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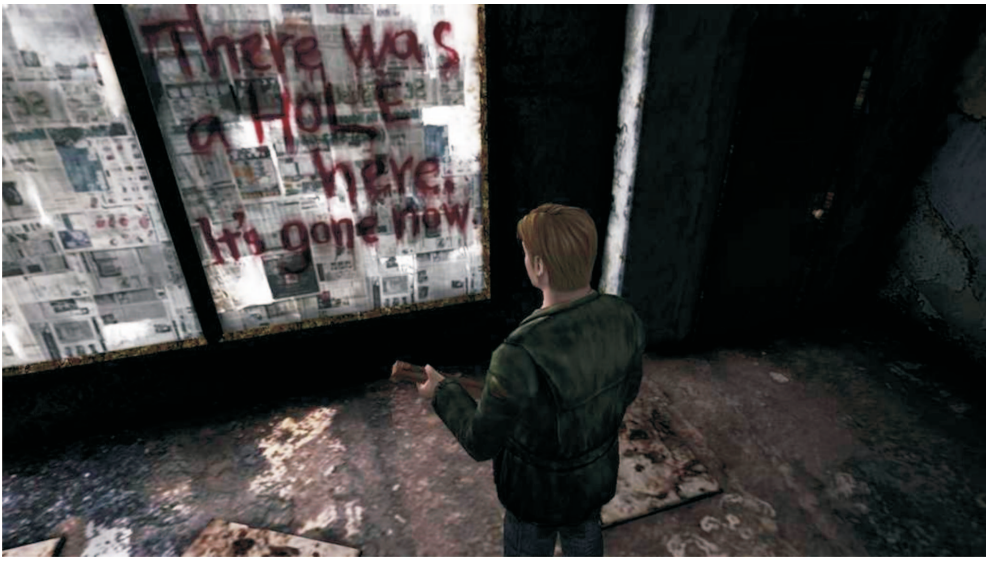
Media Entanglements and the Senses



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Immersion at the Intersection of Technology, Subjectivity and Culture: An Analysis of *Silent Hill 2*

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Abstract. This paper inspects the concept of immersion in video games as a gradient category resulting from the degrees of interactivity and immediacy. By factoring in the objective technological affordances of media, as well as the subjective impression that these affordances help create, and the culturally constructed nature of gameplay experience, I argue that high degrees of interactivity and immediacy are not achieved solely by giving the player more freedom of action, and, respectively, by inflecting the content of the narrative as little as possible with the medium's specific narrative affordances. Quite on the contrary, it is necessary that freedom be limited and content be manipulated for the video game to have high degrees of narrativity and playability, thus ensuring player engagement. In the absence of player engagement, the mediated nature of gaming experience becomes obvious and the level of immersion decreases. In the last section, I explore the relationship between video games and film and point out the consequences the remediation of film has regarding the level of immediacy.[1]

Keywords: immersion; immediacy; interactivity; remediation; *Silent Hill 2*; first person shooters; third person shooters.

For all its widespread use, immersion is a term that is still the subject of debate in the academia and a consensus with regards to what the concept entails remains to be reached. While far from attempting to establish once and for all what immersion means, I hope that, by factoring in research in the fields of post-classical narratology, media studies, and game studies, I come up with a view on immersion that accounts for the objective specific technological medium affordance, the subjective impression of being there, and the cultural

1 This work was co-financed from the European Social Fund through Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007–2013, project number POSDRU/187/1.5/S/155559, Competitive Multidisciplinary Doctoral Research in Europe.

constructedness of the impression of being there. As my argument unfolds I shall refer to the survival horror video game *Silent Hill 2*[2]. The purpose of the analysis is twofold: on the one hand, I intend to show the relevance of the concept of immersion for the production of video games, and on the other hand, I intend to use the video game in order to enhance our understanding of immersion by looking at aspects of interactivity and immediacy.

What is Immersion?

In his book *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation*, Gordon Calleja (2011) traces the complicated history of immersion from its initial purely technological understanding as the ability to remotely, yet actively influence the (fictional) world, to the more recent and more encompassing definitions that regard immersion as the psychological effect of "being there" created by the techno-narrative affordances of the particular media. Today, immersion is roughly conceived as the illusion of presence and, optionally, the ability to influence the fictional world. Although not necessarily using the word immersion, recent approaches to narrative theory have described interpreter involvement in a similar manner. Coming from a cognitive narrative background, David Herman, for instance, argues that narrative world-making means co-inhabiting the same world with the author (2012, 14). Prior to this, attempting to explain how the reader interacts with an "empty centre" narrative (i.e. "a reflector-mode representation of narrative events or existents in the absence of any internal focalizer or reflector figure, hence from the point of view of an 'empty (deictic) center'" [Jahn 2005, N3.2.5]), Monika Fludernik asserted that these narratives are immersive because the storyworld is mediated by an empty centre of subjectivity whose perception of the storyworld is in keeping with viewing script that humans share. Therefore, the reader is given the illusion that it is he/she who is actually seeing the storyworld (1993, 383).

My thesis endorses the more generous definition of immersion and maintains that the technology of immersion heightens the psychological impression of being immersed in another world. Understanding immersion presupposes looking at its two intimately related dimensions: immediacy and interactivity. While the former is the fundamental condition of immersion, and, arguably in non-ergodic, non-interactive media, immediacy and immersion are one and the same thing, in the case of ergodic (Aarseth 1998) and interactive media, the level of immersion

2 Konami Computer Entertaiment. 2001. *Silent Hill 2 Director's Cut.*

should increase with the level of interactivity. Immersion in this paper is a variable, which in itself is the sum of two variables: immediacy and interactivity.

Probably the most popular narrative medium which thrives on immediacy and interactivity is the video game. In my analysis of immersion in video games I conceptualize immersion as a gradient category. Because video games are considered both games and narratives (Ryan 2006, 181–203), my analysis of immersion, i.e. of immediacy and interactivity, will dovetail with aspects of narrativity. In what follows, I shall investigate the survival horror classic, *Silent Hill 2*. My analysis will be divided into three parts: I will be looking at aspects of interactivity and then at aspects of immediacy, with a last section dealing with an issue intimately connected with immediacy, namely that of remediation. Before commencing, I would like to mention from early on that the separate treatment of interactivity and immediacy does not suggest that the two dimensions of immersion are isolated from one another. Quite on the contrary, the discussion of either of the two will always imply the other.

Interactivity

According to Marie-Laure Ryan, interactivity is a gradient category whose level can be established by cross matching the four categories of interactivity based on two criteria: the position of the player inside or outside the gameworld and the ability or lack thereof to influence the gameworld (2006, 107–120). This way we get internal or external interactivity and ontological or exploratory interactivity. In the case of *Silent Hill 2*, we are dealing with a case of internal ontological interactivity, which is the highest degree of interactivity. In the game the player controls James Sunderland, who has to make his way through a ghost town filled with monsters resembling his and the other characters' traumatic memories. James also has to solve a lot of puzzles, an activity reminiscent of adventure video games such as *Myst*.[3]

What is highly relevant for the ontological aspect of interactivity in *Silent Hill 2* is the influence that the player's acts can have on determining the ending. *Silent Hill 2* has six endings that can be triggered by choosing a particular narrative branch throughout the game. Yet, what is interesting is that these narrative nodes are concealed and the person playing *Silent Hill 2* for the first time without knowledge of the game design is likely to be unaware of the decision making points.

A deeper insight into the issue of the plot is required here. Like most horror themed action adventure games, *Silent Hill 2* has a rigid scripted story that leaves

3 Cyan. 1993. *Myst*. Europe: Red Orb Entertainment.

the player room for narrative input only in-between narrative nodes which are usually marked by cinematic cut-scenes. You can dodge or kill monsters, take the short or long way, discover the chainsaw or not, but progress depends on the player's reaching a particular check point which pushes the narrative forward. However, *Silent Hill 2* is, or better yet, was different from most other video games released around 2001 in that the actions of the player in-between two nodes also determine the selection of a particular pre-established narrative script.

How can we relate this aspect of interactivity to immediacy? In real life we obviously have more freedom than in a video game such as *Silent Hill 2*. The limitations imposed by the game mechanics on the player can lead to an awareness of the mediation. When experiencing fictional worlds, individuals extrapolate their knowledge about the real world in order to make sense of it (Ryan 1991, 48–60). In *Silent Hill 2*, the protagonist you control is an average person who should be able to do anything an average human being can do. Yet the rules embedded in the game code allow the enaction of only a small part of the movements a human being is capable of in the real world. The relation between fiction and rules is very well documented by Jesper Juul (2014, 175), who claims that the content of a video game can be split into the following three categories:

1. "Fiction implemented in rules:" we expect the keys in *Silent Hill 2* to open doors, we expect knives to inflict damage;
2. "Fiction not implemented in games:" you cannot jump, although one would expect a human being to be able to jump;
3. "Rules not explained by fiction:" James Sunderland jumps down deep crevices, is thrown from the rooftop of the hospital by Pyramid Head, can get pierced several times by Pyramid Head's spear and, nevertheless, survives.

Judging by the logic of immediacy, it would be desirable that the rules implement as much of the fiction as possible, i.e. give the player a very high degree of freedom in terms of movements, gestures and so on, and limit as much as possible the rules that are not explained by fiction. However, such an attempt does have its downside. Indeed, the limited control options and plot developments are so unlike real life that they highlight the artificiality of the video game, thus making it hypermedial. Nonetheless, the small number of available movements, and the pre-scripted nature of the plot in *Silent Hill 2* and other video games ensure that the game entertains a high degree of playability and narrativity[4] which then

4 Post-classical narrative theory has relinquished rigid definitions of narrative and, instead of

maintain a strong ludic and narrative engagement with the game. Were this not the case, the game would become boring. In the absence of player engagement, the mediated nature of gaming experience is highlighted and immediacy turns to hypermediacy.

On a microlevel, the fact that shackled old wooden doors cannot simply be brought down with the metal pipe James Sunderland wields throughout the game, or that their locks cannot be shot open with the gun can thwart the medium's transparency. Nevertheless, if the game allowed this, its ludic part would be greatly impaired. If getting through were that simple and no longer required finding the right key, the adventure side of *Silent Hill 2* would be significantly diminished. Moreover, "in a well-known formulation, Bernard Suits defines games as being about attaining a goal using the 'less efficient means' available. For example, the high jump would be easier if we could use a ladder, a race would be easier if we could cut across the tracks, and soccer would be easier if we could pick up the ball. 'To stick a game in there,' as Lantz was quoted saying, is fundamentally about reducing the number of possibilities available to the player in order to make a game" (Juul 2014, 189).

So, while the logic of immediacy would push towards an ever greater number of possibilities, the logic of playability, which is fundamental for player engagement, requires the exact opposite, namely, the limitation of possibilities. Notwithstanding the apparent contradiction between immediacy and playability, in fact, a high degree of playability can help maintain the illusion of transparency by ensuring a strong engagement of the player with the fictional interactive world of the video game.

Of particular importance to achieving the balance between immediacy and playability is the technological medium employed by video games. Due to their digital nature, video games can easily enforce their rules on the player, unlike more traditional games, where the players can negotiate the rules or where a player can easily choose to break them. In this respect, video games are different from other games in what concerns the player's lusory attitude.

According to Bernard Suits, obeying the rules of a game is fundamental for the ludic nature of the game-activity as such (1978, 24). Players choose to obey the rules in order to make the game possible, in spite of the fact that these rules make the achievement of the goal more complicated. The gratuitous submission to the

trying to establish what a narrative is or is not, narratologists speak of degrees of narrativity (Fludernik 1996, Ryan 2006, Prince 2008, Herman 2009). By relying on prototype theory, these scholars attempt to identify core features of narrativity that can be shared to certain degrees by cultural products that claim to be narratives.

rules of the game is called by Suits the player's lusory attitude (1978, 35). In a traditional game, the player has to make an effort of volition to commit himself to the rules and resist the temptation to cheat when in danger of losing. In video games, the lusory attitude is no longer an essential element of the ludic nature of the game because, due to technological constraints, the player can no longer cheat, or, in any case, cheating is far more complicated, i.e. the player would have to be a programmer who can develop a patch that can give him/her more possibilities than originally intended by the game developer. As a result, a video game will always be a game because its rules cannot be broken from within. Even cheats, i.e. codes which create an apparently unfair advantage for the player upon insertion, are rules in themselves, albeit hidden, written in the game code by the developers. Consequently, inserting a cheat is not essentially tantamount to breaking a rule since the cheat in video games is itself a rule.

When playing *Silent Hill 2*, the player cannot but obey the very strict rules imposed by the game. Although the anti-gameplay design philosophy of classical survival horror video games (Nae, forthcoming) may determine the player to cheat, the digital medium prevents the player from breaking the rules, thus ensuring the maintenance of the ludic nature of *Silent Hill 2*. Since the player can in no way break the rules and, thus, dilute the ludicity of the video game, his/her only option is to quit the video game altogether.

On a macro-level, we encounter a similar discrepancy between the demands of immediacy and, in this case, narrativity. The fact that the player's actions can have a limited bearing on the outcome and that the outcome, as well as the succession of events, is pre-scripted, is indeed in contradiction with our expectations about the fictional world – expectations informed by our knowledge of the real world. However, the pre-scripted nature of the plot ensures that the narrative design of the video game is maintained. If in *Silent Hill 2* James Sunderland could simply leave whenever he wanted by retracing his steps back to the car, he would not meet Maria, he would not face his traumas, we would not know what really happened to Mary, all in all, we would not have a story. Once again, having a definite narrative profile ensures the player's narrative engagement, which then sustains the illusion of transparency craved by media.

A game designer is coerced to choose the lesser of two evils: either limit the possibilities and stress how little freedom one has in a game which pursues a particular narrative profile, or give the player a great amount of freedom by loosening the script as much as possible, and, as result, lose the narrative design and bore the player, which, in the end, also leads to hypermediacy. Therefore,

the degree of immersion of a video game depends on how well game designers manage to balance the freedom of choice typical of real life and the narrative constraints that maintain the narrative design of the video game.

Immediacy

After focusing on interactivity, it is time to move the focus to immediacy. First, what is immediacy? Immediacy is the desire of media to erase their mediation, to give the audience the impression that they are experiencing the authentic thing (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 6). In the case of fictional narratives, instead of the real thing, the goal is to trick the audience into believing they are experiencing "the world assumed to be actual within the narrative" (Herman 2009, 122). The counterpoint of immediacy is hypermediacy, which seeks not to erase mediation, but to highlight it (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 31).

Intimately related to the issue of immediacy is that of narration. Each narrative has a narrator who manipulates the techno-narrative affordances of the medium in order to convey the story in its plot form.[5] The more manipulations the story undergoes to obtain its plot form, the more obvious the narrator and the medium are, thus obtaining hypermediacy. Conversely, the fewer manipulations the story undergoes, the less obvious the narrator and the medium become, thus obtaining immediacy. In order to illustrate this idea, let us focus on the issue of temporality. It is an established fact in narrative theory that narratives feature a sjuzet and a fabula, also known as plot and story, which are linked to discourse time and story time, respectively (Brooks 1992, 12–13). Discourse time is a clear example of artificiality because it highlights the mediated nature of the narrative through

5 An important digression is required here. The last ten years have witnessed a growing body of literature coming from the fields of adaptation and media studies that have highlighted the importance of medium specificity. There is a wide consensus among scholars in these fields that each medium has a set of narrative affordances provided by their technology that are used to convey the content of a narrative (Hutcheon 2006; Ryan 2006). Drawing on David Herman, I would like make a step further and attribute the employment of these narrative affordances to the narrator. This is due to the fact that the narrator's narrational acts, i.e. what the narrator chooses to represent from the storyworld and the way in which he/she represents, are construed as if they were the gestures of a singular human-like entity, whose acts have a particular motivation and pursue a particular goal. Making sense of a narrative presupposes making inferences about the intentions, beliefs and desires that motivate the narrator's narrational acts (Herman 2012, 44). Narrative cultural products that are the result of collective authorship, i.e. the product receives the input of more than one creator of content, are no exception to this process of reception. Because of our theory of mind and narrative schemata, we need a personal teller to convey the narrative to us (Fludernik 1993, 440). Even if there are clearly more than one tellers involved, reception undergoes the same inferentional process that is based on making sense of the narrational acts of only one narrator (Herman 2012, 48–49).

flashbacks, anticipation, contractions and so on. While some media are better at hiding the manipulation of temporality than others (see film cuts vs. comic book panels), it goes without saying that time manipulation exists in all narrative media, including drama (Hogan 2014, 50–66).

If the gap between discourse time and event time, or plot and story, is a trait of artificiality that flaunts the immediate and, I daresay, immersive character of narratives, then bridging the gap between the two would seem the evident solution to enhance immediacy and immersion. Unfortunately, the presupposed higher degree of immediacy and immersion would come at a cost, namely that of narrativity and playability (in the case of video games). Moreover, as argued in the previous section, low narrativity and playability backfire and in the end reduce the level of immediacy and immersion by revealing the artificiality of the narrative. If a narrative has a low level of narrativity and playability, the process of reception leads to a low degree of engagement, which raises awareness to the mediatedness, hence artificiality of the narrative. As a result, instead of increasing the level of immediacy and immersion of a narrative, decreasing to a minimum the narrator's manipulations of the story with the help of medium affordances decreases the level of immediacy.

Here are a few examples to show how the manipulation of temporality inflects immediacy. If a novel described each and every gesture of a character, coupled with the associated psycho-narration – the verbal representation of the often non-verbal thoughts of a character (Fludernik 2009, 80) –, as it was tried in experimental trends in novel writing such as the nouveau roman, the novel would become almost unreadable. Furthermore, its very status as narrative would be challenged and the novel would be more similar to a description (Herman 2009, 139). Or, if in a sandbox role-playing game such as *Fallout 3*[6] one would have to literally spend eight hours while the playable character sleeps, or would have to literally traverse the Wasteland from one location to another in the absence of fast-travel option, the game would be boring and unplayable. Standing eight hours in front of the monitor will undoubtedly remind the gamer of the mediated nature of gaming experience.

In *Silent Hill 2* we are faced with the attempt to conceal the narrator. In a video game, it is important to note that the narrator is controlled by both the player and the game designer – or, to be more precise, the game mechanics written by the game designer(s). In fact, the player controls the narrator only inasmuch as the game designer allows it. According to the logic of immediacy, in a video game, once the

6 Bethesda Game Studios. 2008. *Fallout 3*. Europe: Bethesda Softworks.

player internalizes the controls, he/she should no longer be aware of the fact that, besides the avatar, he/she is also controlling the narrator. When executing the video game, the console or computer becomes a storytelling device. You manipulate the device into conveying the story the way you want it to in the limits imposed by the game designer. When playing *Silent Hill 2*, you determine a particular unfolding of the plot and a particular presentation of the game's actual world, which means that you, the player, are also the narrator. You control James Sunderland, but you sometimes also control the camera angle from which you view James Sunderland. You also manipulate temporality by pausing the course of events when accessing James's inventory. Yet what the game tries to do is make the control of the narrator so natural that it becomes fully transparent, i.e. the player is no longer aware of the fact that he/she is also manipulating the audio-visual techno-narrative affordances.

But can the internalization of controls alone make the manipulations of the means used to represent the storyworld transparent? The answer is clearly no; the nature of these manipulations is also important. In order to make them transparent, the game remediates an already established medium, whose artificial means of manipulating and presenting the story have been naturalized by the global audience – the feature film.

Remediation

But first, what is remediation? Remediation is the process by which a medium incorporates another medium by means of imitating the latter's techno-narrative affordances with the purpose of attaining a higher degree of immediacy (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 45). For example, *Silent Hill 2* remediates film by employing many cuts, fixed camera angles, continuity editing, extensive cut-scenes, and acting. To be sure, film and video games have always been intimately connected. Yet, *Silent Hill 2* is far more filmic than most previous games. In fact, at the turn of the millennia, video games were becoming more and more cinematic – see *Max Payne*[7] or *Hitman: Codename 47*.[8]

The visual content of the first person shooters from the 1990s, such as *Doom*,[9] *Spear of Destiny*[10] and *Quake*,[11] can very pertinently be described by using film language. Each level consisted of one long subjective camera shot. The duration

7 Remedy Entertainment. 2001. *Max Payne*. Europe: Gathering of Developers.
8 IO Interactive. 2000. *Hitman: Codename 47*. Europe: Eidos Interactive.
9 Id Software. 1993. *Doom*. Europe: GT Interactive.
10 Id Software. 1992. *Spear of Destiny*. US: Forgen Corporation.
11 Id Software. 1996. *Quake*. Europe: GT Interactive.

of the shot was determined by the duration of the gameplay. Its only cuts were generated by the player's accessing the menu or pausing the game, but once the game was resumed the image was the exact one which had been rendered right before the pausing of the game. However, as far as the representation of the diegesis is concerned, classical first person shooters employ no in-level cuts. This would soon change in 1996 with the release of *Resident Evil*.[12] While maintaining a focus on shooting, the game approaches gameplay from a new perspective. This time, the representation of the gameworld was more cinematic in that its walkthrough resembled very much the rolling of a film. If first person shooters employed only very few of the film's techno-narrative affordances (namely the subjective camera and the long shot), *Resident Evil*'s remediation of film really took advantage of what the camera can do, and, consequently, the visual representation of the gameworld features many cuts, different camera angles, continuity editing, in-level cutscenes and other cinematic elements. *Silent Hill 2* pays tribute to *Resident Evil*'s cinematic style by maintaining all the aforementioned characteristics, but adds new ones such as tracking shots that follow James Sunderland as he explores some parts of the gameworld. Furthermore, unlike *Resident Evil* and *Resident Evil 2*,[13] *Silent Hill 2* allows the player to change the camera angle.

But how exactly does the extensive use of cinematic language enhance immediacy? With the advent of more advanced graphics, video games became more successful in imitating films. Film is a highly popular medium whose grammar has come to be culturally associated with immediacy. The spread of television and cinema around the globe has created a new type of literacy that is very unlikely for someone not living in a remote underdeveloped region not to master. Because film language is now the dominant immediacy code, it was natural for video games seeking a high degree of immediacy and immersion to want to employ film language and rise to the representational fidelity of the camera. What is more, around the year 2000 video games were still looking to achieve a certain cultural status. As Bolter and Grusin argue, it is often the case that new media seek to attain cultural capital and so they hope to borrow the prestige of older media by remediating them (1999, 69). Video games are no exception. By remediating film, video games have risen up the prestige ladder from what was initially deemed lowbrow to more middle- or even highbrow tastes.

But have third person video games such as *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill 2* really achieved a higher degree of immediacy by integrating more cinematic elements

12 Capcom. 1996. *Resident Evil*. US: Virgin Interactive.
13 Capcom. 1998. *Resident Evil 2*. US: Capcom.

than previous first person action video games such as *Doom* or *Quake* games did? True as it may be that film is a medium whose representational capacities are regarded as being realistic and transparent, many of the shots recorded by the camera could not be perceived by a human being. For instance, the latest James Bond film, *Spectre* (Sam Mendes, 2015), begins with a tracking shot that follows the protagonist through a crowd at a festival into a hotel, then into a small elevator where he is accompanied by a female partner, then out of the elevator through the corridor into the room, then out the balcony for the camera to soar afterwards a couple of feet above James Bond's head only to then level down and provide an over-the-shoulder shot before cutting. Such a long shot is unnatural because, provided that one could actually sneak behind a person without losing sight of him/her for that long, the follower could not rise above floor level as the camera in *Spectre* was able to. By remediating film, video games started incorporating such unnatural shots that early first person shooters lacked. In a game such as *Quake 2*,[14] the shots you get through gameplay resemble humans' natural sight. We, as humans, have a continuous first person view of the world around us. This view is well replicated by first person shooters, with more recent games using enhanced graphics to render complex moving shadows according to in-game light sources, the avatar's own body parts, such as legs, arms and so on. In many first person shooters, when walking and running, the image trembles in order to mimic our eyesight when moving. In *Silent Hill 2*, we see James Sunderland from a third person perspective, sometimes from an angle in which we, as humans, could never position ourselves.

Taking this into account, it would be difficult to argue that, by remediating film, third person video games have attained a higher degree of immediacy than previous first person shooters. What can nevertheless be deduced is that these games make a shift from imitating natural eyesight, therefore a type of immediacy based on our natural technologically unmediated perception of the real world, to imitating a technological and cultural sight, namely the representational affordances of film, a medium with significant cultural prestige, whose technological capacities are culturally constructed as being realistic and transparent.

To sum up, this paper has been an attempt to construe immersion as the result of two gradient categories: interactivity and immediacy. Without losing focus of the interconnectedness of the two dimensions of immersion, I pursue an individual analysis of interactivity and immediacy. In the former case I argue that, although one could assume that the more freedom you have in a video game, the more

14 Id Software. 1997. *Quake II.* Europe: Activision.

transparent the gaming experience becomes, actually – as I showed –, freedom of action and choice has to be limited in order to ensure a high degree of playability and narrativity for the video game. Similarly, by relying on recent approaches to the concept of narrator, I argue that, although the logic of immediacy would imply that the less the content of the narrative is manipulated by the narrator with the help of the medium's specific techno-narrative affordances, the more authentic, or real the narrative is regarded, the purposes of narrativity and playability make it compulsory that the content be manipulated so as to ensure the player's engagement. My last step was to inspect the relation between remediation and immediacy. By comparing first person shooters and third person shooters I highlight the different ways in which each of them attempt to achieve medium transparency: the former imitate natural eyesight, while the latter remediate film.

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Hypertheatre or Media Entanglement in the Theatre of Jay Scheib

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Abstract. The theatre of Jay Scheib blends theatrical and filmic features, allowing for a theoretical investigation of the manner in which two different media coexist on the same expressive support. How can two distinct media like film and theatre fuse and, at the same time, be apprehended as separate artistic means in a single artifact? The present article uses a theoretical interpretive metaphor that rests on an application of the mechanisms of relationship between two physical systems issued from the quantum mechanical view of reality. From this perspective, the two afore-mentioned media are in an entangled state. Media is understood as "potential materials or forms for future practices," or "automatisms" (Rodowick 2007, 42). At the same time, theatrical or cinematic media is apprehended by the audience in a dynamic way, not defined as a static bundle of defining features. Dynamic conceptualization will modulate or "tune" the comprehension of one of the media considered to be a subordinate system in the duplex. The blending of the two media presupposes a local conceptualization unfolding dynamically and an entangled one manifested nonlocal. The distinction between film and theatre is also to be seen as a difference in the cognitive model which posits a detached display (a screen/a scene), an imaginary world (a diegesis) and a spectator (observer). In theatre, the body of the observer is inside the theatrical display setting, while in film, the body of the viewer is conceptualized to be separated from the cinematic display. The notion of threshold, introduced by Dudley Andrew (2010), renders this shift of attention from one side of the display to the other.

Keywords: theatre, film, media entanglement, automatism, cognitive approach, Jay Scheib.

Introduction

The theatre of Jay Scheib[1] presents the curious case of blending theatrical and filmic features, confronting the audience with a categorization conundrum: is this artifact theatre, film or a different category altogether, a *hypertheatre*? Scheib's performances, which can be considered live cinematic adaptations, use two alternative media in order to depict what will further be called diegesis, a virtual state of affairs.[2] The performance event is achieved simultaneously, as a live play, carried out in a theatre, and as a feature film on a DVD, filmed and edited in real time during the performance. For the sake of simplicity, we will refer to the former as theatre (T) and to the latter as film (F). We use here Scheib's example in order to address some theoretical issues relevant to the cognitive approach of film analysis, and we do not propose an interpretation or a detailed analysis of his work. Scheib's work raises the questions of identity starting from the observation that out of the two artistic experiences neither one fully encompasses the whole artifact. Are we confronted with one work or artifact or two separate ones? Is his work T or F? If this is one work, what is its medial manifestation? Or should it be considered as an instance of the elimination of the above distinction? And if this is the case, are we confronted with a new media, which is neither F nor T? If so, what would its relation be to the constitutive categories T and F, which, obviously, rise to awareness as distinctly conceptualized entities?

Scheib's play, *This Place is a Desert* (2007) stages a human drama unfolding in a setting of continuous video surveillance and pervasive digital image located inside and outside the diegetic world. The setting is composed of two rooms and a hallway. The left room opens into a veranda situated at the back of the stage, used mostly as a living room. In the room on the right there is a bed, thus it can be identified as a bedroom. Between the two, there is the hallway [Fig. 1]. Most of the scenes performed are restagings of Michelangelo Antonioni's films. Scenes and lines from his films are quoted extensively. The play's performance

1 Jay Scheib is director of Theater Arts at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he teaches performance media, motion theater, media and methods, and introduction to directing. His cinematic adaptations are: *World of Wires* (2012), *Bellona Destroyer of Cities* (2010), *Addicted to Bad Ideas, Peter Lorre's 20th Century* (2009) or *Platonov, or the Disinherited* (2014). See *http://jayscheib.com/*; *http://mta.mit.edu/person/jay-scheib* and *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jay_Scheib*. Last accessed 12. 11. 2016.

2 Diegesis is understood as a fictional world where a character can dwell in (Odin 2000, 19; Buckland 2000, 92), as the "story action" (Bordwell 2008, 76), or as a semantic description elaborated out of perceptive data displayed on the cimematic screen (Branigan 1986, 44). In short, it is a mental imaginary construct elaborated with the use of perceptual cues.

blends the features of both theatre and film.[3] As spectators, we are confronted with a performance that transforms theatre into a living enactment of a film and film media into a theatrical performance. In a sense, this kind of performance re-enacts the "cinema of attractions" as defined by Tom Gunning (1986). For the early cinema – until 1906 –, the exhibition of the cinema itself (its technical and viewing possibilities) was an attraction in itself. Cinematic views were props inserted in a theatrical performance.

Starting from the frame of reference of the medial definition of theatre versus film, let us consider the manner in which the choice of intertextuality and cinematic quotation highlights the fact that Sheib's theatre is, from its starting point, a restaging of Antonioni's films. In some scenes, the actors are out of theatrical view – hidden behind walls –, but nonetheless their actions can be seen on the screens hanging from the ceiling. The screens are fed online by the static and mobile cameras positioned in and out of the theatrical stage that record continuously. Sometimes, in those scenes, characters are positioned in the depth of the camera field, in reminiscence of Michelangelo Antonioni's style or Orson Welles's depth frame [Fig. 2]. The 3D body compositions drawn by the actors on stage are intended to be fully comprehensible if one sees them from a specific cinematic frame and vantage point embedded *in* the theatrical diegesis. The optimum view to the drama is denied to the spectator situated in a theatrical vantage point. The spectators, seated in the theatrical hall, can see at times *in vivo* a wall that hides the drama but, as viewers, they can have visual access only to the cinematic screens that optically reveal the plot being carried out behind the wall. The multiscreen display is also a reference to Mike Figgis's film, *Timecode* (2000) [Fig. 3]. This vantage point is refused to the theatrical setting (to the audience in the theatre), but is accessible to the same audience perceptually and cognitively in a filmic setting, i.e. in front of a screen. In short, the audience is alternately prompted to experiment the performance in a theatrical mode as spectators and in a cinematic mode as viewers – both modes embedded in a single theatrical performance.

3 One could say that Sheib's play is a living enactment of the conceptual integration/conceptual blending process occurring between two different input mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985, 2002, 2007).

Some Theoretical Prerequisites

Type/Token/Template

Seeing things from a specifically cognitive approach applied to film analysis, we can start by mentioning Noël Carroll's observations on the difference between theatre and film, which is based on the type/token distinction, i.e. concept versus object that instantiates the concept as its specific expression. "Specifically: live theatrical, token performances are generated by interpretations, whereas token performances of motion pictures are generated by templates" in the words of Carroll (2008, 65). For live theatre, the token performance is generated by an interpretation, a type. For mechanical cinema, the token performance is generated by a template. Also, according to Carroll, since theatre and film practices are different, the performance of motion picture is not an object of artistic assessment, whereas theatrical performances are. The token performance of cinema is not an artwork, while the theatre token performance is an artwork per se: "successful theatrical performance involves a token interpretation of an interpretation type" (Carroll 2008, 70). For Scheib, the distinction is blurred since in the theatre hall the audience witnesses a cinematic performance of the theatrical kind; an artistic instance of a cinematic performance. On the other hand, the DVD copy is a token of a particular instance of interpretation, a token that serves as a template. For Sheib's live adaptations, the theatrical token is also a template, and the audience is confronted with an artistic artifact that is at the same time token and type, token and template instantiated in a recursive manner. Therefore, the performance of cinema in the play performance is also an object of artistic assessment, since it is a constitutive part of the play performance as well.

Medium According to Carroll

According to Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (1996), cinematic media has a value as a communication instrument or has a meaning as a consequence of a particular use in a pragmatic context: "[o]n the issue of the essential nature of film, I hold that film has no essence, only uses, most of which are derivative and subject to analysis and evaluation according to the categories that apply to their sources – art, drama, narrative, nonfiction, and so on" (1996, 245). Also in Carroll's perspective, the "medium is a middleman, a go-between betwixt one thing and another." In his essay, Carroll proposes five distinctive

features of moving images. Something is a moving picture if (1) it is a detached display, (2) it belongs to a class of things from which the impression of movement is technically possible, (3) its performance token is generated by a template that is a token, (4) its performance token is not an artwork in itself, and (5) it is bi-dimensional (2008, 35–51). Sheib's play blends Carroll's distinctive features in terms of the theatrical performance, where (1) theatre and film share the common feature of detached display (stage and screen make reference to a fictional diegesis),[4] (2) both offer the impression of movement, (3) both are generated by a token that is theatrical (a unique performance) and filmic template (a recording device of indicial character in a Peircean manner of speaking) at the same time,[5] (4) film and theatre in this instance are artworks in themselves, and (5) both are 3-dimensional artifacts.[6]

We can focus on Carroll's notion of detached display, common to film and theatrical media. Both media "display persons, places, things, actions, and events that are phenomenologically detached, in the preceding sense, from the actual space of our bodies" (Carroll 2008, 57) or in both cases "the referent of the display is discontinuous with, or detached or absent from, the space in which our eyes can plot the way to our destination" (Carroll 2008, 58). As put forth by Carroll in the quoted text, theatrical performance is also a detached display and is opposed to a local embodiment of diegesis (in a locale accessible to human body and within grasping distance).

Nevertheless, Carroll has recently revised his position and nowadays (2013, 2014) he considers that film cues draw attention – in a constricted way – to aspects described in the diegesis and, conversely, that theatre allows the spectator to freely direct his attention towards the 3D diegetic space. In a sense, the detached

4 Sheib also blurs the line between documentary and fictional discourse. Online screen projections create the documentary of the performance, while generating a fictional world. The performance is, in itself, a fiction on the DVD copy of the play and, on the theatrical stage, it is part of the fictional world depicted by the play. The play depicts a fictional world where one reality (the theatrical diegesis or the drama enacted by the actor's performance on the stage) is recorded by several filmic cameras. The fictional world is a world of recorded reality. Camera recording and screening are as fictional as the drama that the actors are enacting unaware of them being recorded. Conversely, the DVD copy can be seen as depicting a fictional realm (the making of a film) or a real one (the documentary of the making of the film). In the end, the DVD copy makes the documentary of the fictional world called here recorded reality. Origin, copy and the continuous generation of *simulacra* are put to the fore in a programmatic fashion (for example in Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard's poststructuralist literature).

5 Filmic template in Scheib's work is not an immutable type, but is causally dependent upon the actual unique performance of the actors on the night of the play. Each night has another film attached to it.

6 Filmic screens in the play performance are 3D objects or props embedded in the theatrical display.

display is the device or the expressive support – the *window of attention,* e.g. the theatrical stage or the cinematic screen – used in order to perceptually access the referent, the diegetic world. Film intensely uses the variable framing in order to guide the observers' attentional cognitive capacities as an "attentional engine:" "the moving picture maker articulates her own intentions to the audience by guiding our attention" (Carroll 2008, 119–122). [7] Moreover, as Carroll puts it, "the most common and paradigmatic role of variable framing is to develop and articulate movie narratives by guiding attention to critical story information, highlighting the salience of this information via indexing, scaling, and bracketing, and presenting it in a sequence that facilitates our construction of a coherent, intelligible, unified, and compelling story" (2014, 240).

Following Carroll's observations, we can further develop this theory. In the case of films, the window of attention is perceptually given (it is indexed), while in theatre, this is perceptually conducted by the observer (even if attention can be cued by bottom up inputs such as light, movement or sound). In filmic media, the experience of the body of the observer[8] is a conceptual primary reference point used in order to access the detached display, the screen. The screen can represent a secondary reference point in order to acquire access to the diegesis, the imaginary world that is depicted. In cinematic displays, the body of the viewer is the grounds for the conceptualization of a screen that, in its turn, offers access to the diegetic world.

In theatrical media, the haptic experience of the conceptual primary point of reference (the observer's body) is oriented towards the diegetic space, unmediated by a material device. Awareness of one's body is the foundation of the conceptualization of the diegetic world. In a sense, in theatrical media the observer is part of the detached display, and, as a consequence, has a more immersed experience of the diegesis. Nevertheless, each medium can use, in atypical cases, technical devices borrowed from the alternate ones, e.g. screens in Romeo Castelluci's theatre and unconventionally shaped screens in Peter Greenaway's films. On the other hand, the observer, in some cases, obstructs the view of the screen and accesses to the film diegesis. This immersion creates a theatrical mental experience. Also, in the case of theatre, a selective window of attention that belongs to the observer edits stage space in a filmic fashion. However, screening a film is not a typical option for theatre and, conversely,

7 See also Carroll and Seeley (2013, 62).

8 *Spectator* and *observer* are synonyms. They are both subjective entities that cognitively process the influx of stimuli. For the purposes of this paper the *conceptualizer* is an observer stance cued by visual and aural expressions at work.

bodily material immersion in the diegetic space is not a currently feasible option in films either.

Medium According to Rodowick

In *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007), David Rodowick criticizes Carroll's theoretical investigation and considers that, since there are multiple media and they "admit historically to qualitatively different styles and practices," they tend to represent "a set of component properties or conceptual options" (2007, 41). Therefore, the "medium of an art form combines multiple elements or components that can be material, instrumental, and/or formal" that are variable, and the medium can be defined without presuming an integral identity or essence uniting these elements into a whole (Rodowick 2007, 41). Rodowick borrows the notion of automatism from Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed* (1971). I hold that in his essay, Rodowick criticizes Carroll's concept of detached display for being still too essentialist and materialistic, and not enough of an idealized conceptualization.

From this perspective, automatisms are both the material substance of aesthetic creation and the result of artistic practice. In this sense, automatisms are "forms, conventions, or genres that arise creatively out of the existing materials and material conditions of given art practices. In turn, they serve as potential materials or forms for future practices. Cavell calls these materials 'elements,' or fundamental acts that comprise the specific possibilities and necessities of a given medium; in doing so, they recreate the meaning of the medium with each artistic act. What constitutes these elements is unknowable prior to the creative acts of artists and the analytical observations of critics – this is why they are considered potentialities or virtualities expressed in the history of a medium and its uses" (Rodowick 2007, 42).

Automatisms act as "variable limits to subjectivity and creative agency" (for Cavell), and function as "potentialities of thought, action, or creation, and "circumscribe what subjectivity is or can be and how it is conditioned conceptually, though these conditions are neither inflexible nor invariable" (Rodowick 2007, 43). Automatisms "proliferate into individual or collective practices as new automatisms" (Rodowick 2007, 44). Thus, "in encountering automatisms as limits, artists invent new creative strategies as ways of overcoming or transforming them. But once these strategies are incorporated as elements of style, they in turn may function automatically as an aesthetic idea or strategy generating new variants on or instantiations of its concept" (Rodowick 2007, 44).

The present essay argues in favour of a similar understanding of Jay Shieb's new practice and medium, called here, for present purposes, hypertheatre.

Our understanding of the concept of automatism is a cognitive and pragmatic one. An observer's set of beliefs regarding the practice of a medium (film/theatre) creates expectations and conceptual content. The same applies to the difference between film and digital media. The practices involved in the production, distribution and reception of digital media construct a schematic representation of the media involved, i.e. a cognitive model (Deaca 2013, 165) and an encyclopaedic semantic definition of the media based, in certain cases, on prototypical instances that, in turn, qualify as what one describes as the meaning of the media. Defining a specific media is a conceptual operation, an instance of conceptualization that has a schematic aspect, as well as an encyclopaedic one. Digital media does not strictly represent a change in style with respect to classical film, but a change in the cognitive model expressed as a set of expectancies. In short, the audience has in mind a cognitive model and a prototypical instance of the media to be apprehended and they function as a cognitive filter of the data or stimuli at hand. Based on this mental frame, the spectator/viewer can categorize a particular experience as belonging to a certain class. Different expressive means – the expressive display – cue the conceptualization that the observer can construe towards one mental structure or another.[9]

Diegesis 1

The theatrical performance of Sheib's hypertheatre includes living actors on a stage and an audience situated in an Italian-style stage, facing the theatrical diegesis. The stage includes actors, setting, lights, props, a series of digital cameras embedded in the fictional space and several screens situated above the stage that receive the media input from the cameras. This eclectic device cues the audience to construct a diegetic world that we can call, for analytical purposes, diegesis 1. Several cameras are fixed on tripods and one is handled by the director [Fig. 4]. The audience can see in real time, on the screen displays hanging from the ceiling, alternative points of view of the plot unfolding on the stage. Simultaneously, the audience can follow the drama from a theatrical vantage point – since all members of the audience are pinned to their chairs and fixed to a proper optical position –, as well as from the

9 We can further develop the idea that "automatisms" or "cognitive model" are akin to the concept of "situated conceptualization" (Barsalou 1999; 2003; 2008; 2013). It is the task of future research to investigate this matter.

point of view offered by a digital camera, which ensures an alternative view of the scene. Some screens give a complementary view of the plot and of the characters' performance – using a different angle of view, of framing and of scaling –, some give just surveillance video input from the stage location where there is no action, and a third category offers visual access to plot events that are hidden from the audience's view by means of walls and stage props. This third category inhibits access from the position of the theatre audience since the spectator will see an opaque wall on the stage that hides plot and drama, but allows access from the perspective of film-viewers. The theatrical performance contains a diegesis 1 conveyed by the blending of two channels and media: a theatre-like experience and a filmic one. Diegesis 1 is a blend formed by the integration of two media, two types of cognitive experiences of the fictional world. Aural and visual cues help maintain the spectators' focus as they witness the scene in the theatrical hall. The framed theatrical stage can be freely explored by the audience's perceptional and cognitive faculties. The cinematic framings are guided attentional engines that point out aspects of the fictional scene called diegesis 1. It is important to stress that the audience is aware of the actors, who are being displayed in the here and now together with the spectators in the theatre hall surrounding them. Therefore, diegesis 1 is accessed via the perception of the living bodies of actors, which is understood as sharing the same reality status as that of one's own body in the audience. The cognitive model of theatre includes as a defining feature the felt presence of the body of the actor and the spectator's body in the same situation or on the same ground.

A System under a Dual Description: Complementarity

Correlations – co-reference, coherence of space features – between the two media indicate a state of cognitive blending. The resulting blend is a state of fluid superposition of states. This blend is a twofold system that accepts a dual or complementary semantic description. In the view expressed in this paper – contrary to Gilles Fauconnier's theory (1985; 2002; 2007) – I consider that this blend will be apprehended dynamically by an observer only through one single description (understood as a cognitive model or automatism) that represents the access gate into the blended knowledge base.[10] The dominant cues give more saliency, fertility and resolution to semantic elements that compose the foregrounded medium.

10 It is not the case of an equally and equilibrated semantic integration, neither that of a metaphoric blending. Since the cases are situated on a gradual continuum, reading can shift towards a metaphorical reading.

If cued by theatrical display features, the scene (the fictional world) inhibits the cinematic media and foregrounds its theatrical, felt experience features; and conversely, if cued by cinematic expression (variable framing: bracketing, scaling and indexing), it inhibits the theatrical experience of the scene. Cues are instructions for conceptualizations. In a sense, the overall experience is a cognitive figure of ambiguity established between figure and ground. Wittgenstein's duck versus rabbit figure is a typical example. The same set of expressive stimuli is apprehended as a multitude of cues for two alternative conceptualizations.

One consequence for our case study is that the theatrical setting – the stage with living actors in it – can be experienced as a filmic experience and, conversely, shots screened can be experienced as theatrical experiences. The mode of apprehension from one type of media is projected upon the cues from the alternative one. In other words, theatre is apprehended as film and film is apprehended as theatre. Diegesis 1 is in a superposition of states – film/theatre – that the observer, the spectator collapses into a definite and dominant media category. Digesis 1 is a reality under the "uncertainty principle." Semantic features are warped and the semantic space is tuned or shifted in order to conform to the dominant media category. Diegesis 1 can be read as a "theatre of a film" or the "film of a theatre." The dominant medium is a filter that tunes the distinctive features of the secondary one. Accordingly, diegesis 1 is a type of theatre or a type of film. In other words, it is an instance of a category defined as dominant. Diegesis 1 is a system where two defining parameters cannot be measured at the same time, and it is a dynamic conceptualization not a static bundle of features like a dictionary entry. One cannot speak about a possibility before measuring or observing – which in our case means conceptualizing – the semantic description of the artifact with the use of a definite top down cognitive model of T(heatre) or F(ilm). For the system *per se*, it is necessary that the measuring of a second parameter/media changes or disturbs the first parameter/media (checked before).[11]

A recent study elaborated by Gallant's Laboratory *Attention during natural vision warps semantic representation across the human brain* (Gallant 2013) can help us conceptualize this kind of semantic warping. According to Gallant, focusing the brain's attentional capacities towards a given semantic category expands the cortical representation of the target under the "magnifying glass" of attention. Cortical areas that are not initially dedicated to the focalized category

11 Richard Feyman: The Quantum Mechanical View of Reality 1 (Part 2). Workshop at Esalen Institute, 1983. Video available on YouTube: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytGo85BZUww*. Last accessed 23. 11. 2015. See: min. 10:23–10:25.

tune up in order to process the task category. At the same time, dissimilar semantic categories are compressed. Attention expands the similar semantic categories even when the perceptual targets are not present. In the words of Gallant: "on the basis of neurophysiological evidence, we hypothesized that attention causes tuning changes to expand the representation of attended stimuli at the cost of unattended stimuli" (2013, 1). Also, Gallant asserts that "we found that many voxels across occipito-temporal and fronto-parietal cortex shifted their tuning toward the attended category. These tuning shifts expanded the representation of the attended category and of semantically related, but unattended, categories, and compressed the representation of categories that were semantically dissimilar to the target [...] these results suggest that attention dynamically alters visual representation to optimize processing of behaviorally relevant objects during natural vision" (2013, 1). As a general mechanism, "attention could markedly increase sensitivity for the target and improve target detection under these demanding conditions by expanding the cortical representation of behaviorally relevant categories and compressing the representation of irrelevant categories" (Gallant 2013, 1). The initial choice of the observer is to interpret the stimuli afferent to an experience as cues belonging to a type of experience will trigger an interpretive task. Once the interpretive task (the cognitive model) is active in the unconscious, a grounded conceptualization develops as a conscious and felt experience.

Diegesis 2

On the other hand, the DVD film of Shieb's hypertheatre depicts the theatrical performance that we will call diegesis 2 with the use of several types of shots. Some of them are establishing shots framed from the audience's perspective, in which the viewer can see the stage (props and dramatic action), including the screens in the theatre hall and the spectators inside the theatre hall[12] [Fig. 5]. Other shots are enhanced views of diegesis 1 in close-up shots that could not be seen from the theatre audience's vantage point [Fig. 6] as the screen window is entirely covered. Camera movement and the hand-held camera of a silent director/cameraman are underlined. Editing is highlighted. Those features are thus cues for a cinematic interpretive task.

The medial artifact poses a problem of categorization to the observer. Since the content is diegesis 1, i.e. a theatrical performance, is the DVD release an atypical

12 As one can notice, theatrical observers that were outside diegesis 1 are now represented as observers inside diegesis 2.

theatre (the filmed version of a spectacle; a theatre accessed through the media of film), or is it an atypical film (a film depicting a spectacle)? Is the detached display a platform for a surrogate theatrical experience or a film about a theatrical event? What does one see or apprehend: the diegesis as a theatrical event or as a filmic event? [Fig. 7.] In this view, the medium is a mode of processing stimuli. The diegesis is a referent. A body of knowledge, i.e. what one knows about a medium is a filter or a series of algorithms that allow the observer to conceptualize the reference in a particular modal manner.

Diegesis 2 has an ambiguous status. Is this a theatrical event that we see? One can see the stage space and the audience space in the same shot, but this is not strange since it is a conventional framing of theatrical performances on video releases. On the other hand, inserting the audience (framed from the rear and not from the front) generates hesitation. Maybe it is not the case that this is theatre, but it is the "making of a film" instead. Schematic and theatrical settings appear in Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003). So, the DVD release is a documentary film about the process of staging pro-filmic elements for a future film. Under this interpretation, even the theatrical audience is inside a studio, as they witness the making of a film. One could also embrace a metaphorical interpretation of the DVD film, claiming that film is theatre, that is to say, that film in general is an atypical theatre. I would also like to stress the fact that in diegesis 2 the actors can be conceptualized as performed roles, i.e. unknown actors play the actors represented on the detached display of diegesis 1 in the theatrical hall. In other words, the actors that we see in the DVD film can be fictional roles, a make-believe act. This is a case of a staged installation, where both the audience and the actors are fictional entities. This option is not possible in the theatrical grounded cognition, since the body of a member of the audience does not have the reality status of a fictional being. In this interpretation, diegesis 2 incorporates both diegesis 1 and its detached display that comprises the audience, the actors and the setting.

Media Entanglement

Using an analogy as another turn of the screw, we propose to conceive of this kind of relationship established between two media and two alternative conceptions as one of entanglement between two separate imaginary worlds, called here for the sake of example diegesis 1 and diegesis 2.[13] Diegesis is an imaginary world

13 As a note of caution to the reader: it is not hypothesized here that physical mechanisms described by principles such as the uncertainty principle, dual or complementary description

apprehended specifically as a grounded conceptualization. The difference lies in the grounding, not in the imaginary features of the virtual world depicted. One definition of entanglement stipulates that we can know everything that is possible to know about a physical system composed of two subsystems and still not know all that there is to know about the individual subsystems (Susskind 2014). In other words, if an observer measures either of them, he will get random results. But, since there is a correlation between the two subsystems, if an observer makes a measurement (an experience by observation) on one, he can therefore know what the correlated state of the other is. Diegesis 1 is in a superposition of states and, until an observer experiences it, there is no collapse towards one or another subsystem. On the other hand, the two media subsystems – diegesis 1 and diegesis 2 – are correlated, since observing one entails a correlated state of the other. Diegesis 1 can be thought in terms of any of the two states or labels (the medium of theatre or the medium of film), but once the observer decides for one alternative, the whole system that contains the pair of media subsystems, i.e. theatre performance and DVD release, coheres to a definite state in which one is dominant (master) and the other is subservient (slave). In this thought experiment, features of the subordinate media are tuned in the sense of losing their specific intensity; they are inhibited and have less granularity and intensity. Put differently, each local subsystem, diegesis 1 and diegesis 2, is in a superposition of states (T/F), but if the observer measures one, he knows with certainty the state the other is in. The procedure can also be inversely correlated. Knowing, for example, that the DVD is considered a film, automatically entails that the live performance is considered theatre (and this is valid the other way round as well). If one observer considers the play performance to be a kind of film (an atypical film), he will immediately know that the DVD release is a kind of atypical theatre.

The same correlation between two media occurs in the theatrical hall and in front of the cinema screen. Nevertheless, the superordinate category, the hypertheatre, is a system that incorporates a correlation between two non-local subsystems. The correlation defines a sharp distinction between the two subsystems and the two, alternate media. Hypetheatre is defined by this kind of entangled relationship, regardless of the particular kind of detached display contained by each separate subsystem or artifact. One cannot say if hypertheatre is theatre or film – even if it is based on the definition of the two media –, all that

or entanglement are ontological realities of the media, but that these concepts can be used in order to explain the subjective conceptualization of reality and thus of media. In other words, observers make a classical mental simulation of a quantum mechanical view of reality.

can be stated is that it is an artifact which can be experienced as a conceptual trajectory that moves back and forth between two conceptualizations. Placed in an essentialist framework, hypertheatre does not have a definite status because it has included both of the above-mentioned possibilities in a paradoxical dynamic sequence. In order to have a complete description of this kind of work of art, we have to take into account both modes of existence of the object, since the specificity of hypertheatre rests on not being either of them, but being the construal of an ambiguous conceptual trajectory and consequently oscillating between them. Like in the case of the well-known duck/rabbit ambiguous figure, the conceptual description of hypertheatre has to take into account its defining indecision. The non-local artifact cannot be entirely experienced in a single perceptual dimension since, by definition, one subsystem is always non-local and accessed through memory processing, as a perceptual background. (We can represent this non-local medium with a diagram, as in Fig. 8.)

Conclusion

Apart from the automatisms defended by Rodowick, which can be seen as particular *simulations* (Barsalou 1999; 2003) evoked by audiovisual cues, we can assert that the dispute between T and F is constituted by the relationship of the particular body of the observer and the diegesis. Two situations are conceivable and two cognitive models are used by the observer. We start from the assumption that the observer is aware or has in its subjective area of consciousness the detached display. In the theatrical mode, the observer's focus of attention can freely explore the diegesis. The detached display, the stage in the case of theatre (T), is fused with the diegesis. The observer's side of awareness of its own body is in the side of theatrical diegesis.[14] All obstacles in the observer's field of sight are considered to be inside the diegesis and situated within the reaching distance of the body, e.g. the observer can step into the diegesis and has the subconscious feeling that actors can touch him at any given time. The embodiment is translated as the projection of one's own body into the diegesis, on the scene. This is a mental frame and can be applied also to film discourse when the observer has an immersed experience of the diegesis.[15] The theatrical detached display – actors,

14 This stance allows the existence of individual and collective initiation rituals (carnival, festive ceremonials).

15 Richard Schechner (2002; 2003), discussing the case of performance, draws a continuum that has at one pole the ritual, where the participant – as a fusion of spectator/actor – undergoes a change of ontological status, and at the opposite pole, the case where the spectator is situated at

audience and setting – is part of the diegesis.[16] The embodied detached display is the diegetic here and now, and it is intra-diegetic. In this sense, performances are primarily conceived by the observer as instances of reality, and, in order to be ascribed a fictional status, the use of additional cues and a supplementary mental frame is in order. Diegesis 1 is first and foremost a felt reality experience.

On the other hand, the filmic cognitive model presupposes that the display creates obstacles for the viewer situated outside the frame. That which is not visible and not graspable is off frame. The awareness area is disembodied in the sense that the focalization of the audience is not free, but guided, and the display is a screen that mediates between the observer's body – here and now – and the diegesis – there and then. In this sense, the detached display is extra-diegetic. The two sides are separated. As filmic observers of a situation, the audience can always entertain two deictic vantage points with respect to a given scene (Sweetser 2008). They can adopt an intra-diegetic vantage point or an extra-diegetic one.[17] However, the prototypical cinematic cognitive model presupposes that the observer grounds the detached display into his/her immediate awareness area, leaving the diegetic world in the background of awareness. In our view, this kind of conceptual tuning is what defines the cinematic mode of apprehension. Diegesis 2 is first and foremost a virtual one and film has to use additional cues in order to create the felt impression of a documentary. We can also remark that this frame of mind or top-down schema can be applied either to theatre or to film displays. It is a mode of apprehension. Cues that indicate one media (T or F) in a bottom-up fashion can be overwritten by this top-down schema. For example, cinematographic screens in Castellucci's theatre are still considered to be part of theatre. Ambiguous cues inside 3D audio-visual simulations are still considered by the observer as film and not theatre instantiations.

In *What Cinema Is! Bazin's Quest and its Charge* (2010) Dudley Andrew considers the Real and holds that the cinematic screen creates "interior interfaces that multiply states" (2010, 77). Detached displays within other detached displays "suffuse the screen with material belonging to a different level of 'reality' altogether" (Dudley, 2010, 78–79). In his view, the cinematic screen is

a distance of non-involvement as it happens in the case of shows and entertaining performances.

16 It must be pointed out that those distinctions are independent of the considerations of a documentary or fictional mode of apprehension. Understood in a documentary mode, performances imply a change of status of the participant (rituals), and read in the fictional mode, the same performances do not imply such a change.

17 Film has this dual constant vantage point as an immanent feature. Framing is an instance of the intra-diegetic display and editing is an instance of the extra-diegetic display. The two clear cut instances represent discrete opposite sides of a conceptual continuum.

a threshold that reveals "another level of 'reality' beyond" (2010, 80) through which we pass towards what the "screen does and does not hold" (2010, 85). As a concluding remark, I will quote once again from Dudley Andrew, "the screen, then, is a threshold through which the viewer (the view-finder) passes on the way to visual experience. The threshold adds a third dimension to the frame, taken either as depth or as time" (2010, 84). The threshold is a manner of conceptualizing the reality simulated by the observer and is dependent upon the space/diegesis conceived. The threshold allows two heterogeneous spaces to communicate – one on the side of the observer's body and one on the side of the fictional world depicted – "stand[ing] in permanent relation to the spaces that lie on its either side" (Dudley, 2010, 85).

Hypertheatre posits a fluid function of non-collapsed states: theatre and film, a coherent Schrödinger's type of wave function. If the observer chooses to assign elsewhere either theatrical or filmic status to the present stimuli and experience, by correlation, a counter-status will be instantiated and the conceptualization will occur as a dynamic decoherence. Consequently, the temporality and dynamicity of conceptualization are contained as an emergent feature necessary for the apprehension of a static superposition of states/possibilities. The medium presupposes a conception of reality based on automatisms. The medium practiced by Scheib is therefore of a new kind and involves an entangled situation as its main distinctive feature or automatism. This constructional pattern initiates a new schema and category. Hypertheatre is a new medium; it is a twofold system containing a dynamic relation of conceptualization between two subservient media categories.[18] As a final remark, keeping within the cognitive semantics framework, we can claim that new conceptual constructions can generate new media.

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18 In order to have a more detailed image of this construct, we can imagine a box containing a folded spring that has a blue and a red end. In order to find out what the box contains, we open it and the spring unfolds sometimes with the blue end towards us sometimes with the red one. Another example would be Schrödinger's box that contains a living/dead cat.

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Figure 2. *This Place is a Desert*. The frame composition is structured in the cinematic depth of the field (like in the films of Antonioni, Welles).

Figure 3. *This Place is a Desert*. Frame composition that replays *Timecode* (Mike Figgis, 2000).

Figure 4. *This Place is a Desert*. In the right quadrant of the image, the cinematic observer can see the mirror reflection of the director embedded in the theatrical diegesis and hand-holding a digital camera that feeds the cinematic image.

Figure 5. *This Place is a Desert*. The theatrical audience is part of the cinematic diegesis.

Figure 6. *World of Wires*. In the right quadrant of the image, we can see an image projected on a screen in the theatrical hall but recorded from a vantage point situated in the rear end of the theatrical scene. On the left side of the image, the screen is destroyed by the actors.

Figure 7. *World of Wires*. On the silkscreen, in the theatrical hall, there is an image, recorded from behind the scene, of a character who destroys the screen upon which his image is projected.

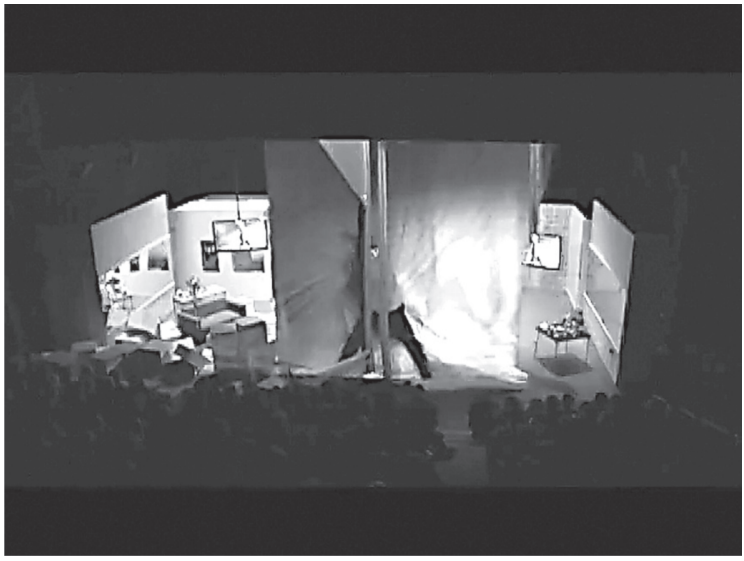
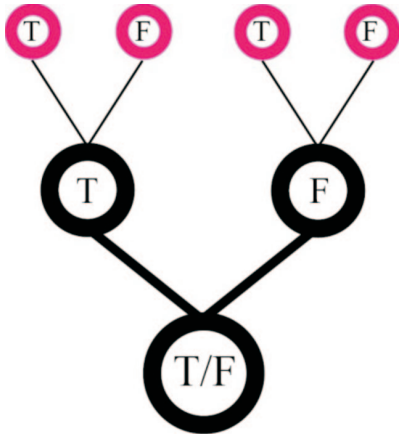


Figure 8. Diagram representing the relations between theatre (T) and film (F).



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The Intermedial and the Transmedial across Samuel Beckett's Artistic Practices

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Abstract. The essay offers a brief overview of famous Irish playwright Samuel Beckett's intermedial practices. By exploring a number of artistic media (drama, theatre, novel, television play, film) the artist tried to get at the essentials of each medium by virtue of his minimalist and media-conscious aesthetics. As a result of this gesture he uncovered certain transmedial properties such as musical rhythm and structure, montage, black and white film and photography aesthetics and tenebrism situated at the core of supposed media-specificity. Moreover, it is argued that Beckettian intermediality has a pronounced meta-referential dimension as defined by Werner Wolf. Most, if not all, of Beckett's artworks include a medial self-reference of sorts such as the comment on the disembodiment of speech in radio plays or on the formative powers of lighting in theatre and film. What they also do is make the spectator aware of the fact of mediation and of what it entails. Therefore, the essay ultimately aims to show the immense significance of Beckett to intermediality studies not simply as an artist and a case study but as a media and intermediality theorist as well.

Keywords: intermediality, transmediality, meta-reference, medial self-reflexivity, Samuel Beckett.

Samuel Beckett's works are essentially and profoundly intermedial. Not only do they belong to various media (theatre plays, radio plays, television plays, novels, and a film) or incorporate various media (i.e. are multi-media artworks) but they also exemplify the deep form of intermediality: they adapt the established techniques of one medium to the context of another medium. In doing so, they address the very nature of mediation and intermediality. According to intermediality theorist Jürgen Müller, "a medial product becomes intermedial, when it transfers the multi-medial togetherness (*Nebeneinander*) of medial citations and elements to a conceptional cooperation (*Miteinander*)" (1996, 83). This transcendent medial gesture is precisely what takes place in

Beckett's artistic practices and in this essay I will try to shed some light on just how that happens.

Beckett adapted various techniques and properties of music, painting, and photography in his theatre pieces not in a sense of mere intermedial quotation or reference but in a sense of a true conversion of a specific technique of one medium to another medium. In the words of Beckett's biographer James Knowlson, "Beckett showed, throughout his career, an exceptional ability (and a readiness) to transfer ideas and techniques from one medium to another, ostensibly quite different one, rethinking them, sometimes very radically, to test and stretch the boundaries of the new medium" (Haynes and Knowlson 2003, 126). Thus, the reflexive nature of Beckett's intermediality may also be understood as the reflexivity inherent in his very art and aesthetics; the artist experimented with the limits of each medium he worked with, implicitly redefining their relationships in his artworks.

This tendency to stretch the boundaries of the medium in question resulted in the fact that Beckett's works are not only self-referential but meta-referential as well in that they address the problems of the very medium they exemplify. This is clearly observable in Beckett's radio plays. For instance, *Words and Music*'s dramatic conflict arises between the disembodied words and music, both vocal and sound properties freed from any embodiment, from any containment, which, consequently, refers to the very medium of radio and how it fragments the body and decenters the subject. Correspondingly, in theatre and television lighting plays a key role and is likewise able to fragment the body (as in *Not I, That Time, What Where* among others). Or, in an even more complex manner, lighting is able to correlate with the light of perception, of which examples are abundant throughout Beckett's theatre and television plays, but is especially clear in *Play*, which comments on the medium's dependence on light and its formative powers. The three characters are sitting inside separate urns; only their heads are visible. They are able to speak and continue their stories when the beam of light falls on them. The light continues to wander from one character to another and, therefore, their stories get periodically interrupted. Illumination in this case means being perceptible, emerging out of the darkness of invisibility and non-being. It, too, entails a becoming conscious of one's being perceived and a situation of being forced to perform for the spectator. These implications of such a bodily fragmentation address the cinematic medium as well, and in this specific sense one can even say that Beckettian theatre is cinematic.

Literary scholar Angela Moorjani observes along similar lines that "[t]he resistance to the light and to the camera-eye that the protagonists of *Play* and

Film display serves to interrogate the power of the spectators' gaze as structured through the technology of each medium" (Moorjani 2008, 125). *Film* (1964) is the only film Beckett ever made, and much like *Play*, indeed, it deals with perceiving, being perceived and being mediated. The film's protagonist O (standing for object), played by the famous Buster Keaton, tries to escape any kind of perception. First he tries to hide from the perception of the people on the street, then from the other animate creatures in his room (a cat and a dog) and, finally, even from being perceived by such inanimate objects as the painting on the wall. Yet, ultimately, he cannot escape self-perception and in the end he comes face to face with himself – an encounter that becomes the source of immense horror. O cannot escape the spectators' perception either and thus by simply viewing the film one becomes O's torturer. Being mediated by someone's – including one's own – perception is shown to be an essential and terrifying quality of existence. The inescapable mediation and subject structuring in these and many other instances is brought into attention thematically as well as stylistically, which encourages the spectators to become self-aware and self-observant: the spectacle becomes self-conscious; our relationship to media becomes the central focus of perception. This phenomenon is known in the academic discourse of intermediality as meta-referentiality.

Meta-reference is an important concept in intermediality studies. Intermediality theorist Werner Wolf describes the term by emphasizing its theoretical potential: "metareferentiality can be said to denote all kinds of references to, or comments on, aspects of a medial artefact, a medium or the media in general that issue from a logically higher 'meta-level' within a given artefact and elicits corresponding self-referential reflections in the recipient" (Wolf 2009, v). "'Metaization,' correspondingly, is the movement from a first cognitive, referential or communicative level to a higher one on which first level phenomena self-reflexively become objects of reflection, reference and communication in their own right." (Wolf 2011, iv–vi.) Meta-reference encompasses both hetero- and self-reference. Thus, this concept describes the ability of artworks to comment on their own or other media and argues that artistic practices can be theoretical as well as reflexive. For instance, in *Film* one witnesses the metaization of film perception; the film perceives and is perceived by itself, as it were. Beckett is a meta-referential artist *par exellence*, commenting not only on the media of theatre, film, radio, but most importantly on language, and perception itself. As Beckett succinctly put it himself, he was "an analyzer. [He took] away all the accidentals because [he wanted] to come down to the bedrock of the essentials, the archetypal" (quoted in Knowlson and Knowlson 2006, 47).

Therefore, there appears to be a high degree of minimalism in every type of media artwork of Beckett. They are all analysed and reduced to their bare essentials. This is the well-known principle of Michelangelo, whose art Beckett admired. Michelangelo believed that the stone itself already had its form and shape locked within it and the work of the sculptor was to set that form free; from this perspective, the artist is seen not as a multiplier but as a subtractor, an unveiler.

However, Beckett's meta-referential capacity is not limited to the distillation of a media essence such as disembodied sound in radio or the creative force of light in theatre and film. Another significant gesture is to uncover the transmediality of certain presumably media-specific techniques. One of such techniques creatively employed by Beckett was the Eisensteinian theory of montage (film editing): "[s]everal of Beckett's other plays use the principle of inter-cutting (either auditory or visual or a mixture of both) in a variety of ways. The most striking of these is *That Time*, which inter-cuts three different voice tracks relating to different periods in the life history of the protagonist. Again, within the three stories, different moments from the character's past are edited so as to balance or contrast one with another" (Haynes and Knowlson 2003, 120). The principle of montage thus not only helps to create a contrast between separate scenes, actions, or memories but also creates a link between them; it turns into a way of creating connections between different sonic images, i.e. sounds that imply images. Other outstanding examples thereof are the audiotape recordings that punctuate the rhythm of *Krapp's Last Tape* or the returning cut-up sonic images of *Not I*. The juxtaposition is meant to perceptually reconnect the images so that a different whole would be grasped. The meaning effect is this way created not only by what is explicitly told and does not purely reside in the stories that the characters cannot stop reciting. The meaning is lodged in what is cut out, omitted, deemed insignificant as well as in the very junctures and the acts of splicing together these memory shards.

Due to Beckett's treatment of montage, this becomes not only the cinematic technique of combining filmic images but the theatrical technique of combining sonic and memory images; it turns into the main means of constructing the theatrical character as a subject, signifying his or her experience in a subjective way – a theatrical equivalent of internal focalization in film. For example, in *That Time* the inter-cutting between the three voices from the protagonist's different stages of life (a young boy, a young man, and an old man) creates more than just a contrast between these stages. The same recurring memories and symbols reappear throughout these different ages and, as the play progresses, the different voices lose their distinction and start to merge. The protagonist's identity comes

to be constituted as rhizomatic, as a branching bundle of roots curled around a few central nuclei. Here, montage reveals the change of identity through time as well as the timeless elements that resist that change.

Beckett's fascination with Sergei Eisenstein's theories relates to the latter's similar synaesthetic conception of art. The Russian theorist differentiated between "'metric montage' (an editing pattern based on the number of frames per shot), 'rhythmic montage' (maintaining continuity between shots), 'tonal montage' (creating an emotional effect on the part of the spectator), 'overtonal montage' (a combination of metric, rhythmic and tonal effects), and intellectual montage (soliciting an intellectual response from the spectator)" (Chapman 2013, 37). He saw some basic properties that were common to various art forms; hence the musical vocabulary. Correspondingly, Beckett understood his theatrical works in terms of musical compositions, which was not simply a metaphorical rendering of the pieces but their main structural feature. For example, to *Happy Days* the dramatist referred to as a "sonata for voice and movement" (Whitelaw 1996, 151); he indicated that *Footfalls* should "have a quality of a lullaby" (Whitelaw 1996, 151); and Beckett structured his play *Play* as a canon[1] (Whitelaw 1996, 174). Also, "[w]hile Beckett was directing *Footfalls* at the Royal Court Theatre in London, he said to Rose Hill, who was playing the part of Mother: 'We are not doing this play realistically or psychologically, we are doing it musically.' This remark could be applied to all his productions. They were dominated by an idea that he had expressed in the early 1960s when he said: 'producers [i.e. directors – J. K.] don't seem to have any sense of form in movement, the kind of form one finds in music, for instance, where themes keep recurring. When, in a text, actions are repeated, they ought to be made unusual the first time, so that when they happen again – in exactly the same way – an audience will recognise them from before'" (Haynes and Knowlson 2003, 128). The essential dramatic conflict is inherent in music just like it is an essential feature of theatre or narrative in general. In a sonata, theme A is juxtaposed to theme B, and then the themes are repeated, developed, and synthesized. The musical structure is itself dramatic and Beckett recognized this as a common feature of these different media and forms of artistic expression.

The impact of the musical structures was not supposed to be perceived entirely consciously since, after all, the quality of a lullaby is not the same thing as a lullaby. Rather, such musical structuring was supposed to affect the mind on a

1 Canon is the strictest version of the contrapuntal technique where one voice or melody has to follow and strictly imitate the quantity and quality of the previous interval.

different, unconscious level, thus providing a deeper, multi-layered sensory and mental experience: "[w]hat is clear is that the author-director was deliberately adopting repeated patterns of moves, actions, gestures and sounds so that they would gradually infiltrate themselves into the unconscious of the spectator. Indeed, he [Beckett] described the process as being like 'the effect of those recurring images inserted into films for propaganda purposes which penetrate the subconscious by repetition'" (Haynes and Knowlson 2003, 137). This way, the spectator (even without consciously realizing) would experience the play musically and the experience would gain yet another, intermedial dimension. In his use of musical principles, Beckett wanted to affect both the conscious and the unconscious levels of perception of his spectators and aimed for the highest intensity of perception possible: subconscious and meta-reflexive.

One may ask how a subconscious phenomenon might lead to meta-reflexivity, which is by definition reflexive and, therefore, conscious. The rhythms present in movements, gestures, language and memory refrains, etc. unconsciously ingrain themselves in the minds of the spectators, and in doing so they make one conscious of the rhythmical nature of existence as well as the rhythms of the medium that refract that existence. For instance, *Play*'s characters are stuck in a rut of their own personal melodrama – the inability of getting out of this situation is precisely signified by the repetitious rhythmicality of their performances. But the rhythmic alteration between illumination and darkness, too, brings to attention the power of theatre, film and television to make someone or something perceivable and to do so *ad infinitum*, irrespective of content – mediation itself is rhythmical.

Moreover, the dramatist's synaesthetic aim extended even further as he wrote to his friend Axel Kaun as early as 1937 that it should be possible to reduce "the terrible materiality of the word surface... like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh symphony [to – J. K.] a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies all" (quoted in Haynes and Knowlson 2003, 145). In other words, theatre – just like certain exceptional pieces of music – should be able to signify the lack that hides behind any act of signification and thus momentarily break the chain of significations, exposing the holes of the symbolic structure through which the primordial darkness and chaos is seeping through. This ability is not limited to music but it has found its purest expression in this medium due to its close relationship to affect and to pure intensity. That is to say, music is able to radiate the intensity of signification without actually signifying anything. Beckett tried to adapt this ability in the form of certain subtle structural features such as montage and musical structures to another medium this way

implying that such is the aim of all art: to give shape to the formless and by this very act to expose the formlessness of all form. For Beckett, this aim at "that silence that underlies all" is, in fact, a transmedial quality uniting all artistic media.

As mentioned earlier, meta-reflexivity involves recognizing a theoretical potential inherent in certain works of art. Here one is bound to wonder as to what kind of arguments are implicit in Beckett's practices. Even though Eisensteinian theory of montage has made an impact on Beckett's practices,[2] Beckett's approach to film and to a certain degree theatre (both stage and television plays) is largely Arnheimian in that there are certain undeniable aesthetic correspondences between these two thinkers. In everything Beckett did he preferred the minimalist black and white aesthetics, which, as it happens, corresponds to Rudolf Arnheim's idea of cinema as art. Literary critic Matthijs Engelberts even sees Beckett's *Film* as a direct response to the 1930s film theory debate in which Arnheim was one of the main participants defending the independent artistic value of silent black and white films: "[i]t is therefore self-evident for Beckett that *Film* would be made in black and white; by the same token, it is beyond a doubt for Arnheim that color threatens the artistic character of cinema as much as sound does: 'What will the color film have to offer when it reaches technical perfection? We know what we shall lose artistically by abandoning the black-and-white film. Will color ever allow us to achieve a similar compositional precision, a similar independence of 'reality'? Beckett's *Film* constitutes a response, silent of course, to this rhetorical question of the 1930s" (2008, 156). Significantly, the film is not simply silent but it *chooses* to be silent in an era of the talkies, the sound films, which adds a whole new level of meaning to this aesthetic choice. In the words of the great existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, "[s]ilence itself is defined in relationship to words, as the pause in music receives its meaning from the group of notes around it. This silence is a moment of language; being silent is not being dumb; it is to refuse to speak, and therefore to keep on speaking" (1967, 14). The silence of Beckett's film's is, likewise, a moment of meta-referential language; it keeps on speaking about the film medium with its silence.

Even more interesting from an intermedial perspective is that Arnheim's ideas on photography are truly resonant with Beckett's practice and treatment of theatre and film. A still photograph in a context of moving images is an established and explored intermedial configuration. But Beckett offers a much more unorthodox configuration by uniting theatre and still photography. In a piece on a still

2 Beckett even wished at a certain point in his career to study with Eisenstein and wrote a motivational letter to the Russian film-maker.

photograph inserted in a movie Arnheim once wrote: "a still photograph inserted in the middle of a moving film gives a very curious sensation; chiefly because the speed with which time is passing in the moving shots is carried over to the still picture, whose effect therefore is similar to that produced by holding one expression for an uncomfortably long time. And just as the time is carried over, so the rigidity is, as it were felt as movement, that is suspension of movement" (1933, 110). The juxtaposition here is not so much between the material film stock and a piece of photograph but between the principles of the image with movement and the image without movement – not just the stillness of the image. Nowhere is the use of this technique as powerful as in *Krapp's Last Tape* when Krapp freezes while listening to the recordings of his previous selves and the whole scenic image turns into a still photograph inserted into a stage play. Because this theatrical freeze-frame is not narratively motivated, the effect is the suspension of movement and the result is the image without movement. This morphing of movement into the suspension of movement produces an alienating effect in the theatre image and shifts its temporality away from the immediacy of the present. Just like a still photograph inserted in a film (e.g. the last shot in Francois Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* [1959]) it gives way for the opening of a deeper dimension of reality. The narrative development is suddenly interrupted; an individual moment is extracted from the chain of events and made to turn inwards, to reflect back upon itself. This function of freezing movement is reminiscent of the significance an aria has in an opera; an aria stops the narrative development otherwise carried by recitative and expresses the innermost affects of the character. One is forced to encounter the depth of a moment, instead of focusing on what happens next. Music scholar John Butt goes so far as to suggest that aria, in contrast to recitative, introduces the subjective presence of time into a given opera: "[w]hile the recitative mode comes close to 'everyday' time consciousness in its flow of time seemingly pegged to the objective passing of time (conforming to the traditional 'unity' of time), the aria focuses more specifically on the phenomenon of time consciousness" (2010, 130). The combination of these two different, one objective, the other subjective, temporalities is another transmedial quality that opera and Beckett's combination of theatrical/cinematic and photographic principles share.

To create the visual effect of the photographic dimension, when staging *Krapp's Last Tape* Beckett took special care in making sure that every object on the stage was either black or white. This not only strengthened the Gnostic and Manichean themes of the play but also exemplified the black and white film and photography

aesthetics. The instructions Beckett gave were blatantly clear: "[w]ith regard to costume it should be sufficiently clear from text (don't be afraid of exaggerating with boots). Black and white (both dirty), the whole piece being built up in one sense on this simple antithesis of which you will find echoes throughout the text (black ball, white nurse, black pram, Bianca, Kedar – anagram of 'dark' – Street, black storm, light of understanding, etc.) Black dictionary if you can and ledger. Similarly black and white set" (quoted in Harmon 1998, 60). Beckett's television play aesthetics also draws on the same conception of Arnheimian utilization of absence; Beckett demanded that the plays should be filmed in black and white because the dramatic effect of the plays depended on the contrast of these colours. In a visually minimalist masterpiece *Ghost Trio* (German SDR 1977 version, directed by Beckett) the playwright and now director of his own work went even further since the television play seems to be mostly played out in shades of grey – black and white being reduced to a single colour. The point of this experiment is to achieve maximum intensity with minimum extensity.

Thus, there is a profound correspondence between Arnheim's thoughts on cinema, i.e. his preference for black and white film aesthetics, and Beckett's own aesthetic vision. Arnheim conjectured that "the reduction of actual colour values to a one-dimensional grey series (ranging from pure white to dead black) is a welcome divergence from nature that renders possible the making of decorative pictures rich in intellectual significance by means of light and shade" (1933, 102–103). This "intellectual significance" was what mattered most to Beckett since it adds to the exclusively contemplative nature of the dramatist's oeuvre. These artworks do not obliterate language or thought; they just simply free them from the schematic automaton that every discourse cannot but eventually become and the *habitus* of thought and perception that it engenders. In order to achieve that, a divergence from the realism that natural colour brings with it is necessary. Therefore, black and white images pervade the dramatist's theatre, film, and television pieces as a transmedial property, exemplifying the usefulness of absence. Again, minimalism is the key as the artist subtracts, not multiplies phenomena; because in order to create a conflict one does not need much more than the contrast between black and white.

In addition to the aforementioned media, painting had a major influence and was remediated in Beckett's works in a number of ways as well. Of high significance are the 16th- and 17th-century painting techniques of *chiaroscuro* and tenebrism. The latter was an exaggerated version of *chiaroscuro* – a painting technique that concentrates on the contrast between light and darkness, where

religious scenes in particular were illuminated by an unnatural mysterious light source, often signifying God. Perhaps the most mystifying feature of this technique is its ability to convey a sense that the painted object is illuminated from within and is not lit by any outside light source. "Tenebrism is a Baroque style of painting in which the contrast of darkness and light introduces an element of mystery, ambiguity, and understatement, lending a dynamic quality to the light and bringing an element of drama and pathos." (Hortolà 2015, 37.) In tenebrism, more so than in *chiaroscuro*, what matters most is not the individual colours but the contrast between light and shadow. The exemplary tenebrism of Caravaggio emphasizes and brings to the foreground certain bodily features, dramatizes them to a remarkable effect and makes the body itself the locus of drama.

These techniques were reinterpreted in the dramatist's theatre, television and film pieces. Literary critic Enoch Brater also observes this correspondence: "[i]n the visual arts, too, Beckett was drawn to the precision of a Caravaggio, with his seamless control over light on canvas when less did not seem possible" (2007, 178). For example, the *chiaroscuro* and tenebrist principle may be observed in the performance of *Play*. When staging the performance, Beckett demanded that the urns in which the characters were supposed to sit be illuminated by a single source of light and everything else should remain in pitch-black darkness. Another remarkable instance thereof is the staging of *Not I*, in which the illumination is limited to a single bodily organ – a mouth. Even the exit signs – a constant defamiliarizing light presence in every theatre performance – are supposed to be switched off. Indeed, less does not seem possible. If one compares Beckettian illumination to the treatment of body in Caravaggio, one must conclude that Beckett presents an extreme version of tenebrism; by reducing illumination to the very minimum, he achieves the maximum of dramatic emphasis. Tenebrism is this way conceptually united with black and white film and photography aesthetics, and functions as yet another transmedial property in Beckett's art.

To conclude this all too brief overview, Beckett worked with a number of artistic media and in doing so he achieved a conceptual cooperation of the media he brought together. He reduced each medium to its essentials such as the interplay between light and dark, movement and stillness or the meaningful (not only structural) use of rhythm. He was able to adapt various aesthetic properties from one medium to another, thus showing the universality of certain artistic techniques and principles. Therefore, Beckett exhibited not only intermediality but was able to expose the transmediality at the very core of intermediality in his artistic practices. Beckett's intermedial practices, too, include a meta-referential

dimension since they examine the nature and the limits of media and make the spectator aware of the event of mediation.

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Paul Leni's *Waxworks*: Writing Images from Silence, through Media and Philosophy

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Abstract. The so-called German Weimar Cinema encompasses a profusion of films that used frame narratives. In the case of Paul Leni's *Waxworks* (*Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*, 1924), as the framing stems from a literary act (the stories are framed by the act of narration), the film proposes the *mise-en-abyme* technique as a sort of immersion into the intermedial when it deals with notions like speaking, writing, silence, image and cinema. In the case of silent cinema, and especially in *Waxworks*, the presence of a perverse relation with the medium of writing becomes noticeable (producing a *fantasy of writing*), since every effort to represent the literary act on film results in an infinite production of silent images, creating a parody effect and even postulating an act of aggression against writing. This confrontational relation between the writing code and the code of the mute image in silent cinema allows us to suggest that there is an inherent inflexibility in the language of silent cinema which does not allow the coexistence of written and spoken word as complementary codes. On the contrary, in silent cinema, the image and the silence of the film seem to work *against* the word, the spoken word being set forth against silence, and the written word against images.

Keywords: Paul Leni, *Waxworks*, German expressionism, Derrida, silence, writing, intermediality.

In a frame story, texts are layered inside other texts by means of narration and sub-narration procedures. A narrating voice delegates narration to another narrating voice, usually within its own diegesis, turning the narrative into an iterative process along which the spectator must elaborate a deeper reading of those delegation instances so that the formal scales of content may be understood. The most famous example of using a frame story is the *Arabian Nights*, or *One Thousand and One Nights*, in which an omniscient narrator relates the tale of Sheherazade, who, by virtue of the plot itself, must tell myriad other tales ("one thousand and one") and assumes a second narrating voice as a character herself.

The tales told by Sheherazade also include moments in which the characters go on to tell their own tales, either by means of simple dialogue (which are always delegated narrations) or actual embedded narratives. In this case, we may then perceive three degrees of narration interspersed with one another and, as we are dealing with literature in this particular case, they are all duly verbalized and replace each other's narrative making use of the linguistic code.

There are traces of frame stories in different kinds of cinema, when one particular representation mode gets inserted within the overall mode of representation of the movie. Such is the case, for instance, of *Children of Paradise* (*Les enfants du paradis*, Marcel Carné, 1945); we come across, throughout the movie, different modes of *mise-en-abyme*, in which one representation takes place within another. In this particular case, it is a theatrical representation that takes place within the cinematographic representation. We can consider the sum of all representational devices in film a *mega-narrator*. According to André Gaudreault, this is an instance that comprises all the narrative attributes of sound, image and montage in a film. Nevertheless, the theatre play in *Children of Paradise* is not delegated in the technical sense as the play technically does not narrate but *shows*. Gaudreault and Jost (2005) specifically distinguish the phenomena of showing and narrating as two different models of representation. Showing, in this case, which also belongs in cinema (however, tied to a narration operated by filmic instances), is self-narrated (or shown by an instrument of showing operating on photogram – not on shot – level). It can do without an organizing instance. It would be pure representation; immediate mimesis.

In a silent movie such as *Waxworks* (*Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*, Paul Leni, 1924), however, the *mise-en-abyme* happens within a process of narrative delegation, and comprising not only instances of filmed theatre. Not being specific at any level of silent movies, this can happen, of course, in the case of spoken movies as well –, such as, famously, *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1940). However, we are interested in focusing on this aspect of *Waxworks* as it is decisive for the establishment of a relationship between words and silence in the movie itself. First of all, though, it is befitting to layout some context regarding the time and conditions under which the movie was produced, as well as the movie that inspired it, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene, 1919).

Waxworks was produced in 1924, at the height of the German silent movie industry, which, at that point, consolidated a productivity that encompassed both the internal market (with genre movies, more to the taste of the population)

and the external market (with famous super-productions such as *Metropolis* [Fritz Lang, 1927], *Die Nibelungen: Siegfried* [Fritz Lang, 1924] and *Faust* [*Faust – Eine Deutsche Volkssage*, F. W. Murnau, 1926], intended as competition with Hollywood). This industry catapulted its own star system to the highest popularity, especially artists from the two largest companies, UFA and Emelka. *Waxworks* was released by Neptune but distributed by the giant UFA, known for mixing up the concepts of art house with popular movie, going for a quintessential and refined quality but also for box office success. This concept of art house movie (or *autorenfilm*, "author cinema") ended up being historically associated to that of German expressionism, which, in its initial form, did not keep after 1922, giving way to other genres such as *kammerspiel*, a type of everyman cinema geared toward the working classes that became the main audience in Germany in the 1920s. A more properly encompassing scenario would range from *The Student of Prague* (*Der Student von Prag*, Stellan Rye, 1913) to *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (*Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, Walter Ruttmann, 1927) under the umbrella of Weimar cinema (Elsaesser 2000), referring to the Republic that followed Wilhelmine Germany and preceded the rise of the Nazi regime. The term expressionism, however, is important here as *Waxworks* may be considered one of the main Weimar movies that explicitly referenced this type of cinema. In this case, it is at once homage and parody.

Regarding expressionism,[1] we might rightfully think that narrative distortion was one of the specific features of this kind of cinema, beside moral distortion and degeneracy (madness, murder, suicide) as well as visual distortion (set deformation, radical photography effects, oblique montage). This narrative distortion might have seemed very odd to American audiences precisely because it did not create solid references in terms of the characters' characterization and motivation. In Weimar movies, murder, domination, subjugation and control stories frequently appeared with no visible motivation. Entire narrative sections went by without any hypotheses of plot background being created, without the chance for the viewer to create a link of predictability between themselves and the movie. Such are, for instance, the brutal and apparently mindless acts in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, which seem to transmute into one another as if the images were variations, without the logical effect of narratives. Those mesmerizing and controlling effects which appear in classics such as *Nosferatu* (*Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie des Grauens*, F.W. Murnau, 1922) and *Dr. Mabuse: the Gambler* (*Dr.*

1 For a broader debate about the readings on Weimar cinema, see Eisner (2008), Kracauer (2004), as well as the extensive review in Elsaesser (2000) and Garncarz (2004).

Mabuse, der Spieler, Fritz Lang, 1922) are ascribed in the films to the psyche or to technology. This generated several interpretations involving media theories, psychoanalysis, mass culture, etc. The lack of control over the characters' actions and the consequences of these are often embedded in the very narrative function of the movie, as is the case of the frame stories present in *The Student of Prague*, in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* as well as in *Destiny* (*Der müde Tod*, Fritz Lang, 1921) and, of course, in *Waxworks*.

However, according to an extensive analysis by Elsaesser (2000, 61–105), the frame story in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the original nature of which is revealed to us only by the end of the film, is more at the service of confounding the audience and adding sinister elements of dubious interpretation than actually framing the story, that is, placing it within clearer frames. As the movie starts, we see young Francis giving an account of the incredible adventure he lived while helping capture the malevolent Dr. Caligari and his sleepwalking assistant, the assassin Cesare. We see the whole story emerging as a flashback from Francis's memory (hence the frame) and, as it ends, we return to the initial narrative and find out that Francis is in an asylum. The physiognomy he was associating to Caligari is actually that of his doctor. *Waxworks* is a clear parody of *Caligari*; the connection between the two is signaled not only by the former's title, which, too, contains the word cabinet (in its original German: *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*), but there is also the presence of a frame story that serves multiple purposes, one of which being the combination of fiction within fiction, drawing attention to the very act of telling stories ("narrating"). This movie has also been inspired by the hit *Destiny*, which, also set within a frame, tells the story of a woman who seeks out Death itself in an attempt to bring her husband back to life. Death, then, challenges her to save three people who are perishing in different times and places before rewarding her with the resurrection of her husband. With the woman's story as the frame, the movie goes on narrating her three challenges, returning, of course, to the perspective of the frame by the end of the film.

The frame in *Waxworks*, similar to that in *Destiny* (as it also contains three other stories) arises from a literary act, and therein lies the focus of our interest. As the movie begins, we are at a circus and we witness the arrival of a writer to a tent with in which wax statues stand [Fig. 1]. He has answered an ad looking for a talented person to write a publicity piece for the business. The writer (William Dieterle), whose name we never learn, arrives at the tent, a sinister and suffocating setting, and, at once, meets the owner, a disheveled *Caligariesque* character, and his beautiful daughter, with whom he flirts briefly [Fig. 2]. The owner shows him

some of his wax figures and offers him the opportunity of writing scary tales about them. The figures represent historical characters: Harun Al-Rashid (Emil Jannings, [Fig. 3.]), the famous caliph of Baghdad from the Middle Ages; the tyrannical Russian Czar Ivan the Terrible (Conrad Veidt, [Fig. 4.]); and Victorian psychopath Jack the Ripper (Werner Krauss, [Fig. 5]). The writer then goes on to produce a tale for each of the statues [Fig. 6.], and the filmic narration is in charge of translating these into images. Our first stop is the medieval Baghdad, where we witness how Harun Al-Rashid loses and arm, then we move on to Ivan's Russia and witness his atrocities. The ending, however, has a surprise in store for the audience.

As made evident, *Waxworks* imitates *Dr. Caligari* as it employs the same actors (that is, Veidt and Krauss – true celebrities at the time)[2] and a similar narrative structure. It is noteworthy how the present of the *writer* and the present of the *images* of the historical characters is treated. They are tied together in this narrative stroke that is the frame, yielding a strange structure of visualization of the literariness proposed by the movie, risking a replacement of the written discourse (which, by its own nature, already is the substitute of spoken discourse) with a visual/cinematographic discourse. The latter is not only silent, but also hallucinatory, deformative, grotesque, delirious in an expressionist fashion, with an exotic touch of orientalism. It is as if by mere replacement of writing with image, the voice originating from speech became murky, skewed and outcast from explicit rationality.

What catches our attention in this movie, in contrast with others that also employ frame stories, is that in this case, the frame serves not only to correlate themes and pour the words created by the writer onto cinematic images (which, somehow, replicates the frame motif in itself), but also serves to create another frame, this time an intermediary one, to set writing (in this case, literature) within cinema. Thinking of McLuhan (1994), it would be a strange device for a movie to process writing within its boundaries, as it brings to the fore a reflection about media. And that is not all. Much like the scene with Thatcher's records in *Citizen Kane*, a movie broadly influenced by expressionist aesthetics (Gaudreault and Jost 2005, 71–73), a scriptural record, represented by the writer's own quill inside

2 German stars were generally recognized as noble ones, coming from the theatrical dramaturgy, and carrying an aura of discretion, respectability and decency. "Even though the US and German star system of the 1920s served the same function, namely to lure movie-goers to the cinema, the two systems reached their goal with different means. German stars displayed culturally distinctive lifestyles, attitudes and fashions. Their success was based on cultural traditions familiar to German audiences, and they represented attitudes and interests that were specific to Germany." (Garncarz 2004, 392.)

the tent, is replaced by a cinematographic narrative. All that is being written down by the writer, instead of getting transposed into another written code (such as in the *Arabian Nights*) – which could function as a substitute –, is translated into and visualized as cinematographic code. This process includes the omission of a series of elements (including linguistic minutiae) which are detailed in the original code, in the writing, as well as the incorporation of others that were not originally in the text. The transformation of one register into another has to deal with the quandaries of an intermedial translation. That involves thinking about the nature of the communicative instances involved in the discursive processing of this movie: speech, writing, silence, image and the cinematic device itself.

Regarding the silent nature itself of silent film, it is important to note that there is controversy about both the sound diversity that existed in the first film shows (voices, sound effects, commentators, screams from the audience and, certainly, music) as well as about the silence inherent to the conditions of perception of these films, since the diegetic world of these was neither deaf nor mute, even the actors' lines – as Isabelle Raynauld (2001, 70) proves – were scripted, rehearsed and staged during the filming. Where lies, therefore, the silence of silent cinema? While there is consensus on the various sound modes that made up the different phases and times of silent cinema, Rick Altman stresses (Szaloky 2002, 111) that many of the sessions of silent cinema, especially in the so-called early cinema, were displayed effectively without any sound accompaniment. Researcher Martin Barnier, after thorough examination of French cinema until 1914, finds the results inconclusive: "[t]he strong overlap between the *café-concert* and 'Cinema' allows us to say that the songs and the chantings around films had a great focus on the way that films were perceived [...] The accompaniment by sound effects and the commentator [...] also concerns us. The frequency of intervention of these sounds and voices in the projections is still difficult to assess. Very few newspapers refer to these two elements" (Barnier 2010, 17).

Moreover, beyond a technical debate about the presence of sound elements in various stages of silent cinema, Melinda Szaloky argues that even if there was no accompaniment or sound synchronization in these films, a whole universe of sound was present in them through a kind of metaphorical kinaesthesia, when we intuit the sound (even the inexistent one) through our bodily experience of deriving a sense from other senses (in this case, hearing from viewing). "We may consider the silence of the film from the standpoint of the medium itself where the medium is defined not in terms of its material technology but as a representational practice directed toward reception by spectators" (Szaloky 2002, 111).

Despite all this argumentation, and in defence of the maintenance of silence in silent cinema, we cannot dodge a certain truism: namely that even though the characters are not deaf and mute (and the films are not diegetically silent), even if there was noise and music accompanying the film, and even if we can "hear" what the characters say through a synaesthetic inner ear, these movies themselves were and are technically silent. Dialogues and sounds suggested in these images are pure virtuality and as such exposed to ambiguity. If there is a tendency to take advantage of this virtual environment and build a sound world that technically does not exist, then it is possible to look at the other side and also enhance the silent environment inherent to the technical nature of these films, making its mediatic nature influence its perceptual nature, as well as the spectators' cognitive reception.

The above argument, which seeks to set aside the silence of silent cinema, seems to lack the possibility to appreciate this silence as a technical attribute that necessarily changes both the film's aesthetic and narrative formats, as well as the viewer's perception as compared to sound film. In short, as a consequence of this argument we lose the intrinsic value of silence and the effects that the cinematic image has when it appears silent. Based on the philosopher Max Picard, Cheryl Glenn reinforces the valence of silence while elaborating on its ambiguity in relation to speech (and the interdependence of each other): "Picard explains our dilemma: 'One cannot imagine a world in which there is nothing but language and speech, but one can imagine a world where there is nothing but silence. Silence contains everything in itself. It is not waiting for anything; it is always wholly in itself and it completely fills out the space in which it appears'. Containing everything in itself, silence is meaningful, even if it is invisible. It can mean powerlessness or emptiness – but not always. Because it fills out the space in which it appears, it can be equated with a kind of emptiness, but this is not the same as absence. And silencing, for that matter, is not the same as erasing. Like the zero in mathematics, silence is an absence with a function, and a rhetorical one at that" (2004, 4).

If, as argued by Glenn, silence assigns a mathematical function to speech, what happens to the image that takes on this function? Or even to music, which accompanied many of these films? If thought and mind are circuits that function as perceptual frequencies, what happens when we replace a circuit of words and logocentric perceptions with a musical circuit? As discussed by the Argentinean philosopher Santiago Kovadloff, at this moment, music is equivalent to silence: "[m]y initial intention is to recognize music as synonymous with silence; the extreme silence as a musical sound. Because if silence is not necessarily the absence of sound, but the presence of a sense that exceeds our understanding, then

music can be the expression of silence. What does listening to silence mean if not listening to what fails to be said?" (Kovadloff 2003, 75). We can think therefore within the frameworks of a broad concept of silence; and looking at the inherent influence of silence on silent film, the problem we seek to understand is how this technical attribute transforms the filmic image into the viewers' experience.

Derrida, in his *Grammatology* (1998), tries to deconstruct Lévi-Strauss's theory of *écriture* (literally, "scripture"), according to which the foremost function of written communication would be to "enslave and subordinate," as opposed to the "natural" quality of speech, connected directly to humanity itself. Derrida treats *écriture* as a kind of violence that precedes the invention of writing (hence the need to use a distinct word). The process of naming things already pertains, in an originating instance (Derrida's archiscripture), to the creation of *difference*, that is, to separating the world in itself, to establishing the act of postulation. Therein lies the birth of law, morals and cultural codes. What Lévi-Strauss sees as violence against a certain natural, idyllic and "true" state that is speech, Derrida sees as an inevitable facility in itself, putting *écriture* in a place of precedence to speech, necessarily correlating violence, *écriture* and difference. Violence, in this case, is the inaugural act that covers up the "essential" origins sought by Lévi-Strauss. As those origins erase their own traces, they can rightly serve as desecrated origins, with the knowledge that they are not original, and functioning at once as their own prosthetics and the negation of their own existence. A phantom limb, the Derridean inscription perpetuates a cul-de-sac in the relationship between image and words, admitting precedence to writing but at the same time assuming that this precedence can only be detected by its traces, naturally impossible to be viewed. "The scripture, in its daily life meaning, the common use of the word, dependent as it is of the entry of a surface, the violent incision and separation of a medium (even the projection of characters on a computer screen is not a passive process) works, thus, as a model of this inscription more fundamentally violent that Derrida called above the 'archiscripture.' It is clear that the speech – the voice – can't serve as a model for such process: according to the traditional system (logo and phonocentric) of representation which opposes speech and scripture, the speech is transmitted by the transparent medium and not printable air, it leaves no trace; it is the ideal and immediate mediation of the soul, meanwhile the scripture dwells the external and corporeal realm of matter. Simply put, it may be said that violence *is* (arch-) scripture *is* difference." (Johnson 2001, 33.)

If we trust Derrida to consider *écriture* as a foundational violence that performs the feat of erasing its own traces as well as the origin of its precedence, we are

entering into a terrain of silence. The Derridean trail leads to a formulation of silence that is absolutely inextricable, unattainable and ineffable. If the *écriture* is a violation, the only category that can be thought of in terms of something to be violated is silence. And the insertion of the theme of writing into *Waxworks*, set off by the intermediary phagocytosis promoted by the dimensions of *mise-en-abyme*, leads to some considerations about the possibilities of silence in the movie. Such is, in particular, an ironic use of the same writing, shaped into a narrative Russian doll that transforms the symbolic character of words into a spilled cauldron of signs and hallucinations. This process includes settings ravaged by deformity, images that come to life, thoughts that turn into narratives and dreams made real to haunt the living.

Silence in *Waxworks*, therefore, according to a Derridean logic, is not a return to an idyllic state (being itself the place of Eden, replacing the concept of speech in Lévi-Strauss) where everything works in peace, and which is absent from the areas of writing and sound. Silence (from which the Derridean trail emerges) is a space of conflict, by being at every moment one step closer to inaugurating archiscripture, which nominates and puts order in the world again. A silent film, due to its stubborn return to this instance, is continuously insisting on looking back, on seeking the incommunicable, on walking this fading trail again. It is a medium, therefore, opposed to sound pictures, which seek to move forward and communicate in a logocentric way. *Waxworks* has the merit of questioning the vicissitudes of this opposition of media within their own themes and narratives. On the one hand, we have the writer looking to rationalize those images of wax and putting them in an evolutionary and logical order. On the other hand, all instances of the film (its edition, performances, art direction) seek to validate silence and its unrecoverable trace – like a truly original chaotic scenario. And it is precisely in this conflict where the power of the film lies.

Without lingering on a theory of image, we can move on to the recognition that the relationship between imagining writing (through the writer's character) and the act of shaping it into a cinematographic narrative is largely rooted in irony. First of all, there is the break, typical of the expressionist narrative, associated to the process of writing. The writer himself seems stuck to a layer of timelessness, implausible when it comes to causal narrative: he remains in the tent as he writes, as if there was no obvious need for changes in time in storytelling and in the narrative continuity of any given movie. Time and space, in the stories viewed through the frame, seem constantly obliterated – rather effectively as part of a dream. Here, symbolic elements stemming from the unconscious, after being condensed

and dislodged, are more important than any kind of causal sequencing. "The symbolic code blocks discursive mastery on the part of the spectator, in contrast to the illusion of narrative control the audience enjoys in the classical Hollywood cinema, for example, by often knowing more than the characters. Compared to this classical storytelling, whose compliance with the spectator's desire "to see and to know" makes it appear invisible, Weimar films often foreground the question of who authorizes or controls the act of narration. The profusion of nested narratives, framed tales, flashbacks, *mise-en-abyme* constructions and interlacing of narrative voices is an index of the differences that established German silent cinema as historically specific." (Elsaesser 2000, 81–82.)

As it is shown by the ambiguous nature itself of the relationship between speech, silence and writing (especially from Derrida on), the transformation of a written and verbal discourse into a discourse of images and silence in *Waxworks* does not happen exactly as an inversion of the relationship between speech and silence. Here, first of all, there is no true speech, and very little writing. There is no source text, as is a case of adaptations. Everything truly happens within a *fantasy of writing*. We can talk about images that dream of being written, silence that dreams of having voice. Everything we perceive in the movie is shaped into images that connote writing: images of the writer, images of the writer writing, and even images of the writer's writing itself. It bears remembering that writing is also made of images, and, in a silent film, the appearance of writing on placards acquires an aesthetic sense. Those images dynamically generate other images almost spontaneously, precisely because they are propelled by the writing/image and speech/silence relationships that are set off by the essential elements that comprise the structure and plot of the movie. In *Waxworks*, speech does not exist, technically, and those two systems (silence and speech) somehow orbit each other but never touch. Hence, everything pertaining to speech resides only in the quandaries of the placards, and everything pertaining to writing is but a dream of the image represented by the writer himself.

Much the same way as speech seeks to return to the pre-linguistic silence that oriented our ancestors, spoken cinema seeks to return to silent movies, whether through a transposition of this principle or by inter-relations across media. A silent movie such as *Waxworks* seeks to *dwell* on the silent ambience that is the Derridean trail. If *écriture* establishes the human, and everything else is silence, then silent film, by mimicking structures, equalling representation powers, distorting and contorting its own possibilities, also seeks to return to this fading trail. It seeks to *dwell* on it, even when it is unable to represent it. Hence, finally, the natural trading floor that is built between silence and image, is yielding to the

natural silent fortress of silent movies. This configuration vilifies and expurgates the insertion of words (as opposed to images) and speech (as opposed to silence), consummating its language by the cognitive process of poetry.

This almost intuitive association of image (disconnected from words) with silence that catalyzes the aesthetic and cognitive reception processes in silent film is demonstrated, in *Waxworks*, through the wax figures' coming to life. After all, we must not forget that the wax figures of Harun Al-Rashid, Ivan the Terrible and Jack the Ripper are, for the film, images of those characters. Each of those static images, processed in the writer's mind, become *living images*. They will silently penetrate the almost eldritch settings, product of a readily oneiric and deformative imagination (typical of expressionism), which will also be created by the *image* of the writer. In this case, images emerge from images, transforming the expressionist panorama of the film into something disconnected from reality. This is true not only in the sense that it is a product of fiction (which is intellectual), but also in the point of view that the absence of the world of sound obliges all visual aspects of the film to dialogue with one another from a perspective that emerges from the pictorial. Thus, the exaggerated and grotesque performances are extensions of the geometric settings, as if all of the film's visual code followed a clear path away from the imprisoning and regulatory reality of the world of sound (cf. Chion 2005, 7–12). As argued by Bordwell and Thompson when discussing expressionist aesthetics: "German Expressionism depends heavily on *mise-en-scène*. Shapes are distorted and exaggerated unrealistically for expressive purposes. Actors often wear heavy makeup and move in jerky or slow, sinuous patterns. Most important, all of the elements of the mise-en-scène interact graphically to create an overall composition; characters do not simply exist within a setting, but rather form a visual element that merges with that setting" (1986, 354).

Logically, the wax images contribute a lot to encourage the deformative aspects, psychological as well as visual, which the film aims to achieve from this erratic flow of images. In a way, the wax statues serve both to alienate the viewer in the face of the atrocities committed by the figures portrayed in the three episodes, as well as to justify them. Harun Al-Rashid orders beheadings. Ivan the Terrible owns torture chambers. Jack the Ripper seeks to assassinate the writer himself. These are stories of violence, tragedy, jealousy and madness. Such degenerate subjects are processed by the wax figures in both the symbolic aspect (the crimes are committed, in the mind of the viewer, by mere images of images, non-living figures) and the historical one. Wax museums played an important role in the imaginary of the 1920s. Siegfried Kracauer, in his thorough evaluation of Weimar

cinema through the theme of tyranny, also attributes to the wax figure a central role in the significance of *Waxworks*: "[t]he halo of unreality with which Leni surrounded the three episodes was the most appropriate, because these episodes carry as central figures the wax figures. These figures, in general, portray kings, murderers or heroes of the past – mimicking them to allow the contemporary to feel the shivers of terror or fear that they caused in their time. Their waxy appearance in an amusement park tent features Harun and Ivan like ghosts that are remote both in time and in relation to the real world" (Kracauer 2004, 104).

We must not forget that the three wax characters in the movie are clearly the image of their actors. Jannings, Veidt and Krauss were immediately recognizable celebrities to the audience back then. In that sense, the film may be regarded, in its most populist and media-typical configuration, as a kind of living wax statue museum in which Harun Al-Rashid and Emil Jannings can be viewed at the same time (and indistinguishably); as if the imaginary dimensions of history, society and media were intercommunicating interfaces. It is a multiple, simultaneous and indiscernible aspect of image, also impossible to represent exclusively through writing or speech. In each and any direction, therefore, the farce of the writer in *Waxworks* points to what he is not: first, the technical image of the movie, that seeks to falsify speech and writing; second, the imagination of the writer himself, guilty of the delirious deviations both in verisimilitude and in the constitution of ambience and settings in the story; and third, the consumable image of the star system of German silent film, also immediately transmittable, without the help of the codes that the movie seeks to parody.[3]

We do not go from the writer, from words and speech to get to silence and, especially, image, in vain. One need only remember that the movie itself gets resolved in much the same manner. After seeing the stories of the caliph and the Russian czar translated into images in the movie, we assume we are in for a viewing, also on a *mise-en-abyme*, the whole story of the British serial killer. However, that does not come to fruition. In just five minutes, the writer's farce is definitively denounced by the movie's narrative, which decides to undertake its own code, independent from the flow of image metamorphoses in operation when there was a hierarchy between the image of writing and the image of cinema. Thus, the writer, exhausted after writing overnight, falls asleep after he begins with Jack the Ripper's tale. What follows are the five most intense minutes of the

3 Just not to fail to mention a possible contradiction, the names of the actors were written in the placard the first time their image was shown, as was usual in silent movies at the time, but this does not invalidate the fact that the actors were recognized due to their immense popularity, especially due to their images.

film, from an aesthetic point of view. The scene is almost entirely formatted as overprints and acts as a trigger for an imagistic unconscious onscreen, and reality gets indistinguishable from the writer's dream [Fig. 7]. What used to be linearity, narrative, affectation and farce, becomes an unbounded flow of images of Jack chasing the writer himself and his protégé. We not only lose track of time and space, but the movie scenery also accentuates the deformity of these. This time around, without the cognitive filter of words, the movie seems to say that finally that is what it is all about. It waxes about pure image; image without referent, murky, multiplied, the true nightmare of the word. The writer no longer yields a fumbling written discourse but something that stems directly from his unconscious mind. Once again, then, dream appears as a means for a primitive image, and the final message of the movie can hardly be interpreted otherwise. Thinking Jack had struck him, the writer jams the pen against his own chest [Fig. 8], materializing through this gesture the inefficacy of writing in silent movies. "That the writer, as he falls asleep, seems to 'stab' himself with his pen, only adds (a) further link to the chain of castration anxieties, but with a sarcastic-sadistic comment on the central conflict of the *Kino-Debatte*, namely the rearguard battle of the literary establishment – the writers – to retain their cultural capital, while some of their less high-minded colleagues are prepared to 'sell out' to the cinema, here once more, as in *Dr Caligari*, depicted as a fairground." (Elsaesser 2000, 85–86.)

Finally, the ending of *Waxworks* allows us to draw a link between expressionist aesthetics, the Derridean *trail* and a theory of silent cinema. The expressionism (literal or parodic) of the film, in its deep connection with the natural transmutation of images, is the perfect environment for the diffusion of a deeper conflict. As it was put by Kracauer when discussing the film: "[b]ut what, in the frame-story, was nothing more than a place full of entertainment, is now a desert hunting ground for ghosts. Expressionist paintings, ingenious lighting effects and many other resources available in 1924 were used to create this eerie phantasmagoria, which substantiates the notion of chaos, in a way even stronger than the *Caligari* script" (Kracauer 2004, 105). The transformation of space in phantasmagoria serves as a bridge to think about image and silence as linked to the *trail* (which fades) originating from Derrida's archiscripture, placing them at the epicentre of a debate (on transmedia, as well) which also includes writing, sound and speech. In this sense, silent cinema, with all its idiosyncrasies, works as a media body that allows an open dialogue about these topics. This dialogue permeates philosophy and media theory, making contemporary study of silent film increasingly essential.

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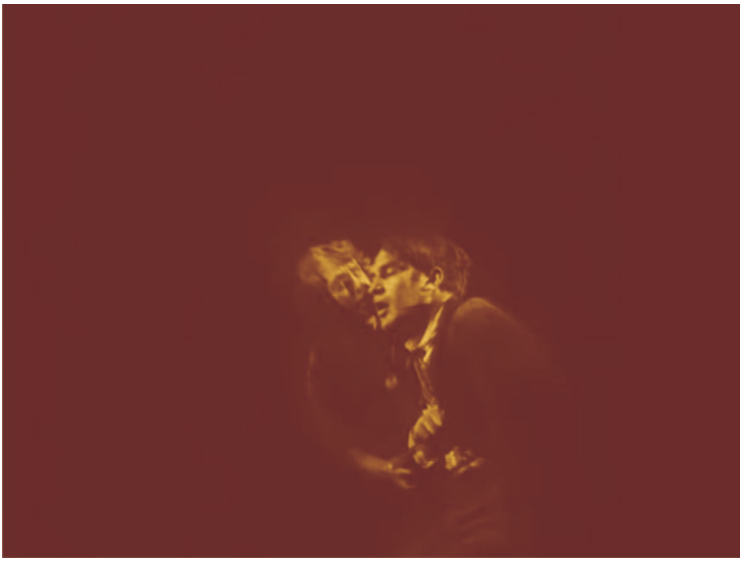

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Ken Jacobs and the Perverted Archival Image

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Abstract. This paper analyses two recent works by American filmmaker Ken Jacobs that deal with aspects of remediation. The first is *A Tom Tom Chaser*, in which Jacobs records the telecine process that transforms the classic silent film *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* from chemical into electronic media. The film is riddled with poetic turns inviting the audience to rediscover the medial noise hidden by images. Moreover, Jacobs focuses on the moment of transition from a material medium (the film strip) to the immaterial (the image, the video), so that the noise brings the viewer closer to a perception or brief capture of the medium in itself. Images are both figured and disfigured along this process. The second work is *The Guests*, an unconventional 3D film in which Jacobs transforms a short take from a Lumière Brothers film by discovering unseen views of the original footage. In his remediation of the 3D technology, Jacobs employs the Pulfrich effect, which allows him to blur the images of the archival film and to create instances of uncertainty between the views coming from the two human eyes. As a result of this procedure, the characters in the film seem to look directly at the audience. The analysis of both films highlights the poetry of the typical manoeuvre by which Jacobs perverts the archival medium, whereupon the viewing mode between media denaturalizes the usual media gaze (framed and representational), focusing on the moment of viewing in itself. This, as a result, favours the medium for what it is and subverts the gaze that expects something representational, discursive, perhaps story-driven.

Keywords: archival footage, experimental cinema, Ken Jacobs, remediation, intermediality.

There are artists who can shift back and forth between the two aspects of archival media: between the body itself and its image, between the moment of seeing and the point of view it creates. Ken Jacobs is one of the most interesting cases in terms of such transgressions in perspective. In his book, *Breakdowns*, Art Spiegelman depicts Jacobs facing the observer. There is a rectangle cutout placed against his left eye, suggesting he has a fragmented view of the observer – who also sees him. From the other side of the gaze, his perspective might be interrupted and cadenced by the frame of his choice. With this play between pictures and

subjectivities, Jacobs and Spiegelman offer up a sort of gaze that is anything but casual. As he puts the autonomous gaze of the depicted character in evidence, Ken Jacobs not only provocatively inverts (and subverts) the perspectives between observer and observed, but also hints at ways of denaturalizing the gaze by means of sensations and perspectives emanating from the characters, the materialities and immaterialities (the immaterial consisting of a dissolution of would-be representational imagery). [Fig. 1.]

In a verbal portrayal of his friend (and "vanguard filmmaker"), Spiegelman recounts how Jacobs triggered his understanding of paintings as "giant comics panels" whereupon a larger frame may hint at new, smaller-scale images that often escape us. Perhaps that is why Jacobs's picture is fragmented and, interestingly, his right eye is free of the rectangular frame (or canvas), unlike his left eye. However subliminally, what this simple picture of Jacobs proposes is a relationship with the image that both denies and renews one's gaze and, not by chance, introduces an interval and an ontological differentiation between the experience of the left eye and that of the right eye. It generates mediated images that are cutouts rather than a natural instant or perception, something man-made rather than natural. If an image can be fabricated by a point of view, then it can also be dismantled.

In the light of the wealth of Ken Jacobs's experiments with archival images, this paper aims to propose the paths of perversion of the "archival effect" as a mode of perception of the alchemy and the unravelling of ontology of the image woven by the North-American director. I will claim that Jacobs goes beyond just inaugurating other new devices and cinematographic experiences. He also dislodges the experience of image off to a different locus, to another percept. He searches for an experience that lies not in the image, but in the eye; thus, it happens in between the lapses and peculiar intervals created by his perversion of the archival image. Why does Jacobs frame what he sees with his left eye in his portrait? Which image does he want to block? What is the new optical phenomenon that he wants to intimate? If the image no longer resides in the archival film or another support and not even in proper eyesight, where is it in fact realized? Jacobs seems to point out the spectral materiality of the gaze itself and its imaging process, shifting the focus away from a finished image that represents the world as expected. Even more: amidst the perverting acts performed by Jacobs, what is the relationship between writing, inscription, montage, image and materiality?

What is peculiar about the gaze on Spiegelman's frame is that Ken Jacobs's starting point is a pre-captured image, a given image, an archival image wrapped in celluloid film (materiality) as embodied forms of perception. It is an archival

image that he must open, manipulate, and pervert. Thus, through his optical interaction with the archives, Jacobs proposes something that goes beyond re-signification, which has already taken place in the use of the found footage films by means of the so-called archival effect (Baron, 2014).[1] He seeks hidden images and visualizations from among and inside archival media or virtual crystals, which flourish unexpectedly along the line between material and immaterial, the gaze and infinite imagination (Marks 2010, 10). The perversion of an archival image does not initially occur only between media, forms, and remediations, but it also contaminates gazes, eyes, and materials that were previously regarded as self-evident and uncontested. Additionally, according to Jacobs, the archival image does more than presenting the past: it also develops a future or a space for invention isolated in the gap between the actual medium and its reception by the brain, that is to say, Jacobs gives back to the viewer an image in media res, in the process of becoming something that the brain would read as representational or anecdotic. It is therefore necessary to do a brief review of Jacobs's work up until his recent experiments with 3D technology as seen in his film entitled *The Guests* (Ken Jacobs, 2014), which will be analysed in the final portion of this article.

1. On Images beyond Memories, Histories and Archives

In 1969, Jacobs screened *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (Ken Jacobs, 1969), a 1905 film produced by both Mutoscope and Biograph that he had found and updated. In an inspired aesthetic turn, he added several new frames as well as decoupage to the old film, changing both its original aspects (such as meaning, narrative and message) and aesthetic principles.[2] This famous found footage film influenced some remarkable experimental and contemporary filmmakers such as Michael Snow and Peter Kubelka, among many others. In addition, Jacobs also approached

1 Here we refer most of all to the good work of Baron (2014), who understands the archival and the entire found footage experience as a form of aesthetic imagination of history. We will argue that Jacobs's use of the archival material is closer to an ontological debate not just about the image but also about sight itself. In my view, the perversion of the archival image happens precisely in that moment of transition: when an archival image ceases to be strictly historical in order to become an optical, historical and perceptual aberration.

2 Since 1961, however, Ken Jacobs has been directly involved with the *Anthology Film Archives* group, which gravitates around Jonas Mekas and his circle of friends. He has also been conducting research, screenings, debates, and experimental film productions. The over 30 films that Jacobs has directed can be divided in two different groups. First, there are his experimentations with archival images, in which he focused on the "cinema of attractions" period of early cinema. The second group comprises his work with 3D and the so-called *Nervous System*, which is detailed on the third part of this article.

early cinema by going beyond the established interpretation that restricted this period as pre-narrative (and pre-historical) cinematography. By emphasizing the visual attractions of films like *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (Ken Jacobs, 1969), Jacobs directly influenced the academic research of Tom Gunning and Charles Musser, whose works modernized the interpretation of early cinema.

It is worth noting in the found footage of *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, how Ken Jacobs made small yet notable alterations in the views, the cuts and the highlights of the myriad images and small frames that make up the long shot of the 1905 film. He not only edits the found archival film, but also creates interest by reshooting it to capture his projections on screen, thus establishing a new meeting point between the projector and the camera. At the interregnum of this meeting – the intervals that are so deftly emphasized by the editing, oscillating between stills and the movement in the archival images (Røssaak, 2011) – Jacobs expressively handles the archive. Consequently, he yields a presence, not that of the "archival effect," but of the materiality (and visuals) of the archival. By putting an emphasis on the tangible quality of the archival image, and by performing the process or mechanism of imaging, the filmic effect folds in on itself neither as image nor as experience, but as materiality.

Therefore, from early on, Jacobs's intentions were to awaken real aberrations within archival images. He duplicates the archival film, which gets deliberately reproduced as a dangerous simulacrum. The images we see in *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* are no longer copies nor reproductions of the recorded medium and the archive of that recording. They are images that call back to a possible remembrance, something that has dissipated in the process of being disfigured by the adulterated editing, which takes them beyond the archive and intimates historical and visual transgressions. Those hidden and volatile ghosts are aberrations that nevertheless create a new mechanism for the archival image, which, when adulterated, makes up new images in between the shooting and the projection, leading to new optical discoveries. The poetics and performance of the archival film is a constant and perpetually renewed gesture seen throughout Jacobs's work. It can be seen on the threshold of languages and media, along the border of the gaze that moves between visible forms and mediations (internal and external) of optical media. This is why Jacobs divides the film into three parts: the full section; then the misconfiguration of this, cutting, and fragmentation; then the perversion and final presentation of the same section, now with the an essentially changed image form and visual experience. Jacobs's poetics of archive subversion is an optical-material turn.

The second approach consists of Jacobs's experiments known as *The Nervous System* films – again, directly related to archival images. However, Jacobs did something more radical when he inverted the sense and directions of the archival frames, thus confronting the audience's habits of image formation, which might occur in the gaps between eyes and brain. Ken Jacobs explained the main goal of those experiments in his *Notes on the Nervous System*: "[t]he Nervous system consists, very basically, of two identical prints on two projections capable of single-frames advance and 'freeze' [...]. The twin prints plod through the projections, frame... by frame..., in various degrees of synchronization. Difference makes for movement and uncanny three-dimensional space illusions via a shuttling mask or spinning propeller up front, between the projectors, alternating the cast images." (Pierson 2011, 16.) [Fig. 2.]

Jacobs's 2005 film, *Ontic Antics Starring Laurel and Hardy: Bye, Molly*, is possibly his most famous and descriptive *Nervous System* experiment. In one of the first frames of the film, Jacobs shows the wheels of a train spinning in different rhythms and directions. Sometimes the image bifurcates then fuses two frames into one. Sometimes the image is paused and the audience hears an astonishing soundscape, which is also inconstant. Although *Ontic Antics* is not a 3D film, it was directly influenced by the 3D principle while in the making. This means that Jacobs emphasized the intervals between frames, in the cinematographic image, as well as the lapses between eye perception and the brain registering an image. In *Ontic Antics* Jacobs edited the archive of his found footage film according to the rhythm of an old locomotive and, inspired by this cinematographic imagery; he forced the audience to see something that had not previously been present (neither perceived nor imagined) in the frames of the archival.

In both his experiments with archival films and the central nervous system, Jacobs establishes a double and paradoxical process that shifts assertively between archival film and the images they convey. On the one hand, he struggles in poetic agony with the index, as if denying the fact that the index can suggest a single image of an event. By cutting, tiling, and even hacking the index in the archival films, he rejects the unity of the information and images therein disseminated;[3] he

3 My proximity to Jacobs's archival image perversion and its hacker turn unfolds in a sense upon how the distortion of a certain "original" ontology ends up generating new possible and potential worlds. In that sense, it is worth sharing the second paragraph of the hacker manifesto, which aims to offer an ample perception of that turn: "Whatever code we hack, be it programming language, poetic language, math or music, curves or colourings, we create the possibility of new things entering the world. Not always great things, or even good things, but new things. In art, in science, in philosophy and culture, in any production of knowledge where data can be gathered, where information can be extracted from it, and where in that information

ends up mistrusting the image he wants to convey with such confidence. In *Ontic Antics*, this phenomenon may be noticed as we see two duplicated and divided images, one on each side of the screen, triggering a fusion and getting mixed with the images in the center, resulting in a third view. Shattered, broken, the image there lies not just in the archival footage, and not at all restricted to the right or left eye, as it cannot even establish unity. The image falls apart entirely. It is re-created in the body, inside the brain; it "happens" – fast and volatile, within the same temporal lapse that gets "archived" within the body of the spectator. The image, in this way, is "archived" inside the body as a result of a direct contact of the filmic "materiality" with the spectator's corporeality. This moment leads to more doubts than certainties. Would it not be a sort of perversion of the image?

On the other hand, along with this mistrust, Jacobs begins seeking hidden images – virtual but present – condensed among poorly developed nitrate salts; images that were sometimes randomly captured, yet are still able to resurrect from the shadows of the archives. This pursuit is permeated by a faith in finding images, however evasive, temporary, distorted or hallucinated. This is at the line that separates the index from the event when Jacobs excavates, adulterates and deprogrammes images. It happens in the intermediate places of perception, where Jacobs traverses the crystals of time and brings the material up-to-date, as if poetically touching the fractals of the archives, or the virtuosities of the image. If, as Laura Marks reminds us, the image establishes a relationship between information and infinity, then Jacobs annuls the feelings and the senses of perception and invites the spectator to experience new bendings of space – on the other side of the archival, and in the perception of images, unusual temporal twists pointing to the future that take place in the brain of the spectator. As a result of this manoeuvre, the perception of the archival image as memory or as any metaphysical redemption of the past is not entirely possible. The archival film and its ontological information from a remote past are torn apart, de-programmed and, as the index is not persistent, one may go on to view something beyond the index or its materiality, something that can only be concocted in the brain in reaction to the subversion of imaging expectations. The peculiarity lies in the fact that those volatile, aberrant images are nevertheless material.

new possibilities for the world are produced, there are hackers hacking the new out of the old. While hackers create these new worlds, we do not possess them. That which we create is mortgaged to others, and to the interests of others, to states and corporations who control the means for making worlds we alone discover. We do not own what we produce — it owns us." (Wark 2004, 002.)

Jacobs provokingly throws us into another environment in order to help us go beyond an understanding of the archive restricted to testimony, as addressed by, for example, Agamben (1998) or Sarlo (2007). The audiovisual shimmer in this new cut points to what is to come, and in the wake of Derrida's archival fever, the archival generates its own deviations, speculums, and speculative aberrations about what is beyond the index and the aura of the occurrence. For Jacobs, the archival is above all multiple, multifaceted, and malleable – an optical phenomenon that takes us to other spatial-temporal spirals.

Like a hacker immersed in analogue media, Jacobs disrespects the archons of audiovisual archival films. Archons are understood, according to Derrida, as the power of constriction that makes archives possible – the preconceived, patriarchal, and authoritarian ideas that engender secondary, derived, and preformatted concepts and perceptions. To Jacobs, this power is above all optical: technological standards that invent (and restrict) the technical possibilities found in the act of perception and observation. Therefore, Ken Jacobs perverts the optical archons and their data – the moulds of perception – along with the technical-sensorial configurations that make the audiovisual gaze possible as well as historically or technologically restricted. Yet, what does it mean to say that Jacobs perverts archival images?

To be more specific, perversion reappears as a poetic mode in Jacobs's more recent films such as *The Guests*. In any case, what we suggest as a "poetics of perversion" consists of a subversion of an original grammar and meaning, which, concerning the archival images and their "effect" (cf. Baron 2014), approaches a redemption of a past long gone and therefore metaphysical. On the one hand, Jacobs challenges the spectators to see, in the act of re-watching an archival film, an inapprehensible past in relation to the past itself that the archival film attempted to record. On the other hand, the archival image itself is viewed directly in its materiality. There is no more past, or an act of temporal differentiation from a present gaze that updates the archival, but an ebullience of the crystals of the past that generate images of an offbeat future. This is the essence of the perversion of the archival. By being perverted, the archival itself bifurcates and makes possible mediations of perspective between the distinct natures of the image, between the gaze of the observer and the singular feeling by the observer of also being gazed upon (Castro, 2002).

2. *A Tom Tom Chaser* and Some Archival Boundaries

Jacobs qualified *A Tom Tom Chaser* (Ken Jacobs, 2002) as a scanning improvisation. In an extremely simple manner, the film uses the archive of *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* and follows its telecine process of transferring the "original" chemical material to an electronic image. Using a similar aesthetic principle, Jacobs also reframes the original takes of the Mutoscope and Biography film archive. However, in *A Tom Tom Chaser* the image blur is much stronger and takes center stage. [Fig. 3.]

By emphasizing its process of material and mediatic transformation, Jacobs refrained from assigning a locus for the archival. Thus, he uses the transformation of the archival image to invite the audience to invent their gaze. The material is neither an original archive nor a future archive in the process of becoming. It is only a simple and displaced archival image. Peculiarly enough, the gaze of the audience has no other possibility: it must occur in between medias, within a certain boundary, and without specific media (or form) configurations. [Fig. 4.]

Wittily edited, *A Tom Tom Chaser* creates fast aesthetic perceptions that sometimes impose a specific medium upon the audience; thereafter it casts the same image into another media materiality and then alternates the perception of the image between different frames. This reframing occurs in between media, consequently blurring the image. On top of that, the eye rarely has enough time to reframe between these media. This means that the eyes need more time to capture, focus, and see (or *believe* they are seeing) an image beyond media and materiality.

Directly or indirectly, the dynamics created by Jacobs interact with the remediation concept elaborated by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, who state that remediation is a transference and refashioning of the content from one medium (and the perception of the medium) to the configuration of another medium. However, remediation might happen in two different instances and in aesthetic or technological turns. The first is known as immediacy, which creates a first person point of view and a virtual reality effect. In visual media, immediacy puts viewers through an immersive experience in which seeing simulates a sense of reality. In their genealogy of immediacy, Bolter and Grusin refer back to the Renaissance perspective when viewers saw through the image and had a feeling of believing what they saw. Thus, immediacy constructs a natural sensation and an "unmediated presentation."

On the other hand, hypermediacy is a construct that presents viewers with the perception of the media configuration itself. It means that the viewer can

simultaneously observe the representation as well as the media used to enact this representation. Thus, hypermediacy flirts constantly with fragmentation, heterogeneous media, interruptions, and indeterminacy. "In all its various forms, the logic of hypermediacy expresses the tension between regarding a visual space as mediated and as 'real' space that lies beyond mediation" (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 41).

Jacobs's remediations in *A Tom Tom Chaser* (as well as in most of his works) have a more precise dialogue with the hypermediacy tradition. However, for very brief moments, Jacobs invites viewers to believe in what is known as the archival effect, which is a sense of past and reality while casting the gaze upon the frame. The *Tom Tom* archival image oscillates between chemical and electronic perception, and Jacobs inserts both remediation and hypermediacy between media. In a provocative manner, Jacobs asks the audience to at once believe and doubt what they are seeing.

Where the scanning process erases traces of remediation in a digital age, Ken Jacobs does the exact opposite. In between archival images (and hypermediacy), *A Tom Tom Chaser* offers precisely a scanning-image. When an image is liberated from its material support, it occurs only inside the brain in a delay, as an illusion. However, and paradoxically, it is precisely when the image, during the interval of its remediation, becomes ethereal that it reaches the viewer, gets embodied and becomes an archival image. Jacobs offers both a meeting and a mismatching of the material and the viewer's body; and the material consists of matter in its fault, its ephemeral and fully realized blank, matter before matter, matter before memory. Without specific materiality, the image is restricted to a phantom, or a simulacrum that almost becomes an autonomous figure. Again, that is why it is a perverting act, since the image for Jacobs is always essential and extremely material yet never ceasing to be imaginative in an offbeat, unpredictable and unsettling way.

3. *The Guests*: Perspectivism, Paces and Paths of Figures

Finally, what would this material and poetic perversion insistently woven by Jacobs be? By exploring the transition and the buffer zones between different media and materialities, Jacobs ends up intertwining images of different nature, which approaches something that can be described with the concept of multinaturalism, used by Viveiros de Castro (2002, 377), in the field of anthropology. (This refers to the belief that lies at the core of the mythologies and cosmologies of indigenous

American cultures, namely that that animals are former humans. We are, of course, only borrowing this anthropological concept; nevertheless, it allows us to enlighten some of the phenomena of perspectivism. Jacobs is frequently referred to as an alchemist; and we hereby stress his shamanic side in order to outline distinct imagistic perspectives that are completely isolated from one another.

And that is where the discussion encounters the debates about an ontology – anthropological and imagistic – that favours incompleteness, intervals and inconstancies between modes of perception over a properly rounded, defined form with a single framing. The perversion would occur during that passage between opposite perspectives. When animals cease to be human, and when humans, by means of their shamanic rites, abandon their bodies to tour animal cosmologies, a twist of perspective occurs which creates the opportunity to reconsider the world. Perversion, on the other hand, and in Jacobs's poetics, happens during the process of the sensible transfiguration of matters which get dematerialized, which abandon their original bodies in order to, deprived of bodies, like animistic entities, create a visual vertigo that approaches aberration, leading to something inaccessible, almost forbidden. Perversion would be the poetic act of traversing, of passage, by which the viewer would gain access to a sort of impossible nature, an entirely other language, which, much like an Eden, has no more ontological possibility of interacting, imagining or even seeing. And that is the kind of perversion – since perspectivism would be essentially heretical – that we see in most of Jacobs's films and archival experiments.

Recently released in the festival circuit only, *The Guests* is one of Ken Jacobs's latest films and it is directly screened in 3D technology. This is the first time he uses a 3D camera and 3D glasses in his work. However, as stated earlier, Ken Jacobs has been experimenting with 3D concepts since the 1970s, his *Nervous System* films can be seen as an intimate continuity between both moments.

As in his other works, Jacobs uses an archival and a found-footage chemical-based film as a starting point for *The Guests*. The original Lumière film is only a few minutes long and merely registers the arrival of guests at the wedding reception of the Lumières' sister. It is a little-known film by the Lumière brothers and it has a peculiarity that is widely explored in the framing: guests appear lined up before the Lumières' camera and speed up, almost one by one, in a sequence that allows for the exploration of a peculiar depth-of-field. The first perversion Jacobs does in the Lumière film is the radical extension of cinematic timing using slow motion to extend second-long frames into minutes. By alternating rhythm and movement, Jacobs transformed the few minutes of the Lumières' film into a

90-minute experience. This radical extension dilates the presence of the figures, of the guests, who walk step-by-step, frame-by-frame, through the Lumières's camera and the 3D glasses. [Fig. 5.]

The second perversion is directly related to the Pulfrich effect, which, as Ken Jacobs once affirmed, is one of the key concepts that influenced his 3D experiments. The Pulfrich effect occurs when the two eyes send image signals to the brain in different time frames. The gap in this case is totally different from retinal persistence due to which the internal movement of the cinematographic apparatus and frame opens and creates an illusionary image. The gap of the Pulfrich effect occurs very subtly in and between the two eyes and the brain. It creates a delay in the picture and small differences in light, thus inserting a pendulum or time lapse between the eyes and the brain, which extends the duration of perception from one image to another. The odd thing is that the Pulfrich effect has often been used to create the three dimensional effect. In *The Guests*, Ken Jacobs does the opposite: he uses 3D glasses and employs the Pulfrich effect to provoke distrust in the act of seeing; he blurs the view and creates a misty three-dimensional environment. By this, the 3D becomes opaque. Consequently, the imagistic pendulum woven by Ken Jacobs establishes a spatial disparity in moving objects. Therefore, *The Guests* is a film in which space is not a projection, but an invasion. It is exactly in that aspect of invasion that the multinaturalism of image – between different materials and temporalities – gets transfigured into perspectivism. Instead of just seeing, as the usual projection of Renaissance perspective, the viewer goes on to feel observed, seen, followed by the gaze of those objects, those sculptures marching in a slow and precise movement toward the other side of the frame, of the field, of the shot and the traditional cinematic space.

Ken Jacobs combines the length of an archival footage with the Pulfrich effect and, little by little, adds 3D. Thus, he perverts the so-called archival effect and does something more radical than remediation. Just like in *Adieu au Langage* (Godard, 2014), Godard's latest film, one can notice in Jacob's work a hypermediacy experiment with 3D. In this, an opaque 3D phenomenon "happens" in between the eyes and the brain and produces a strange feeling when using the 3D apparatus, which is itself perceived and experimented by the audience. However, *The Guests* gradually becomes a film of effects that hints at counter effects. It is as if it played against its own device: it starts with the 3D, showing unusual or nearly invisible frameworks and frame details. By this, the Lumières's film refers back to the brushstrokes of an impressionist painting (echoing Godard, who once called

the Lumière brothers the last impressionists). The audience begins to perceive faces, tiny details, delicate gestures and unusual movements or image-times. In this film, Jacobs creates a 3D experience similar to kinetic art and uses a play of colors and depths that reminds us of a Mondrian painting. We are looking at art that highlights surfaces.

It is as if the ghost-like imagery recorded by the Lumière brothers had sprouted volume, shape, and forms that, once alive, presented autonomous effects. This is a sculptural film. Gradually, between one pendulum and another, between the ontological and vertigo images, there is the feeling that the audience is not composed of viewers watching ghosts, but rather the exact opposite. The viewers are being seen and observed from the other side of the crystal-images. This spatial disparity of *The Guests* makes possible the survival of the images (*Nachleben*), as Aby Warburg described it (Didi-Huberman 2002). However, Jacobs still debates a cinema that abolishes the dynamics of Renaissance perspective and reveals a form of sensitive image organization that denies the original projection or point of escape. Ken Jacobs eventually creates fissures in the ontology of media filming within the Lumières's archive, and perverts it. His version is the opposite of archeology; it is nostalgia and it is what has been called the archival effect, because he points to the future, to images that demand to be created. The remediation instant in *The Guests* can be considered an almost impossible *dismediation* of the archive. It is a heretical act that goes beyond aesthetics. It is a form of salutary disrespect toward time and the movements inscribed inside the archival material. Finally, when this unprecedented experience ends, we toast to the vitality of our retinas while, distant and guarded, Ken Jacobs greets us with this unique visual heresy.

In bringing this article to a close, I would like to comment on a last picture in which Ken Jacobs inserts his own image into the archival footage, and appears as an audiovisual figure. In *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (Mekas, 2000), Jonas Mekas shows and comments on an archival recording from the 1970s at his house. There are intimate and festive moments that celebrate the delicate quality of a daily life that is easygoing, pleasurable and grounded. Mekas, surrounded by friends in his apartment, tells them about a time when Jacobs, Bible in hand, read, commented and talked about one of its passages. The scene has no sound and, even as an archive or index of this occurrence, the audience can only speculate as to what Jacobs said. Even so, the scene is truly revealing. Jacobs, Mekas and Spiegelman all have Jewish origins and seem to intentionally play with images, memories and archival film

in a playful effort to bring back to life something that already happened – from the index to real imagination, something already given, inscribed and archived in this great support that we can, somewhat mystically, call world.

However, Jacobs's Jewish turn leads back to a play of gazes, images and figurations that is deeply rooted in the prohibition of idols in that religion. By referring back to an image that is not there, evident and stark, in the archival film, Jacobs turns to a way of seeing that seeks to transpose the veil of image itself and intimates a non-figurative vision, truly different from the Christian, metaphysical idealization. As Mondazain very deftly stressed, the veil of image is, for the Jewish Torah tradition, an evident materiality, a stance of the literal, "a pure screen of the legible that cannot, in any shape or form, be in the sphere of inscription of the visible" (Mondazain 2003, 42). It is the invisible visible, beyond figurative image that this way of seeing, deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, ends up establishing. In that vein, we can say that at the core of the archival perversion, in Jacobs's works, lies an eagerness of surpassing a particular way of seeing the archival that is essentially figurative and metaphysical. The perverting act flirts with the prohibition of the idol image by Judaism as much as with a turn, a different way of seeing that seeks, aesthetically and poetically, to enliven the invisible that lies beyond the image.

If everything is written, then a certain original aura can be awakened, if only to get in touch with the archives of the world. In this way of thinking, writing is less about inventing something new than about rewriting (or reviewing) what has already been written, stored and inscribed. It is within this fairly religious environment that Ken Jacobs's archival film subversions persist in implementing the act of seeing beyond the image – in transcending its sacredness – and beyond its physical, material and media support. These are profane gestures that embody an ethical presence. If the audiovisual archive creates a world that has already been given to the viewer, then Ken Jacobs seeks to see through it and reveal what escaped and did not get stored. It is as if, from the creation of the world, we pass through cinematographic imaging to the fundamental, silent and unmoving figures inside, and that little by little we are accompanied by their ghosts until, in a psychotic schizophrenia of images, they begin acquiring optical and sculptural autonomy. The summary of Ken Jacobs's poetic perversions unfolds in an audiovisual world created by the very creatures that inhabit the archival media where the figures are no longer passive, but control the previously autonomous gaze of the viewer. They are figure-guides that lead us to a world which, indeed, we can see (and read), but can never inhabit. The paradoxical effect of those

imagistic experiences lies in their power and reveals itself in the vertiginous instances and hallucinations that come from poetically giving up control of our gaze. At the end of each session, such images indelibly inhabit our memory. This is the heretical pleasure of an optical heresy that the perversion of archival film offers to its spectators.

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Figure 5. Ken Jacobs: *The Guests* (2014).

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History, Cultural Memory and Intermediality in Radu Jude's *Aferim!*

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Abstract. A historical drama that can be interpreted at the juncture of theoretical discourses (heritage film, auteur film), genres (historical film, western, road movie) and representational modes (connecting to, but subverting the master narrative of Romanian historical cinema), Radu Jude's *Aferim!* (2015) has attracted the attention of the international public by the unique response that it gives to the tradition of representation of the (Romanian) historical past. Its unmatched character even within New Romanian Cinema can be attributed to the fact that it does not focus on tensions of the post-communist condition or their antecedents in the recent communist past; instead, it goes back in history to a much earlier period, to the Romanian *ancien régime*, after the Ottoman occupation and before the abolition of Gypsy slavery, only to point at the historical roots of current social problems. Through its ingenuous (inter)medial solutions (black-and-white film, with an implied media-archaeological purport; period *mise en scène* but with an assumed artificiality and constructedness; a simple linear plot infused with a dense dialogue in archaic Romanian, drawn from a multitude of literary and historical sources; a sweeping panorama of 19th-century Wallachian society presented in a succession of *tableau* compositions), Radu Jude's ironical-critical collage defetishizes the traditional historical iconography and debunks the mythical national imaginary, unveiling the traumatic history of an ethnic and racial mix.[1]

Keywords: cultural memory, western, allegory, intermediality, tableau, collage.

Radu Jude's *Aferim!* (2015), screened at the 65th Berlin International Film Festival, where Radu Jude was awarded the Silver Bear for Best Director, and with the biggest domestic viewer number in 2015, has also attracted the attention of the international public by the unique response that it gives to the tradition – and

1 This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of National Education, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-ID-PCE-2012-4-0573.

challenge – of representation of the (Romanian) historical past. Its unmatched character even within New Romanian Cinema can be assigned to the fact that it does not focus on tensions of the post-communist condition or their antecedents in the recent communist past as most attempts at micro-realist representation do; instead, it turns back in history to a much earlier period, to the first half of the 19th century. This cinematic gesturing towards the distant Romanian historical past has multiple connections with, and at the same time is disrupted from, various representational traditions.

What *Aferim!* is can probably be best understood in terms of what it is *not*: first and foremost, from the character and purpose of the heritage film. Belén Vidal starts her volume *Heritage Film: Nation, Genre and Representation* by outlining the main traits of the heritage film: "[u]nlike the western, the romantic comedy or the horror film, the heritage film is not a genre in the industrial sense of the term. Rather, the concept has its roots in British film studies, where it has become associated with a powerful undercurrent of nostalgia for the past, conveyed by historical dramas, romantic costume films and literary adaptations. These films often flaunt their connections with classical works of the literary canon, lavish production values and star performances" (2012, 1). Whether called period film, costume film or costume drama, heritage film is "a type of film that places its characters in a recognizable moment of the past, enhanced by the mise-en-scène of historical reconstruction" (Vidal 2012, 1). Heritage film constructs an imaginary reality with the claim of authentic representation, "trading on a nostalgic view of history as an attractive commodity and promising escape into worlds safely located in the past" (Vidal 2012, 16). As Aga Skrodzka remarks in discussing heritage film as compared to the vernacular cinema after the 1990s, "heritage genre envisions premodernity as times of truer, purer and more stable collective identity" (Skrodzka 2012, 32).

Aferim! returns to premodern times but not with the above-mentioned disposition of the heritage film. In terms of period *mise en scène* and authenticity of period detail, *Aferim!* evokes the heritage film, but only to get distanced from it by creating a counter-nostalgic image of the past and also by inducing a sense of artificiality. Thus, instead of creating an opulent image of the past that reinforces the national and collective identity of the present, *Aferim!* unveils a terrain of cultural anxiety with the aim of pointing at the historical roots of current mentalities and demystifying the national image of the past. Radu Jude's highly original film experiment is definitely an auteurist achievement and, as Belén Vidal states, "auteurist and heritage discourses remarkably exclude each other" (2012, 27).

Aferim!, greeted as "something new in Romanian cinema" (Lazăr and Gorzo 2014), touches on the issue of Gypsy slavery in the period of the Romanian *ancien régime*, after the Ottoman occupation and before the liberation of Gypsy slaves. Set in early 19th-century Wallachia, the plot may be regarded as flexibly matching the narrative construct typical of westerns and road movies: a constable, Costandin (played by Teodor Corban), is hired by a boyar, Iordache (Alexandru Dabija), to find a Gypsy slave, Carfin (Toma Cuzin), who has run away from his estate after having an affair with his wife. On their way, Costandin and his son, Ioniță (Mihai Comănoiu), meet all kinds of members of 19th-century society, providing a possible viewpoint from which society can be represented. This is, however, not the outsider's critical viewpoint typical of the picaresque tradition: Costandin's remarks, formulated as lessons for his son, literary quotes in fact from a great number of 19th-century authors, echo the working mechanism of the society of the time, confirming and accepting the abuses as being the normal course of life, the way of the world, the persisting and unalterable order. In the end the Gypsy slave is brutally punished by the boyar, who cuts his testicles with a pair of scissors.

A historical drama that can be interpreted at the juncture of theoretical discourses (heritage film, auteur film), genres (historical film, western, road movie) and representational modes (connecting to, but subverting the master narrative of Romanian historical film), *Aferim!* is a revelatory response to the tradition of national cinema. Film is a "medium of cultural memory," characterized by its power, together with literature and other forms of medial externalization, "to shape the collective imagination of the past" (Erll 2008, 396, 389). In connection with the recent Thirld World cinema, reflecting the social changes that have taken place from the second half of the 20th century on, Ismail Xavier highlights the significance of "the cinema as an instance of the affirmation of emerging national values, a key factor in the construction of national identity" (2004, 355). A quarter of a century after the regime change in Romania, however, in his latest film production, Radu Jude critically reflects on the historical role of cinema in the construction of Romanian national identity.

Through its concern with history, *Aferim!* initiates an architextual dialogue with the Romanian historical film tradition initiated by the 1912 silent film *The Independence of Romania* [*Independența României*], subtitled *The Romanian-Russo-Turkish War 1877*, directed by Aristide Demetriade, and continued by a long series of historical films including Sergiu Nicolaescu's films created during the communist period. During the decades of communism, historical film

genre formed part of ideological appropriation, moulding history in the way it best served propaganda purposes, showing an image of history that provided heroic models as edifying patterns of identification and meant to contribute to reinforcing Romanian national identity. Sergiu Nicolaescu was one of the most popular film directors who created historical dramas evoking the birth of the Romanian nation, glorious events, epic battles and collective sacrifices.[2] Almost all historical personalities line up in his historical dramas of epic dimensions as embodiments of the national character. Historical film genre in the period of communism, often blending history and melodrama, reinforced a mythical image of history and played a significant role in the edifice of the ruling ideology as it was meant to arouse patriotic sentiments and national nostalgia.

The Romanian historical film tradition is playfully-reflexively evoked by Nae Caranfil in his *The Rest is Silence* (2007), which reinvents the conditions of shooting the first Romanian historical film, at the same time the first Romanian feature film, *The Independence of Romania*. Nae Caranfil's reflexive return to the beginnings of Romanian film history reveals the strong interconnectedness between cinema and historical representation and also provides a distantiating enframing of history. Both Nae Caranfil and Radu Jude avoid the quasi-obligatory micro-realist representation, which dominates New Romanian Cinema, and ingenuously reframe the genre of historical film. While the former chooses an overtly reflexive form within the confines of the feature film, the latter resorts to a more covert form of reflexivity by apparently letting loose the toolkit of historical film and creating the immersive frame of historical illusion but actually juxtaposing this toolkit with another one that systematically undoes the created historical illusion, resulting in a highly subversive form that puts in quotation marks the film's historical format.

The preoccupation of New Romanian Cinema with the past – the recent past most of the time – is rooted in the urge to understand the social and interpersonal mechanisms, deeply rooted in the communist past, of the present post-communist condition. Thus, those films that reach beyond the sphere of the strict present tend to remain within the span of social time that Jan Assmann (2008) relates to communicative memory, characterized by the proximity to everyday interaction and communication, embracing at most 80–100 years, that is the time span of three or four interacting generations. Within this time span, the 1989 events occupy an

2 E.g. *The Dacians* (*Dacii*, 1966), *Michael the Brave – The Last Crusade* (*Mihai Viteazul – Unirea*, 1971), *War of Independence* (*Războiul Independenței*, 1977), *We Were in the First Line* (*Noi cei din linia întâi*, 1985), *Mircea* (1989).

eminent position, dealt with in several films.[3] The connectedness to the present of communicative memory and the anniversary character of the past historical event institutionalized by cultural memory is "bridged" in Cristi Puiu's short film *Das Spektrum Europas* (2014), created within the documentary film anthology *Bridges of Sarajevo*,[4] reaching the upper limit of the time span of communicative memory as defined by Assmann. Christian Ferencz-Flatz compares Cristi Puiu's aforementioned film and Radu Jude's *Aferim!* in terms of a related preoccupation, namely the nexus between the present and the past. What links the two concepts, according to Ferencz-Flatz, is the resorting to the procedure of citation, the literary reference as well as the form in which these films approach the issue of history; what distinguishes them is that while Puiu approaches history from the present and conceives of history as a domain that has become virtually inaccessible due to the prejudices of the present, Jude approaches the present from the direction of history and reveals the direct correspondence between the prejudices of the past and those of the present (Ferencz-Flatz 2015, 122–123).

Jude reaches far back in early 19th century, that is no longer within the span of communicative memory, but a more remote past – *in illo tempore* – that forms part of cultural memory[5] embracing historical, mythical, cultural time in Assmann's use of the term. *Aferim!* seeks to displace rather than to reinforce the mythical dimension of the Romanian historical past, and challenges Romanian national identity by evoking profoundly non-heroic genre images that do not fit into the canonical image of national history. The canonical image of the nation is superseded by a transnational landscape[6] that involves Romanian peasants,

3 E.g. *12:08 East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost*, Corneliu Porumboiu, 2006), *The Paper Will Be Blue* (*Hârtia va fi albastră*, Radu Muntean, 2006) or *Three Days till Christmas* (*Trei zile până la Crăciun*, Radu Gabrea, 2011).

4 In the omnibus film project *Bridges of Sarajevo* (*Les ponts de Sarajevo*, 2014), occasioned by the World War I centenary, 13 film directors, among them also Jean-Luc Godard, explore the ways in which Sarajevo has inscribed itself into European history and reflect various artistic perceptions of today's image of the city. It was projected in the Special Screenings section at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival. Cristi Puiu's short film *Das Spektrum Europas* borrows its title from Hermann von Keyserling Baltic German philosopher's book published in 1928, which is read and commented on in bed by a retired couple (Valeria Seciu and Marian Râlea), spiced up by a great deal of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices.

5 Jan Assmann formulates the interrelatedness of memory and identity as follows: "Memory is knowledge with an identity-index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one's own diachronic identity, be it as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation, or a cultural and religious tradition" (2008, 114). What has been a commonplace ever since John Locke, namely that identity and individual memory are indispensably interlocked, applies in the same measure to the nexus between (individual and collective) identity and cultural memory.

6 The transcultural perspective of the film is enlarged by the transnational – Romanian, Bulgarian, Czech and French – alliance of production.

Turkish-influenced boyars and Gypsy slaves, and enriched by a multitude of ethnic groups whose stereotypical images turn up in the characters' conversations. The Orthodox priest, one of the various representatives of society whom the constable and his son meet on the road, enumerates, like a live *Völkertafel*, the stereotypes of various nationalities. His discourse is a hilarious collection of ethnic stereotypes; the prejudiced Gypsies occupy the last position in the line of clichés as ones whose subjugation is set in stone: "'Each nation has its purpose. The Jews, to cheat, the Turks, to do harm, us Romanians to love, honour and suffer and like good Christians. And each has their habits. Hebrews reads a lot, Greeks talks a lot, Turks has many wives, Arabs has many teeth, Germans smoke a lot, Hungarians eat a lot, Russians drink a lot, English think a lot, French like fashion a lot. Armenians are lazy, Circasians wear many a lace, Italians lie a lot, Serbians cheat a lot and Gypsies get many a beating. Gypsies must be slaves. When Ham spread horse shit on Noah, Noah cursed them to be slaves and as dark as shit.' 'That's right.' 'They must be kept on a tight leash. 'Tis a holy commandment.'" Besides ethnic stereotypes, the film presents a view of social order based on xenophobia, homophobia and sexism, which comes to light on the road, in the dialogues between various characters.

Jude's film brings to the fore an ethnically mixed society in which different ethnic groups occupy distinct positions in the rigidly hierarchical social organization. The main narrative thread unfolds around the prejudiced Gypsies; the Orthodox priest asks the question whether the Gypsies are men or descendants of the devil itself; however, Carfin, the Gypsy slave to be punished possesses the widest view of the world as he is the one who has travelled the most. The boyar's Turkish word, Aferim! (i.e. Bravo!) with which he appreciates Costandin for finding the runaway Gypsy slave, ironically overwrites the burdened, hierarchical Romanian-Gypsy relation as the third in the actual possession of power. Social interactions are staged in a series of episodes in which every single dialogical situation, whether between the constable and his son, the constable and the boyar, the boyar and his wife, is hierarchical, and almost every member of the nation (with the exception of those in the lowest position in the hierarchy, the Gypsy slave and the child) reproduces the experienced social relations of inequality at the first available opportunity.

Aferim! is the first Romanian film that brings up the issue of Gypsy slavery. However, albeit dealing with this social-historical taboo, it is not its main purpose to recontextualize and speak about slavery as such.[7] Instead, it aims to face the

7 For a historical approach to Gypsy slavery under the Romanian ancien régime, see Viorel Achim (2004, 34–42).

present spectators with their own racism, it holds up a mirror reflecting present social attitudes towards the Other. In this way, the temporal distance between the viewers' present and the represented historical time is cut short by the created interferences between the premodern past and the – supposedly – post-postmodern present; a profound preoccupation with today's (mal)functioning of society, especially with the historical reasons for it, filters through the historical template, the representation of the past acquiring thus allegorical overtones.

In his seminal essay on *Historical Allegory* Xavier points at the "essential connection between allegory and the vicissitudes of human experience in time" (2004, 333). Allegorical discursive practices, Xavier claims, emerge in periods of social crisis; modern culture, so tightly conjoined with allegory ever since Walter Benjamin's reconceptualization of the notion, presents "a new awareness of instability" that "only enhances an old perception of the problematic character of signifying processes, a perception that is nowadays taking us from the lost paradise of transparent languages" (Xavier 2004, 333). Xavier's essay dwells on the role allegory in its modern form plays in diverse cultural processes, from high art forms to popular culture, present in all sorts of traditional popular genres. *Aferim!* is a unique experiment in that it explores the allegorical potential of various genres and discursive practices. By resourcefully activating the cinematic codes of popular genres such as the western or the historical film, Jude's artistic achievement offers a subtle reading and a disconcerting view of the early 19th-century Romanian realities as the allegory of present social relations and mentalities infused with stereotypical thinking and prejudices.

If we regard the narrower definition of the historical film, provided by Natalie Zemon Davis, according to whom historical film is "a genre composed of dramatic feature films in which the primary plot is based on actual historical events, or in which an imagined plot utilizes historical events, making them central to the story" (Davis 2000, 5), then the mere utilization of a historical setting – Wallachia, 1835 –, as in the case of *Aferim!* [Fig. 1.], is not enough for the generic inclusion. Obviously, *Aferim!* does not struggle for such an inclusion. It is not centred on any particular historical event; it rather presents a sweeping panorama of 19th-century Wallachian society [Fig. 2.], caught in emblematic instances frequently occurring in Romanian literature and film (e.g. the fair, the inn). The plot that lacks a "proper" historical event is loosely strung on a narrative thread, deliberately slipping from under the generic authority of the historical film.

The archaization of images, the impression of archival footage, the employment of a static camera and of *tableau* compositions with many figures imitate the

style of early film tradition. The representation of peasant figures also connects back to the literary and cinematic traditions, e.g. to social *tableaux* in Aristide Demetriade's *The Independence of Romania* or Stere Gulea's *The Moromete Family* (*Morometii*, 1987) as possible media-archaeological traces. Here, however, the social fresco is not idealized, nor merely realistic but caricatured and grotesque (see the recurrent *tableau* compositions with many peasant figures who turn their back to the camera). Thus, the *tableau* is employed not as the *lieu* of pathos but that of irony. The grotesque social *tableaux* are counterpointed with painterly landscape *tableaux*, grabbing "reality" in the opposite extremes of social caricature and the romantic wilderness of nature. [Figs. 3–4.] The *tableau* may be perceived in the film as a marker of the historical film format, evoking the epic grandeur that classical historical films strive for. In his essay Ismail Xavier (2004, 354) mentions "suggestive examples of historical narratives where magnified visual spectacle serves as a kind of animated national monument or *tableau vivant*. The mobilization of material resources, technical skills, and the proverbial 'cast of thousands' could be exhibited as a sign of a nation's (or a social regime's) strength and legitimacy." The epic grandeur and "figural totalization" (Xavier 2004, 358) that the historical *tableau* carries in itself is here undermined by the subversive, profoundly non-heroical representation and the lack of "appropriate" content, i.e. battle scenes or other historical events displaying a totalizing view of the "national character."

The film simultaneously constructs and deconstructs the illusion of historical reality. It unfolds in the in-betweenness of the seemingly "natural," unmediated, and the artificial, mediated, that can be grasped in terms of the "twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy" of cinematic experience (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 5). On the one hand, the film creates the impression of historical reality as an experience of immediacy through a series of devices: period *mise en scène* informed by a vast amount of visual (illustrative, photographic, painterly and cinematic), historical and literary material, created through both the profilmic (setting, costumes, the characters' way of speaking and behaving) and the style of cinematic mediation, through vast static *tableaux* and photographic images with archival footage effect, further archaized by the employment of fade-in and fade-out. On the other hand, the *effet de réel* is overwritten by the hypermediacy of cinematic experience. *Aferim!* is in fact a hypermediated patchwork of diverse medial representations that can be best grasped in terms of intermediality. The film displays a simple linear plot imbued with a dense dialogue in archaic Romanian, drawn from a multitude of literary and historical sources (not fully comprehensible perhaps for the native Romanian viewers either; the English

subtitles only epitomize all that is being said in the dialogues). The characters converse in parables with moral lessons that are taken from 19th-century Romanian texts;[8] the literary material is ingenuously arranged in a way as to make possible a narrative thread, but the artificiality of the spoken words, the tension between the formal, written text poured into the informal speech situations is sustained throughout the film. The painterly quality of the images is provided by vast *tableaux*, associated with the employment of fixed frontal camera position, long takes, extreme long takes and awkward compositions evoking the theatricality of the early film. The effect of authenticity is thus counterpointed by a high degree of assumed artificiality and constructedness.

Radu Jude's *Aferim!* has been labelled by reviewers as a "Romanian Gypsy western." The generic affiliation to the western is announced on a blue and red coloured movie poster; the harsh coloured poster is in sharp contrast with the film's soft black-and-white texture. [Figs. 5–6.] The generic code of the western provides the narrative pattern ("man-hunt:" search for the runaway slave; conflicts among nations situated at different stages of development; punishment), the temporal positioning (early 19th-century historical milieu), the sense of the place (backward rural scenes; wild violence as part of the daily life; the Romanian countryside as a "frontier zone") and also the inclination for stereotypes as well as the retrograde, racist, colonial attitude (the finding of the Gypsy slave and punishment from a morally superior position taken for granted). The western hero, lonely and of a masculine integrity, is enacted here by the two protagonists, the constable and his son. The constable is old and coughs heavily all through the film; his cough is apparently disruptive rather than motivated, but it actually serves as a displacement of the western generic code and of the immersive frame of historical representation. The film places in the position of the hero a vulnerable and in fact passive man, an anti-hero who obsequiously follows the orders of the boyar without critically reexamining them and who, in his continuously asserted moral judgements attesting his intolerant, colonial views, proves to be an unreliable and fallible character, not providing the possibility of identification for the spectator. Even the quasi-heroical act of finding the Gypsy slave is undermined: by the boyar himself within the diegesis, who verbally humiliates the constable in front of his son, and by the whole heterogeneous material that makes up the film narrative as a whole.

8 The compilation of literary fragments from 19th-century Romanian writers – Iordache Golescu, Anton Pann, Ion Creangă, Nicolae Filimon, Ion Budai-Deleanu and others – praise the work of the script writers Radu Jude and Florin Lăzărescu.

The generic clichés of the western applied to the archaic Romanian society also invoke the "eastern"[9] as a generic reference; Jude's film explores to the most all the dissonances and tensions created in this cultural gap. The linear film narrative, the two protagonists' being on the road from the beginning to the end of the story, is reminiscent of the narrative construct of road movies; in this respect, again, the tension between the modern-time road movies and the premodern journey on horseback can be perceived. The evoked and displaced generic references result in a generic collage relying on the juxtaposition of diverse visual codes and clichés. The images activate this layeredness already at the very beginning: during the opening credits there appears the image of a thistle swaying in the wind [Fig. 7]; it may be the "eastern" correspondent of the vegetal stereotypes of the western, at the same time, it bounds the image to the region as the typical local weed and also a possible symbol of the social wilderness and uncultivatedness that the film will represent. Together with the accompanying music, it creates the specific atmosphere of a "Balkan western" as *Aferim!* has also been called. The simultaneity of distinct codes anticipates the multiple layeredness of the film; these generic and cultural layers are superimposed and result in a heterogeneous collage of genres and representational modes.

Viewing *Aferim!* is a complex cinematic experience that allows for the activation of a wide range of cinematic references, overt and covert allusions and image types that associate particular genres if not particular films. The perception of the visual layeredness of the film can be conceived along the concept of allegory, which in narrative film "is not simply produced by a storytelling process involving agents and actions, but also results from visual compositions that, in many cases, establish a clear dialogue with particular iconographical traditions, ancient and modern. Depending on the particular editing strategy adopted, a filmmaker can privilege the horizontal, narratological, succession of shots to create specific space–time structures of action, or can privilege the vertical relationships created by the interaction of image and sound, or by the intertextual connections between the film's pictorial composition and cultural codes deriving from painting and photography" (Xavier 2004, 337). Jude's film preeminently initiates a dialogue with particular iconographic traditions, within and beyond Romanian (cinematic) culture. Besides the aforementioned elements of the western manifesting at the "horizontal level," the film is infused with elements that exert their effect at the

9 An interesting connection, worth thinking over, is provided by the film *Mirage* (*Délibáb*, Szabolcs Hajdu, 2014), a Hungarian "eastern" about slavery in contemporary days set in the Hungarian Puszta [wasteland], having as its protagonist a runaway black football player enslaved by a tyrannical Romanian slave owner and his Gypsy fellows.

"vertical level," thus requiring a "multi-focal cultural gesture" that Xavier regards as being characteristic of allegorical reading: "reading films allegorically is always a multi-focal cultural gesture, requiring the capacity to explore what is suggested both by the horizontal succession of shots and by the vertical effects of visual compositions or cultural codes embedded on its soundtrack" (2004, 337). *Aferim!* goes against a smooth integration of vertical effects and cultural codes, instead, it plays off one cultural code against the other, at least, preserves the underlying tensions, resulting in a masterful patchwork of cliché images and cultural codes.

The collage effect also manifests in the sound–image relation. In the opening shot, which is an extreme long take recorded with a fixed frontal camera, there turns up an empty landscape which is first filled with the voices of the conversing protagonists approaching on horseback, but they cannot yet be seen. While the spectator follows the horseriders turning up and entering the image on one side, their voices remain in a constant, unaltered proximity until the characters leave the image on the other side, without the camera following them. [Figs. 8–9.] Thus, the landscape *tableau* emerges with the power of creating an immersive spatial background for the anticipated action, but due to the "two-dimensional" use of the soundtrack, to the "archaization" of the technique, this immersive structure is overwritten by a bizarre dissonance which will only be amplified by the unique constructedness of the film. The dissonant sound–image structure – *tableaux* recorded in extreme long takes with distant, dot-like characters and their voice added in "close-up" – will be repeatedly employed, reinforcing the artificiality and laying bare the mediatedness of "historical reality."

Just as incorporating literary quotes, *Aferim!* also relies on cultural codes (photographic and painterly representations of the 19th-century Romanian society) and intertextual connections (manifold cinematic references). The space construction of the film and the recurrence of social *tableaux* carry many of these covert references. The road movie type narrative pattern allows the inclusion of a great diversity of landscapes that serve as the background of the protagonists' quest but also as markers of architextual connections. The large, open-air, empty spaces grabbed in landscape *tableaux* may evoke the genre of the western including the Romanian spaghetti westerns and perhaps also the Mărgelatu series.[10] The "mioritic"[11] foothills call forth the space representation in Romanian historical

10 Popular adventure films set in the historical past, directed, in turn, by Doru Năstase, Gheorghe Vitanidis and Mircea Moldovan in the eighties, with the famous Romanian actor, Florin Piersic in the main role.

11 "Blaga, a renowned inter-war poet and philosopher, advanced the concept of the *Spațiul Mioritic* (the Mioritic Space), which provided a definition of the Romanian national identity

films, albeit with perceivable differences that subvert the idyllic space that is one with the nation (e.g. in Sergiu Nicolaescu's *The Dacians*); the journey through the foggy forest may evoke in the spectator the ending of Stere Gulea's already mentioned *The Moromete Family*. *Aferim!* subtly brings in motion these implied spatial references with a discrete media-archaeological purport.[12]

The collage effect disrupts the veil of the illusion of historical reality, which is only reinforced by goofs. Christian Ferencz-Flatz espies and interprets goofs, intentionally left within the final version of the film, as forming part of the film's moments of oscillation between diegesis (realist representation) and metadiegesis (breaking the illusion of realist representation). He draws attention to moments in the film when actors make mistakes while shooting, for instance, the actor playing the Orthodox priest on the road (Alexandru Bindea): in the course of the perhaps funniest scene of the film the horse of his cart moves in the wrong direction and the priest suddenly looks into the camera with remorse in his eyes [Fig. 10]; or, at a certain point towards the end of the film the actress playing the boyar's wife (Luminița Gheorghiu) addresses the constable, Costandin, by mistakenly using the Gypsy slave's name: "Carfine," and she is also confused in front of the camera for a brief, hardly noticeable moment (cf. Ferencz-Flatz 2015, 129–130). Besides, the film that Christian Ferencz-Flatz qualifies as a "well-spoilt film" in the title of the above reference also resorts to *temps morts*, metaleptic moments and occasionally deliberate clumsiness of shooting.

Through its ingenuous intermedial solutions, *Aferim!* is deemed a collage of life and artifice, rendering the historical "reality" in a series of audio-visual, generic and cultural stereotypes, relieving the historical image from under the convention of mythical or realistic representation. The collage as the film's major structuring principle and figurative potential disrupts the veil of the illusion of historical reality, pointing at the artificiality of history as construct. In contrast with the homogeneous construction of historical representation in traditional historical film, the intermedial constructedness of *Aferim!* brings to the fore a

through a combination of environment and culture. The environment helped to shape the Romanian lifestyle and the Romanian lifestyle helped to shape the environment." (Lowatt 1999.)

12 The question arises how a film so deeply embedded in the Romanian social, cultural and historical context "is readable" for spectators unfamiliar with these cultural reminiscences. The international recognition and popularity of the film attests that *Aferim!* does exert effect among non-Romanian viewers as well, due to its ingenious film language solutions, its humour and the human patterns perpetuated across times and spaces: "And yet, as with so many Romanian films, Radu Jude's approach is one of deadpan humour, born from a world-weary culture grappling with a bumpy history that seems to have only one constant: people were made to suffer" (Hoffman 2016).

fragmented image of the historical past, shattered into pieces by diverse media representations. *Aferim!* as a media collage engaged in a dialogue with history extends the possibilities of the structural mode of intermediality that, according to Ágnes Pethő, "may take the form of diegetic reflexivity, or it may result in the world appearing as a media collage, it can be perceived as a marker for metaleptic leaps, intermediality may perform metaleptic constrasts between the 'natural,' the seemingly unmediated and the artificial within the image, as well as 'folds' of the immediate and the mediated (applying Deleuze's well-known concept to intermedial cinema)" (Pethő 2011, 5–6).

Through its sophisticated reflexivity and unconcealed criticism, Radu Jude's bittersweet, ironical intermedial collage defetishizes the traditional historical iconography and debunks the mythical national imaginary, unveiling the traumatic history of an ethnic and racial mix and opening up the historical perspective as a grain of thought for the present.

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The Phenomenology of Trauma. Sound and Haptic Sensuality in *Son of Saul*

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Abstract. The winner of many prestigious prizes (Oscar for the best foreign language film, Grand Prize of the Cannes Film Festival, and the Golden Globe among them), the Hungarian film, *Son of Saul* – according to most critics – represents the Holocaust trauma in a completely new and intriguing way. The filmmakers have invented a special form in order to tackle the heroic task of showing the unwatchable, representing the unthinkable. In this essay I analyse the representational strategy of the film from a phenomenological point of view, and position it in the theoretical framework of haptic sensuality formulated by Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks, among others. I mainly focus on the use of sound, in particular the role of sound design in the creation of haptic space. With the help of the analysis of the representation and artistic invocation of the different bodily senses in the film, I demonstrate how traditional artistic formal elements (characteristic of highly artistic, even experimental productions) are combined with high impact effects often present in popular film forms. I argue that the successful combination of these two factors makes the film an example of artistic immersive cinema. [1]

Keywords: *Son of Saul*, haptic cinema, senses, cinema of immersion, Holocaust.

The most striking feature of the recent Hungarian film, *Son of Saul* (*Saul fia*, László Nemes, 2015) – that won the Oscar for best foreign language film in 2016, the Grand Prix of the Cannes Film Festival and the Golden Globe – is the ability to represent the Holocaust in a new and uniquely unsettling way. The filmmakers invented and successfully realized a peculiar film form in order to tackle the heroic task of showing the unwatchable, representing the unthinkable. In the present essay I intend to analyse the representational strategy of the film in the theoretical framework of haptic sensuality. Among other haptic strategies, I will mainly focus on the analysis of the role that sound plays in the film, and on the

1 This work was supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund, project number NN 112700.

role of sound design in the creation of the haptic environment.[2] Through this analysis I will demonstrate that the film combines experimental formal strategies (characteristic of intricate artistic cinema) and high impact effects, often present in popular film forms. I will argue that it is the successful combination of these two strategies that made *Son of Saul* into a film that is effective in the sense of popular cinema, while it is also an art film that has remarkable aesthetic qualities.

The film takes place in the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1944. Saul, the main character is a member of the *Sondercommando*. They are prisoners responsible for operating the crematorium: preparing the groups to be sent into the shower rooms, transporting and burning the corpses. Saul finds moral survival upon trying to salvage from the flames the body of a boy that might or might not be his son – the film leaves this question open to interpretation by providing hints, both pro and contra. The answer cannot be determined on the basis of the narrative information provided – the interpretation will depend on the subjective emotional reaction to the narrative information in each viewer.

On a basic narrative level (structure, delivery of plot information), the film has a classical form. The opening situation is changed by a sudden turn of events: a young boy miraculously survives the gas chamber, and after he is killed by a German officer, Saul who witnessed these events decides to find a rabbi and give the boy a proper burial. The film follows the adventures of Saul who is about to accomplish an impossible mission: to steal and bury a body in a concentration camp. In the end, the mission is only partly accomplished: the body that was saved from the flames and intended to be buried in earth, finally finds its peace in water. Saul survives the mission but does not survive the story. Plot information is provided in a realistic, linear fashion. The depiction of plot events does not cause any ambiguity: events take place in the present, the point of view of the narration is an external one associated with the character of Saul.

Haptic Sensuality

Film studies have shown a growing interest in the phenomenological interpretation of perception and understanding of film during the last one and a half decades. Following the trendsetting books of Vivian Sobchack (1992; 2004), the works by Laura U. Marks – who is interested mostly in the dimensions of

2 Tamás Zányi, the sound designer of the film, was awarded the Vulcan prize for technical achievement at the Cannes Film Festival (2015), and also won the Golden Reel Award for Best Foreign Film of the American Motion Picture Sound Editors (2016).

sensual experience in relation to audio-visual works – have become a widely referenced inspiration for many scholars. In her book *The Skin of the Film* Marks proposes an auratic, embodied, and mimetic theory of representation that could be appropriate for many kinds of cinema, not only for the intercultural works that the book itself describes (Marks 2000, xiii). Marks contends that synaesthesia (the study of which seems to have had a renaissance recently, see Cytowic 2002; Robertson and Sagiv 2004) and haptic visuality (visuality that stimulates not only the sense of vision, but also the other senses) enable the viewer to experience cinema as multisensory. By emphasizing the multisensory quality of perception she aims to shift the discussion of visuality away from the optical terms that usually predominate (Marks 2000, 131).

Although Marks concentrates primarily on the role of the proximal senses, that are not normally considered important in connection with the audio-visual medium (such as touch), her argument helps to re-conceptualize visuality in general, as well as the hierarchy that exists between image and sound in audio-visual media. However, this hierarchy is not only a feature of audio-visual media, the bodily senses in general seem to have a similar hierarchical pattern. Research that studied fifty-three languages has testified that verbs depicting sensual activities are part of a linguistic hierarchy where the strongest is vision, followed by the senses of hearing, touch, taste and smell. The same research also pointed out that "the verb having the prototypical meaning 'see' within a given language has a privileged position in that it commonly can be used in an extended sense as an overall frame with which to describe the perceptual activities of the other sense modalities" (Branigan 1997, 114–115).

Furthermore, psychologists also argue that the primary sense of acquiring information is vision and hence when the information gathered by other senses contradicts visual information, the latter overwrites the former – ventriloquism is based on this very effect (Herschberger 1992). Hence, the intention of redefining the hierarchy of the senses is not only a concern for film perception but it touches upon this hierarchy in a general sense. And haptic modality can provide a common ground for this project since it interprets all of the senses as stimuli addressing the human body. According to Marks, "as vision can be optical or haptic, so too hearing can perceive the environment in a more or less instrumental way. We listen for specific things, while we hear ambient sound as an undifferentiated whole. One might call 'haptic hearing' that usually brief moment when all sounds present themselves to us undifferentiated, before we make the choice of which sounds are most important to attend to" (2000, 183).

Here Marks speaks about an approach to listening, about the fact that hearing can be haptic, but it is also important that sound itself has proximal qualities. As Edward Branigan notes, "audible sound comes from an object whose mechanical vibrations cause vibratory waves in a medium, as in air, water, flesh, or bone. Sound rubs against and within us" (Branigan 2010, 42).

In general, for Marks the importance of haptic sensuality and visuality lies in its ability to evoke memories, feelings, and content stored by the different senses and not being describable by traditional means of audio-visual representation. Based on the examples analysed in Marks's book, it is clear that this type of representation is often connected to some kind of loss, trauma, and the difficulty of remembering. This suggests that the choice of haptic strategies in the case of depicting topics that traditionally resist representation might be the most adequate solution, and it is especially true in the case of the Holocaust.

Son of Saul, on the one hand, uses the strategies of haptic visuality, but on the other hand, by emphasizing the importance of sound, that already has a basic proximal quality, makes the overall perceptive experience even more sensually accentuated. Because of its material qualities, sound has a more visceral effect on the human body than immaterial light. Our body reacts physiologically to sound: it affects blood circulation, skin resistance, muscle tension and respiration (Recuber 2007, 323). Furthermore, "though we may make sounds, our bodies are unable to create light. Thus, light seems relatively external, objective, and disembodied whereas sound is within us and personal" (Branigan 2010, 43). In connection with sound and materiality it is worth noting that the technology used for shooting *Son of Saul* has a more than symbolic meaning: the film was shot on 35mm film stock – it was recorded on actual material, its existence is real in material terms.

The film opens and ends with sounds without pictures. At the beginning, the screen is still dark when sounds of birds and the noise of a water stream can be heard; a little later the film starts at a place that looks like a clearing in a forest. The film ends in the same forest, and after the last picture of a beautifully green and empty forest disappears from the screen, the darkness is filled with the noise of rain. My personal sensual experience was that the noise of the rain is gradually starting to resemble the crackling of fire. Personal experience and subjectivity play an important role here since hearing is a more subjective sense than vision; often it is more difficult to recognize phenomena based on noise than based on image. Christian Metz summarizes this situation by saying that sound is an adjective while vision is a noun: "[w]hen we see a physical object, he

says, its identification is complete and all that could be added would be merely adjectival, as in a 'tall, reading' lamp. By contrast, when we hear a sound the identification remains incomplete. A 'whistling' sound still needs to be specified: the whistling of what thing? from where? because of what action?" (Metz quoted by Branigan 2010, 49). This incompleteness and vulnerability of the sense of hearing is used in the film in connection with dialogue as well – but more about this later. Also, the rain vs. fire interpretation of the closing sound is not entirely alien to the metaphors present in the film: Saul wanted to save the body from fire and finally buried it in water.

In the meantime, the prototypical form of haptic visuality described by Marks is also present in the film: in the case of haptic visuality the eyes function like organs of touch. "Optical visuality depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object. Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze." (Marks 2000, 162.) These haptic images are often blurred, which makes their recognition difficult. *Son of Saul* opens with a picture that looks exactly like that: the first image is a greenish blur that fills the screen [Fig. 1]. After some time, it turns out that the picture is produced by shallow focus and as the hero approaches the camera, finally his face becomes sharp while his surroundings remain relatively blurred. The background of the picture stays almost unrecognizable, probably several people are digging a hole in the ground. Soon we learn that Saul is there to help in managing a fresh arrival of people. Right after we see his face on the screen, he immediately turns away to do his work – with this gesture the film sets its cruising speed and style, we follow Saul throughout the film, mostly seeing his back in medium close-up. The chosen aspect ratio also comes into play here: the traditional 4:3 ratio is used to limit the visual information about the surroundings, and to reduce the viewer's point of view to the narrowed down vision of Saul. The dominant shot type throughout the film is between medium close up and close up, and it almost never exceeds medium shot. There are several dramatically important shots that might be interpreted as wide shots, for example: the killing of the boy, the negotiations with the doctor about the body and the killing of the first rabbi Saul finds.

The consistent use of shallow focus and the narrowing down of the field of vision by aspect ratio and shot size work against optical vision in general throughout the film. Haptic vision is based on closeness and the elimination of distance, while optic vision maintains the distance, and distance "allows the viewer to organize

him/herself as an all-perceiving subject" (Marks 2000, 162). Distance and optic vision, according to Marks, are connected to the question of mastery. The vision that is typical of capitalism, consumerism and surveillance is a sort of instrumental vision that positions the thing seen as an object for knowledge and control. But in contrast, the type of vision, such as in haptic visuality, "that is not merely cognitive but acknowledges its location in the body, seems to escape the attribution of mastery" (Marks 2000, 131–132). The repositioning of the audience, by eliminating the all-perceiving position and the controlling knowledge, makes them more vulnerable in the perceiving situation, and makes the experience more effective. The viewer's suggested "physical" closeness to Saul makes the perceptive identification more accentuated. [Fig. 2]. All of the haptic qualities present strengthen the possibility that the viewer could be drawn not only into the subjectivity of Saul but also into his environment, perceptively. Identification can be processed on the intellectual but also on the perceptual level. This double dynamic plays an important role in the phenomenological concept of embodied vision: "[t]heories of embodied visuality acknowledge the presence of the body in the act of seeing, at the same time that they relinquish the (illusory) unity of the self. In embodied spectatorship the senses and the intellect are not separate" (Marks 2000, 151).

Off-screen Space and Sound

Constraints of visible space in the film create the increased importance of off-screen space that is in close connection with the role sound can play in these situations: "a focus on the ear and sound directly emphasizes the spatiality of the cinematic experience: we can hear around corners and through walls, in complete darkness and blinding brightness, even when we cannot see anything" (Elsaesser and Hagener 2010, 131). The field of vision can be limited by framing but this does not necessarily mean the limitation of the field of hearing. According to Michel Chion, the medium of film provides a defined and limited place for images, while for sound no predetermined frame of container exists (Chion 1994, 67–68). Similarly, there is a difference between off-screen space and off-screen sound: while the former cannot be seen, the latter is just as present as the sound whose source is visible on the screen – it is impossible to differentiate acoustically between the two (Chion 1994, 83). Since in *Son of Saul* the visible space is limited by various techniques, off-screen sound plays a crucial role.

Chion speaks about two types of off-screen sound: active off-screen sources of sound, which cannot be seen but inspires interest in viewers urging them to

figure out what that sound is exactly, where it comes from, and what causes it – and makes them want to see its source. Active off-screen sound, in a way, controls the dynamics of editing in traditional film composition: the sound is followed by the image of its source. The other type is passive off-screen sound, that creates atmosphere, "surrounds" and stabilizes the picture, does not urge the viewer to look for the exact source of the sound – this sound does not direct the interest towards the exterior of the frame, rather it anchors the frame and the picture in it (Chion 1994, 85). This type of off-screen sound also fits the "traditional use of voice-off [that] constitutes a denial of the frame as a limit and an affirmation of the unity and homogeneity of the depicted space" (Doane 1980, 37–38).

The soundscape of *Son of Saul* combines the two types of off-screen sound. Active off-screen sound plays an important role, although the film does not reveal the events happening outside the frame – viewers have to construct the outside world and visualize the source of the sounds by building on their imagination. In this sense the features of active and passive off-screen sound are merged into an atmospheric sound that delivers important information about the world outside the frame, but at the same time focuses the audience's attention inside the frame since the events of the outside world are to horrid to see. This is how the off-screen space becomes the place for representing the unrepresentable that is significantly assisted by the creative tension that the active/passive off-screen sound creates.

Pascal Bonitzer describes the off-screen area as a disquieting place in which tension can be eased by its revelation and concretization (2008). Hence, it is of paramount importance how a certain film uses off-screen space and articulates the relationship between the onscreen and off-screen. On the one hand, the film can define the space outside the frame as a "reality substitute," of which the role is to imitate being the "natural" continuation of the image that had been dis-incorporated from it: the off-screen space exists in the shadow and for the sake of the onscreen image. On the other hand, a film can accentuate the off-screen: "by accentuating the space of the non-visible it is the imperfectness, openness, dividedness of the filmic space that is highlighted" (Bonitzer 2008). The examples of the latter case are films that have a non-classical form, and do not employ standard continuity editing. *Son of Saul* combines classical and non-classical strategies in this sense: through the tension between onscreen and off-screen space it depicts the problem of representation on a rhetorical level. While human drama is taking place onscreen that is supported and contextualized by the invisible "continuation" outside the frame, the absence of this off-screen space is also heavily accented. The invisible, the absent, makes the presentation of the visible continuously fissured.

Furthermore, as Bonitzer notes: "[a]ccentuating the off-screen as the Other of the on-screen, in fact means that the emphasis has been transferred from image to sound, and sound is freed from being a slave to the realistic stage of the image. And sound, as it is known, is often provocative" (Bonitzer 2008).

Embodied Metaphors

The film's artistic strategy concerning embodied presence is clearly formulated in a dramatically important, highly symbolic moment. Throughout the film we do not see any trace of emotion on the face of Saul, not even at the moment when he supposedly recognizes his own son. He seems to be emotionally dead. He does what he has to do without thinking, moves around like a machine, his body constantly tossed around by his superiors. But there is a crucial moment when he is first left alone with the body of the dead boy. He sits on the bench beside the corpse and takes a really deep breath – we can hear the sound of the air entering his body. At this moment, he seems to return to being a breathing, living human being – as if his soul had returned into him. Breath, in many cultures, traditionally symbolizes the soul (Quinlivan 2012, 9). [Fig. 3.]

In the concept of sensual film experience and embodied vision, breath plays a crucial role. According to Davina Quinlivan, through the conceptualization of breath, film is able to create a connection with the breathing body of the viewer – films are able to influence the breathing rhythm of viewers, make them gasping for air or hold their breath. The breathing of the audience, in a way, is the consequence of the film (Quinlivan 2012, 21 and 125). This mechanism is quite significant in the case of *Son of Saul*. At the point when the above-mentioned scene takes place in the film viewers already understand the relevance of a deep breath in the world depicted. The narrow field of vision that viewers are constantly forced into together with Saul strengthens the feeling of being locked into a small place. Each moment when the film, after long sequences of close ups, lets its viewer look out into the wider space in a middle shot or in an almost wide shot, has a physical effect: it feels as if the film lessens the grip on us and lets us take a deep breath. It might be worth noting here that the word haptic comes from *haptein* (to fasten) (Marks 2000, 162) – it is not only us who fasten the images, but also haptic visuality fastens images around us.

In order to better understand the mental and physiological effects of films, cognitive film theory offers the concept of audio-visual metaphors. According to this idea, sound and image induce bodily and cognitive associations that are

based on a certain perceptive and cognitive topography. Audio-visual metaphors are effective mechanisms that are able to synaesthetically combine figures, objects, spatial formations and certain emotional contents during the process of narration (Fahlenbrach 2008, 86). These emotion metaphors relay pre-symbolic meaning by connecting emotional content to actual sensual experiences. Kathrin Fahlenbrach illustrates this mechanism in connection with the emotion of fear. On a conceptual level fear is depicted as fluid in a container, a hidden enemy, a supernatural being, etc., and these concepts also relate to bodily associations and patterns of experience. The rhetorical devices using these concepts ("to be overcome with fear," "frozen with fear") are powerful because they are able to grasp together the emotional content and a related physical dimension (Fahlenbrach 2008, 89–90). The combination of visual images and sound effects makes audio-visual media a particularly successful tool for creating emotion metaphors, and these can be especially effective in transferring the bodily dynamics of emotions to audiences.

Regarding *Son of Saul*, one of the interesting tropes is the labyrinth and its connection to the sense of fear. The motif of the maze "represents in its gestalt a hermetically closed system full of nooks and crannies, which guide its visitors toward the centre of the maze, which is a trap from which they can only escape with difficulty" (Fahlenbrach 2008, 92). These features make the labyrinth an effective metaphor for the emotion of fear (as a closed container, hidden enemy, or opponent in a struggle) that is able to induce bodily reactions in viewers.

The camera in a labyrinth typically represents a subjective point of view (of the person lost in the maze) and denies the provision of an overview of the space, which makes orientation difficult and causes confusion. Spatial confusion, the feeling of being wedged into a closed system, and the sense of the invisible enemy's closeness – these are all topographic constructions that project the emotion of fear into physical space. It is possible to understand the construction of space and narrative in *Son of Saul* as such a labyrinth, a dangerous and narrow corridor with full of traps, and a monster at the end: the gas chamber. In this sense, the entire film and its spatial construction, with Saul wandering inside and the viewers following him closely, become the audio-visual metaphor of fear. It seems that for Saul it is the body of the boy and the mission connected to it that constitute the thread that helps him to escape the dreadful labyrinth.

Obscurity and Uncertainty

The haptic qualities mentioned earlier, that resist intellectual and objective conceptualization, have a connection with obscurity and uncertainty. Obscurity is one of the central concepts of *Son of Saul* and is present on many levels in the film.

There is a highly symbolic, self-reflexive episode in the film, when Saul, in order to further his personal mission, helps other prisoners, who secretly try to take photographs of the concentration camp. One of the prisoners pretends to repair a broken lock on a door while the other one tries to take photographs of what is happening in the courtyard. Suddenly the wind blows smoke in their direction, covering up the scene, thus they are unable to take the picture. The smoke that reminds the viewer of the process of cremation, at the same time blocks the vision of horror and makes it impossible to be recorded in photograph. The situation mirrors the problems of representation that the film itself wrestles with. The smoke in this scene is a narrative equivalent of the technical tools that are used in the film to express the difficulty of visual depiction, such as the narrowness of vision created by the 4-by-3 aspect ratio, and the constant use of shallow focus [Fig. 4].

Another motif that is not only significant from the point of view of haptic sensuality but also has a metaphoric connection with the smoke scene, is an episode that takes place by the river where later the body of the boy will find its final resting place. In this scene the members of the *Sondercommando* are ordered to the riverbank to shovel into the river the ashes coming from the crematorium. It is a deeply haunting image as ash is filling the air – the fine powder does not cover up anything at this time, since there is nothing to hide there visually, but the entire scene is composed as if it would be possible for the viewer to breath in the flying, light, but also horrid substance. [Fig. 5.] This scene also evokes the sense of smell that plays a significant role in Holocaust literature. The recollections about ghettos and concentration camps often mention the distinctive olfactory experience. The penetrating smell of these crowded places where people were squeezed in under primitive hygienic conditions had become one of the most basic experiences of the victims. "The smell of the ghetto was not just the smell of fear, of dirt, unwashed bodies, unwashed clothes; it was also the sweetish stink of corpses and the characteristic smell of diseases like typhus, tuberculosis, wounds that would not heal, ulcers." (Engelking 2001, 96.) The olfactory experience itself is described very suggestively by Charlotte Delbo, who was deported to Auschwitz: "[t]he smell was so strong and so fetid that we

thought that we were breathing not air but some thicker and more viscous fluid that enveloped and shut off this part of the world with an additional atmosphere in which only specially adapted creatures could move. Us" (quoted by Kremer 2001, 151). [Fig. 6.]

Obscurity and uncertainty are also features of the film's soundtrack. The sound of rain at the end of the film that can be mistaken for crackling fire has already been mentioned. Dialogues are sometimes also represented in a certain, obscure way suggesting that the concentration camp is not a place for words and thinking. Most of the scenes take place in a chaotic, multilingual sonic environment, where sounds are off-screen and signal the horrifying but mostly invisible events. As Tamás Zányi, the film's sound designer said in an interview, the unique concept of vision in the film opened up the possibility for the expansion of the sonic environment. Because of the narrowness of the visible space and the use of shallow focus it was only a very small slice of story space where sound had to be synchronized with visible images. The bigger part of the story's space remained invisible and had to be created by the sound designer – it meant significant freedom but also an enormous task. Zányi used this freedom to "broaden the sonic environment:" the scenes are built wider in sonic sense, noise and human voices can be heard not just from the "middle" of the image but from both sides of the picture.[3] At the same time, partially as a consequence of this strategy, dialogues between characters, that seem to be crucial to the understanding of the story, are muffled, almost impossible to hear or understand.

Designers of filmic soundscapes always have to make a choice between creating a perceptive realism or a narrativized, psychological realism for the audience. The former subordinates the sound to camera position and creates a "sound perspective" suggesting that the viewer is positioned beside the camera and hears the events from the camera's perspective in spite of all the problems this positioning might create. The latter strategy simulates a certain psychological realism by subordinating sound to narrative, positions the microphones close to the events, which are the most important from the point of view of narration at a certain moment, and – even when circumstances contradict it – makes the sound clearly audible (Branigan 2010, 55). This whole phenomenon is related to the idea of "point of view," or as in sound design some have called it: "point of audition." However, Michael Chion has pointed out that the concept of "point of view" refers to two very different and unrelated phenomena: one is about a spatial position, the

3 Studio discussion with Tamás Zányi in the programme *Pergő Képek* of the Hungarian Tilos Rádió (28 May, 2015).

other is related to the objective/subjective distinction. In the first case sound design tries to create "point of audition" by simulating the sonic environment of a certain point in space, while in the second case the aim is to evoke the subjective position of a character and their auditory experience (Chion 1994, 89, 91).

In the case of *Son of Saul,* the sound design aims for perceptive realism where not all the factors are subordinated to audibility; and at the same time the film's concept of "point of audition" combines spatiality and subjectivity since the camera (and the viewer) follows Saul closely all the time – viewers hear the diegetic world from the spatial position of Saul and this sense of closeness to and identification with the hero also creates the sense of subjectivity in relation to audible aspects. This merged, perceptive and subjective construction affects the comprehensibility of dialogues, which is, in my opinion, used by film-makers as a stylistic tool. However, this effect is not detectable by non-Hungarian listeners since for them subtitles eliminate the obscurity of certain dialogues. Although, based on my repeated listening experience of the film in normal conditions in the cinema, this "problem" is most probably intended by the film makers, it is part of the stylistic concept of the film: it further accentuates that language and verbal communication had lost their relevance and only actions remain important in the situation depicted.

Obscurity of Narration

"In classical cinema, most scholars would conclude that narration, i.e. the filmic realization of the plot, is usually that to which all other parameters (editing, camera work and primarily sound) are subordinated." (Elsaesser and Hagener 2010, 136.) Haptic visuality, in the meantime, seems to work against narration: "[t]he haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative" (Marks 2000, 163). But haptic imagery can also be used as a tool of classical narration, for example as a trigger for viewer expectations. The viewer would ask: what is the meaning of the mysterious, foggy picture? What is hidden in the background of the image covered by the blur that shallow focus creates? And just as haptic imagery can be used against or in accordance with narrative causes, there are other tools that can be used in a similar manner. For example, in *Son of Saul* the sound sometimes helps narration, sometimes makes it difficult to follow, and the same applies to acting.

On the one hand, the film has a strong, classical narrative structure – the hero has a mission, and in order to accomplish the mission he has to face many

obstacles –, on the other hand, many details work against the clarity dictated by classical narration. The restricted visual field of shots gives the viewer the task to imagine the horror happening outside the frame – most of the clues are provided by sound design. The dialogues are often incomprehensible even in crucial moments, and also kept to the minimum throughout the entire film. Géza Röhrig's acting in the role of Saul is especially expressionless, which might represent the general mental state of the character, but also makes it difficult for the audience to recognize and understand his motives. For example, one of the main reasons why I personally believe in the interpretation that the boy is not his son (neither legitimate, nor illegitimate), is the fact that he remains completely expressionless even when he first sees the boy, and also at the moment when the boy is strangled in front of him. It might be conjectured that his apathy is so severe that he is unable to express emotions anymore, nevertheless, this tiny acting detail has fully convinced me that Saul has not found his son, he only interprets the miracle of the boy surviving the gas chamber as a sign for him to do something in order to save his own humanity.

Saul's expressionlessness causes further narrative uncertainties as well, for example about a woman he meets during one of his errands in the camp. Does Saul know the woman? (He says no, but his friend says otherwise.) Might she even be his wife? It is impossible to guess because of expressionless acting. Viewers' identification with characters is not supported by the acting of the leading actors, rather the film grabs the viewer and keeps him/her locked in the sensually accentuated, sonic environment, and stimulates bodily identification. In this very dense sonic environment the haptic qualities of sound also support identification. As Marks notes: "[i]n these settings the aural boundaries between body and world may feel indistinct: the rustle of the trees may mingle with the sound of my breathing, or conversely the booming music may inhabit my chest cavity and move my body from the inside" (2000, 183). Only that in *Son of Saul* it is not the music that inhabits our chest – there is no music in the film – but the shouts of prison guards and the screams of death. The substitution of staggering images for unsettling sounds makes the film's effect, in a way, more aggressive – it is more difficult to separate ourselves from sound effects than from visual stimuli. Loud sound immediately, unconsciously draws our attention: "processing visual information requires that one actively orient one's eyes toward the stimulus, while processing auditory information does not require that one actively orient one's ears" (Fiske–Taylor 1991 quoted by Branigan 1997, 117).

Experimental vs. Mainstream

Many of the above mentioned aspects of the film draw our attention to its differences from classical film form. For example, the accentuated use of haptic sensuality could signal an artistically adventurous, even experimental film form that is far from mainstream styles. But *Son of Saul* uses these artistic techniques for creating an intense, suspense-driven film that employs the strategies of genre cinema – especially such body genres (Williams 1991) as horror. Narrow visual field, for example, is a stylistic tool often used by horror movies to heighten the tension and to suggest that the threatening force might be very close to us, just outside the narrow frame. The anthropological connection between horror and sound is also well known: "[t]he main 'anthropological' task of hearing [...] [is] to stabilize our body in space, hold it up, facilitate a three-dimensional orientation and, above all, ensure an all-round security that includes even those spaces, objects and events that we cannot see, especially what goes on behind our backs. Whereas the eye searches and plunders, the ear listens in on what is plundering us. The ear is the organ of fear" (Schaub 2005 quoted by Elsaesser and Hagener 2010, 131).

Another aspect that helps us to contextualize the intensified sensuality of *Son of Saul* in relation to current trends in mainstream cinema is the notion of "immersion cinema" (Recuber 2007). Recent changes in projection technology and theatre architecture focus on the importance of the physical and kinesthetic experience of the spectator immersed in high-fidelity audio-visual technologies. These technologies can be characterized as attempts to create believable sensorial experiences even if such experiences are not possible in the real world. This approach concentrates on the technological side of the question, such as the invention of new technologies of 3D recording and projection, improvement of sound systems, screening shapes and formats. According to Tim Recuber, mingling the technology produced illusion and the sense of realistic experience in immersion cinema produces a very dangerous mixture that re-contextualizes the concept of authenticity: the viewer has the impression that a depiction of history is authentic because the technology makes it possible to simulate "the experience of being there."[4] Immersion cinema does not deal anymore with such shady tools of uncertain effectiveness as a good script, talented acting or directing, rather it leans on the calculated, predictable effects provided by technology. As a consequence, the ideology of passive, commercial viewership is strengthened, while the social and artistic agency of cinema is diminishing (Recuber 2007, 316).

4 Recuber's example here is *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) (cf. Recuber 2007, 326).

When speaking about immersion, Walter Benjamin and others used the concept in a metaphorical sense and referred to the emotional and intellectual immersion of the perceivers of art. Today, metaphysical immersion is replaced by the mesmerizing effects of technology (Recuber 2007, 320). "[T]his new, physically enveloping approach to film turns even the most harrowing tales of war's dangers into spine-tingling experiences, making brutal aspects of history fun in the same way that a particularly scary or intense rollercoaster ride is fun." (Recuber 2007, 327.) This excessively technical approach to movie experience seems to bring about the disappearance of socially important topics while replacing active viewer participation with a passive, consumerist approach.

The concept of *Son of Saul* is interesting from this perspective as well. On the one hand, it deals with a historically, socially important topic that is concerned with the politics of remembering, but on the other hand, it builds on the strategies of immersion cinema. The difference between the sensual immersion of *Son of Saul* and the Hollywood blockbusters of immersion cinema might be summarized in connection with the obscurity/uncertainty discussed above. Immersion cinema aims to create a perfectly "narrativized perspective" and "psychological realism" (Branigan 2010, 55), while *Son of Saul* creates a perceptual realism that lacks perfection, but somehow seems to tear the texture of fiction, and gives the impression that we are able to witness "The Real." And sound plays a peculiar role in this experience since, as Christian Metz notes, "auditory aspects, providing that the recording is well done, undergo no appreciable loss in relation to the corresponding sound in the real world: in principle, nothing distinguishes a gun shot heard in a film from a gunshot heard on the street" (Metz is quoted by Branigan 2010, 45). Hence, for Metz, a particular film sound, when believed by an auditor to be typical of such sounds, renders original acoustic situation that created it during filming irrelevant. In this sense, nothing distinguishes the death screams in *Son of Saul* from the screams heard in the gas chambers. "Even in the darkest hours of mankind there might be a voice within us that allows us to remain human. That's the hope of this film." – said director László Nemes in his Oscar acceptance speech. Finally, *Son of Saul*, not least by giving sound such an important role throughout the film, might be able to give voice to the sound of conscience.[5]

5 In different languages there are many metaphors that connect sound and conscience, see: Dolar 2006, 83.

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Figure 6. The penetrating smell had become one of the most basic experiences of the victims.

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Subjects and Objects of the Embodied Gaze: Abbas Kiarostami and the Real of the Individual Perspective

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Abstract. It is widely accepted that Abbas Kiarostami's cinema revolves around the representation of the gaze. Many critics argue that he should be considered a late modernist who repeats the self-reflexive gestures of modernist European cinema decades after they were first introduced. The present paper will contradict this assertion by investigating the problematic of the Kiarostamian gaze and analyzing the perceptual side of the act of looking. I will argue that instead of focusing on the gaze of the spectator directed towards the filmic image, he exposes a gaze that is fully integrated into the reality to be captured on film. The second part of the paper will explain this by linking the concept of gaze to the Lacanian concept of the order of the Real. Finally, I will contextualize all this by discussing the Iranian director's position between Eastern and Western traditions of representation.

Keywords: Abbas Kiarostami, gaze, Jacques Lacan, perception, the Real.

Since Jean-Luc Nancy's famous book on Kiarostami entitled *L'évidence du film* (Nancy 2001), the gaze of the Kiarostamian camera has become the center of most analysis focusing on the Iranian filmmaker. Several facts, such as that his *mise-en-abyme* is operated not only within a film, but through multiple works; that in some cases a film director is the main character of the movie; that a film crew, sometimes Kiarostami himself, is present in the diegesis; and finally, the fact that he shoots fictions and documentaries alike make obvious that the problem of the gaze oriented towards the reality to be represented has to be discussed. As Frédéric Sabouraud explains: "[i]n a certain way everything is gaze in Kiarostami, because his system […] is based not only on the perception of reality through the vision that has the character of it, but also on the vision of the spectator facing the images" (2010, 75). The gaze is central to the Iranian director's work, which is

also confirmed in his 2008 film, *Shirin* (Nancy's book appeared years before this film). *Shirin* constitutes an extreme moment in Kiarostami's oeuvre as it presents the pure gaze, the embodied gaze without object,[1] focusing on the act of looking as an isolated event (Grønstad 2013, 29).

The gaze is a complex issue in Kiarostami's cinema, largely because it is a governing principle that operates on at least two levels. Firstly, some of his films are linked together by a number of references, this is the case, most obviously, of the *Koker trilogy*, where the second and third films invoke the previous ones.[2] Together with the many incidents (Sabouraud's term) that take place in Kiarostami's films, and which destroy the illusion of fictional representation,[3] this approach should be considered as a self-reflexive gesture intended to enhance the viewer's consciousness of the act of viewing. When analysing Kiarostami's cinema, one might ask: if it is based on this self-reflexive approach, should he not simply be considered a late modernist (in the same way as Haneke), who is merely emphasizing the overwhelming presence of the medium decades after this idea became popular in arthouse cinema? In what follows, my argument will prove that this is not the case, especially due to a second level of representation of the gaze. I agree with Nancy, who states that "[Kiarostami] is not interested in the film about the film or in the film, he is not investigating the *mise-en-abyme*" (2001, 27). Though Kiarostami frequently reminds us of the fact that we are watching a

1 *Shirin* (2008) is a ninety-minute experimental film in which we only see close-ups of faces watching and reacting to a cinema screen during the projection of a traditional (though non-existent) Iranian film. We do not get to see a single image of the film within the film, we are forced to deduct the story based on the sounds and dialogues, as well as the emotional reactions of the viewers.

2 The *Koker trilogy* is one of the most sophisticated examples of this kind of quoting a film within a film. The second movie, entitled *Life, and Nothing More…* (1992) presents a film director who revisits the region where his previous film was shot, and where an earthquake took place between the two shootings. Obvious references to the title, poster and protagonist of the first film are made during the quest. In the third film of the trilogy (*Through the Olive Trees*, 1994) we watch the way in which the second film was made, how the casting took place in the village, what conflicts arose between the amateur actors, etc. Furthermore, this third film begins with a short monologue by the actor playing the director of the second film, who declares that, of course, he is not the real director of *Life, and Nothing More…*, just an actor. This is made very clear at a certain point in the film, when the characters pass the crew of the second film, who are shooting a scene, and where, for a very brief moment we can glimpse Kiarostami himself, who – according to the diegetic world of the third film – should not be there.

3 Sabouraud calls them incidents because they are disguised as small, unintentional glitches. Think of the scene in *Life, and Nothing More…* where Mr. Ruhi tells the child that, in fact, he was made to look older in the film, and that the house that he presents as being his home is actually not his. The same happens in *Close-Up* (1990) when, by the end of the film, the real Makhmalbaf finally meets the protagonist: the sound equipment apparently breaks down and we are unable to hear their dialogue.

film, what is much more important is that he places the gaze at the center of the represented reality. Kiarostami's cinema is not about the constructed nature of cinematic representation, but about the constructed nature of reality itself.

This is best shown by the fact that we can grasp another level of the representation of the gaze which is equally important in Kiarostami's films, and which Sabouraud only partially mentioned when discussing a character's vision of reality (I refer the reader back to the quote on the previous page). It is important to understand that Kiarostami not only speaks about the characters' vision but that his films are organized to make visible and to expose a gaze that is capable of constituting, of forming the world itself. Thus, instead of the multiplicity of interpretations, it is the formative power of the gaze that comes to the foreground. Through the inclusion of the gaze of the camera and the director's gaze in both the narrative and visual composition of his films, and the combination of the formal aspects of documentary and fiction, Kiarostami creates a representation of reality that is able to grasp this invisible, yet so essential side of reality that is related to the formative power of the web of gazes within it.

Most scholarship focusing on Kiarostami's approach to reality and the mediation between documentary and fiction is convinced that this attitude reveals a certain disbelief in the representational capacities of film in general, and of documentary in special. On this point, Frédéric Sabouraud writes: "[t]his is a strange fiction, that seems not to believe in the documentary take […], but at the same time gives the impression to distrust like hell a fiction […] that is risking to destroy the essence, the truth of the scene" (2010, 36). In my view, it is not disbelief in the medium itself that we experience here, as Kiarostami is a devoted fan of cinema. Rather, we are facing a different understanding of reality – an understanding that considers the gaze to be not only part of the medium, but fully integrated into the reality that is being captured. In this sense, the gaze is not only the subject, but also the object of perception, which is exactly how Merleau-Ponty conceived it, and to some extent, Lacan and Sartre as well.[4] At the heart of Merleau-Ponty's notion of perception is that "my body simultaneously sees and is seen," so my body is part of the world, of the things that it observes, and this results in a primordial

4 At the heart of Merleau-Ponty's notion of perception is the idea that my body simultaneously sees and is seen, so my body is in every sense part of the world, of the things that it observes. And thus, the act of seeing originates from the world, the medium of things. This is what phenomenology calls chiasm, chiasmatic structure: that who perceives is in the very same moment perceivable, exposed to the perception of the world he observes. Chiasm is about the interconnected nature of the seeing subject and the seen object. And this results — according to him — in a primordial subjectivity: we simply cannot transcend our embodied, material and irreducible relation with the world (Merleau-Ponty 2002 and Merleau-Ponty 1964).

subjectivity: we simply cannot transcend our embodied, material and irreducible relation with the world. Thus, the act of seeing originates from the world, it is what phenomenology calls chiasm (Merleau-Ponty 2002 and Merleau-Ponty 1964).

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty explains the enworlded nature of perception – and thus the constitutive characteristic of the gaze – through the notion of depth (*profondeur*). According to him, the most important aspect of the perception of space is orientation: "[g]enerally speaking, our perception would not comprise either outlines, figures, backgrounds or objects, and would consequently not be perception of anything, or indeed exist at all, if the subject of perception were not this gaze which takes a grip upon things only in so far as they have a general direction; and this general direction in space is not a contingent characteristic of the object, it is the means whereby I recognize it and am conscious of it as of an object" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 295). Depth (of space) is a crucial dimension, in particular because it immediately reveals the relationship between the subject and the thing: "the vertical and the horizontal, the near and the far" has sense only from the perspective of our relation to the world (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 310–311).

Cinema is probably the best medium to grasp the constitutive gaze – a notion of the gaze that takes into consideration not only the subjective perspective of the filmmaker, but one which is also able to identify a gaze that becomes the object of the cinematic gaze itself. "Cinema presents – that is to say, shares (communicates) – the intensity of a look upon a world of which it is itself part and parcel […]. It is part of it precisely in the sense that it had contributed to its structure as it is now: as a world where looking at what is real is resolutely substituting for every kind of visionary seeing, foreseeing, and clairvoyant gazing." (Nancy 2001, 20.) From this perspective, it is vision that generates the world – a vision that is entirely part of the world it observes. As Sabouraud points out (2010, 82), this can be unmistakably observed in Kiarostami's so-called car films[5] (especially *Taste of Cherry* and *Ten*), where the car is both the cinematic apparatus for recording reality and the element whose observational presence triggers the action. This understanding of the gaze is made evident in almost all of his films through the characters' relation to their surrounding world.[6] Sabouraud also emphasizes

5 A term used by critics and scholars to describe those films of Kiarostami in which action is built upon a main character driving around in a car. (Sabouraud 2010, 81–83.)

6 A few examples from Kiarostami's oeuvre: in *Close-up* (1990), the filmmaker is part of the events he follows to the extent that we are not able to watch the scenes where he is not allowed; it is the recording equipment, the cinematic apparatus that is first shown at the beginning of the documentary *Homework* (1989); it is the semi-fictitious film director we follow throughout *Life*

(2010, 81) that although they are characterized by their gaze upon the world, these characters should not to be taken as voyeurs. As I see it, these protagonists are not exactly voyeurs because they are very visibly integrated into the world that surrounds them. Their gaze is more than just outer observation: it effectively changes reality. The characters are genuinely part of the world through their constitutive gaze, and in this way in Kiarostami's cinema it is vision and gaze that take over the role of action. The gaze made visible through cinematic representation constitutes the visible world.

In his early feature *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (1987) it is surprising to see how the mother is not able to leave behind the rigid perspective she has on the world. Ahmed tells her many times that he has to take back the notebook of his friend that remained accidentally in his bag, but she does not listen to him, she thinks that the child (as children always do) just wants to play and thus escape the responsibility of homework. What is interesting here is that the mother does not think that her boy is lying, she just does not listen to him because her attitude towards the world, her perspective is governed by patterns or (even unwritten) laws. The same is true in the scene with Ahmed's grandfather, who is not interested at all in Ahmed's reasons, he just wants to once again put into practice a hierarchical pedagogical practice used for generations, a practice that also defines his own world-view. This is the reason why he sends the kid to bring him the cigarettes that – as he is well aware – are hidden right in his pocket.

Probably the best or most obvious example of the constitutive gaze of a character can be found in Kiarostami's *Certified Copy* (2010). The owner of the café where the two main characters (who most probably have met just a few hours earlier)[7] sit down to have a discussion seemingly mistakes them for husband and wife, and afterwards they start acting accordingly. It is the individual perspective, the gaze of the old lady that changes reality in such a way that, ultimately, we are also uncertain about the true nature of their relationship. With this quite straightforward turn Kiarostami makes his viewers aware that the major issue for him in this respect is neither the gaze of the spectator watching the filmic image

and Nothing More..., who explores a reality (the present situation of the actors of the previous film) that would not exist without him; the presence of the reporter and his crew in *The Wind Will Carry Us* is by itself distorting the reality it tries to capture, so much so that the dying old woman lives much longer than she has been expected almost only to defy the curious gaze of the camera.

7 There has been much critical and scholarly dispute on the actual role and relationship of the two protagonists. Based on the child's referring to James as a stranger ("Ce James," this James), I would agree with Simon Levesque that though there is a clear "referential jamming" here, it is more plausible that the two are acting out as actors playing and taking seriously a spontaneous fiction (Levesque 2013, 9–10).

nor the gaze of the medium distorting reality, but those gazes that operate – often without being observed – within the reality to be grasped.

Kiarostami and the Lacanian Real

It is Laura Mulvey who first linked Kiarostami's cinema to the Lacanian concept of the Real in her book *Death 24x a Second* (Mulvey 2006, 123–143). Mulvey argues that the tragic earthquake which destroyed the village and region where the first film of the *Koker trilogy* was shot is left intentionally unseen, unrepresented by Kiarostami in the following two films. The lack of any kind of re-enactment creates a situation where the actuality of the invisible yet traumatic event is unquestionable – exactly in the same manner as Lacan describes the order of the always hidden Real that is behind or beneath any phenomenal appearance accessible to direct experience (Mulvey 2006, 128).

Interpreting Kiarostami's cinema using the Lacanian concept of the Real helps us to understand several motifs of the oeuvre. Arguably, the clearest parallel to the (lack of) representation of the earthquake in the *Koker trilogy* is found in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), where we never get to see the old lady who is expected to die so that the crew can film the famous burial ceremony. Her invisible yet very important presence is emphasized by the struggle of the protagonist, who checks her situation every day by taking a distant look at her house.

While acknowledging the theoretical usefulness of Mulvey's approach, I will employ the Lacanian concept in a different way since, in my view, it is the exposed actuality of the unseen (yet always present) gaze that should be described as the Real. The idea was already formulated, although not fully elaborated by Jean-Luc Nancy: "[t]he reality of images is the access to the real itself […]. Before the filmmaker's gaze that we must fit, there is no room for reflexivity or for speculation on looking and images. We are dealing neither with formalistic (let us say, tentatively 'symbolic') nor with narcissistic (let us say 'imaginary') vision. We are not dealing with sight—seeing or voyeuristic, fantasizing or hallucinating, ideative or intuitive—but solely with looking: it is a matter of opening the seeing to something real, toward which the look carries itself and which, in turn, the look allows to be carried back to itself" (2001, 16–18). It is the lack of reflexivity and speculation emphasized by Nancy that makes this view important for us, because it brings forward the hidden characteristic of what I have called the constitutive gaze.

As Todd McGowan points out, Lacan has had a huge influence on film theory because his approach became the starting point for an ideological analysis of the

gaze considered to be the function of the imaginary that dupes us: the gaze is the misguided look of the spectator (McGowan 2007, 4). But according to McGowan, so-called early Lacanian film theory (for example, Mulvey, Baudry, Comolli, and others) misunderstood Lacan, so he suggests to go back to the original Lacanian concepts themselves. He argues that we should not work on the subjective gaze of the spectator of the filmic image (which was the starting point for all analysis of ideological representation in cinema). Instead, we should consider the gaze as Object. "In the years after the essay on the mirror-stage, Lacan comes to conceive the gaze as something that the subject (or spectator) encounters in the object (or the film itself), it becomes an objective, rather than a subjective gaze. […] Understood in Lacan's own terms, the gaze is not the spectator's external view of the filmic image, but the mode in which the spectator is accounted for within the film itself." (McGowan 2007, 5–7.) The gaze is a blank point, "it is the point at which the spectator is obliquely included in the film" (McGowan 2007, 8).

The inclusion of the gaze in the image destroys the invisibility of the spectator, which was considered the crucial element of the voyeuristic experience of cinema. If in the (filmic) image the gaze is present as a stain (as Lacan puts it), we arrive to the idea of the reversibility of seeing, to the chiasmatic nature of perception, as described by Merleau-Ponty. As the French phenomenologist explains in *Le visible et l'invisible*, we are always subjects and objects of vision; we are able to perceive and to be perceived at the same time. This phenomenon of the perceptual experience of seeing and being exposed to a gaze is described by Lacan in the terms of a split between the Eye and the Gaze (1978, 67–78).

Lacan does not agree with Sartre's phenomenological description of the gaze (Lacan 1978, 84), who tackles the same issue from a different perspective as he discusses the gaze in relation to the existence of Others.[8] The very definition of the Other in his view is that it is capable of seeing me: "'being-seen-by-the-Other' is the *truth* of 'seeing-the-Other'" (Sartre 1978, 257). And when it comes to the issue of the gaze, for Sartre, the most important aspect is that although we relate it to an eye, the two cannot be perceived simultaneously. "If I apprehend the look, I cease to perceive the eyes; they are there, they remain in the field of my perception as pure *presentations*, but I do not make any use of them […]. We cannot perceive the world and at the same time apprehend a look fastened upon us; it must be either one or the other. This is because to perceive is to *look at*, and to apprehend a look is not to apprehend a look-as-object in the world (unless

8 See the chapter *The Existence of Others* (Sartre 1978, 221–302), especially section IV: *The Look* (Sartre 1978, 252–302).

the look is not directed upon us); it is to be conscious of *being looked at*." (Sartre 1978, 258–259.) This approach is important for cinema (and for the analysis of Kiarostami) for at least two reasons. Firstly, it makes clear that although gaze has been analysed in so many different ways in film theory, representing the gaze as object in cinema is not a simple task: the image of a face, or of an eye on its own will not suffice. In order to be able to show it, Kiarostami has developed a complex strategy – which will be presented in the last section of this paper. Secondly, it emphasizes the chiasmatic structure of perception and vision as described by Merleau-Ponty from yet another perspective.

On this basis, I suggest considering the gaze in Kiarostami's oeuvre as the unseen, hidden and traumatic Real that defines everything despite its apparent absence. In his famous Seminar XI, Lacan declared: "[i]n our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze" (Lacan 1978, 73). This is true not only for the gaze between characters (which will be elaborated later on), but also for the invisible real presence of the cinematic apparatus, that is, the gaze, or the act of perception itself. In Kiarostami's view the cinematic apparatus is not only a medium that defines the image the spectator is able to perceive, but is also a gaze that is part of the world it represents. It is quite interesting to observe the difference between the way in which the director makes his point at the beginning of his career, and then some twenty years later. In the documentary, *Homework* (1989) the interviews begin with a shot of the set, where beside the interviewee and the director himself we can clearly see the camera and the DOP, the apparatus that will later clearly influence some of the students during their confessions about sensitive issues. [Fig. 1.] In 2010, in his first European film (*Certified Copy*), the cinematic apparatus (the camera object) is still present but in a much more subtle, almost invisible way, similar to Lacan's imperceptible Real. After having shown several shots of the protagonists staring directly into a mirror which is subsequently replaced by the camera, in the scene that takes place in the restaurant, in which James is absent, Juliette Binoche fixes her earrings and hair while staring into the camera in a room where there is no mirror at all [Fig. 2]. In this situation one can find no other convincing explanation than that she used the lens of the unseen yet always present camera as mirror. In this way, the camera, and through it the gaze itself, becomes part of the diegesis, it is observing and representing. I consider that this exemplary moment bears a symbolic value for Kiarostami's cinema as a whole by clearly

showing the director's deep conviction regarding the actuality of the invisible gaze that affects every moment of life.

Eastern and Western Traditions of Representation[9]

In what follows, I will discuss how the issues tackled above should be interpreted within the context of Islamic rules of representation. It is remarkable that the gaze and observation is in the focus of the work of a visual artist who lived and worked for decades in a country that has severe rules limiting representation; and it is also quite surprising that – contrary to some of his colleagues – he has never been convicted for breaking these rules. This is relevant to the topic of this paper because one of the most problematic matters in Islamic culture is related precisely to the gaze. As Sussan Shams points out in her book on Kiarostami, in Eastern and especially Islamic cultures, the veil should be interpreted as a metaphor for the blocking of the scrutinizing gaze. After describing the representational conventions of Persian painting and miniatures, she argues that even traditional houses (having high walls and windows which only open onto the inner court) and the structure of towns were designed in order to block the foreigner's gaze, to stop the public sphere from invading the private (Shams 2011, 49–58). She writes: "the position of Islamic societies towards the 'gaze' is special in the sense that it associates it with perversion and voyeurism" (Shams 2011, 57). In this way when it comes to visual representations "we can say that in this aesthetic what is questioned is less the represented object itself, and much more the 'gaze' directed towards this object, towards the visible" (Shams 2011, 58). This is the reason why it is so remarkable that although Kiarostami lived in Iran, and was also a documentary filmmaker, he never presented the specificities of the provincial Iran (*The Wind Will Carry Us*) or of the damaged region of Koker (*Koker trilogy*) in detail. Instead, in all these films he focuses on the gaze of a stranger arriving there to exploit the tragic events through representation. It is instructive to compare this situation to the case of Michelangelo Antonioni's documentary on China, as related by Susan Sontag. According to her, *Chung Kuo – Cina* (1973) caused serious resentment amongst Chinese audiences not because of what it showed, but due to the unconventional camera angles and compositions employed by the Italian director and his crew. Apparently, the problem was rooted in the fact that

9 Even though this formulation and dichotomy is oversimplifying, it is needed for pointing out some characteristics of Kiarostami's cinema. The introduction of the broader cultural context of the so-called Eastern and Western tradition of representation helps to make clear the crucial role of the constitutive gaze in his films.

it was not the object that determined the image, but the position of the observer, the gaze directed towards it (Sontag 2005, 132–137).

This is the reason why I find Shams's conclusion so surprising: after presenting a detailed analysis on the characteristics of Islamic visual representation, she argues that Kiarostami is in fact translating the logic of Persian paintings and miniatures into the language of cinema (Shams 2011, 101). In my view, Kiarostami is doing exactly the opposite: he is in fact putting into practice a so called Western understanding of representation, and he does so in a cinema dealing with a society which believes in quite different representational rules and conventions. This contradiction is one of the main sources of tension in almost all of his films. And this is precisely why we should consider the possibility that with *Certified Copy*, shot in Florence, Kiarostami did not wander into foreign territory, but, in fact, just came home. In the city where the rules of Renaissance perspective were born, the idea that the (optical) position of the viewer defines the limits of his vision is the natural understanding of perception and visual representation. In *Certified Copy* several scenes are constructed thematically and visually in such a way that they reflect the overwhelming presence of the individual perspectival gaze. For example, there is the scene where the two protagonists, simply because of their point of view, mistake the angry phone conversation of a passer-by for a marital quarrel.

Shams explains how the painters of the Muslim world – in accordance with the conventions of the Islam – abandoned the representation of the depth of space, and how they chose two-dimensional rendition. They used vertical instead of horizontal composition, and thus, all that was presented as being behind in Western images was presented by them as being above (Shams 2011, 106–108). In miniatures we also find a vertical arrangement, where the painter "carves out" the space in the image without resorting to the perspectival illusion of the depth of space (Shams 2011, 45). The conclusion that the same compositional logic can be observed in Kiarostami's cinema is surprising because it is quite obviously the opposite that takes place: as several scholars writing on Kiarostami (including Shams herself) point out, it is striking how verticality is almost completely missing from his compositions. In this regard, Alain Bergala's descriptions are really enlightening. He describes in detail how already in *Where is the Friends Home?* or in *Life, and Nothing More…* we only see the first floor of two-story buildings and everything else is only present as the space outside the frame (Bergala 2004, 78). It is clear that Kiarostami is open to accept artificial cinematic situations just to avoid vertical compositions.

Hajnal Király also argues that Western reception is overemphasizing the Western roots of Kiarostami's cinema. Her argument is built on the fact that self-reflection in the Iranian director's films is completely different from what we are used to in Western art cinema. "Kiarostami's approach to cinema is completely different: he is not conceiving cinema as art, but a medium, a 'third party' ready for intervention, a rather poetic tool revealing, through gaps and lies, a sociocultural reality and truth." (Király 2010, 141.) She considers the observable self-reflexivity in Kiarostami's films to have nothing to do with the playful-narcissistic self-reflexivity of Western art, instead, she claims it is much closer to the ornamental and symbolic iconography of Persian miniatures. I agree with Király that this is a completely different self-reflexivity, but I do not think she takes this line of thought far enough. It is very true that the Kiarostamian gaze upon the world does not simply want to show itself in a narcissistic way, but what is really important here is that this forever individual gaze is an intrinsic part of the observed world. Thus, a representation of the world without this worldly, human gaze is simply inconceivable – and this idea is far away from the logic of Persian miniatures, and, more generally, from Islamic understanding of visual representation.

The depiction of viewpoints and gazes becomes very sophisticated in the third film of the *Koker trilogy*. Here, due to the fact that everything is watched from somewhere, the shots and camera movements are able to make the importance of the gaze visible on their own. Alain Bergala makes this point in his convincing analysis of a scene from *Through the Olive Trees* (Bergala 2004, 72–74), where the young Hossein tells the (fictional) director the story of his unsuccessful marriage proposals. These proposals were at first addressed to the parents of the girl, but following their death in the earthquake he turned to the grandmother, who was then taking care of Tahereh. But also the grandmother refused him – not because she agreed with the arguments of the deceased parents, who considered the uneducated young man unworthy of their daughter – but simply because she respected the decision of the dead. At a certain point during the discussion there is a flashback which shows the moment when Hossein once again approaches Tahereh and her grandmother in the cemetery. The position and movements of the camera clearly suggest a POV shot, though we are not aware of the person watching all this. Hossein is the focal point of the image, but after a few moments both Tahereh and her grandmother appear in the scene and then leave the place, while the camera stays put – which clearly shows that none of them can be the observing subject. It takes a few seconds until we realize that the camera followed the scene from the point of view of "the gaze of the tombstone" of the

dead parents, conveying thus their attitude towards Hossein. [Fig. 3.] In his films and interviews, Kiarostami refers indirectly, or sometimes directly, to the enormous power the habits and laws passed on by previous generations have over the Iranian society as these are considered unquestionable by the living. Alain Bergala presents the Law as a sort of unchanged tradition passed from generation to generation, without critical reflection because the law is considered a form of an impersonal truth and thus it is out of reach for the individual (Bergala 2004, 22). Through the use of the personalized, enworlded optical viewpoint of Western perspectival images, Kiarostami demonstrates the all-round presence of the gaze. And, more significantly, by doing this in *Through the Olive Trees*, he manages to expose the invisible Real, the actuality of the gaze, arguing thus in a very subtle manner that these so-called laws handed down by former generations should be understood as mere individual perspectives.

In conclusion, I believe that Kiarostami developed a subversive position within Iranian cinema, not due to the content of his films (which is why he has never been banned by Iranian authorities, unlike his former collaborator Jafar Panahi), but due to their form. Kiarostami does not show things, objects or situations that are not allowed to be screened, instead, he shows them in a way unfamiliar in Iran. The harsh social realities presented by Panahi are only the consequences of a worldview that denies the legitimacy of the individual gaze, a worldview that is overridden by Kiarostami's cinema. Only the impersonal law, the rigid, alienated, conventionalized tradition of a patriarchal and hierarchical social system is the one that pretends to lack a gaze – and so do the images created within such a tradition. Kiarostami does not accept the denial of the *raison d'être* of the individual gaze because he thinks it is exactly the reason why Iranians (and especially women) cannot make life choices based on their personal needs and desires. The fact that he puts the individual gaze directed upon this reality in the center of his films and not the social realities of the country is not just a simple play with formal elements of visual and cinematic expression, it is the central and most subversive element of his art.

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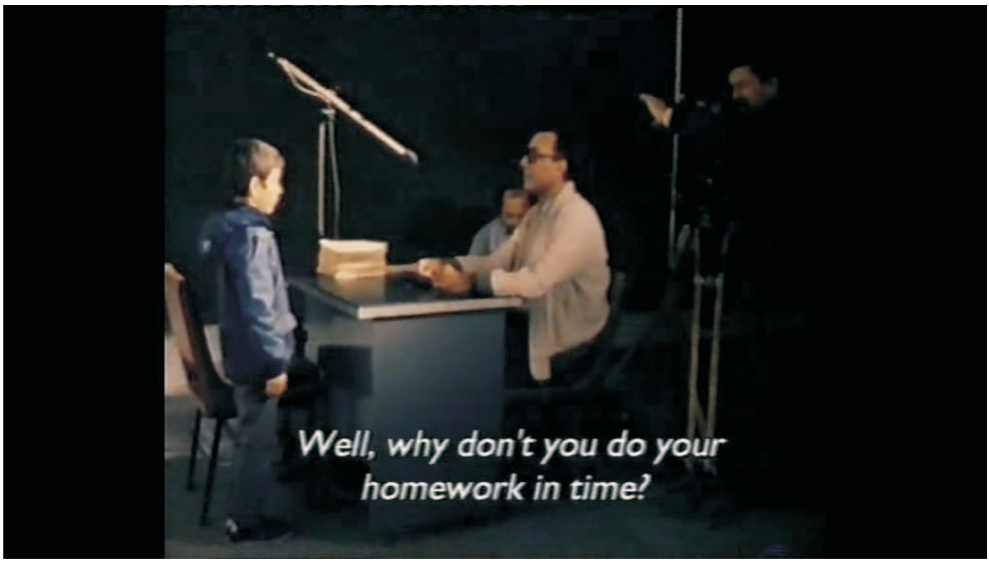

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