figure is invoked by the lamenting song of a mother for her young daughter. In this process, the billowing tonality, the "almost illegibility" of the wailing, the undulated wailing tone of the song all become forms of the uncanny. The sudden obscuring of the image of the white garland of jasmine on the throat of the girl becomes a step towards the uncanny. The illusion that modern thinking may bring solutions to various issues of life is challenged in the context of the film through the use of the song.

c) Creating a metaphysical core through the use of the uncanny: through this song, cinema reaches towards what is unfathomable. The sense of uncanny emerges from the song and the emotional rhetoric of the father. The song becomes the core refrain of the film and thus gains its potency of a ritual. This ritual/song, the crescendo of the tune, and the performance that modulates and shifts become significant in themselves conveying a sense of uncanniness.

Epilogue

This paper attempted to trace the emergence of the uncanny through a piece of music. We found that he fragility and also the positioning of the piece in a repetitive circular motion was important. In the song's transformation into ritual, the collapse of the secular memory is embedded from the beginning, but at various points of repeated listening, at varying emotional charges, there will occur a point, and this point may be different for each audience, where the collapse will be experienced, it is at that point that the uncanny comes into play. The phenomenon of seeing the exasperating turmoil from an external position on the screen and experiencing it internally within ourselves are two phenomena that work together towards performing the intermedial oscillation of the uncanny. In other words, the uncanny breeds within the intermedial fold of image and sound, and the intermedial unfurls within the uncanny.

To conclude, let us return to the anecdote from the very beginning of the article. As discussed, we came to this interpretation through an intense film analysis in an online classroom setting. The ten to twelve hours of self-observation and the mounting pressure of viewing brought to the fore layers of the intermedial and the uncanny. Kapferer differentiates between "process" and "practice," "the objective of much ritual to both replicate this [fundamental recognition of the centrality of time and movement] and to enter into the dynamics of its production, to intervene within time and its passage, as it were. The stress on process is not the same as an emphasis on practice to which the idea of process has been reduced. Ritual and cinema are practices that are mutually informative" (Kapferer 2013, 61). Our experience, then may be an extension of the process of the ritualization of the cinematic, in order to enter the intermedial impulse of the film. Through this dilated process of the film experience, the uncanny indicates the possibility of the existence of an unknowable metaphysical core of cinema connected with the unknown universe of the consciousness itself, experienced through wonder, discovery, realization and further mystery.

As a concluding remark, we agree with Adrian Martin that "Ghatak presents a style that does not exist only to serve or express his story, but to formulate itself as a vital proposition, materially, in the multiple times and spaces created by cinema, before our very eyes. He gives us a world, his ambivalent attitude toward that world as it is, and something still more: he brings to the surface of film the forces and energies that transform the world, violently or magically, from moment to moment. Could we ask for anything more from the cinema we love?" (Martin 2014, 216.)

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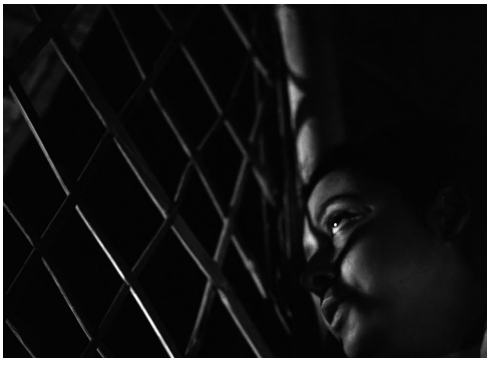

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Jane Austen and the Uncanny: The Colonial Past in Patricia Rozema's Adaptation, *Mansfield Park*

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Abstract: Neither Jane Austen's writing, nor film adaptations of her novels made in the heritage film tradition seem particularly uncanny. Linked in the viewers' minds with the representation of the English countryside stability, the films promote traditional values and take the spectators away from the problems and anxieties of the contemporary status quo. However, Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999) uses Austen's plot to question the colonial past by creating uncanny effects. Understood in this paper as an eerie resurfacing of the hidden (following Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Sigmund Freud, John Hodgkins, Barbara Creed), the uncanny becomes a tool for inquiring into how contemporary filmmakers and their audiences revisit old stories. Rozema creates two subplots for the main narrative: a story about an artist's growth (Fanny Price becomes a writer) and a colonial narrative, which foregrounds the Bertrams' dependence on their property in Antigua and their use of slave labour. Both plot lines enrich the film with uncanny effects linked to the inherent intermediality of film adaptations. Grotesquely frightening verbal images from Fanny's writing (extracts from Austen's *Juvenilia*) and the uncanny visuality of Tom Bertram's drawings frame the viewer's revisitation of *Mansfield Park* while reminding him/her of a subversive potential – of the uncanny and film adaptations.

Keywords: film adaptation, uncanny, Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park,* Patricia Rozema.

In his classic work, *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud quotes an episode from Karl Gutzkow's *Die Ritter vom Geiste* (1850–52)*:* "The Zecks [a family name] are all "heimlich." – "Heimlich"? What do you understand by "heimlich"? – Well, . . . they are like a buried spring or a dried-up pond. One cannot walk over it without always having the feeling that water might come up there again. – *Oh, we call it "unheimlich"; you call it "heimlich."* Well, what makes you think that there is something secret and untrustworthy about this family?" (Freud 1955,

223). Focusing on the phrase, given in italics, Freud illustrates the ambivalence of the uncanny, an ease with which familiar turns into unfamiliar or safe and ordinary into threatening and extraordinary. The Zecks are compared to "a dried-up pond," which communicates the feeling of uncertainty (when the speaker admits that you never know where you are with them) and the anticipation of something hidden coming to the surface. Intriguingly, the speakers define *(un) heimlich* differently but agree on the kind of effect that the Zecks produce: "there is something secret and untrustworthy about this family" (Freud 1955, 223).

In *Double Vision: Adaptation, the Uncanny and Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* John Hodgkins also reminds us of the difficulty in defining the uncanny: "as Masschelein indicates, the uncanny is a notoriously tricky concept to define, a point reaffirmed by Nicholas Royle when he observes that, because the uncanny 'is what cannot be pinned down or controlled', it is 'destined to elude mastery'" (Hodgkins 2021, 65). Hodgkins then proceeds by giving Freud's definition, where the discussed concept is viewed as something "undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror" (Hodgkins 2021, 66).

Freud distinguishes between two large groups of meanings associated with the word *heimlich*. The first group emphasizes "belonging to the house, not strange, familiar" (Freud 1955, 222), while the second forefronts everything "concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others" (Freud 1955, 223). Well-acquainted with Ernst Jentsch's definition of the uncanny[1] and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's understanding[2] (the uncanny as something that ought to have been kept concealed but has come to light), Freud is interested, as Barbara Creed notes, in the circumstances in which the familiar "can become uncanny and frightening" (Creed 2005, 3). The uncanny is not new or foreign, but it is something old and familiar estranged by repression and thus turned into frightening and unfamiliar.[3]

1 See: "on the whole, Jentsch did not get beyond this relation of the uncanny to the novel and unfamiliar. He ascribes the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness to intellectual uncertainty; so that the uncanny would always, as it were, be something one does not know one's way about it" (Freud 1955, 221).

2 To quote Freud: "we notice that Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the *Unheimlich*, for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (Freud 1955, 225).

3 It is necessary to provide another quotation from Hodgkins to demonstrate a balanced contemporary understanding of Freud's central thesis: "However, one doesn't necessarily need to subscribe to Freud's particular theories of psychological repression, some of which seem increasingly problematic today and which even Freud acknowledged couldn't account for all instances of the uncanny, to appreciate a kind of phenomenological truth at play in his work" (Hodgkins 2021, 66).

Embracing both definitions of the uncanny (the known/familiar turning unknown/unfamiliar, and the hidden/repressed coming to light), the discussed passage from Gutzkow (in Freud's *The Uncanny*) introduces us to the debates on the *(un)heimlich* through the family imagery. It also emphasizes the importance of Schelling's definition of the uncanny by using "heavier" metaphors for the hidden ("a buried spring") that is revealed ("water might come up there again").

This essay is built around Patricia Rozema's cinematic rereading (1999) of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, in which family homes are viewed as sites for resurfacing of the hidden. For Rozema, Mansfield Park is a space for confronting what one had hoped to ignore – long-buried secrets, skeletons in the cupboards, and shameful truths locked behind closed doors. Partly seeing through Austen's text, partly reading against the grain, Rozema produces an interpretation that convincingly illustrates Freud's metaphor of "a dried-up pond" or a space of uncertainty, where the submerged will emerge.

The uncanny effects of homes are discussed, for instance, by Barbara Creed in her book on horrors, where she mentions that "the workings of the uncanny in film" are often produced when "the friendly inviting place of refuge suddenly becomes hostile and uninviting, or the cheerful welcoming host becomes cold and frightening" (Creed 2005, 5). While unpacking these effects, Creed looks back on Rosemary Jackson's observation concerning "an ideological or 'counter cultural' edge to the uncanny. In other words, the uncanny has the power to undermine the social and cultural prohibitions that help to create order and stability" (Creed 2005, 4).

Film narratives that adapt Austen's prose are inevitably set in family contexts and deal with themes of domestic stability or instability together with ways of achieving the former and avoiding the latter.[4] *Mansfield Park* is not an exclusion. Due to having the name of a grand estate in its title, the novel welcomes rereadings that question the splendor and comforts of noble homes and families of high rank. The *unheimlich* effects turn into tools for looking behind family facades, which mask and hide the frightening and the inappropriate.[5]

4 For example, see the adaptations of *Sense and Sensibility* by Ang Lee (1995) or by John Alexander (2008); *Pride and Prejudice* directed by Simon Langton (1995) and by Joe Wright (2005); *Emma* directed by Douglas McGrath (1996) and by Autumn de Wilde (2020); *Persuasion* directed by Adrian Shergold (2007) and by Carrie Cracknell (2022).

5 For the tropes of the uncanny in the 19th-century English literature (and beyond) see Wolfreys (2018); for the uncanny in the heritage film, Vidal (2012); for general effects of the heritage film, Monk (2011); for transgressive potential of the heritage film, Voigts-Virchow (2004).

Such an approach to the classics is in line with the tasks undertaken by contemporary adaptations. Austen's text works with the themes of deceitfulness, untrustworthiness, and the like. However, Rozema's adaptation specifically foregrounds uncertainty and revelations of the secret and unknown, unlike other existing film versions of *Mansfield Park* (1983, miniseries directed by David Giles; 2007, directed by Iain B. MacDonald). Certain cinematic and literary rereadings of Austen (for instance, Seth Grahame-Smith's 2009 novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and its 2016 film adaptation) play with combining classic plots with comically frightening effects and potentially uncanny situations. Unlike such cases of radical "shipping" of the Bennets, Mr. Darcy, and the zombies, Rozema produces uncanny effects by slight shifts, which she introduces into the novel's story.

Rozema's film does two things: it unpacks the latent uncanniness of Austen's *Mansfield Park* and comments on the uncanny nature of film adaptations in general. Adaptations function on the boundaries between media, verbally composed and bodily performed, and between the imagined and the realized. Adaptations are liminal because they are experienced "as palimpsests through our memory of *other* works that resonate through repetition with variation" (Hutcheon 2006, 8), which implies that we are experiencing something familiar turned unfamiliar and different. The literary original encounters its *Other* on the screen while itself turning into an eerie doppelgänger of the film text. The previously read novel will haunt the film we are watching, and if we reread the book, the film will be haunting our rereading. Different versions of the same text coexist in our imaginations, and we find ourselves in resonant spaces where boundaries between different experiences – cinematic and literary – are erased. The othering of literature (or any "originals") that film adaptation undertakes explains its subversive potential, "an ideological or 'counter cultural' edge" (Creed 2005, 4), which Jackson mentioned in connection to the uncanny and which we find helpful for the understanding of adaptation in general.

This paper looks at how Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* creates uncanny effects on three levels – in film dialogue, through the use of bodies in *mise-en-scènes*, and via "organizing" unpredictable intermedial encounters.

The Verbal Uncanny: Grotesque Exaggerations that Hide … What?

Starting with a girl whispering a story to her little sister and stopping on the phrase "starved to death" (00h02'44"), *Mansfield Park* seems to be a distorting

mirror of its original. The themes of a "handsome house," "large income," and "good luck" (Austen 2008, 23), with which the novel commences, are present in Rozema's version, but from the start, they have to compete with two other narratives. The first is introduced with a whispered tale: Fanny (Hannah Taylor Gordon) is a talented storyteller with a preference for eerie plots and a tendency to exaggerate. The second additional narrative – that of slavery and slave labour responsible for incomes, comforts, and good luck – begins to develop several minutes into the film. Fanny Price, a poor relative of Lady Maria Bertram, is on her way to Sir and Lady Bertram, where she will live with the family and be brought up together with the Bertram children. Travelling along the coast on her way to this paradise, Fanny sees a ship not far from the shore and hears a strange song coming from it. "Black cargo," the coachman explains to her, meaning slaves brought as a "gift for a wife" (00h04'46"). Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park at 5 o'clock in the morning to be met by a drunken elder cousin Tom and dropped by the entrance to wait until everybody wakes up to welcome her.

The subplot of Fanny Price becoming a writer and "the spiritual mistress of Mansfield Park" (Said 1993, 84) appropriates texts from Jane Austen's *Juvenilia* (1786–93), her surviving childhood writing in a variety of genres, and her letters (to sister Cassandra, for example). The film uses fragments from Austen's texts which function as a voice-over or are read out in front of the screen by little Fanny and grown Fanny (Francis O'Connor). The choice of these sound bites reveals the central strategy of the filmmakers: to immerse the viewer into the comically horrifying visionary fantasies of a gifted teenager.

One of Fanny's stories centres on a certain Eliza: a thief, an eloper, a spendthrift, Eliza is everything young Fanny is not. Eliza lived beyond her means and "was imprisoned and partially eaten by her two young sons." To wind up the story, Fanny suddenly says into the camera: "But she intends to murder the guards" (00h13'09"). Pronounced by a young girl, given away by her parents, brought to an unwelcoming house and promised to stay in this house, "if all goes well, forever" (00h11'16"), the phrase acquires an additional meaning. Fanny Price is, on the one hand, an aspiring writer with a wild imagination. On the other, she is an eerie creature who lives both in reality and in the imaginary world, where there are ways to triumph over her daily existence and take revenge.

Literary Fanny, to a certain extent, does take her vengeance. Her silence and obedience, her righteousness, alongside her ability to win it all in the end, make a contemporary reader wonder how much she keeps hidden. Margaret Drabble calls her the "most quiet, almost voiceless heroine" (Drabble 2008, XIV) of

Austen: "Fanny Price is frightened of company, and wants nothing better than to listen unobserved; her judgements are shrewd and severe, but she keeps them to herself" (Drabble 2008, XV). Nina Auerbach is even more severe towards Fanny: "there is something horrible about her that deprives the imagination of its appetite for ordinary life and compels it toward the deformed, the dispossessed. She is unconvivial, a spoiler of ceremonies" (Auerbach 1980, 9). Auerbach goes on to label Fanny "a monster," "a vampire," "feasting on the activities of others," and an incestuous creature, who longs for someone of her kind (hence possessive love of her brother William and foster brother Edmund).

Cinematic Fanny, played by Francis O'Connor, is open, energetic, lively and forthright. She has everything for the viewer to like her (with literary Fanny being much less popular than, say, Elisabeth Bennet). If not for this sub-narrative of a becoming writer, cinematic Fanny would have lacked her literary predecessor's hidden existence. But with this narrative, she turns out to be a complex, non-obvious character.

When Fanny writes her book *The History of England*, the viewer witnesses her quick transformation from a girl in her teens into a grown woman. The main characters of her opus (and there are more in Jane Austen's original) are mainly female: a "murderess and wicked queen" Elizabeth, "lovely" Mary Queen of Scots, who was "brought to her untimely, unmerited and scandalous death" by Elizabeth, and Jeanne of Arc whose mention is accompanied by a well-known comment "they should not have burnt her but they did" (00h13'28"– 00h14'24"). History is a collection of laconic revelations – of murders and deaths, injustice and rivalry. Interest in history, which Fanny has developed during her studies, persists, and under Edmund's guidance, she continues to get acquainted with what is going on in the world – of the past and the present. Whether history is an invention or a fact, we witness how her gift of grotesqueness coexists with her interest in the most complex issues of the nearest past, and her attempt at female counter-history. She develops her writing talent while working on her opinions on contemporary history and politics. During an argument with Sir Bertram (Harold Pinter) about slavery, this grotesqueness of recent issues comes to the fore. Sir Bertram compares mulattos to "mules," relying upon the "facts" found in Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774). Contradicting him, Fanny mentions her reading abolitionist Thomas Clarkson: "Correct me if I'm in error, Sir Thomas, but I've read, Sir, if you were to bring one of the slaves back to England, there would be some argument as to whether or not they should be freed here. If I'm not mistaken…" (00h35'31"– 00h35'45"). Challenging the animalistic, dehumanizing imagery of Sir Bertram

with the discourse of freedom and equality, Fanny exists in the context where despite flawless facades, something is boiling underneath, ready to resurface.

Fanny is extremely sensitive to the mismatch between the external and the internal. After the ball in her honour, she hides in her room and, picking up a page from her writing desk, reads out: "And then a few hours before Laura died. She said: 'Take warning from my unhappy end. Beware of fainting fits. Beware of swoons'" (00h51'26"). At that moment, she looks out of the window and sees Henry Crawford, who has become her admirer. Fanny doubts him, which is proved later by his eloping with married Maria. The moment when she puts out the candle and, remaining unseen for Crawford, pronounces: "Run mad as often as you choose but do not faint (00h51'59"– 00h52'05"), the viewer realizes that there are at least two different Fannies – one is a young girl, a poor relation dissatisfied with her position, while the other is a future literary "master," controlling her emotions and hiding quite a lot beneath the surface. Fanny is not portrayed as a victim (or potential victim) in her developing relationship with Henry because she uses it as her literary inspiration. After a particularly sincere confession on Henry's part, Fanny is shown busy with writing. She reworks his words, adding to them her "wild constructions" (Edmund's characterization of Fanny's work): "the intimacy between them daily increased, till at length it grew to such a pitch that they did not scruple to kick one another out of the window on the slightest provocation" (00h54'43").

Verbal grotesqueness triggers the viewers' response to the clash between the gorgeous vistas of Mansfield Park and hideous imaginings of a poor relation. It also prompts a question: what is wrong with Mansfield Park, which, unlike many homes in Austen adaptations, is a draughty place with deserted rooms and crumbling walls that deteriorate in the final episodes? The following section deals with the bodies in *mise-en-scènes*, partly revealing what is wrong.

The Bodily Uncanny: Distortions of Bodies

The focus here is on two characters – two bodies – Lady Bertram (Lindsay Duncan) and her eldest son Thomas (James Purefoy), representing what might be called a troubled body and an untroubled body. "Untroubled"[6] is that of Lady Bertram, the

6 The word "untroubled" is used in quotes because, as an inert and drugged body, Lady Bertram represents passive resistance to patriarchal order: she almost refuses to participate in social life. Unlike her sister, who takes responsibility for her family (even if sending Fanny away), Lady Bertram chooses non-responsibility and absent presence as her response to feminine confinement and subordination.

lady of the house, whom the film narrative transforms into an opium eater. Lady Bertram's placid temper and indifference are thus embodied in the adaptation, which gives a forthright explanation for her vagueness and even a bit of stupidity.

Her first appearance in the film is sonic, not visual: the viewer hears snores, and the camera pans to a sleeping lady with a dog in her lap and a bottle with a tiny glass on a small table at her side. Lady Bertram embodies the absent presence in the most significant episodes of the story. She fails to participate in an argument between her husband and Mrs. Norris (about Fanny's place of living). She is asleep when a fatal decision to stage the play is taken and she does not look after her daughters properly during the rehearsals (she is drowsy). Edward Said associates such behaviour of the indifferent mistress of the house with "feminine 'lawlessness'" (Said 1993, 86), emphasized in the novel, when, with Sir Bertram's departure to the West Indies, the young men and women are left "without true parental authority" (Said 1993, 86). The situation is made even more challenging in Rozema's film because Lady Bertram is not just indifferent but explicitly under the influence of a drug. Feminine "lawlessness" transforms into drugged irresponsibility, the life lived in a state of drowsiness.

Lady Bertram is the lethargic body of the film. When she wakes up, her behaviour is often comic and out of place, as during the episode of home theatricals when Sir Bertram unexpectedly arrives, sees the goings-on, and disapproves of them immediately. His wife wakes up with an inappropriately beaming smile and says happily: "I could not have born your absence a minute longer" (00h34'16"). She seems sincere, while the film narrator represents this sincerity ironically.

A particularly compelling performance is given by this untroubled body in the episode when Maria and Julia are playing the glass harmonica. The camera pans towards Lady Bertram, sitting with Pugsy in her lap and commenting: "I must say the pleasures of life rarely transcend a moment such as this" (00h25'13"). The *mise-en-scène* positions her in front of a wooden wine holder in the form of a statue of a slave. Huge plants are around it, and through the window, we see her elder son Tom Bertram just arrived from the West Indies. The commentary about "the pleasures of life" seem to contradict the image of a lady sitting in the middle of the "jungle" with a black man behind her back and a half-empty bottle, pointed at her like a gun. Moreover, the sound of a glass harmonica, which accompanies this scene, was viewed as a mentally disturbing sound, provoking the senses to an unnecessary degree and even leading to madness. "Untroubled" Lady Bertram has a more troubled double: her poor sister Frances – Fanny's mother. Played by the same actress, she is the embodiment of an alternative life track, lacking in

comforts, large income and good luck. However, she is also an absent presence in the life of her daughter, who was given away to the Bertrams.

The main troubled body of this narrative is the eldest son Thomas, the drunken host to meet Fanny Price on her early morning arrival. With nothing frightening about him, Thomas metaphorically represents the hidden trying to reveal itself through the body's mobility (unlike his drug-addict mother, alcoholic Thomas is constantly in motion) and troubled physiology. He arrives from Antigua (with the words – "Ah, Antigua, and all the lovely people there paying for this party," 00h25'35") drunk and, provoked by questions about the West Indies, his hiccups start (making Maria comment in disgust "oh, please"). The episode develops with Tom falling down, and more unpleasant hiccups being an answer to Mary Crawford's greeting. If Edmund is the intellect of this narrative, Tom is its body: his illness is the climax of the colonial story. Shown vomiting, coughing, gasping, and breathing hard, Tom is "purging" himself and the family of the West Indies experiences. His is both the suffering body and the body in disgust.

Tom is also an artist responsible for the most unsettling images of the film. Although the appearance of his uncanny sketches occurs later, the viewer is ready for it because Tom is introduced as a painter during the first scenes at Mansfield Park. On her arrival, little Fanny sees his self-portrait: Tom depicted himself allegorically with a picture and paintbrushes in one hand and the other protruding towards someone who presents an imaginary danger. The portrait might represent a reflection in the mirror, and the viewer can see behind Tom's back an allegorical figure of death that has already placed his hand on Tom's shoulder.

Together with more traditional forms of painting, Tom also "paints" on his body, which happens during the staging of *Lover's Vows* (1798), a play by Elizabeth Inchbald, mainly remembered thanks to Austen's mention. Sir Thomas Bertram arrives in the middle of the rehearsals to find the daughters half-dressed and his elder son Tom with a face painted black. Tom performs the Servant: in Austen's text, he asked for any comic part. Performing a slave on stage is one of his bodily reactions towards the colonial experience. When his father confronts him about the theatricals, we see their dialogue as shot/reverse shot with the word "Antigua" written on a map behind Sir Thomas.

Having his father's name, the eldest son and heir opposes Sir Thomas due to political contradictions. Unlike Fanny or Edmund, he is never shown disputing with him but either emotionally arguing or running away. Sir Thomas is a powerful repressing force in Mansfield Park, and his eldest son's rebellion is shown as a series of bodily distortions – from reenacting the painful Antigua

experience on stage (transformed from the father's study) to falling seriously ill. Interestingly, in Austen's text, Sir Thomas is linked to the idea of repressive horror. His arrival in the middle of rehearsals opens the second part of the novel: "How is the consternation of the party to be described? To the greater number it was a moment of absolute horror" (Austen 2008, 163). Although the unexpected arrival is a tense episode in the film, the affect of horror, linked to Sir Thomas, is used by Rozema later, in the scene, which is absent in the original and central for the film's revision of the colonial past.

The Intermedial Uncanny: Drawings from the Colonies

In his analysis of the uncanny in film adaptations, Hodgkins comes up with a formula "cinema is the most uncanny of all art forms" (Hodgkins 2021, 69). Reasons for this are manifold: the film image being "a spectral double, the simulacrum of landscapes and townscapes filled with human beings that seem to live" (Prawer 1980, 83), the film possesses an "inherent ability to revive the dead" (Shaneen 2007, 114), meaning that the human beings alive on the screen might be dead in reality, and, as Lesley Stern puts it, what is being seen "acquires a certain degree of automatism" (Stern 1997, 360). According to Hodgkins, cinema "effectively destabilizes the distinctions between presence/absence, life/death, and animate/inanimate, just as the uncanny does; and those are not the only binaries it undermines" (2021, 70).

The most affectively complex episode occurs in *Mansfield Park* when the drawings appear on the screen. Late in the evening, when Fanny is arranging things in Tom's room, she comes across a brown sketchbook which contains ink drawings made in the West Indies. For the film, experiencing this discovery is destabilizing. The soundtrack is unexpectedly full of the sounds of the jungle: the wind over the sea, exotic birds crying, and native chants heard. Accompanied by the sounds of "nervous" violins, the visual image is handheld, and the editing is jittery. The previously stable image becomes agitated, channeling the viewer's agitation. We also see Fanny's face experiencing affects and emotions we never saw her experience earlier in the film – pain, loathing, and indignation.

The episode is staged as the resurfacing of the hidden and the secret. The images in the drawings are of tortures, assaults, rapes and executions. Handcuffed or walked in line, human bodies are seen only partially sketched. Tom has recorded his most vivid memories of disastrous goings-on in the West Indies, which let several understandings of the uncanny condense. The drawings contain images

described as naturally uncanny by Freud[7] because they represent bodily parts seen in close-ups, as if "dismembered" by the artist from the whole body. The sketches are also animated via camera work and montage, thus making the viewer experience the uncanny ambivalence of the inanimate (drawings) turned animate (film). Finally, the images reveal the hidden. They represent the mysterious land "Antigua" which was verbally present but never shown. Characters, who went to Antigua, used to disappear from the film narrative to reappear again – altered. Antigua, an absent presence previously, is now onscreen, but it is fragmentary, ambiguous in its inanimateness, and extremely frightening.

One of the first drawings is titled "Our Neighbours," which makes the viewer think that Tom might have witnessed something done by other wealthy families. However, towards the end of the sequence, Fanny comes across a familiar face – Sir Thomas Bertram Senior, the father of the family and the respectable head of Mansfield Park, shown whipping a black man. At this moment, Sir Thomas appears behind Fanny's back, and she half looks back at him, turning the page of the sketchbook. The next page also contains the image of Sir Thomas with a female slave. With a scream, Sir Thomas tears the sketchbook out of Fanny's hands to burn it later in the fireplace. "My son is mad," he says. "Go to your room," Sir Thomas shouts (01h28'48" – 01h28'54"). Fanny is leaving, and Tom's gasping and labouring breath dominates the soundtrack.

For uncanny effects, the speed of motion varies. When the camera focuses on Sir Thomas, the speed is standard. When we switch to Fanny's face and movements, they are in slow-motion, creating the effect of hallucination. The sketchbook images and Sir Thomas' rage represent Fanny's hallucination – the dark side of good breeding, comforts and respectability.

This resurfacing of the uncanny has its consequences: the stability of Mansfield Park has shattered again this evening. The sketchbook episode generates a cumulative effect in the narrative: Fanny is provoked to leave her room, go downstairs, drop her candle, go into the first room in front of her – and find an adulterous couple, Henry Crawford and Maria Rushworth, in bed. She then hurries to Edmund for consolation; they embrace and almost kiss. This route the film takes – from the scenes of torture in the colonies via adultery towards incest – is destruction triggered by the uncanny images. What is hidden does not straightforwardly reveal itself but is secretly subversive for the status quo in Mansfield Park.

7 "Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist […] feet which dance by themselves…" (Freud 1955, 244).

Although the film follows the novel in its happy ending, it provides an uncanny climax for the plot of *Mansfield Park*, which changes the way the classic story is received. Wit (the Crawfords) and wisdom (Fanny, Edmund) that have competed throughout the narrative reap the rewards they deserve. However, it is the working through the hidden (and not just spiritual integrity), which makes happiness possible in Rozema's version. Despite its subversive potential, the uncanny acquires a healing effect, transforms the onscreen *Mansfield Park* into the narrative of recuperation.[8]

Conclusion

The essay has discussed several cases of uncanny revelations in Patricia Rozema's adaptation of the classic novel. Grotesque lines from Austen's *Juvenilia,* used for the film dialogue, both conceal and make visible the peculiarities of the central character Fanny Price, who is portrayed as quiet and eloquent, obedient and rebellious. The opening lines of the film function as an invitation to go beyond the surface appearances and the viewer is led gradually to uncanny discoveries. The bodily experience of the characters (Lady Bertram and her son Tom) adds to the story of misfortunes, concealed by the respectable facade but ready to emerge. The climactic uncanny disclosure of Tom's sketches creates an eerie experience for the audience and – as if – for the film itself, resulting in altered camera work, editing, and sound effects.

What is specific about the traces of uncanniness in Rozema's film? The uncanny is a tool for a revisionist adaptation to comment on the aspects of its literary progenitor that were ignored or stayed less visible previously. In Rozemas' *Mansfield Park,* it is the colonial past resurfacing in the uncanny episodes.

8 The uncanny encounter with the hidden colonial story has a de-hierarchizing effect: domineering Sir Thomas apologizes to his elder son, who finally recovers; the golden girl of the family (Maria Bertram) stays in the parsonage, while a poor relative (Fanny Price) lives in Mansfield Park, and Edmund acts as Fanny's 'assistant,' thinking of a title for her first book. On the one hand, the closing episodes play upon the truism that moral values win over social status (good conquers evil), and this victory – in the film – owes a lot to the unmasking and cathartic power of the colonial story. The viewers are reassured by a voice-over refrain, "It could have all turned out differently, I suppose, but it didn't" (01h47'35"), supported by the well-orchestrated movements of characters in the closing *mise-en-scènes*. On the other hand, the healing and soothing ending might be taken with a grain of salt. The voice-over shares the news with the audience: "And Sir Thomas eventually abandoned his pursuits in Antigua. He chose instead to pursue some exciting new opportunities in tobacco" (01h47'22"). Pronounced by Fanny, as if she were repeating somebody else's words (her husband Edmund's?), the phrase makes a knowing viewer suspicious about the new pursuits. Do they mean just moving from Antigua to Barbados?

However, the filmmakers created a particularly Austen-esque type of the uncanny, glossed and itself hidden under layers of irony and a distancing narration.

Thinking about film adaptation in the context of the uncanny helps to foreground the haunting presence of several texts in our experience of different versions, re-readings or reworkings. For a knowing audience, Patricia Rozema's film seems to be stamped forever on its literary progenitor. The revisionist view transforms and enriches the contemporary audience's interaction with a classic, relying on the intermedial potential of the screened literature.

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Media Representation and Affective Intermediality in *Der Tote im Bunker* and *Vielleicht Esther*

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Abstract. This essay presents some results of the author's current research about the intersections between intermediality and constructivist/constructionist branches of psychology (Kelly 1992; Mascolo and Mancuso 1990), which might prove productive for the study of the representation of emotions in literature. Although with some significant differences, these schools suggest that emotions are at least partly, cultural constructs that aggregate physiological and cultural elements. Some of these theoreticians also suggest that people can experience a discrepancy between what they feel and what they are culturally supposed to feel, and proceed to "work" on their emotions until they achieve the target state. The author's hypothesis is that the insertion of media representation in prose texts might point to the existence of affective discrepancies and suggest that emotion work is needed in order to achieve a target emotional state. While sometimes "changing" the medium is a successful operation in this sense, in other instances it increases the indeterminacy of the target emotion, especially when we deal with morally ambiguous characters with whom the narrator must negotiate an affective relationship, and which might give rise to an uncanny feeling of ambivalence. The author illustrates this hypothesis while reading two family memoirs that deal with the inheritance of the Second World War, and the URSS, respectively, Martin Pollack's *Der Tote im Bunker* (*The Dead Man in the Bunker*, 2004) and Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (*Maybe Esther*, 2014), but also suggests that this mechanism is not limited to the use of photographs in memoirs.

Keywords: media representation, emotions, memory studies, uncanny.

This article focuses on the emotional impact that photographs of dead relatives, entangled in the events of the 20th century, are described to have in two memoirs, Martin Pollack's *Der Tote im Bunker* (2004) and Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014). The fundamental thesis I propose is that these pictures evoke mixed emotions that the beholder has to work through in order to establish

their role with regard to morally problematic ancestors. Marianne Hirsch claims that, for writers belonging to the so-called second generation (the sons and daughters of the people who were implicated in WWII), photographs can act as "screens on which we project present or timeless needs and desires and which thus mask other images and other concerns" (2008, 120). She also underscores the bodily, affective components of images, and of sight, quoting Jill Bennet's argument that "images have the capacity to address the spectator's own bodily memory; to touch the viewer who feels rather than simply sees the event, drawn into the image through a process of affective contagion. […] Bodily response thus precedes the inscription of narrative, or moral emotion of empathy" (Hirsch 2008, 117). Two different impulses emerge in these different passages of Hirsch's essay: a projective, observer-driven one, in which the observer projects their needs upon a picture, and a passive moment, in which the image acts on the observer by eliciting a bodily response that precedes narrative interpretations and moral emotions. In this essay, I will turn to other branches of the cognitive sciences to focus on how interpretive frames can shape emotional relationships with, and embodied reactions to, photographs. Moreover, I will make hypotheses on how the implied authors expect the photographs to affect readers. The pictures are inserted by the authors in texts that aim at publication and diffusion, and therefore also have communicative, not only self-analytical, purposes.

In *The Generation of Post-Memory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012), Hirsch suggests that archival images can "function as 'points of memory' that tell us more about our own needs and desires, our own fantasies and fears, than about the past to which they supposedly bear witness" (Hirsch 2012, 22). They recount their own encounter with a photo of Hirsch's parents taken in 1943, in which the young couple is seemingly happy and smiling, despite being Holocaust survivors, probably still afraid for their lives and grieving their loved ones. In a chapter in this book, Hirsch and co-author, Leo Spitzer try to make out whether the blur on the father's lapel is a David star, which would solve the unsettling effect that this "happy" picture taken in dire times has upon them, the observers, by making the direness visible. Eventually accepting that they will never be able to make out whether the blur is a star or not, they acknowledge that "this picture's indexicality is more performative – based on the viewer's needs and desires – than factual" (Hirsch 2012, 61). Pictures, they proceed to argue, can elicit "feelings disproportionate to what the pictures can, in fact, support" (Hirsch 2012, 67). They illustrate this conclusion on a novel featuring descendants of German perpetrators (Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room*,

in which the grandson of an SS officer, Micha, looks with frustration for proof of her father's guilt in photographs, Hirsch 2012, 65–67), too. In this essay, I will examine two instances in which pictures elicit feelings, as the writers describe them, that these images cannot offer solid ground for, or help unravel and stabilize. I will argue that theoretical tools developed in intermediality can be useful for the study of image/text relationships of this emotionally-laden kind. Lastly, I will suggest that the concept of the uncanny can be used to describe the feeling of displacement originating from the co-presence of different interpretive frames for the same image.

The two pictures I will discuss both portray bodies. The photograph has typically been associated, in memory studies, with a false promise of presence, that is doomed to be disattended, since the moment portrayed is ended, irretrievable, and the person unavailable (see, for example, Assmann, 2002; Hirsch, 2008; Albertazzi, 2010). The body is also typically supposed to elicit an affective response, something that in turn speaks to the "apodictic" value of affective memories: "These cannot be corrected because they arise and fall with the intensity of the lived relationship, of the immediate impression. If one abandons the latter, in fact one no longer has anything" (Assman 2002, 283; my translation). The two case studies proposed here explore the possibility that this lived relationship elicits discording emotions that call for re-elaboration in the textual apparatus.

Der Tote im Bunker (The Dead Man in the Bunker)

Martin Pollack's book recounts his struggles to reconstruct the story of his father, Gerhard Bast. Bast was a Gestapo officer and SS man. Some of Pollack's other relatives were also active party members, even when the Nazi party was illegal in Austria, the country where Pollack's family comes from. Pollack's biological father fled the Allies after the capitulation of Nazi Germany and died in 1946 at the hands of a *passeur* as he was trying to flee, under a false name, from Italy to Austria, and he is the titular dead man whose body was found hidden in a dismissed bunker on the Brenner pass. In Pollack's book, therefore, the stories that are reconstructed are stories of perpetrators, or at least people who were "implicated" (Rothberg, 2019) in the Nazi regime. We observe the author trying to figure out what his father's crimes were, but also to understand why, and how, the surviving members of his family mostly retained the same political orientation after the war. Pollack also retraces the development of his own passion for Eastern

European culture, which eventually causes a painful break with his family, occasioned by his grandmother's anti-Semitism and anti-Slavic racism.

Ekphrastic descriptions of old photographs of the family abound in the book: in some, but not all, of the editions these pictures are also inserted.[1] The pictures that pose Pollack fewer hermeneutic problems are those that clearly signal what is wrong in his family's ideological makeup. For example, the photograph of his father as a small child holding a real shotgun is inserted by Pollack in the wider frame of his family's love for weapons and hunting, which Pollack retrospectively connects, under the sign of dedication to cultivating violent masculinity, with their membership in the Nazi party. The photographic portraits of his father and of his grandfather, too, do not pose great challenges to the narrator's interpretive acts because of the scars they bear on their faces. Both men had been part of university fraternities while studying law at the University of Graz and they got facial scars from duelling. The fraternities were instrumental in the diffusion of Nazi politics at the University of Graz, so the scars come to confirm their implication in the regime. These pictures perform for the narrator what Georges Didi-Huberman (2003) describes as the photograph's promise of staging the visible signs of whatever the represented subject's truth is. Talking about the hysteric women "treated" by Charcot at the Salpêtrière hospital, Didi-Huberman argues that the women's photographs invited the expectation of bringing to sight the unquestionable signs of madness, which were often either staged by photographer, doctor, and inmate, or dependent on the effect of the indications contained in the caption of the pictures on the spectator. The pretense to the staging of a univocal sign made readable with absolute certainty by Charcot's "clinical gaze" is considered by Didi–Huberman to be a violent reduction of the many possible ways in which a symptom can be read.[2] In *Der Tote im Bunker*, what the narrator is asking of the pictures is that they show him the unquestionable sign of evil.

The pictures that are hard for him to decode are those in which these clear signs of evil are absent. Looking at a picture of his parents smiling at each other

1 For the German text, I refer to Pollack (2004), while I have seen the photographs in the latest Italian edition of Pollack's work, published by Keller in 2018. I have contacted Keller to inquire where they had acquired the photographs, whether from the author or a different German edition, but I have not received an answer.

2 "He [Charcot] was sparing with words, but so efficient; in retrospect, he seems to have been the great director of symptoms that, in return, spoke to him of their own accord. And in this silent dramaturgy, the symptom became sign: it seems that it was enough for Charcot to 'order the patient to move' or to call for a certain second or third patient to come to his side—this was enough to transfigure the visibility of the summoning of the patients into the visibility of explanation: a sign. A sign, that is, the temporal circumscription of the changeable, lacunal cryptography of the symptom." (Didi-Huberman 2003, 23.)

in occupied Slovenia in 1942, at a time when his father had already participated in the execution of several political prisoners in Münster, Pollack asks himself a series of questions: "Did she ask him about his job, did she want details, or did she prefer to keep it in the dark? Did she suspect what her lover did, what his job was? I don't believe it [...]. She probably didn't want to know too much about Münster either. I can't remember ever hearing the name of this town from her. On the other hand, I hadn't suspected that she had ever been to Gottschee/Kocevje – until I found the pictures in which the two of them are standing in a meadow and smiling at each other" (my translation).[3]

For the narrator, the picture becomes a sign of the possible betrayal of the bond of trust with his mother. The parents' apparent lightheartedness is hard to interpret, especially in that environment. Gottschee/Kocevje was in occupied Slovenia, a *Banditenland*, theatre of heavy fighting between the Germans and the partisans. How could the parents have a permit to vacation there? Could the mother really occupy that space without knowing what was going on? But despite these clues, there is no clear sign of evil here, and therefore Pollack does not know how to feel about this photograph, he does not know what to make of his parents' exchange of loving smiles.

The difficulty here, the reason for this uncanny feeling, is not only a matter of lack of information. Pollack's doubts as to the mother's conscious implication cannot be limited to Kocevje, 1942: and there can be no doubt as to her wider implication in the Nazi regime at the time that Pollack is writing. The difficulty the narrator is facing is an emotional one, about recognizing the fact that his mother was both a Nazi and a loving mother at the same time. My hypothesis is that Pollack employs photographs or ekphrastic descriptions of photographs as indicators of a breach in his narrative sense-making operation – I am following Meretoja in considering memory as "a mode of sense-making that is mediated by cultural narrative models" (2021, 25) – and therefore as an encouragement to do "emotion work" for coming to terms with this breach, a process that is then described in the textual section. A useful concept to understand this process is that of "mnemonic imagination" (Keightley and Pickering, 2012). According

3 "Hat sie ihn nach seiner Tätigkeit gefragt, wollte sie Einzelheiten hören, oder zog sie es vor, das im dunkeln zu lassen? Hat sie gehant, was ihr Geliebter machte, was zu seinen Aufgaben gehörte? Ich glaube nicht daran [...] Wahrscheinlich wollte sie auch uber Münster nicht allzuviel wissen. Ich kann mich nicht erinnern, jemals von ihr den Namen dieser Stadt gehort zu haben. Andererseits hatte ich auch nicht geahnt, dass sie einmal in Gottschee/Kocevje gewesen war – bis ich die Bilder fand, auf denen die beiden auf einer Wiese stehen und einander beliebt anlachen (Pollack 2006, 157–158).

to Keightley and Pickering, memory and imagination are not rigidly divided, but they interact as individuals think back upon the past while trying to forge narratives that comprise the construction of a future-oriented sense of self: "the remembering subject engages imaginatively with what is retained from the past and, moving across time, continuously rearranges the hotchpotch of experience into relatively coherent narrative structures, the varied elements of what is carried forward being given meaning by becoming emplotted into a discernible sequential pattern. It is that pattern which is central to the definition of who we are and how we have changed" (2012, 43). These acts of reflection sometimes involve media products, such as photographs or music, in various ways, explored by the authors in different works (Keightley and Pickering, 2015; 2017). Concerning the two case studies discussed in this article, we will observe the mnemonic imagination at work, as it entails reflecting on some pictures of family members: the special focus of this article will be on emotions, on the way that "emotion work" is involved in practices of sense-making. Hirsch and Spitzer talk about "reparative reading," quoting Sedgwick (2006), to indicate ways of reading that think "historical experiences in relation to one another to see what vantage points they might share or offer each other for confronting the past without allowing its tragic dimensions to overwhelm our imagination in the present and the future" (Hirsch 2012, 24). In the next pages, I will try to build a theoretical grid to focus on what exactly this sort of reading might entail especially from an emotional point of view, and the reasons that can make them fail, or succeed.

Emotion Work, Emotional States, Situated Conceptualizations

"Emotion work" is a concept coined by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, who codified it extensively in her book, *The Managed Heart*, first published in 1982. Referring to the Stanislavsky method of acting, Hochschild claims that people can resort to a series of techniques to develop feelings that they initially lack, something she calls "deep acting," as opposed to surface acting, which refers to people only outwardly showing these feelings (2012, 38). For example, they can try to re-enact emotions they have felt in the past, or to act according to cultural representations of emotional states. This notion is connected to a view of emotions as partly culturally constructed and context-dependent: "If we conceive of feeling not as a periodic abdication to biology but as something we do by attending to inner sensation in a given way, by defining situations in a given way, by managing

in given ways, then it becomes plainer just how plastic and susceptible to reshaping techniques a feeling can be. The very act of managing emotion can be seen as part of what the emotion becomes" (Hochschild 2012, 27). Hochschild's terminology surfaces in the theory of emotion proposed by some exponents of Personal Construct Psychology. This branch of psychology offers a constructivist theoretical outlook, according to which people anticipate life events by building prototypes, inspired by culturally circulating structures and modelled on their own interpretations of previous personal experiences. PCP founder George Kelly's fundamental postulate is: "a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events" (1992, 32). People read new situations and therefore model their responses and behaviours according to these systematic anticipations. Emotions have been considered by some PCP scholars to be organized in prototypical formations. I am referring to Mascolo and Mancuso, who summarize: "when speaking of different emotional states or experiences, we refer to a patterned prototype […] or syndrome […] of motivational, cognitive, physiological, experiential, behavioral, and expressive processes. Use of the term prototype suggests that different emotional states or experiences can be defined in terms of idealized configurations of attributes or dimensions" (1990, 211).

Mascolo and Mancuso refer to Hochschild's theories to describe the process through which people try to understand what emotion-prototype they should adopt, especially when they experience a discrepancy between what one feels and what one "is supposed to feel" according to the social, cultural, and personal context: "to the extent that constructed experiences stand as incongruent with standards represented in the remainder of a person's construction system ("I'm not supposed to feel this way in this context"), the system works to resolve the incongruity" (Mascolo and Mancuso 1990, 210).

With reference to *Der Tote im Bunker*, decoding the image is an act of emotion work because it is an act that concerns the management of emotions, performed in order to solve what Mascolo and Mancuso call a discrepancy. But it is largely a failed attempt. Pollack's issue with the happy pictures is that he does not know what "emotion work" to do, he does not know what his goal is with regard to the act of looking at these pictures. The ambivalence between the interpretive frames evoked by family pictures and by the affection he feels for his family members, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the interpretive frame and feelings of rejection evoked by Nazi war criminals, is not resolved for him in the textual apparatus, where only question marks abound. One might object that the scandal lies in the multiplication of the identities of the people represented,

not in the hermeneutic frames: it is the parents that are both smiling lovingly at each other, and currently implicated in violence. But this, too, is an emotional difficulty on the narrator's side: the problem is that the observer has to relate to the characters represented; the image elicits different relational responses. The picture is inserted as proof of this scandal, as a signifier of the difficulty of choosing between two frames. Mieke Bal has argued that we read visual artefacts according to framings, which are context-dependent codes "which limit[s] the possible meanings" (1996, 26) of the images we encounter. What Pollack's memoir allows its readers to perceive is what happens when these framings collapse, when signification, i.e. the process of meaning creation (Elleström 2021, 22), is made particularly difficult by circumstances. Acts of media representation – "the representation of another medium of a different type" (Elleström 2021, 81) – such as the reproduction of a photographic image, and *ekphrasis*, in written texts, might serve the purpose of representing these mixed, difficult emotions, because each represented medium can be described by the text as pointing to the necessity of resorting to different semiotic modalities to make sense of what is happening. Elleström defines "semiotic modality" as "the frame[s] for understanding representation" (2021, 49). In these cases, media representation is an act, which implies a shortcoming of the frame provided by the main medium (the photograph in Pollack's case). When frames are missing or slippery, this might suggest to readers the insufficiency of any strategy for signification. If we take emotions to be partly relational, situational categories, examining the media that are indicated for successful representation of emotions means focusing on the way that the implied author is encouraging readers to make sense of emotions, and therefore to position themselves with regards to the character represented.

Before coming to some theoretical conclusions, let us turn to Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*.

Vielleicht Esther (Maybe Esther)

In her memoir, Petrowskaja tries to reconstruct the story of her Jewish, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian family across the twentieth century. She also reflects on the implications of this pursuit and claims that the events she mentions do not concern her merely as a relative of the victims, but as a person living in the aftermath of these events. This quest for elective emotional affiliation is not always easy. An especially difficult case is the one concerning her paternal great-uncle Jeguda Stern – his name, Jeguda, is thematized and discussed by the author, who at times

calls him Judas both because it is the way in which his name has been mistakenly translated into German, and to institute a suggestive connection with the Biblical character – who in 1932 tried to kill the German ambassador in Moscow, and was subsequently condemned to death by Soviet authorities. Ernst van Alphen (2021) indicates that there are marked differences with regard to second-generation writers' engagement with victims of the Holocaust, for different reasons: for example, the lack of collective memory, the different way in which the Nazi and Soviet regimes ended (by external or internal action), and the fact that many designated "enemies of the people" did not recognize themselves as such at the time of incarceration, while still believing in the general validity of the category "enemy of the people." Remembrance of the victims of the Soviet Union is marked by shame, by the internalization of the stigma of one's relative being marked as an enemy of the people, and by the lack of a collective dimension of remembrance: "this relationship between first and second generation is radically affected by shame. This is almost the complete opposite of the relationship between first and second-generation survivors of the Holocaust" (Alphen 2021, 119). Alphen suggests that, in second-generation artefacts, the past comes back indirectly, and the victims of the regime are often described as ghosts or zombies (2021, 121). In *Vielleicht Esther*, Katja calls Jeguda Stern *ein Phantom*, a ghost (2014, 19). He has undergone a process of forgetting by his own family, who saw him as a dangerous legacy, not a hero or a victim, but someone who had thoughtlessly put the whole family in danger. To sympathize with him is in itself dangerous: "Although my father owed his premature birth to his uncle Judas, for a long time he hardly knew of his existence, it was kept from him for his own protection and that of the whole family. Sympathizing with Judas might have raised suspicions, but if anyone ever sympathized with him, is not known. It was life threatening to remember the star of Judas. He himself had not thought for a second about the consequences of his act for his relatives. How then should they have preserved him in the family memory?"[4]

Petrowskaja also repeatedly underscores that the archives in the Lubjanka building are not innocent, neutral archives – if such archives do exist, at all. Archives are enmeshed with the powers who established them.[5] The items

4 "Obwohl mein Vater seinem Onkel Judas seine Frühgeburt verdankte, wusste er lange Zeit kaum von dessen Existenz, sie wurde vor ihm verheimlicht, zu seinem eigenen und der ganzen Familie Schutz. Mit Judas zu sympathisieren hätte Verdacht erregen können, es ist aber nicht bekannt, ob jemals jemand mit ihm sympathisiert hat. Es war lebensgefährlich, sich an Judas Stern zu erinnern. Er selbst hatte keine Sekunde lang über die Folgen seiner Tat für seine Angehörigen nachgedacht. Wie sollten sie ihn dann im Familiengedächtnis bewahren?" (Petrowskaja 2014, 143)

5 See Alphen (2007) on the issue of the moral implications of archives; and Osborne (2016)

collected are only those that point to Stern's guilt. Petrowskaja manifests ambivalence about entering the Lubjanka, an experience which makes her feel both as part of the *organy*, and a potential suspect:[6] she feels "infected" (2014, 149). All these statements point to the difficulties of relating to Jeguda, and the first reaction elicited by the photograph is not euphoric. The picture is inserted in the written text three different times with three different framings, as if to suggest the difficulty of establishing one's connection to it, even in emotional terms. There is no clear, pre-interpretive bodily reaction, other than a strong sense of ambivalence and distance that has more to do with the information and frames that surround the picture.

The narrator claims that it is hard for her to understand Judas because he has shot someone, and "we don't shoot people." He is not a straightforward victim: this, too, makes "Verstehen" hard: "As an assassin, he remained forever a stranger to us, you don't shoot at other people! Despite his violent end, he was not a victim."[7] Through archival research, Petrowskaja reconstructs the historical situation, which leads her to believe that the attack was probably orchestrated by the Soviet secret services using the social outcast Jeguda as a scapegoat to provoke Nazi Germany. But this factual, historical understanding falls short of bringing her closer to Jeguda. Therefore, she embarks on writing a stream of consciousness paragraph, in which the past is absorbed into the present, the ortographical norms of the German language collapse, and the "I" pronoun indicates both her and Jeguda, as she bonds with him over a shared feeling of social exclusion, while at the same time not erasing the specific context of Jeguda's struggles, as the narrator focuses, for example, on suggesting, but not describing, the impact of the hunger of the Ukrainian famine: "the crunching of the machines, aorta rupture, bones, machines that grind consciousness to powder, and now the second wave is coming, hunger, the grain is being taken away, part of it goes abroad, from there you get machines that, if you don't know how to serve them, are more useless than people who die, machines grind and grind, everything turns to dust or bread

for a detailed account of the treatment of archival research and its implication with power in *Vielleicht Esther*.

6 "Du kommst ins Archiv, berührst ein Blatt Papier, und schon arbeitest du in den Organen, bist eine von ihnen, du hältst dich an die Regeln, und doch wird dir mitgespielt, du bist in ihrer Gewalt. Du atmest ihre Luft, die Luft ist für alle, und schon bist du infiziert" (Petrowskaja 2014, 149). ("You come into the archives, touch a piece of paper, and you're already working in the organs, you're one of them, you follow the rules, and yet you're being played along with, you're in their power. You breathe their air, the air is for everyone, and you're already infected," my translation.)

7 "Als Attentäter blieb er uns für immer fremd, man schießt doch nicht auf andere Menschen! Trotz seines gewaltsamen Endes war er kein Opfer" (Petrowskaja 2014, 148).

and goes to hell, and there is no longer a place where there is no corruption and crime, and everyone has already shot but not me" (my translation).[8]

To achieve this strived-for understanding, or at least come close to it, the narrator has shifted from the observation of the photograph and archival documents to a writing technique typically associated with fictionality, the stream of consciousness. In interviews and in the text of the book itself, Petrowskaja has stressed the importance of fictionality in her work, claiming that, in her book, "everything is true but the German language" (Benevento 2020, 83). Here is where the importance of this partially fictional quality of Petrowskaja's work, connected to the use of literary language,[9] surfaces: obviously, she can never know whether her reconstruction of what Jeguda felt or of his motivation is entirely true, but the act of imagining them has brought her closer, at least temporarily, to the sense of affiliation that she has declared to be her goal, vindicating a past of forgetfulness and exclusion from the family history. Only partial fictionality, which emerges through the use of a literary technique, and the resort to narrativization – Jeguda is also indicated as *unser Held* (2014, 157), a term usually employed to indicate the hero of a story – resolves the problem of reading the picture for Petrowskaja.

Petrowskaja, too, employs the photographs as encouragement to do "emotion work" that is then described in the textual part, which might serve as an invitation for the reader to do the same emotion work, and so as a description/prescription of a certain way of managing emotions. Decoding the image is an act of emotion work because it concerns the management of feeling. Pollack incessantly registers his feeling towards the images; Petrowskaja starts with a feeling of uneasiness toward Jeguda which is signalled by the repetition of the pictures in different framing, but she also approaches the same picture with a clear view of what she

8 "Das knirschen der maschinen, aorta ruptur, knochen, maschinen, die das bewusstsein zu pulver mahlen, und jetzt kommt die zweite welle, hunger, das korn wird weggenommen, ein teil davon geht ins ausland, von dort bekommt man maschinen, die, wenn man nicht weiß, wie man sie bedient, nutzloser sind als menschen, die sterben, maschinen mahlen und zermahlen, alles wird zu staub oder zu brot und geht zum teufel, und es gibt keinen ort mehr, wo es kein verderben und kein verbrechen gibt, und alle haben schon geschossen nur ich nicht" (Petrowskaja 2014, 178)

9 In general, it is narrativization that emerges as fictionality. Katja's father tells her that he was able to leave Kiew because a fikus plant had occupied a place for him in the van which were to take them way: when the fikus had been removed, he had been able to board the van. But later, her father says that he cannot remember the fikus at all. He tells her: "Sogar wenn er nicht existiert hat, sagen solche Fehlleistungen manchmal mehr aus als eine penibel geführte Bestandsaufnahme. Manchmal ist es gerade die Prise Dichtung, welche die Erinnerung wahrheitsgetreu macht."So wurde mein fiktiver Fikus als literarischer Gegenstand rehabilitiert" (Petrowskaja 2014, 129–220). („Even if it didn't exist, such blunders sometimes say more than a meticulous inventory. Sometimes it's just that dash of poetry that makes the memory true. So my fictional ficus was rehabilitated as a literary object," my translation.)

wants to feel with respect to him: a form of understanding, *Verstehen*, which is both cognitive and emotional. Shifting the attention away from the picture, that served the purpose of triggering curiosity, also means changing the definition of the strived-for form of understanding, i.e. the concept of understanding: while focusing on the photo meant focusing on indicial procedures, and the observer/object divide, the stream of consciousness points to a more emphatic form of understanding that stresses the importance of emotion and the possibility of contact, of overcoming the observer/object divide, even if this can be achieved only temporarily, and not fully, since the experience will never be embodied.[10] The goal here is to remember Jeguda more effectively, not to embody him. According to Marie-Laure Ryan (2001, 121), fiction entails a process of recentering which features spatial, temporal and emotional aspects. Petrowskaja is illustrating here one of the possible ways to arrive at this act of recentering, especially from an emotional point of view.[11] The crossing of the intermedial border therefore also serves the purpose of showing that "emotions" can be redefined, worked over.

Conclusions: Interpretive Ambivalence and the Uncanny

Martin Pollack's issue with the happy pictures of his parents is that he does not know what "emotion work" to do, he does not know what his goal is with regard to these pictures. The clash of different interpretive framings, which also entails different emotional reactions blueprints, is not resolved in the textual apparatus where question marks abound. The picture is inserted into the text as proof of the scandal of the possibility of normality and love in brutal times. If we consider the uncanny to reside in the ambiguity of the figures we encounter, here the uncanny resides in this unsolvable clash of interpretive frames, as the parents are both loving and implicated in violence. According to Freud, the uncanny is "is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to

10 I avoid using the term "empathy" here because I prefer to focus on Petrowskaja's description and construction of an emotional state, rather than imposing an external categorization on it. The debate about empathy and its limits has been conducted in the fields of historiography and memory studies, too: readers interested in these thematics might turn to Assman and Detmers (2016). On the issue of fictional empathy and embodiment, I refer to Adriana Clavel-Vázquez and María Jimena Clavel Vázquez, who argue, that "our capacity for empathetic imagining is significantly constrained because this exercise of imagination is an *embodied* exercise of imagination" (2018).

11 I have already suggested a productive encounter between Hochschild and Ryan's theories in Bigongiari (2022).

the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" ([1919] 2003, 148). In a sense, this is true for the people depicted in Pollack's family pictures, as well as for Jeguda Stern. Both pasts had been voluntarily forgotten, or their importance downplayed, by the surviving family members. In these two cases, which are both emotionally difficult, but for significantly different reasons, the represented feelings suggest conflicted, unresolved relationships that re-emerge as the writers look at the pictures. While Pollack cannot solve this impasse, probably because of the enormity of the negative feelings associated with the Nazi regime, Petrowskaja proposes imaginative work as an antidote to the forgetting of victims of the Soviet regime. My suggestion is that the use of pictures or *ekphrasis* for the signification of a breach in narrative sense-making, and thus the need for re-elaboration of one's emotional position, is not limited to works of second-generation writers. For example, Gothic novels often employ *ekphrasis* of portraits to suggest a familial history of violence in which the descendant who watches the portrait might feel implicated in, or contaminated by – an uncanny effect often enhanced by the fact that the characters portrayed can come to life, or be still alive decades or centuries after the usual span of human life. One of these novels is *Melmoth the Wanderer*, in which the character who observes the ancestor's portrait is then compelled, by this coming-to-life, to have a relationship with the problematic ancestor. This might be a fantastic representation of the "aliveness" of the pictures and the past with which we have an unresolved, ambiguous relationship: the need of facing the ancestor, which requires going beyond one's initial feelings of ambivalence and maybe even dread. If an uncanny feeling is a feeling of indecisiveness – responsive to the question, is the figure am I looking at dead or alive, in its effects on me, the observer? – emotion work might temporarily be used to solve this duality by deciding for the aliveness of the pictures, in order to elaborate what the observer feels must be elaborated, be this attempt successful or not.

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Medium Specific Uncanny in Contemporary Video Games

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Abstract. The academic discourse on the uncanny in video games usually focuses on the phenomenon of the so-called "uncanny valley" (Mori 2012). The article explores the emergence of other, medium-specific occurrences of the effect, prioritizing interactivity as a key factor in its establishment. Two unique areas are particularly prominent in the increasingly photorealistic worlds of video games where uncanny moments associated with the wider, Freudian concept can be found. These are linked to necessary (structuring) and contingent (destructuring) components of the game: namely its heterogeneous ontology and the glitches that may appear in it. The author hypothesizes that these less conceptualized uncanny situations are regular features of the gaming experience and emerge when the immersion in an iconically realistic environment has been broken and eerie absences or ghostly presences pop up either through encounters with the game's boundaries that result from the technological limitations of the software or the appearance of unintended errors in its processes.

Keywords: video games, simulation, reality-effect, uncanny, glitch, bug.

The Notion of the Uncanny in Highly Mimetic Video Games

The academic discourse surrounding the uncanny in video games is usually focused on the alienating effects of realistic-looking humanoid characters (Kätsyri, Mäkäräinen and Takala 2017; Ratajczyk 2019), invoking Masahiro Mori's (2012) concept of the "uncanny valley." There is even a claim that the ubiquity of these characters in video games and computer-generated animation changed our perception and desensitized us towards this sense of the uncanny (Tach 2013) where an ambiguity regarding the human/nonhuman, animate/inanimate nature of the character is triggered by its appearance, movement or other observable behavior (Kirkland 2009, 1). Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny (much of it

derived from E. A. Jentsch's essay) is much wider than Mori's "uncanny valley" would suggest. While examples and associations to the paradoxical nature of a being that is seemingly living while actually dead or inanimate can be found in Freud's discussion of the concept (referring to wax figurines, dolls, and automatons), it is not restricted to effects elicited by visual stimuli of humanoid or anthropomorphic figures. Freud writes very broadly that "the 'uncanny' is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud 1955, 220) and cites "Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light" (Freud 1955, 241).

The present article explores the emergence of other, medium-specific occurrences of the effect that metaphorizes Mori's relatively straightforward, thoroughly mapped, and much-theorized concept. Two unique areas are particularly prominent in the increasingly photorealistic worlds of video games where uncanny moments associated with the wider, Freudian concept can be found. These are linked to necessary (structuring) and contingent (destructuring) components of the game: namely its heterogeneous ontology and the glitches that may appear in it. In the context of highly mimetic games, what comes to light (to the surface where players are confronted with them) that should have been concealed (remained hidden deep behind the interface of the game) is the algorithmic and restricted nature of the simulation either through encounters with its *boundaries* that result from the technological limitations of the software or the appearance of *unintended error*s in its processes. Both can break the simulation's resemblance to the physical world or the familiar workflow coded into its design. (Design is the keyword for the complex structure consisting of aesthetic and functional aspects.)

I hypothesize that these less conceptualized uncanny situations are regular features of the gaming experience and emerge when the "immersion" in an iconically realistic environment has been broken, or – from a different perspective – "ghostly presences" pop up in a simulation formerly believed to be "rational", that is, predictable and consistent. This can be the result of both a *systemic function* or a *systemic malfunction*. To substantiate my claim, I have to discuss the concepts of simulation, reality effect, and glitch in video games.

The Ontological Heterogeneity of Game Elements

Espen Aarseth points out that it is not satisfactory to refer to all "game content" as fiction because our relationship to games is different from the way we approach fictional stories in any kind of medium (Aarseth 2007, 36). The player can interact with the virtual environment based on the rules of the game, and her input and behaviour have real consequences in the game world.

To describe the heterogeneity of in-game objects more accurately, he distinguishes between three categories that possess different ontological qualities: they can be fictional, simulated, or real (Aarseth 2007, 36–37). I would like to keep the adjective fictional for the description of narratives in games, but preserve the essence of Aarseth's differentiation and use the broader concept of representational[1] instead for identifying individual objects or aspects that are purely decorative, and player interaction is highly limited or not possible with them at all. The dominant aspect of these elements (in respect of what they represent) are their sign-like qualities: they are mimetic in the sense that they refer to real-world objects or concepts mostly through their iconic nature. I recognize a door by its appearance in a virtual environment even if I cannot open it or pass through it with my player-character (because there is no mechanism behind the image of the door). It can be approached and serves as an obstacle, just like the wall surrounding it, but it does not function as a *door*, so it is purely representational.

If it functions as a door in the game, we can call it a simulated object, even if some of its qualities are still just signalled. (For example, its wooden material is necessarily just a representation but has the same primary function in the game as a real door. A simulation almost always simplifies real-world mechanisms and therefore works like a model.) A simulated object is a complex one because it consists of "signs and a dynamic model that will specify its behaviour and respond to our input" (Aarseth 2007, 37). As it logically follows from Aarseth's observation, the simulated nature of game objects cannot be understood as a quality

1 The main reason I use this term here is because conceptually fiction and the quality of fictionality is not the opposite of real and reality (as Aarseth's model suggests), but that of factual(ity) as both fictional and factual are a (narrative) discourse, and both belong to the domain of representation. How can we differentiate between the fictional and factual representation of single in-game objects that represent real-life objects? Does it even make sense to talk about factual representation of objects? For example, if you encounter a famous, recognisable, unique, real door, such as the door of 10 Downing Street in the game, will that be a factual representation of a door? In my view, this is a completely different issue and has no bearing regarding the basis of the division, on how in-game objects function.

that stems solely from the properties of that single object, but from its place in the larger system: its relationship with other elements and the player(s) of the game, or rather, the object's ability to react to its virtual environment. Therefore, they are better described as objects that dynamically participate in the simulational system.[2] There is a double premise in Aarseth's conceptualization: whether the player can interact with them, and whether the resulting behaviour refers to (or recognizably resembles) the behaviour of some object outside the game.

It is worth noting that the sign-like nature of simulated objects can be twofold: they can represent an object by their forms or perceptual attributes (what they look like, how they are animated, how they sound) and by their behaviour (how they interact with other objects or with the player). In the second case, the resemblance is not realized through visual or acoustic features, but through the similarity of processes, modes of operation, which, due to their abstractness, must be of course manifested perceptually. This can be remote (visual and acoustic stimuli) or contact-based (haptic/tactile feedback). I call this latter type of semiosis (which is a unique characteristic of mimetic games) procedural iconicity (or similarity through processes).

So, the processes themselves in elements of simulation can carry representational values (large objects that can be opened and passed through with our avatars are inevitably defined as doors, moving things that can shoot you and be shot are enemies, but the very act of shooting is a name given to a simplified representation of a complex real-life interaction). In this sense, simulation is a complex, in-between realm: at the same time real – even if it has no physicality, is purely virtual, but it creates a system, a specific mode of operation – and representational, sign-like, as it refers to something beyond itself, and more importantly outside the game. The procedural iconicity or functional reference of game elements is often complemented and reinforced by a textural or traditionally iconic aspect to clarify the representational meaning of the object: the ball in *FIFA* games (EA Sports) does not only behave like a football, but it also looks like one. In games simulating physical objects, this is usually a formal (often literally surface level), but not a structural similarity.

2 As Gábor Zoltán Kiss observed, from the recipient's/player's point of view this is an adequate description of the difference between "traditional" and "new" media in a broader context, where traditional media can be characterized by a conscious and constant attention to the meaning of its elements and "provokes interpretative activity, in the case of iterative media, the user performs an extranoematic activity and operates a machine" (Kiss 2012, 252). Csaba András describes this as a different kind of interpretative work when he remarks that "the player is primarily interested in the function of the sign in the machine, i.e. how a sign affects other signs in the game. The player's focus of interest is not what a sign means, but how it behaves" (András 2019).

With simulation, we also touched on what we can call "real" elements in a game. Aarseth, perhaps unwittingly, but intuitively narrows down the category of real when he defines these types of elements as already existing concepts fully realized in the game (meaning they are also representational in some sense.) The idea is as follows: The incorporation of an object that exists outside the game only becomes a simulated object if its existence necessarily includes physical realization and if its virtual reconstruction needs substantial amplification. This is the case for most objects, but there are exceptions. If the object is already conceptual and can be digitally reconstructed without any simplification, then nothing will differentiate it from its external (real-world) counterpart. Aarseth's somewhat debatable example is the labyrinth. "If a 2D drawing or a painted or tiled floor can be a proper labyrinth (and they can since labyrinths do not require a specific height) then a 3D virtual labyrinth in a computer-simulated world is a real labyrinth since it can be navigated by the same rules as the one at Hampton Court." (Aarseth 2007, 41) I should add that categorization is not necessarily that simple if we think about a hedge maze in a game that is conceptually real in the sense of being a labyrinth, but merely represented in respect of its physicality.

Let us consider the difference between two versions of two games: chess and football. Chess played on a computer is also a real chess game, in so far as the essence of chess lies not in the materiality of the pieces, but in the rules of the game. If you can play chess on the board, you can play chess on the computer. While FIFA games are certainly simulated versions of football operating with both procedural and traditional iconicity – as there is a clear representational link between the forms and even a similar set of rules – they require skills that are very different from playing football: therefore, they are quite different games. (It is not just the physicality, but the player's role to control an entire team during a match, not only one member of it. The team-play aspect is completely lost in this digital version.)

Most processes in a simulation are simplified models of real processes that they attempt to imitate. However, the rule-based behaviour of a game object does not necessarily possess representational qualities through procedural iconicity or their traditional iconicity has nothing to do with how these objects actually function in the game. It may not imitate any pre-existing real object, mechanism or phenomenon outside the game.

In the *Candy Crush* game series (2012–), the system is completely autonomous, even if it evokes various associations in us, it is a totality with an independent existence, and its particular mechanisms do not try to allude to an external reality.

If it refers to anything, it is to the way in which similar games have worked in the past (but this is an issue we are not addressing here). The fact that the moving, disappearing game elements are depicted as candy is of very little importance in terms of the laws of the game. At most, it adds to the sense of gameplay, which may be important from other perspectives, but for the understanding of the problem at hand, this matter must be separated from the feelings and associations of the player. As Csaba András has pointed out, the game's success was more due to its rewarding mechanism than to its setting or design (András 2021).

Of course, every game-element is, in a sense, a real signifier, even if not representational, because they have internal value and meaning in all software as they have a function within the system. This aspect is perhaps not present in Aarseth's discussion of "game content" because the term "real" inadvertently evokes representational elements in the game, not the system itself, which is in a sense the sum of internal operating principles and not a reference to a reality independent of the game, but an addition of something new to reality, an extension of it. The system itself is the predictable, formalizable, algorithmic construct, the abstract set of rules that govern the behaviour of its elements which can function and interact without referring to anything besides the software, they simply exist and behave in a certain way – and this is precisely what is real in them.

The "Reality Effect" of Functionless Elements – or The Dual Nature of Simulation

In games that seek to model physical reality as accurately as possible (to the extent technological and financial circumstances allow), there are still a lot of objects that are non-functional and purely decorative. Their presence may be due to necessities or artistic choices of the creators. I use the term function here not in the aesthetic sense of the word common in literary studies, but in a ludic sense, as an operational mode of a machinery, whether the given element is able to give feedback and react dynamically to the input signals it receives.

Sometimes game objects are non-functional only in the sense that they do not fulfil the function of the real-world object they denote, but they are nevertheless very important for the game. A common case is when they frame the virtual space, effectively forming the boundaries of a level. In this capacity they serve as impenetrable obstacles for the player, whatever their representational qualities may indicate, therefore they often function differently than their iconic nature would suggest (revealing an inconsistency between their representational and

ludic aspects). These expectations are even stronger if the player has already encountered the same type of object with different, richer ludic functions (revealing an inconsistency within the ludic system). Imagine a not-too-high wooden fence that you can easily jump over with your character. This is a plausible action that more or less models real-world physics given the spatial parameters of the object and the movement abilities of your avatar. But even if the game deviates from the laws of physics, the rules of movement are consistently applied within the game, because this gives us the opportunity to master the skills required for progress. Imagine that the same fence is used in the game to mark the boundary of the map, the playable area of a game level. Here, the uncanny moment occurs, as no matter how hard you try, you cannot jump over it.

In a highly mimetic level design, boundaries appear natural as signs of obstacles that fit organically into the environment (cliffs, unclimbable rocks, fences, etc.). *Half-Life 2* (Valve Software, 2004) is often praised for its inventive solutions to effectively limit the area its players can explore while avoiding the appearance of artificiality (Aarseth 2012). However, not all games put effort into this: sometimes a game simply does not allow the player to proceed forward at a certain point, without attempting to justify this limitation with any kind of recognizable, in-game obstacle: it is an eerie aesthetic experience to realize that the represented world continues while the simulated world ends.

While in some cases the absence of objects, in other cases their presence leads to haunting experiences. Certain in-game objects merely add the feeling of authenticity or realism to a location simply by their appearance/texture without being an active or functional part of the simulation. Eben Holmes describes the phenomenon as follows: "When game designers set out to design a reality in their games – by modelling terrain, lighting, A.I. behaviours, characters, buildings, cars, washing machines, and teapots – this reality is itself an elaborate reality-effect. [...] The 'ordinary reality' of the game's physics becomes uncanny in its very essence because while it produces a graphic realism that is faithful, proportioned, and believable for the player, this reality remains merely an effect played out on screen and is subject to the vicissitudes of the game's process and the player's suspension of disbelief" (Holmes 2010). His description evokes Roland Barthes's notion of the *r*eality-effect (1989) by which he draws attention to the narratively functionless elements in stories where the sole purpose of these "futile" or "useless details" is to signal the works' similarity to reality.[3] In a

3 Naturally, it is not always obvious what should be considered non-functional in a (narrative) literary text (see: András 2014, 102–103). Even in video games, this is not a clear-cut dual

medium like the contemporary video game, aren't most environmental elements designed to support realism in one way or another? Is there a scope within which we can productively apply Barthes's concept for games?

It is crucial to note that Barthes does not point out representational strategies which bring works of art closer to reality (he explicitly talks about realistic fictional narratives), nor does he even suggest that they cause the recipient to confuse the contents of the work with reality (as it might happen in the case of a trompe l'oeil). It is only a question of locally creating a kind of discourse that refers to itself, indicating the category of realness (regardless of its content).

Since both Barthes's effect and realism denote a conceptual, representational discourse, it is problematic to apply them to the mechanical, algorithmic system of the game which – as I argued – can be regarded as an extension of reality generated by the game itself, not a mere sign of it. (Consider the operation of software that performs a specific function and does not represent external reality in any way.) The purely mechanical/rule-based aspect of the game cannot really be linked to the reality-effect (the expression implies the process of semiosis), since this domain contains *realized* (albeit virtual) objects or actions as the program *executes* a sequence of operations. (Even if this aspect of the game is not directly observable as the vast majority of the algorithmic processes are either hidden from the player – and can only be inferred by their effects – or the game objects that display these operations also possess representational qualities.)

The situation is different if we approach the issue from the concept of simulation, which would describe a system supported by signs referring to the world outside the game that can create a "referential illusion" (Barthes 1989) or an "aesthetic illusion"[4] while having their own mode of operation: in a simulation, the player engages in real action, real activity that imitates (models) another kind of activity. The game adds a layer to the player's actions and virtual "events" (not necessarily in the narrative sense) to be the representation of other kinds of interactions. Simulations in mainstream video games are dual in nature: they are working systems in themselves and representations of other systems or environments that are usually found in our physical reality. But how do they become representations? We

opposition, but the medium facilitates differentiation, since a ludic function is less a matter of interpretation and more a present or absent mechanism.

4 "Aesthetic illusion consists primarily of a feeling, with variable intensity, of being imaginatively and emotionally immersed in a represented world and of experiencing this world in a way similar (but not identical) to real life. At the same time, however, this impression of immersion is counterbalanced by a latent rational distance resulting from a culturally acquired awareness of the difference between representation and reality" (Wolf 2011).

should complement Aarseth's formula that a "simulated object" consists of "signs and a dynamic model" with the observation that the semiosis here happens on two distinct levels. First, when the algorithmic operation itself contains procedural iconicity (points are counted according to the same basic rules in *FIFA* games as in real football: the basic condition is that the ball has to reach the goal line), and second, when this system is reinforced by traditional (formal, audiovisual) iconicity (the playing field, the players and the ball actually resemble their real-life counterparts). Because of the consonance between the two modes of imitation (both the processes and the audiovisual characteristics of the simulation refer to the same signified), it can be seen as a redundant way of signalling/representing.

If we are looking for an analogy with Barthes's concept, the representational devices (both kinds of iconicities) here are explicitly linked to (ludic) *functions* and are not elements that are specifically and exclusively responsible for a (representational) effect, so at best, we should distinguish this game-specific dynamic phenomenon by calling it a simulation-effect.

We can risk saying that the "effect of reality" can be located in game elements that do not actually have the functions that their formal similarity (representational nature) would imply.[5] (For example, the object that looks like money on a table is merely a decoration, a texture of the referred object if it cannot be used in the game to buy things with it, even if it can be moved or picked up.) The purpose of these representational references is to create the *sense* of an audiovisually authentic reality, in essence, they refer to a reality (i.e. some aspect of a world beyond the game text) rather than creating (or being a part of) it. Most mainstream games utilize these kinds of aesthetically significant elements to compose spectacular segments where the atmosphere, the feeling of a virtual world is more important than the main game mechanics or progression in the game, amplifying a kind of cinematic character, where the medial channels of hearing and sight (distant, observational) become dominant instead of the possibilities of interaction, manipulability, and control (close, participatory). A much-cited example of this kind of episode is the Tibetan village in *Uncharted 2* (Naughty Dog, 2009).

In a simulation, precisely the capacity of these elements for the "reality effect" causes the disruption in the game experience when they are revealed as mere representations, evoking an unsettling feeling because of what is expected from them in a dynamic environment: they do not work as their reference suggests. This points to the fact that a simulation highlights the sign-like nature of traditional

5 My phrasing suggests that as part of a simulated environment all elements must necessarily have some kind of algorithmic aspect.

iconicity (heightening our "culturally acquired awareness" of the difference between representation and reality), in opposition to procedural iconicity's inherent autonomy, its ability to realize – even if by simplifying the signified – instead of only representing.

These objects may have a certain type of function (e.g. the stack of money that can be moved, and picked up, even its physicality fits into the game's space-time), but they do not have the primary function that their representational aspect implies (the money has no exchange value). The effect of the uncanny is triggered precisely when this discrepancy between representation and ludic function is exposed. Something that is familiar behaves in a strange or reduced way, where this strangeness is usually the result of the limitation or lack of a central, key function. What is also revealed at this point (to varying degrees depending on the situation) is the model-like, limited nature, finiteness, and purposiveness of the simulation system behind the representation, which is reflected in the object's reduced or missing functions.

Glitches and Bugs

In the previous section, I tried to point to certain features of the game's virtual reality itself as the source of uncanny experience, but in fact, this is much more discussed in connection with glitches, that is, anomalies resulting from the unintended operations of the game. Here again, I focus on features that are unique to the medium and not just stimuli caused by perceptual or visual distortions. It is important to conceptualize the difference between glitches and other related phenomena (variously called bugs, errors, crashes, faults, anomalies, exceptions, etc.) from a ludological and aesthetic perspective to understand why the glitch is the one that is primarily associated with the uncanny.

Two, often interchangeably used concepts gained prominence and are associated specifically with the unintended behaviour of games and other software: bugs[6] and

6 Bug and "debugging" are the wider and undoubtedly older expressions. Fred R. Schapiro writes that "the legend derives the terms from an actual moth found inside an early computer by the pioneer computer scientist Grace Murray Hopper" (1987, 376). However, the wording of her log entry on the incident is revealing: "First actual case of bug being found" – which suggests that "Hopper and her colleagues must have thought the discovery of the moth remarkable because mechanical defects were ALREADY called bugs" (Schapiro 1987, 377). In fact, as Schapiro points out, "it is plain from citations in the OED Supplement and the Dictionary of Americanisms and the 1878 Edison quotation that, moth notwithstanding, the computer term bug was merely a specialized application of a general engineering term dating from the 1800s" (1987, 377).

glitches.[7] Patrick Capriola's description represents a widespread contemporary view of the glitch as something mystical and perplexing in nature as opposed to the software bug: "A glitch is a short-lived fault in a system and can, more often than not, usually correct itself once you have restarted your computer. On the other hand, a bug is an error, failure, or fault in the program that generally arises [...] from mistakes and errors made by people in either a program's source code or its design" and adds that because the glitch "eventually corrects itself" it is "challenging to troubleshoot" (Capriola 2021). Alex Pieschel's definition outlines a similar contrast, with a slightly different emphasis regarding the severity of the issue: "In general internet nomenclature, both words refer to errors that work against authorial intent, but 'bug' is often cast as the weightier and more blameworthy pejorative, while 'glitch' suggests something more mysterious and unknowable inflicted by surprise inputs or stuff outside the realm of code." (Pieschel 2014) Holmes's description of the glitch is more poetic, but belongs to the same interpretative tradition: "To think of glitches in terms of their uncanny presence is to think about ghosts. Like ghosts (and Derridean *traces*), glitches appear negatively. They are present as an absence, as revenants and null-values returning to haunt the gamic reality" (Holmes 2010). It is often conceptualized not by its positive form, but by the unexpected change and difference it represents (Menkman 2010). Perhaps the distinction based on the identifiability of the glitch's source is less useful if we want to explore its impact on the average player, but its predictability and the extent of subversion may be a more relevant consideration.

For a more tangible and grounded distinction, I turn to a tripartite taxonomy elaborated by Chris Lewis, Jim Whitehead, and Noah Wardrip-Fruin. They distinguish between the concepts of fault, error, and failure. For them, a "fault is a phenomenon that leads to an error in the system" and although it can be hardware-related, they focus on the type that is "a mistake during the design or implementation of a video game." Error refers to "the manifestation of a fault during the software's execution that creates a state that could contribute to a failure," which is described as "a *user-observable* deviation from the expected behaviour of the system" (Lewis et al. 2010, emphasis mine). For us, it is not the

7 According to popular history, the modern meaning of the Yiddish-derived term glitch was first used and promoted by John Glenn, an astronaut who co-authored the 1962 book *Into Orbit* with his colleagues from Project Mercury, the first human spaceflight program of the United States. Glenn wrote that "another term we adopted to describe some of our problems was 'glitch.' Literally, a glitch is a spike or change in voltage in an electrical circuit which takes place when the circuit suddenly has a new load put on it" (quoted by Zimmer 2013). But Ben Zimmer points out that "by the time that glitch entered the space program in the '60s, it had enjoyed a long life in radio and television, referring to a variety of technical problems" (Zimmer 2013).

specific terms that are of interest here, but the logic behind the division, which does not present the concepts as different types of defects in the game, but as different aspects of a single phenomenon, ranging from a fault in the code to an anomaly in the gameplay.

They further isolate the concept of the glitch from its root cause and position it at a fourth level of this whole mechanism, when they claim that "these failures create unexpected 'glitches' in the game world" (Lewis et al. 2010). They practically define it as a surface effect or symptom which can only be understood as such in its relation to the player. Another important factor worth mentioning regarding the causal chain between the concepts as "not all faults will inevitably lead to errors, as some dormant faults may never be exercised by the game during operation. Similarly, not all errors will lead to failures, as some errors in the game state might not have any adverse effect at a user-visible level" (Lewis et al. 2010). In this sense, the user does not necessarily encounter the bug as an aesthetic or any other kind of experience, as it can remain hidden at a layer of the game not accessible to the player.

Perhaps it is now clear that it is not the "mystical" aspect in the above definitions that prompted me to associate the glitch with the uncanny, but the fact that, by any definition, it is something noticeable, its essence lies in its display, it necessarily manifests itself for the player. As Rosa Menkman puts it: "glitches do not exist outside of human perception" (Menkman 2010). For Agata Waszkiewicz, the glitch is primarily "audiovisual" as it "brings to the foreground what is usually Invisible" (Waszkiewicz 2019, 218). From this perspective, the glitch is the perceptible result of an unintentional process, a consequence of an error that is revealed during gameplay.

Even when it emerges as a perceptual, non-interactive phenomenon and renders the player as its passive observer, its existence (and its impact) is the consequence of its systemic context. The player's recognition of its anomalous, rogue nature in the simulation and the lack of intent on the designer's part contribute to the effect of the glitch. A glitch very often breaks the player's immersion by distorting the mimetic (traditionally or procedurally iconic) aspects of the game, but it also focuses the attention on the operation of the algorithm. It is really revealed here that the formal similarity of the constructed virtual reality and the one it represents hides deep structural differences, that behind the surfaces of objects and the scenery accessible during ordinary gameplay lies another type of reality, often the absence of the represented reality. Think about experiencing empty interiors (of large objects) and off-map spaces that are normally inaccessible by

game rules. (The game world must only be explored along certain paths and perspectives by which the illusion is created that the simulation is similar to reality, with all its complexity and without limits.)

It has also been pointed out that this type of in-game event is not exclusively negative in the context of its impact on the player. According to Matthew Bellinger, "moments of failure are not assumed to be inherently 'bad,' and are instead read as unanticipated functions that subvert the normal, procedural rhetoric of the device or platform, then error messages become legible as a kind of supplementary rhetoric – a discursive 'add-on' meant to convince users that a particular form of functioning was not supposed to happen" (Bellinger 2016). Waszkiewicz argues that "the use of error becomes art in its own right and points to another way in which video games engage players" (Waszkiewicz 2019, 219). Wilma Alice and William Sims Bainbridge theorize that common players often take advantage of software errors and utilize them like cheat codes to advance in a game and achieve success or go even further: "exploiting glitches and cheats can be moves in a metagame, in which the player rejects the rules that the video game manufacturer established and sets new criteria for winning" (Bainbridge and Bainbridge 2007, 72).[8]

The glitch can be understood as a deviation from the references the system has set up with similar or exactly the same in-game situations. As Waszkiewicz puts it, the glitch "is a symbol of (its own) transgression from one state to the other" (Waszkiewicz 2019, 219). Aesthetically, what becomes visible with the glitch, is its own difference from the ordinariness and normality that the game itself has previously created. A glitch is not simply a radically new experience, a strange view, or a perplexing sound; it appears when the well-known elements of (the virtual) reality are assembled in strange, new, and surprising ways when the familiar behaves in an unfamiliar way.

The fluctuating electrical current (which was associated with the early usage of the term) and its uncertain driving forces are good reminders that a glitch does not necessarily arise from the code or the game algorithm, but any external factor can contribute to its emergence, validating associations with its ghostly nature. Consequently, each occurrence of a glitch means a different kind of relationship to the faults and errors (or in summary: bugs) of the program. Some glitches can

8 Tamás Pólya interprets this type of player attitude as an "oppositional position" in the lines of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication. In this sense, while the player perfectly understands the suggested courses of action, "it bypasses, undermines, subverts, ridicules, disregards the dominant code that shapes the game text and the dictates of the game-developing power" (Pólya 2021).

always be invoked by generating known game situations, while others are truly one-offs and cannot be deliberately repeated.

Whether something is really an unintentional glitch (a malfunction) is also not entirely objective and it is often a matter of critical judgement whether it is poor design or a specific bug causes it. Bainbridge and Bainbridge draw attention to a phenomenon that stems from what they call the discrepancy between the game's display model (representational dimension) and its world model (systemic dimension): "discrepancies between the two models […] might perhaps be described as design limitations rather than programming bugs, but under either name they are errors" (Bainbridge and Bainbridge 2007, 65). But who is to say whether, in the case of games, an "incorrectly" set parameter that makes the game too easy or too difficult is really a bug or just a feature of the game? (Which nevertheless can be re-adjusted or patched in the next version to improve the gaming experience.) According to Lewis, Whitehead, and Wardrip-Fruin it is easier to decide with other types of software that "either performs a service (such as an operating system or a web server), is a tool (such as a word processor or spreadsheet) or is a controller (such as the software inside cars and planes)" if they do "not provide necessary functionality" because games are much more complex in this respect, their "goal is to evoke a certain emotional reaction, be it entertaining and/or meaningful" (Lewis et al. 2010).

While bugs mainly refer to algorithmic malfunctions, glitches always have an aesthetic side as they distort the representation: "During a glitch, things in the game appear to stretch and warp; objects become caught in wall and surfaces or hover frozen in midair; 'dead' objects and characters come (back) to life; strange apparitions emerge in the geometry" (Holmes 2010). Moreover, the phenomenon is interesting precisely for this reason: much of the online discourse on video game glitches focuses on their (aesthetic) impact on the recipient. However, it is important not to confuse glitch aesthetics or glitch art with the aesthetic dimension of genuine glitches. In her Glitch Studies Manifesto, Menkman clearly speaks of the glitch as a liberating phenomenon in the context of art, "an alternative way of representation or a new language" that "does not only invoke the death of the author, but also the death of the apparatus, medium or tool" (Menkman 2010). Menkman is well aware of the paradox that lies at the heart of glitch art: "to design a glitch means to domesticate it. When the glitch becomes domesticated, controlled by a tool, or technology (a human craft) it has lost its enchantment and has become predictable" (Menkman 2010). Therefore she distinguishes between "true glitch" and "design glitch." In glitch art, the glitch no longer appears only

on the receiving end, but also on the side of the creator, because it is intended, or at least not erased. Nevertheless, Menkman's approach confirms our assumption that even true glitches have a unique aesthetic quality that can be used as an artistic tool. When the 2016 video game *Oxenfree* (Night School Studio) utilizes glitch aesthetics (intentional, domesticated glitches) as a rhetorical device, it becomes a heavily self-reflexive strategy and medium-conscious gesture. It is no coincidence that in the game, glitch aesthetics are connected to the theme of ghosts and the uncanny. However, Waszkiewicz warns us that "in this case it is a part of the aesthetic and narrative layer rather than the ludic one" (Waszkiewicz 2019, 221).

A glitch can make progress in the game more difficult, even impossible, or it can also facilitate it. Either way, it modifies the game experience, and it spoils the original, intended gameplay. Take, for example, the technique called "vomit roping" in *Red Dead Redemption 2* (Rockstar Games, 2018), where the glitch actually makes navigation easier in the virtual world. You eat something rotten with your character and while it pukes you can descend from a great height without hurting yourself because the game can only manage one event that happens to the character (this is also expressed in its animation), and it prioritizes the vomiting over the falling, which will then have no in-game consequences as it would otherwise.

The adjectives most often associated with glitches shed light on the split perspective between (aesthetic and dramatic) player involvement and an ironic distance from them (their non-seriousness): some quick google and youtube searches show that glitches are most often described both by professional content creators and commenters as funny, hilarious, but at the same time creepy, bizarre, horrifying or terrifying. What often makes these glitches really uncanny (a blend of contrasting effects) is the lack of (physically and psychologically) adequate reactions to them from within the gameworld, other characters, etc. No one notices or reacts properly to them, all the glitching/deformed objects/characters behave like nothing extraordinary happened as they are not programmed to give authentic, relevant, or any kind of response to unforeseen situations. This differentiates the effect of glitches from a horror-effect where the impact comes just as much from the environment's reaction and the context of the monster as from the appearance of the monster itself.

What is highlighted or revealed by both intended and unintended characteristics of the game: the functionless objects and "perceptible symptoms of errors in the game's processes" (Holmes 2010) is not only the algorithmic structure of

games which is typically obscured by the primary audiovisual and interactive experience but also the whimsical and volatile nature of the simulational system which was assumed to be predictable and familiar. On the one hand, a purely decorative, non-interactive element most often has a role to reinforce the realism of the game by audiovisual similarities to reality (giving a sense of a world that has been carefully worked out in detail), but unlike Bartes's literary examples of the reality-effect, the purely representational character of such objects are contrasted with the dynamic nature of the simulation. Uncanny situations emerge from the inoperability or unexpected functioning of these objects, which quality is revealed by the impossibility or limitation of interacting with them. On the other hand, the glitch breaks both the spectacle of familiar representations and the belief in the knowability and transparency of the game. Beneath the recognizable interface, there is a depth of a radically alien, de-humanized, and unknowable machinery that flashes when these limitations and errors become apparent. When the inadvertently generated spectral phenomena disrupt the ways one perceives and understands the simulated reality, attention is drawn to the deficient ways of imitation, the fragility and imperfection of the automaton, eliciting that uneasy feeling when we witness something that should have remained hidden as part of an imperceptible realm of existence.

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Pandora's Myth and Cultural Trauma in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*

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Abstract: Since its 2015 debut, Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* has been conceptualized as a creation myth, as a succession myth, as the Pygmalion myth and as the Pandora myth, among others – each of these argumentations acknowledging the permeability between different interpretations. The author argues that *Ex Machina* recodes the myth of Pandora and creates a fertile ground to display cultural traumas that have been affecting women – such as female subordination and oppression caused by a patriarchal structure and stereotypical binary oppositions. Thus, Garland's film also suggests that the old forms of female oppression might be reaffirmed in the context of the age of technological innovation.[1]

Keywords: *Ex Machina*, Pandora's myth, humans and machines, women, patriarchy.

Introduction

The influential relationship between mythical and cinematic texts has been long established, the latter serving as a carrier of mythical motifs, for instance, "the fight between hero and monster, initiatory combats and ordeals, paradigmatic figures and images" (Eliade 1963, 205). The works of Martin M. Winkler (1985, 2001, 2009) heave revealed this connection, leaning on the influences of Greek mythology, emphasizing the similarities between the plots and motifs of genre cinema – western, gangster, science fiction, among others – and mythical storytelling. Greek mythology's prominent position in this regard is strongly supported by the Western (literary) tradition, which also influenced the classical narrative storytelling of film. Narrowing it down to the connection between Greek mythology and the genre of science fiction, Adrienne Mayor assigns Greek

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mythology's importance to the fact that many of the Greek myths apply *biotechne*, "from *bios* 'life' and *techne*, 'crafted through art or science'" (Mayor 2018, 23, emphasis in the original). This means that in certain Greek myths, fantastic elements are presented as outcomes of technological – and not magical – feats. The mythical figures of Talos and Pandora can serve us as relevant examples of such *biotechne* due to their status as artificial beings that were meticulously crafted. Science fiction – already since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) – is drawn to artificially created beings, as many automatons, robots, androids and (partially mechanic) cyborgs populate the fictional worlds of this genre. Following this lead of genre tradition, English screenwriter Alex Garland's 2015 directorial debut, *Ex Machina*, unfolds its narrative around an AI robot, thereby entering the pantheon of science fiction's artificial beings.

In recent years, *Ex Machina* gained a lot of attention, providing fertile ground for interdisciplinary studies, addressing science fiction film, (cyber)feminism, gender studies, and occasionally mythological perspectives, as well. Garland's film has been conceptualized as a creation myth (Seaman-Grant 2017), as a succession myth (Alvares and Salzman-Mitchell 2019), as the Pygmalion myth (Aksit and Favaro 2019), as the Pandora myth (Akkan 2021), and each of these argumentations acknowledged the permeability between different interpretations. In this article, I argue that *Ex Machina* fulfils the criteria of a recoded Pandora myth most distinctively. Furthermore, by reusing the original myth's characters and narrative elements, the film displays cultural traumas that have been affecting women – such as female subordination and oppression caused by patriarchal structures and stereotypical binary oppositions. Hereby Garland's film turns out to be a materialization of what Donna Haraway called the "informatics of domination" (Haraway 2016, 28). Surprisingly, the director achieves this without creating a single biologically female character in his narrative.

The film presents Nathan (Oscar Isaac), the successful programmer and founder behind a fictional search engine called Blue Book,[2] who invites one of his employees, Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), to his forest villa to perform a Turing test on his artificial intelligence, built as a female-looking robot,[3] Ava (Alicia

2 The company's name is a reference to philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's *The Blue and Brown Books* (see Wittgenstein 1958) and it is also a playful amalgam between the social media platform of Facebook (Meta Platforms since 2021) and the search engine of Google.

3 Ava is not human and thus, neither a woman, but since her creator consciously attributed Ava with audio-visual markers of femininity (feminine voice, feminine face and body), in this paper I will also refer to Ava with the pronouns: she/her. Given the fact that Ava is essentially a software with a mechanic hardware, gendered pronouns can be theoretically problematic, yet I assume these are the pronouns that respect the integrity of the narrative.

Vikander). According to the original concept of the Turing test, the test consists of three components: a judging questioner and two respondents, one human and one machine. If the judge identifies incorrectly the test-takers or hesitates to decide which one is which, the machine passes the Turing test. Quoting Goksu Akkan "the Turing test seeks to test the ability of a machine to portray intelligent behaviour that is almost the same as, or at least not different, from a human's" (Akkan 2021, 21), but it must be mentioned that Garland's screenplay alters the original procedure of the Turing test. In *Ex Machina*, the judging questioner, Caleb, is aware from the start that he interacts with a machine, Ava, while the original human component of the test is completely eliminated. In fact, it is presumed that this test rather resembles Eliezer Yudkowsky's AI Box Experiment (see: Alvares and Salzman-Mitchell 2019, 181), which imagines the AI trapped in a box, ready to convince and manipulate a human gatekeeper for the sake of getting out of the box. Hence, the proper stake of the test would fall on Caleb, the main question being whether he will consider Ava as a conscious entity that should be freed. Essentially, *Ex Machina*'s central conflict – and narrative tension – revolves around these questions: will Ava gain freedom and if she does, what are the costs of freedom?

Reinterpreting Pandora's Myth

Ex Machina's leaning towards Greek mythology is already palpable in the film's title, which refers to a theatrical plot device used by the ancient Greeks, namely *deus ex machina* (in Latin), meaning "god from the machine."[4] This plot device was used as a spectacular element, "in which a god appears suddenly above the stage at the end of a play and issues proclamations about the future, which was sometimes staged with the mechane, a crane of some kind used in the late-fifth-century theatre for lifting actors above the stage" (Johnston 2019, 125). Garland deliberately wipes out the term "god" from the original phrase, suggesting a shift of importance between the notions of this plot device: the machine develops into a more crucial factor than *deus*. In a more radical interpretation, this obliteration implies that the machine subjugates the god. While *machina* in its original context meant purely a technical tool for (theatrical) entertaining, the term machine in a science fiction context proposes connotations related to robots. Therefore, the

4 *Ex Machina* is not the only Garland title which plays with the word "god." In his miniseries entitled *Devs* (2020), at first, the viewer thinks "devs" stands for the abbreviation of developers, but it turns out that the V is Roman, therefore it should be understood as the Latin word *deus*.

"truncated" title already suggests that in Garland's narrative, the machine will obliterate its creator god.

Introducing Greek mythology's Pandora myth, this mythical narrative can be situated in a corpus related to Prometheus, the titan, who helped humanity and brought upon himself the wrath of Zeus, the chief deity of the Greeks. The myth of Pandora is inherently a revenge story in which Zeus punishes the titan Prometheus and humanity through a dangerous gift, Pandora.[5] Zeus commissions the lame blacksmith, the craftsmen's god, Hephaestus, to create Pandora – the first human woman, whose name means gift. Pandora is sent to Earth, to Epimetheus (Prometheus's brother).[6] Although Prometheus warns his brother not to accept any gifts from Zeus, Epimetheus accepts the gift and marries Pandora. By winning Epimetheus's favour, she gains access to the titan's jar,[7] in which the ills of the world are locked. Pandora opens the jar, afflicting humankind with many misfortunes, leaving only hope in it.

It is not coincidental that Ava, *Ex Machina*'s feminine AI android, embodies the archetype of this beautiful, but manipulative woman, while also contributing to the cinematic legacy of femme fatales, who have spawned from the same ancient "mother," Pandora. Ava's position as a reconfiguration of Pandora is emphasized by her creation story. Ava was assembled and created by Nathan, the programmer, who can be seen as a reinterpretation of the god, Hephaestus. Additionally, Ava manipulates men in the same way as Pandora does. While Pandora seeks to open the jar guarded by Epimetheus, Ava seeks to escape from her locked glass box guarded by Nathan. In the end, both Pandora and Ava succeed in the execution of their plans: Pandora lets out the ills of the world, while Ava escapes from Nathan's home laboratory, letting herself out in the world.

The intertextual dialogue between these two characters becomes particularly interesting in their relation to the female gender. According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Pandora is the first human woman (Hesiod 1993, 77), a prototype on which all the later versions of women will be based. Ava holds a similar position, being labelled by Nathan as the first – female-gendered – AI that is ready to participate in a Turing test. Ava's audio-visual feminine attributes, her voice, and body are completely artificial, they are meticulously constructed by a male creator,

5 It should be noted that in present-day debates artificial intelligence holds a similar position, being labelled as a possibly dangerous technological innovation, "gift."

6 It is noteworthy that Prometheus's name means "foresighted" and Epimetheus's name means "late thinker."

7 Due to a mistranslation from the 16th century, the jar became a box in the popular imagination (see Mayor 2018, 172).

just as Pandora's voice and body were artificially constructed by a male god, Hephaestus. As Hesiod conforms it in *Works and Days*, Zeus "ordered famous Hephaistos immediately / to mix earth with water, and to put in a human voice / and strength, to make it like immortal goddesses in face, / a beautiful, lovely maiden's image" (Hesiod 2015, 106). It must be mentioned that after Pandora's initial creation by Hephaestus, other deities were involved – Athena, Aphrodite, and Hermes – to form Pandora's personality, to teach her tricks and skills. This learning period after the initial creation can be found in Ava's trajectory as well, she started to learn through her software, which is Nathan's fictional search engine called Blue Book.

In *Ex Machina*, the role of Epimetheus, the gullible man from Pandora's myth, falls on Caleb. And just as Pandora becomes a negative signifier of all women, so is Epimetheus a rather negative signifier of all men, his character being associated with ungrateful male stereotypes. Epimetheus and Caleb appear in the role of the manipulated, naïve man – their rash decisions, their emotional vulnerability – wreaking havoc on the world around them.[8] One major difference must be noted, though: *Ex Machina* suggests that its epimethean figure, Caleb, will suffer a tragic faith, while in Pandora's myth, Epimetheus does not have to endure tragic consequences. The myth does not punish the naïve man, but Garland's story does punish Caleb, hinting at a death of starvation, possibly even suffocation.

Regarding the parallel between Hephaestus and Nathan, *Ex Machina* makes it obvious through dialogue that Nathan defines himself as a god. In the 11th minute of the film, Caleb tells Nathan the following: "If you've created a conscious machine, it's not the history of man. That's the history of gods." In the 16th minute of the film, Nathan refers falsely to this conversation, telling Caleb: "I wrote down that other line you came up with. About how if I've invented a machine with consciousness, I'm not a man. I'm god." Caleb tries to correct himself and his twisted quote, unsuccessfully. A male scientist envisioning himself as god is a recurring trope in the science fiction genre since the 19th century (Seaman-Grant 2017, 55), therefore on one hand, Nathan's dangerous delusion validates *Ex Machina* on a genre basis, but on the other hand, it establishes a standpoint from which a comparison between Hephaestus and Nathan can be made, associating both characters with the notion of god.

8 Caleb's naivety is further supported and ironically twisted by the film's Tinder marketing campaign, where (human) Tinder users could communicate with a bot called Ava, which used images of Alicia Vikander, the actress, who plays Ava. As Theo Phan writes: "this message exchange between a deceptive bot and a naïve receiver searching for intimate connection ingeniously mimicked the narrative of the film" (Phan 2023, 46).

A Hungarian-written mythological encyclopaedia presents us with the following description of Hephaestus: "his place of work is on Mount Olympus or in the depths of volcanoes, where he is also assisted by 'self-operating' golden statues" (Szabó 1973, 142, translated by the author). Although an impeccable technological analogy between self-operating golden statues and AI machines cannot be constructed, the concept of a self-operating statue speaks for itself, as Adrienne Mayor observes: "ideas about making artificial life – and qualms about replicating nature – were explored in Greek myths" (Mayor 2018, 1). Nathan's most important self-operating AI/android, Ava, is locked away, but he has another helping machine, Kyoko – a mute, female-gendered assistant, ready to take her master's commands as a cooking robot or even as a sex robot.

Beyond the parallels between the characters (Ava – Pandora, Nathan – Hephaestus, Caleb – Epimetheus), between Garland's film and Greek mythology's Pandora myth, the cinematic reinterpretation is validated by the reapplication of certain plot elements and thematic nodes. In this regard, the act of female seduction, the act of female disobedience and the act of (artificial) creation play a major role. Ava, to become an echo of Pandora, had to seduce Caleb and he had to let himself be deceived to follow Epimetheus's steps. Furthermore, Ava had to commit a transgressive act just like her mythical counterpart. Both narrative requirements fell behind a much dominant obligation, namely, the female character had to be a man-made creation, not biologically born, but artificially made.

Ava was made by a "present-day craftsman," the programmer genius Nathan, just as Pandora was made by the god of craftsmen, Hephaestus. A key feature of these creations is that both are created through a so-called "wombless reproduction." According to Seaman-Grant, "men attempting to reproduce without wombs have been a constant theme of tales of creating artificial life, including Frankenstein" (2017, 106). In these creation stories, the man undertakes creation without a partner. Partnerless fertilisation and creation are also found in biology, through the process known as parthenogenesis, whereby ontogeny occurs without the participation of male gametes. The Greek origin of the concept is not accidental since the motif of parthenogenesis is also found in Greek mythology. For instance, in the story of the birth of Aphrodite, the goddess is created from the gametes of her castrated father, Uranus, whose gametes are thrown into the sea. Hephaestus's creation act is another example of parthenogenesis, as he created Pandora independently, from water and clay.

The act of creation – serving as a crucial argument in the Pandora reinterpretation – also points out the weaknesses of the Pygmalion reinterpretation of *Ex Machina*.

According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion did not create an automaton, nor a "living" sculpture – it was the goddess Aphrodite (Venus in Roman mythology) who made Galatea alive (Ovid 2010, 274–276). Pygmalion is an artist, but not a craftsman, as the god Hephaestus or his cinematic counterpart, *Ex Machina*'s Nathan. The becoming-alive of Galatea is the result of a miracle, which became possible via a female goddess, not a male god. Therefore, the Pygmalion myth misses out on what Mayor calls *biotechne* (Mayor 2018), which I consider substantial in this parallelism between myth and science fiction film.

As we will see, the Pandora myth in Garland's film is far from a simply intertextual reference that entertains the viewer. By recoding the original myth in a futuristic setting, *Ex Machina* not only displays the cultural traumas that have been affecting women but also suggests that the damaging, male-dominated practices of antiquity will be carried through to a new technological era.

Displaying Cultural Trauma

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, cultural trauma "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 2004, 1). Cultural trauma is a socially constructed phenomenon, this aspect reflecting a major difference from individual trauma, which is constructed on a much more intimate level. Cultural traumas affect the collective, a group connected by a common feature – for instance, sharing the same national or ethnic parameters. As with any other type of trauma, cultural trauma is displayed through a trauma narrative that defines the victim and the perpetrator.

In this case, the afflicted collective is the group of women that is marked by the role of the victim, while men (more exclusively the oppression systems produced by men) take the role of the perpetrator. The cultural trauma of women cannot be narrowed down to a single, specific traumatic event, on the contrary, it is a series of traumatic events that established female stereotypes, female norms, and women's inferior position in society. Discussing the cultural trauma of women, presumably, patriarchy has the most significant and most extensive impact, as a system in which the male asserts himself as the leader of a group, this model being reprised from families to governments through centuries. Valerie Rein has even coined the term "patriarchy stress disorder" to signify that women's systematic oppression has led to consequences (tangible

in a psychological-medical context), which can only be associated with trauma and trauma processing (Rein 2019, 11).

The systematic oppression of women has been articulated in the course of history in acute, clearly distinguishable chapters from the practice of witch-hunt to the pseudo diagnosis of female hysteria – as feminist scholars Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément have pointed out in *The Newly Born Woman* (1986, 3–39). This history of oppression was also advanced by a series of sacred narratives that suggested women's inferiority as a necessary and logical conclusion. Among these sacred narratives was the myth of Pandora.

The figure of Pandora, embodying the archetype of the beautiful woman, who brings danger to men, has become a pillar of the patriarchal order, a reference that justifies the dominant position of men, and the necessity of this dominance. In Pandora's myth "woman is reflected as a disease spreading, scaring figure which must be controlled by masculine rule" (Ercan 2014, 37). The negative connotations related to Pandora are extended in fact to all women, as the following statement by Hesiod in *Theogony* confirms it: "from her is the race of female women, / The deadly race and population of women, / A great infestation among mortal men, / At home with Wealth but not with Poverty" (Hesiod 1993, 77).

Regardless of the honoured legacy of ancient Greek culture as the begetter of democracy, it must be noted that this democracy was not extended to women. According to Ercan, in ancient Greek society, women were considered second-class citizens, deprived of civil and political rights (Ercan 2014, 39). In this context, the Pandora myth displays an undeniably misogynistic moral tale, which warns men not to trust women and not to give them agency.

Following this logic, an inevitable question seems to arise: if *Ex Machina* is a reinterpretation of the Pandora myth, does this means that Garland's film shall be considered also misogynistic? Veronica Hollinger defines feminist science fiction as a science fiction, which is "written in the interests of women" (Hollinger 2003, 128). Without taking into account the whole narrative, *Ex Machina* can be mistaken as a patronizing and sexist film,[9] where an abusive man is terrorizing gynoids – through restraint, rape, verbal and physical abuse. However, the narrative ultimately punishes the abusive man. He will be killed by his own creations, an event catalysed by the manipulative Pandora figure, Ava. Therefore, the victims kill the perpetrator. In this equation murder equals justice, more exactly female

9 See Nathan's lines, such as: "You bet she can fuck!" "Dude, you are wasting your time talking to her," "she is so fucking clumsy."

justice, thus, *Ex Machina* enters the array of female revenge narratives.[10] The narrative element of justice not only refutes the accusation of misogyny but also defines the film as a moral tale. As it has been discussed previously, the Pandora myth is a moral tale (warning men not to give agency to women), however, *Ex Machina* twists the morals of this tale. On the surface, the film warns about artificial intelligence's violent takeover, hereby adjusting its narrative to science fiction genre traditions. Secondly, as a female revenge story, is a moral tale, which warns men not to mistreat women. In other words, the gynoids' dreadful revenge can be looked at as the consequence of constant mistreatment and abuse. As Alvares and Salzman-Mitchell noted related to Ava's mechanical body and skin as a combination of Nathan's previous female robots, Ava carries inside herself "the collective memories of female suffering; her actions embody justice for all of Nathan's victims" (Alvares and Salzman-Mitchell 2019, 188). As I'll argue, Ava (and Kyoko) are carrying inside themselves the female suffering of all women, the cultural traumas of womanhood – the scars of the patriarchy, of stereotypical binary oppositions, of an androcentric viewpoint on women.

In *Ex Machina* a patriarchal structure is displayed, which puts Nathan as the lead of a nuclear family – in the role of the father and of the husband. His authority is efficiently reflected through the way he controls every other character's free movement. In this respect, Ava takes place at the negative end of the scale: being locked in a glass box, her free movement is completely restricted. Ava is followed by Kyoko, who has access to the places that are connected to her service: e.g., the kitchen and the bedroom. Caleb has more access compared to his "feminine" counterparts – he can go outside, he can visit Nathan's laboratory with his supervision – but overall, he is a guest in the house and has to deal with personalized restrictions. Nathan, of course, has total access to every place in the house.

Adjusting to the lead role of the "family," Nathan, in his relation to Ava, embodies a father figure. The father-child dynamic correlates with Ava's Pandora-like, wombless creation and can be observed in the characters' interaction, as well. For instance, in the 86th minute of the film, Ava confronts Nathan on the site of a laboratory corridor, a transitional space that marks Ava's balancing act between hermetic confinement and total freedom. Recognizing the danger of escaping, Nathan demands obedience from his creation: "Go back to your room!" – Nathan instructs Ava. To quote Seaman-Grant's analysis, "Nathan has

10 Female revenge narratives may include *Kill Bill 1–2*. (Quentin Tarantino, 2003-2004), *Promising Young Woman* (Emerald Fennell, 2020) or *Lady Vengeance* (Park Chan-wook, 2005) among others.

so succeeded in his goal of creating a simulacrum of a human woman that, like a human woman, Ava desires agency, independence and freedom, which is what men seem to want to eliminate from women in the first place" (2017, 109). Therefore, the scene underlines not only Nathan's male dominance but also that Ava wants to step out of this father-child relationship, which restricts her free movement and thus her free will.

Although Kyoko's character exceeds the film's initial triumvirate of the Pandora myth (Ava – Nathan – Caleb), her experiences as a gynoid robot also contribute to the above-mentioned patriarchal structure. In her relation to Kyoko, Nathan takes on the role of the (abusive) husband. While Ava is imprisoned as a precious doll, Kyoko serves as a slave in the household: her muteness is the crucial symbol of her oppression. Being a service robot, Kyoko has to cook, has to clean and of course, satisfy his master sexually, if demanded. Nathan and Kyoko's relationship – built upon inequality – is most viciously reflected in one of the dinner scenes. Kyoko accidentally breaks some of the plates to which Nathan reacts furiously: he becomes verbally abusive, expressing a highly disdainful tone towards her. Throughout the film, Kyoko is continuously regarded as merely an object, but because Kyoko is a female-gendered robot, this objectification evokes female objectification – one fundamental symptom of gender inequality, driven by male dominance.

Beyond displaying a patriarchal structure, Garland's film presents a strong set of binary oppositions that support gender inequality. The genre of science fiction must be noted in this regard, as it's not unusual that these narratives are built upon powerful dichotomies of human and non-human characters.[11] According to this genre tradition, *Ex Machina* presents the opposition between humans and machines. However, the opposition is doubled, as every character that represents the human is male and every character that represents the machine is artificially gendered by a male creator as female.

Hollinger points out that "women have tended to play supporting roles as the 'others' of men" (Hollinger 2003, 126) and considering science fiction's fascination towards otherness, other-than-human characters, feminist science fiction can further unfold the thematic node of otherness via the man – woman opposition. While analysing gender discrimination in dystopian visions, Anna Gilarek affirms that in the androcentric concepts of man and his "other," "'the other' is ascribed an inferior rank, along with features opposite to those exhibited by the superior norm" (Gilarek 2012, 222).

11 Aliens (*Alien*, Ridley Scott, 1979), robots (*The Terminator*, James Cameron, 1984) and other non-human beings, such as na'vis (*Avatar*, James Cameron, 2009) can support this argument.

Thus, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément argue that throughout history, the culturally constructed binary oppositions have paved the way for gender inequality, producing couples that are hierarchical and therefore, inclusive. "Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity" (Cixous and Clément 1986, 64), where activity is assigned to men and passivity is assigned to women. Binary oppositions such as culture/nature, head/heart, or sun/moon, have helped to implement gender stereotypes via metaphors, describing men as the main producers and consumers of culture, as rational thinkers, and as powerful leaders, whilst describing women as caretakers and caregivers, who are at the same time mysterious and are driven by emotions.

Ex Machina establishes a structure that is dominated by strong binary oppositions. Apart from the already mentioned opposition between humans and machines, the opposition of outside and inside spaces holds considerable importance, since Ava's main objective is to escape imprisonment and go outside. There are several scenes in which Nathan and Caleb interact with each other in natural settings (garden, waterfall), implying that "the experience of outside" is solely a man's privilege. Additionally, the notion of activity and passivity, are interlinked with the opposition of outside/inside, meaning that activity belongs to the male characters who can exercise their mobility, while passivity fits the gynoids, Ava and Kyoko, the former being locked and the latter being mute.

Drawing a parallel once again between the film and the Pandora myth, the Greek text displays binary oppositions in a similar logic. There is the obvious man – woman opposition and the one between the first (manufactured) woman, Pandora, and the men (and titans), who were born, not made. Furthermore, the binary opposition of inside – outside is also stressed through the narrative motive of the jar. Related to the jar, the active – passive opposition manifests, as well. The turning point of the myth lies in Pandora's shift from an enchanted, nice-to-look-at woman, who seems passive to an active, manipulative woman, who lets out of the jar the ills of the world.

In a similar fashion, in Garland's film, Ava's initial passivity changes into activity by realising her dreadful escape plan. Both the mythic and the cinematic text stresses the importance and the consequences of this shift, which in the film is marked by Ava's trespassing acts – from the murder of her creator to her very physical movement from the locked house to the "open" nature. Ava's subversive "fluidity" towards oppositional categories can be further linked to the phenomenon of The Uncanny Valley, a term in robotics coined in 1970, which "refers to the unease and apprehension that people experience when they

encounter eerie, »not quite but very nearly human« replicas or automata" (Mayor 2018, 102). Evidently, Ava's uncanny effect (in a Freudian sense, see Freud 2003) – confusing the borders between human and machine – largely contributes to the ultimate success of her escape plan.

But what is the price of gaining female agency? Analysing feminist science fiction novels, such as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1986) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time (*1991), where female protagonists take revenge on oppressing men, just like Ava does in *Ex Machina*, Gilarek argues that there is "a certain paradox in the advocacy of violence as a solution to patriarchal oppression" (Gilarek 2012, 234). In Garland's narrative, the fembot becomes active through violence, by oppressing her oppressor, Nathan. Thus, this problematic paradox does not get resolved in the film either, emphasizing the moral blind spot in female revenge narratives.

Conclusion

Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* is a paramount reinterpretation of the Pandora myth in which the dangerous advancement of artificial intelligence becomes peripheral, compared to the film's sensibility toward representing the cultural traumas that have been affecting women. Recoding the figures of Pandora, Hephaestus and Epimetheus in its story, the film follows the original Pandora myth's most crucial narrative turns, but without the original text's misogynistic undertone. On the contrary, invoking Greek mythology's Pandora myth, Garland delves into structures, traditionally used to enhance gender inequality. *Ex Machina* builds up the patriarchal system and those inclusive binary oppositions that define women's place in the world, just to destroy these structures through its avenger heroine. The transition from "the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks" (Haraway 2016, 28) of the informatics of domination becomes the most palpable through Ava, who – as a combination of a search engine network and mechanical female body parts – is only a simulation of a woman. Furthermore, here lies the film's most important warning regarding technological advancements, not particularly in AI itself, but in the danger of reproducing female objectification and oppression through female-gendered AI robots.

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Framing Anxiety. Intermedial Techniques of the Uncanny

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Abstract. The article deals with techniques of the uncanny that are used in horror films, especially in movies that show frames within the image frame and particularly frames of television sets. The author situates the concrete device of framing in the context of medial technology and intermediality, not least the mediality of the television, its representation in movies and the resultant uncanny aspects. Distinctions are then made between the uncanny and anxiety with regard to the effects of framing, especially in relation to the specific status of a framed gaze. The author uses examples from Japanese and US-American horror films.[1]

Keywords: uncanny, horror film, intermediality, television in film, *Halloween.*

The Uncanny as Border-Crossing

John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), one of the most famous stalker films, established the point-of-view shot in horror films as a means of indicating the extra-diegetic presence of a killer that is invisible to both the victims in the film itself and the cinema audience. The point-of-view shot suggests that the view of the camera is identical to the view of an unseen person, usually the killer. The frame of the image thus imitates the field of vision of the human eye. However, the frame created by the camera is often narrower than the field of vision belonging to the human eye, and the movements of the camera are also too abrupt to produce the illusion of a human perspective. Thus, it becomes obvious that it is a camera that is "looking," usually at the potential or prospective victims, and this focus on the camera already addresses a medial and intermedial aspect. This view through

1 The article reworks and elaborates some of the ideas from an earlier essay published by the author in *Image and Narrative* (Wünsch 2012).

a camera reminds the audience of a hunter's look. This camera technique might lead to an audience's identification with the perspective of the killer, or points to the production of the film and therefore produces a distance.

In addition to the point-of-view shot, the half-subjective shot is also used in *Halloween* to an even greater degree. This type of shot also imitates the perspective of the killer but does not reproduce his vision precisely. Although the killer is seen in the image, only a part of his body is shown in the film frame or he is only visible from behind. It is important to note that during these shots, the film frame is often doubled by other frames, such as doors, windows or window panes. Such doubling is evident, for example, in a scene in which the serial killer, Michael Myers, stalks a child from a car. The camera is placed behind Michael in the car so that his back is seen from behind a mesh net consisting of little squares. The camera then pans to the side windows in the back of the car so that the image is divided into multiple frames: the little squares in the mesh net and the different frames of the windows of the car. [Fig. 1.]

In his discussion of internal framing devices in *Halloween*, Steve Neale (1984, 335) notes that these shots focus on the fields of vision as marked by the frame. He also states that the point-of-view shots dominate the first part of the film, whereas the "system of frame" is more prevalent in the second. For Neale, the point-of-view shot mediates control and power for the audience, which identifies with the look of the killer, while the half-subjective shots and division of images into small frames in the *mise-en-scène* frustrate the spectators, because it causes them seemingly to lose control over the image(s) in the frame(s) (see: Neale 1984, 337).

According to Christian Metz (1997, 58), the use of multiple framing devices in a film brings about a transition to the reflexive. The frame within a film frame is, for Metz, a result of the means of self-expression of the cinema per se, and it is always "meta-cinematographic" (1997, 60). Metz referred to this film technique as "deictic dispositive," or more specifically, the dispositive of the screen and its framing (1997, 60). The film screen is both the rectangle and the site of that which is displayed; "it enables the vision but also forecloses it; it shows and conceals" at the same time (1997, 61). *Halloween* is therefore a film about showing and concealing by rendering cinematic techniques themselves both visible and invisible.

Another medial technique that produces uncanny effects in horror films such as *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998) and the US-American adaptation *The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002) is that the film frame is doubled by other frames such as doors, windows or frames of a television set and screen. This technique produces the effect that the viewer supposes that the killer will appear every moment.

Another technique is that the spectator hears the perpetrator breathing and expects that he is coming out of the Off, cross the film frame itself and appear in the image of the film. These techniques could be defined with Deleuze as "obsessive framing." (Deleuze 1989, 77). He writes about framing: "all framing determines an out-of-field. […]. The out-of-field refers to what is neither seen nor understood, but nevertheless perfectly present" (Deleuze 1989, 17). This obsessive framing makes the camera usually await the entry of a character into the frame. Therefore the visual absence of the killer/ghost produces a ubiquitous presence, the uncanny situation in horror films in that the characters as well as the audience have the impression that something or someone is present, but not (yet) visible. The frame activates the space beyond the frame and the expectation that someone is coming from the out-of-field into the frame. This expectation might cause an uncanny feeling. Sigmund Freud mentioned expectation not in his essay on the uncanny, but in his text on anxiety "inhibition, symptom, anxiety." He writes: "anxiety has an unmistakable relation to *expectation*: it is anxiety *about* something. It has a quality of indefiniteness and lack of object." (Freud 1959, 165, emphasis in the original.) The frame raises the expectation of something, because a frame always refers to an outside of itself. Therefore, within the horror film genre frames refer to a coming element. It does not need an object to produce anxiety. Jacques Lacan has written that "the field of anxiety is situated as something framed." (Lacan 2014, 75) while Samuel Weber doesn't relate the frame and expectation to anxiety, but to the uncanny. He writes about E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman,* one of the main reference in Freud's essay on the uncanny: "The Sandman *is* insofar as he is *coming*. Nathanael's problem is related precisely to the ubiquitous possibility of this coming, an eventuality that cannot be foreclosed by any of the borders with which we seek to wall in our spaces and control access to them." (Weber 2000, 9, emphasis in the original). In Hoffmann's tale, that Weber interprets after Freud, the young Nathanael is told that the Sandman is an evil man who comes to children when they will not go to bed and throws a hand full of sand in their eyes, so that their eyes jump out bloodily. Weber stresses that the threat of the Sandman consists in his coming. Like the Sandman, the "bogeyman," how the unknown killer is called in *Halloween*, is a figure that catches the victims at home, the danger lies in the uncertainty when he will enter the room or/and image. It is this uncertainty, but simultaneous certainty of expectation (both of the character and the audience of the horror movie) that makes the figure ubiquitous: the home is not a closed room anymore, but becomes permeable. "The power of the Sandman, then, inheres in

his ability to invade and occupy what in the modern period is considered the most sacred of spaces: the private space of the family, the *home*" (Weber 2000, 9, emphasis in the original). The Sandman, the killer, or ghost cannot be kept outside by walls, they cross borders that loose their closeness, they start to be invaded by that what has been excluded. For Weber the uncanny is the foreclosed that (re-)invades the sacred space of the modern period, the home, or better, the uncanny questions the borders of inside and outside, private and public, familiar and unfamiliar. The same way the film frame refers to its "off," the frame of the interior in horror movies refers to the outside. But beside the invasion of an uninvited guest what is of interest in the context of intermediality are the frames of different media in these horror movies, for instance that of television sets and screens. Television itself could be characterized as intermedial and invasive. Its intermediality consists in the fact that it incorporates other media like film and theatre. Television has its own formats, it absorbs and transforms media and their content and therefore destabilizes borders that become fluid as Tony Fry argues: "the nature of the televisual's materiality, immateriality, culture and economy is ever fluid. The medium is extreme evasive, it sweeps outside of its circuity and place creation and encounter" (1993, 13). Television not only incorporates, but also expands in different ways. In comparison to the media cinema and theatre there is no start or stop, television is "on" 24/7. Beside the temporal expansion, it expands spatially by invading houses and apartments. Avital Ronell argues in her analysis of television that the home where the television set is placed is already uncanny, but that with the placement of television sets in our homes, the not-being-in-the-world, not-being-at-home, "the impossibility of staying at home" (1995, 110) becomes observable. She writes that "every medium is related in some crucial way to spectres," (1995, 113) that "seriality always involves the possibility of serial killing" (1995, 110). The stalker film *Halloween* starts with a scene that shows the serial killer Michael Myers circling a house in a suburban neighbourhood. [Fig. 2.]

He watches through a window into the living room. This framed window is already a permeable object. Normally disposed for the inhabitants to look outside from a safe point of view, this window now becomes a point of invasion and inversion of the gaze. This invasion remains unnoticed also because the inhabitants watch horror films on television for Halloween, namely *The Thing* (Christian Nyby 1951) and *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero 1968) Here, it is not the window anymore that offers a view to the world, but the television set. Both, the TV as well as the killer invades the home that becomes an uncanny

place. The voice of the speaker warns the viewer: "lock your door, close your windows and turn off the lights." [Fig. 3.]

But this command disregards that the home is not a safe place, that the myth of suburban safety for nuclear families from the outside world is unstable. In addition, with the entry of the television set into the (private) home also horror and uncanny narratives enter the private sphere. Television transmits both psychic as well as physical waves. The warning of the speaker to close doors and windows directly addresses the audience that is not able to leave the cinema delighted after a horror film anymore, because at home even after the TV is turned off, there stays a remainder of the uncanny in the room. This concept of invasion of the private and intimate is being used in the narration of many horror and stalker films. The invasion of the killer, ghost, or vampire into the private space of the home can be read in analogy to the invasion of the private through television. According to Weber "the television set turns out to be something like a Trojan Horse introduced into the heart of the domestic fortress that we call 'home'" (Weber 1996, 122). Television is uncanny because it is supposed to be uncontrollable what is being transmitted and what are the limits of transmission. One could claim something similar about the serial killer/ghost/vampire: once they have been in the home, although one rarely sees how they cross the barrier, nothing is like before. The curtains, which have been installed for protection are now potential hiding places. Danger seems to come from everywhere: from under the bed, from the closet, behind every door. Carol Clover writes: "the house [...] may at first sight seem a safe heaven, but the same walls that promise to keep the killer out quickly become, once the killer penetrates them, the walls that hold the victim in" (Clover 1993, 31). The serial killer or ghost that invades the private home from outside or the television that transmits the outside world and horrific contents in the houses be described with the psychoanalytic term extimacy. Extimacy is a variation of the word intimacy and signifies the unconscious of the subject as both outside and inside a subject and is close to Freud's idea of the uncanny as the repressed that returns seemingly from outside, such as the Sandman who reminds us of our castration anxiety. But the Sandman destroys the eyes and therefore the look. The characters are also usually "blind" regarding the danger that is coming, especially because they watch these old movies. The alleged interior is simultaneously outside, and vice versa, the unconscious is not deep inside of us, but structured by and in language to use Lacan's reformulation of Freud's psychoanalysis. From this perspective the uncanny intermediality consists in the absorption of television of this different and older medium film.

It could have uncanny effects not only because of the uncanny content of these films, but also because older audiences could be reminded of their first experience of watching these films, when they were younger and more anxious or anxious of different things: older and repressed anxieties may rise again while watching. Here again there is a similarity between the killer and the television set and other media at home: television starts a signification process or at least a displacement of meaning, it transforms the spatial order of the home, but more importantly, it transforms the vision of the world or vision itself. As Martin Heidegger claimed: the world becomes a picture ([1938] 2002). "What we see on the TV screen is not so much 'images' but *another kind of vision*, a vision of the other (to be understood as both an objective and subjective genitive)" (Weber 1996, 121, emphasis in the original). According to Weber the television screen is a site of an uncanny confusion and confounding, because of a strictly undecidability in regard who sees what. "What we see […] is someone or something seeing" (Weber 1996, 122). What Ronell assumes and what movies like *Ringu* show, that TV is watching us, is even more the case today in times of online conversations, meetings and conferences.

Framing Anxiety

So far, I have outlined the similarities between uncanny techniques of horror films and uncanny aspects of television and intermediality, as well as the Freudian expectation anxiety that has been reassigned by Weber to the uncanny. Later Weber writes: "that the uncanny is inseparable from anxiety is evident; but it is more difficult to determine precisely how it relates to it" (Weber 2009, 78). In the following, I would like to describe more specifically Freud's thoughts and Lacan's assumptions on anxiety, and subsequently analyse the difference between anxiety and the uncanny in regard to the psychic effects of the frame and intermediality.

When the victims in *Halloween* are being haunted ('*heimgesucht*') by the killer, the attack mostly takes place when they are passive and helpless. Freud writes about the relationship between expectation and helplessness in regard to anxiety, that the "expectation anxiety" is an anxiety before a repetition of a situation of helplessness (Freud 1953, 325). He differentiates between real anxiety and neurotic anxiety, the last is being signified by this indefiniteness. According to Freud this uncertainty derives from the circumstance that the cause of anxiety is a repressed situation of helplessness and the expectation of a repetition are the first

steps "for self-preservation if he can foresee and expect a traumatic situation of this kind which entails helplessness, instead of simply waiting for it to happen" (Freud 1949, 160). For Freud anxiety is a signal and a way of "changing from passivity to activity," to master the traumatic experience (Freud 1949, 162). But the return of an affective impulse "that is transformed by repression into anxiety" is more specific for the uncanny: "this type of anxiety would be the Uncanny, and therefore it is a matter of indifference whether it was originally anxious or of some other effect. Second, if this is really the secret nature of the Uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has allowed the 'canny' – literally the 'homely' to pass into its opposite, the uncanny, the unhomely" (Freud 1955, 241). While for Freud the uncanny is the return of a familiar effect and anxiety is the signal or expectation that this effect returns, Jacques Lacan argues in his seminar on anxiety: "no matter how much time we spend on the nuances of this framing of anxiety, it will never be too long. Will you say that I'm seeking out this anxiety to a state of alertness, to a response that is already a defensive response faced with what's about to happen. [...] This, indeed is the *Erwartung*, the constitution of the hostile as such, the first line of recourse beyond *Hilflosigkeit*" (Lacan 2014, 75, emphasis in the original). But anxiety is different for Lacan. Although, "expectation can indeed serve, amongst other means, to frame anxiety, […] there is no need for any expectation, the frame is still there. But anxiety is something else. Anxiety is the appearance, within this frame something, of what was already there, at much closer quarters, at home, *Heim*" (Lacan 2014, 75). According to Lacan expectation displaces anxiety to something outside, to the hostile or better: the hostile is constituted by expectation. For Lacan the unknown, hostile guest belongs to the uncanny and not to the register of anxiety, because it is "already well wrought through expectation" (Lacan 2014, 75). Lacan follows Freud in the assumption that the expectation is a handling of anxiety. Expectation conceals the fact that the cause of anxiety is much closer to the home. "This occupant […] isn't the *Heimliche*, it is not the inhabitant of the house, it's the softened up, appeased and admitted hostile" (Lacan 2014, 76). While the constitution of the hostile eases anxiety and belongs to the uncanny, real anxiety is being released by "the sudden appearance of the *Heimliche* within the frame" (Lacan 2014, 76). The term "Heimlich" points to the fact that anxiety is not triggered by something unknown, but by a known, yet covered cause. Furthermore, Lacan repeats that anxiety is always framed. When anxiety is not without a frame the question arises if it is not the frame itself in which anxiety is situated. Then the framed images of cinema and television would be the privileged 'frame' where anxiety becomes

readable. This would also and especially apply when intermedial frames appear in movie images. Lacan stresses that the frame addresses the relation between stage and world and the stage in its own dimension. He gives the example of Freud's case of the Wolf Man he describes in *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis.* I will not explore this case in detail, but just briefly describe the famous dream of Freud's patient. The patient dreamt that he was lying still in his bed while the window opposite to him suddenly opened and he was terrified to see that some wolves were sitting on a tree in front of the window looking at him (Freud 1991, 259). The numbness of the Wolf Man, the opening window and the look through the window reminds to the situation of the spectator in cinema. Lacan writes that in the moment of the opening of the curtain there is always a moment of anxiety. This anxiety does not refer to the content of the image but to the frame. "Now, what can we see in this dream? The sudden opening these two terms are indicated – of a window. The fantasy is beheld on the other side of a windowpane, and through a window that opens. The fantasy is framed." (Lacan 2014, 73.) According to Lacan, the dream of the Wolf Man shows the scene of phantasy rather than its content. The Wolf Man sees the wolves looking at him through the window. This looking at him Lacan describes as the being-seen by the Other and the question after the desire of the other: "What do you want (from me?)" The question is extremely prominent in this scene, because it is not being answered, the wolves are mute. With their silence and otherness they question the Ego of the Wolf Man. Here, the basic relationship between anxiety and the desire of the other is exposed: the question "what do you want?" asks what the other sees in me. When there is no "communication," anxiety arises. It is a confrontation with the desire of the other without knowing what I am for the other, what the other sees in me. But what happens in horror movies often is that either the audience shares the look of the killer or, as in *Ringu*, the look or gaze itself appears in the television screen. [Fig. 4.]

This is according to Lacan the moment of anxiety. For him anxiety arises when the lack lacks. The lack lacks when the object a exposes itself. Weber writes about the object *a* that is has no frame, but is a frame (Weber 2000, 192). The object *a* in a framed picture is something that is missing from the picture and frames it. But it is also a gap in which the viewer places himself. Gerhard Schmitz describes this gap as following: "in order to posit the subject of seeing there have to be a gap at the place of the gaze, a blank space, a hole that works like a blind spot – a non-seeing, that has to be seen. In this non-seeing the subject of seeing is placed" (Schmitz 2000, 238). Thereby the frame or the gap within

a picture is what enables seeing itself. But when the frame or the gaze itself is being represented, our status as a subject fades. This happens when either the frame or the gaze itself is being represented.

Conclusion

I would argue that uncanniness in film arises, when there is something coming, namely in moments of uncertainty when borders or frames are being crossed or become permeable. In these examples the frame of other media appear that shows the permeability of borders and frames. The focus on the frame itself is not only and always scary, even if one can describe it as an *object a.* Nevertheless, anxiety arises when the gaze of the other is framed. In the stalker film this is especially the case when the masked killer appears in the frame at a point when he is no longer expected, but he emerges suddenly in the frame of the door. In these moments there is no lack or uncertainty, but a confrontation with the subject seeing itself seeing, a disturbing and anxious moment indeed. This also applies to the figure of the female ghost in *Ringu* who articulates a mute demand, similarly to the wolves in the famous dream analysed by Freud.

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Figure 3. *The Thing* (1951) on television in *Halloween.*

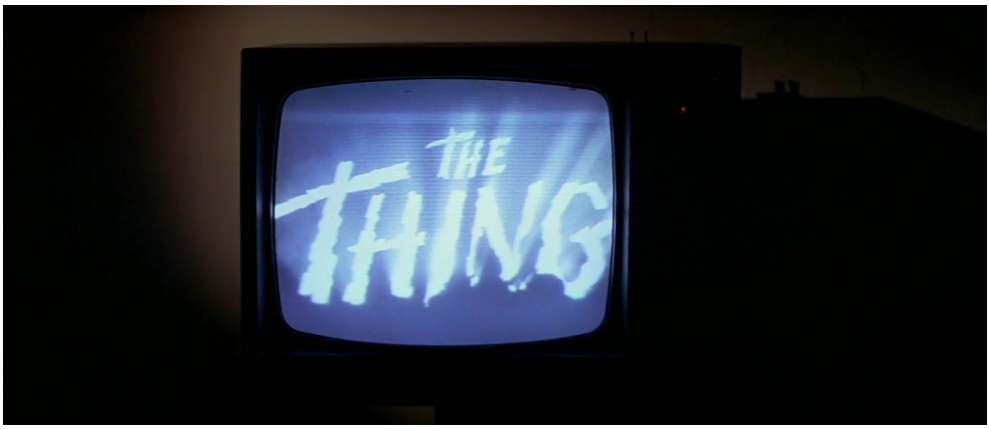

Figure 4. The gaze of the ghost in *Ringu* (1998)