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The Cinema of Sensations I.

A selection of essays written for the XIVth International Film and Media Studies Conference in Transylvania, "The Cinema of Sensations" organized by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, between the 25th and 27th of May, 2012.

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Thinking Like a Carpet: Embodied Perception and Individuation in Algorithmic Media

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Abstract. Keynote talk given at the *"Cinema of Sensations" International Conference* organized by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, between the 25th and 27th of May, 2012. (The photos of Laura Marks illustrating the article were taken by Dorel Găină, and are reproduced here with the permission of the artist.)[1]

Keywords: embodied perception, algorithimic media, Deleuze, carpet as machinic phylum.


I have been slowly returning to cinema from long visit to Islamic art and philosophy: *Enfoldment and Infinity*. There I learned: once you suspend figurative image making, a world of creativity opens up. Large-scale forms, such as figures and narrative, cramp the creative energy of the lines and colors that compose them. But as you know, Islamic art is often aniconic. Freed from representing figures, its lines and forms take on a life of their own. Figures are molar, but life is molecular. So I propose thinking like a carpet as a way to release the life contained by figures.

Is it possible to release the energy contained in small units, instead of making them conform to human-scale forms? What would it be to inhabit the point of view of a point?

1 A similar but divergent essay appears in *Entautomatisierung* [*Deautomatization*], ed. Annette Beauerhoch, Norbert Otto Eke, Renate Weiser, and Anke Zechner (Paderborn: University of Padereborn Press, 2013).

Thinking like a carpet can be a way to start at any point and connect to the universe. A way to unleash creative energy that's not available when we start at a larger scale. What I'm after is not only the thoughts and hands of weavers as they produce these astonishing patterns. It's not only the material of wool and silk, or for that matter of pixels and silicon in new carpet-like media. It's the way the carpet itself thinks, pulling forces from the weavers, the yarns, the matrix, the algorithm and producing something new: the carpet as a force of individuation.

In my book, *Enfoldment and Infinity* (2010), I compared the media art of our time to the religious art of Islam. I was inspired by Islamic art and Islamic thought because, in avoiding a direct representation of God, they create powerful abstractions that indicate the divine presence/absence, are pulled toward it, demonstrate and perform it, but do not show it. This power of non-representation created the conditions of a kind of nonorganic life in Islamic art.

Enfoldment and Infinity ended by going beyond religion. In the last chapter I looked at some carpets that seem to have an internal life force that does not obey the injunctions of a benevolent (or any other kind of) God; carpets that suggest we do not need to ascribe creation to God because Life creates itself. This talk develops on that perception:

1. life of points
2. points connect to the universe
3. algorithmic media (carpets)
4. ways different kinds of carpets imagine the universe
5. carpet as machinic phylum
6. embodied response

I propose to examine the ways non-figurative, or aniconic images may appeal to an embodied way of looking that gets out of a human perspective and into the perspective of a point.

Aniconism

There are many reasons why Islamic *religious* art tends to be aniconic. Islam came about at a time when the other religions of the book, Judaism and Christianity, were iconoclastic. Aniconism helped distinguish Islam from other religions visually. The Qur'an cautions humans not to compete with God by trying to make living forms, and that it is impossible to conceive of God. God, being beyond comprehension, is also beyond representation. A branch of rationalist philosophers of ninth-century Iraq, called the Mu'tazili, argued that since God is indivisible, He has no attributes

(such as sitting on a throne). Thus any attempt to identify the properties of God in art risks blasphemy (see Tarif Khalidi [1985], 84). Theirs was not the only view, and I must note that in the eastern Muslim world, dominated by Shi'ite Islam, there exist many figurative images of Muhammad and other saintly people – images that would be cause for persecution in the western, largely Sunni, Muslim world. Still, Islamic art for religious reasons almost always avoids depicting anything with a face, anything with a body, and even sometimes anything with an outline. It is an abstract religious art that shifts your attention away from the human scale and both out toward the infinitely large and in toward the very small.

The Interval: Perception of a Point

Looking at a carpet, entering its patterns from any point, our perception creates something new. The idea that perception must discover the world anew every time arose in the thought of the scientist of optics Abu´Ali al-Hassan Ibn al-Haytham (b. Basra 965, d. Cairo 1039), known in the West as Alhazen. Ibn al-Haytham introduced the intromission theory of vision in his *Kitab al-Manazir* or *Treatise on Optics* around 1000. Consulted in Arabic, and translated into Latin in 1200 by Gerard of Cremona (see Ahmad 1969, 37), the *Optics* remained the major work on optics until Kepler in the seventeenth century (see Lindberg 1976, 58–60). In it Ibn al-Haytham described a contemplative mode of perception. He argued that we do not automatically perceive form; form is a psychological concept, not a given in nature. This means that contemplation is necessary for the recognition of form, for it requires us to use our internal faculties, such as memory, comparison, imagination, and judgment. Ascertainment can only be relative, to the limits of sense perception (see Sabra 1994, 170–171). So form is produced in an oscillation between what we see and mental operations: it is created in time, in the embodied mind.

In *Enfoldment and Infinity* I noted the remarkable similarity between al-Haytham's theory of perception and that of Henri Bergson, 900 years later. Bergson's concept of the subject as a center of indetermination influenced Gilles Deleuze's Leibnizian idea that perception does not reproduce the world but unfolds it from its particular point of view. We humans, like other creatures, tend to act on our perceptions (we see food, smell danger, etc.). But, as Bergson argued, the wider the interval between perception and action – the more time you absorb the perceived world from your given perspective – the more of the universe you can perceive. The longer you look, the more you see (hear, smell, taste, etc.). Widening the interval requires undermining our creatural habits of perception-

action. The wild boar seems to be attacking you, and instead of throwing your spear you take time to contemplate its fur, its tusks…. We might observe that widening the interval is in a certain way anti-human, for our basic human needs demand us to act decisively in order to preserve and sustain ourselves. Yet Ibn al-Haytham's conception of perception, like Bergson's, proposed that human beings have a necessary leisure to contemplate what we perceive before we can act on it.

By shifting activity to a smaller scale, aniconic art (and aniconic ways of perceiving) widens the interval. Aniconism liberates the molecular from the molar, another paired term from Deleuze and Guattari that reflects the scientific proportion 1 mole = 10^{23} units. While the molar scale deals with large-scale happenings and general states, the molecular scale deals with tiny events, bursts of energy that we don't experience when we are acting at the molecular level.

So in privileging a non-human perspective we move not to a larger, God-like perspective, but to a tiny perspective: the point of view of a molecule. Or, say, an atom.

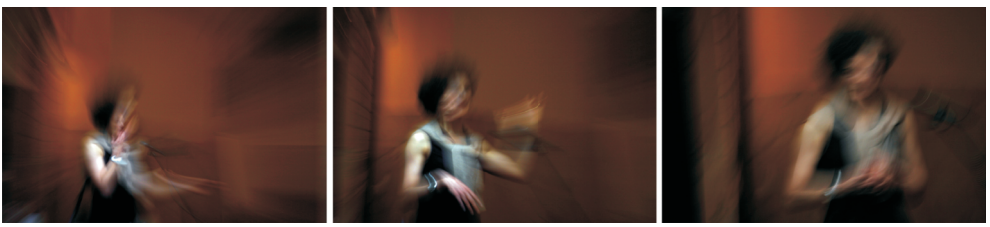
In Iraq in the 8th and 9th centuries, the Islamic atomist occasionalists, a group of the Mu'tazili rationalist theologians, argued that God was so powerful that no thing could endure except by His grace. The Mu'tazili argued that the world is composed of disconnected atoms and the accidents that befall them; and that rational inquiry can demonstrate how divine will causes atoms and accidents to come into existence and cease to exist. Later a conservative, mystical atomism (associated with al-Ash'ari and al-Ghazzali) asserted that humans cannot inquire into divine will and must instead submit to the random actions of the atomistic universe. God alone knows. Therefore, a body's tendency to hang together, to cohere, was simply an accident that befell its atoms. Those atoms could just as easily go their separate ways.

Lenn Evan Goodman describes their argument thus: "No substance extends beyond a point, for the givenness of one point of being does not imply that of another, … lest we limit God's omnipotence and the fundamental datum of contingency." Furthermore, "To the radicals of the kalâm [rationalist theologicans] this meant that God might create intelligence in an atom, or in no substrate at all, without the prerequisite of, say, Life" (Goodman 1992, 53). Here already is a sort of declaration of independence of points, of atoms: independent of each other, but not of course of God's will. The kalâm atomists prefigured a molecular life disdainful of molar habits – though of course all this was only to defer to God's freedom to reorganize the world, atom by atom, as He might see fit.

Writing on Greek atomism, Deleuze and Guattari observe, "The ancient atom is entirely misunderstood if it is overlooked that its essence is to course and flow." An aggregate of atoms, they write, is a war machine, "a physics of packs,

turbulences, 'catastrophes,' and epidemics" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 489, 490). Atoms are not obedient to form but flow in smooth space, coalescing in all kinds of intensive ways.[2]

We hear from such free particles a couple of times in *The Movement-Image* when Deleuze describes how the smallest elements of "flowing-matter" are perceiving, acting; alive. We do not need to see things, for things themselves already see: "The eye is in things," he writes, referring to Bergson, who imagined that every point has a point of view that can be, as it were, photographed: "taken in the interior of things and for all the points of space" (Deleuze 1986, 60). These kinds of photographs taken from inside particles are now cropping up in scientific imaging. Similarly, Deleuze identified a gaseous perception in the films of Dziga Vertov, American experimental cinema, and video (we might think of the analog video synthesis of Eric Siegel): works that do not connect movements together but privilege the energy of each freely moving particle. They attain "a pure perception, as it is in things or in matter, to the point to which molecular interactions extend." Gaseous perception, then, achieves the radical openness to the universe implicit in Bergson's philosophy of perception: the interval between perception and action becomes so minute that the particle's entire existence consists of perceiving and acting in a single instant.



Deleuze thus attributes life to the tiniest particles of matter. This theme occurs also in *The Fold*, where Deleuze extends Leibniz's already generous definition of the soul, or the monad, from organic entities to anything that "perceives," i.e. discriminates among and reacts to its environment. Thus cells, proteins, molecules, photons, and atoms can all be considered to perceive. The universe swarms with infinitesimal souls! This attribution of life to all entities calls to mind Charles Peirce's statement, "Viewing a thing from the outside, considering its relations of action and reaction with other things, it appears as matter. Viewing

2 "Smooth space" refers to space that is heterogeneous and intensively organized; "striated space" refers to territory that is homogeneous and subject to general laws (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 474–500).

it from the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness" (Peirce 1935, 268).

The Deleuzian film theorist Elena Del Rio argues that a film (or, we can extrapolate, any artwork) often takes place on the dueling levels of molar/molecular: large scale/small scale, representation/hundreds of small events. The molar level of meaning, values, narrative may say one thing; the molecular level (affects, attractions) another (see Del Rio 2008, 26–55). Del Rio, analyzing the melodramas of Douglas Sirk, points out that while the narrative takes place on a molar level, trying to convince the audience into ideological beliefs such as the productive Oedipal family, on the molecular level a completely different kind of energy acts. Del Rio describes the "bad girl" character Marylee in Sirk's *Written on the Wind*: she's sexually voracious and frustrated – a "tramp" – wears hot colors, bubbles with swishy, provocative gestures, loves music, loves to dance. Marylee is a mass of molecular energy who cannot be contained by the molar morality of the film's plot. Del Rio argues that representation is molar, performance is molecular. Representation re-presents, it's stuck with the precedent. Performance creates something new: becoming. Marylee is alive with an energy that bursts the bounds of representation – like a carpet.

Figure 1. Screenshots from Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind*

Points Connected to the Universe

So we have a conception of the universe as a swirl of lifelike particles, a dance of points. From an atomist perspective, the points are disconnected. But if we consider the universe to be a plenum, a space entirely filled with matter, points are the seemingly disconnected surface of an internally connected substance. Deleuze in *The Fold* argues the latter: all matter and spirit are inseparable, one fabric, deeply folded. What look like points are really the inflection points of folds (Deleuze 1993, 16). The fabric of the universe is matter; the powers that fold it from the inside are spirit. As Mario Perniola writes (1995, 3–21), the world is not empty, it's full: so full that everything has to be folded up to fit.

The Baroque paintings of El Greco interested Deleuze for the way they depict the universe as a field of folds. El Greco's harsh white highlights and slashing dark crevices emphasize the folded texture of matter. The tips of these folds look to us like points, but if you take one and drag it out you unfold a section of the universe. Certain parts of the image bulge out toward us, others remain hidden. In El Greco's *Annunciation* at the Prado, some of the universe remains enfolded, like the vague area behind the dove or holy spirit that flies down between clouds, the squashed-together mass of angel musicians, and the deep folds of Mary's robe. This is because heaven and earth are on the same plane, a deep fold between them.

The accordion-like space in El Greco also suggests we could unfold it in the opposite direction, the peaks becoming valleys and the valleys, peaks. It gives a sense that not everything is available to vision, but rather it is a struggle to make things perceptible, to unfold the world to perception. The composition tips and tilts: it does not offer the scene to one privileged viewing position, as in Renaissance perspective, but *inflects* at certain points (as Deleuze writes, calling upon Leibniz's calculus-based conception of the universe), emphasizing that the universe appears differently to every point of view. This point of view is, of course, the perspective of the monad, Leibniz's soul that perceives the entire universe from its limited perspective. The monad is a kind of dependent universe (Deleuze 1993, 53).

Reading the *Monadology* you perceive that the religious premise underlying Leibniz's folded universe causes it (as in much Islamic thought) to be closed in on itself. Nothing is free in this universe except for God: this is because Leibniz needs to guarantee the liberty of the deity at the expense of His creatures. God even foreordains the amplitude of the soul, i.e. whether the soul will be saved or damned (Deleuze 1993, 71). Thus we encounter in religious thought a universe that is not really free because it is subject to the freedom of God. Deleuze overturns this almost casually in *The Fold*, asserting that in modern thought an open universe replaced the closed one and Process has replaced God. Yet he retains the powerful model of a universe connected by folds, in which a single source can individuate infinitely.

The Fold, in short, attributes a capacity for life to non-organic things: molecules, atoms, points of matter. Furthermore, it suggests that these points an intensive perception, freed from anthromorphic perspective, that connect them to the very source of life. So we get a sense that the universe appears as a series of disconnected points that are, in fact, all connected by folds. If we can relinquish a human point of view for a while, we can enter into the perception of these points,

perceive the universe the way a point, a molecule, an atom might perceive it. An infinity of dispersed, tiny points of view that connect us to the universe.

Carpets as Algorithmic Media

All carpets have some degree of automatization: the square matrix of the loom, determination of number of threads per inch, knot style, and design. Given their basis in calculation, carpets are a fundamentally algorithmic medium, where an algorithm is an instruction to be executed. It's important to note that carpet designs are not necessarily determined by the materiality of their medium. Many carpets borrow their designs from other media, such as painting. So the algorithms that carpets carry out are somewhat independent of the medium. Carpets don't only express the material, they express a relationship between material and idea: an algorithm.

We can say carpets *index* their algorithms, for examining a carpet we can figure out the algorithms followed by the weaver (Soderman 2007). For example, the pattern of the Lotto carpet (so called because it occurs in the paintings of Lorenzo Lotto) applies algorithms of recursion and mirroring to basic motifs in order to fill a field with them. And, thinking in an unfolding way, we can say those algorithms in turn index their weavers, designers, and programmers. Looking at them we see the expression of the instructions for their making, a communication between the designer and the weaver.

Algorithms are created by humans, of course, so far from being a cold impersonal medium, algorithmic works like carpets indicate all kinds of decision-making, reflection, even emotion – and of course error. For example, a carpet in the collection that Joseph McMullen amassed in the early decades of the twentieth century and donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, allows us both to image the model (the algorithm) that the weaver followed and to intuit the decisions she made that deviate from themodel in executing it. It is a funny-looking carpet with asymmetrical touches of color. The collector described it this way: "This is a very close but hilarious descendant of no. 97 [another carpet in the collection].... The design is basically faithful.... But there is no comparison between the sloppy drawing in this rug and the sophistication of its model, while the use, or misuse, of colour, particularly blue in the central medallion, is strange indeed, without system or sense. Again green is used in the corner pieces at one end only. It is all a refreshing reminder that the human spirit can, and does, produce wonderful effects impossible to the trained and sophisticated mind." (Joseph McMullan 1972, 52.)

Algorithmic media, when executed by hand, permits all kinds of decisions, felicities, and mistakes to occur. But what about algorithmic media executed by machines, such as computers? I shall return to this question.

Carpets Imagine the Universe

Art historians sometimes interpret carpet designs as models of the universe, and I have adopted this slightly old-fashioned practice. For example, a number of Persian carpets look a bit like a universe in which everything emanates from God, as in Islamic Neoplatonism. From a central medallion radiate patterns that become ever more complex: sometimes their motifs are entirely abstract, sometimes they are floral, and sometimes their vinelike forms intertwine tiny creatures. The most complex such carpets were woven during the Safavid period, 1501–1732. They imply a relationship between infinitesimal and infinite, for from any point of view you can reconstitute the generating center, as the monad reconstitutes the universe from its point of view. Ultimately they confirm a whole, though, because the individual motifs do not make sense independently of the center that gives rise to them.

A set of Turkish carpet designs from Ottoman times, such as the Ushak carpets, consist of medallions (symmetrical radiating shapes) inside medallions in contrasting colors, each with a complex, intertwining pattern, set against a ground whose pattern is similarly complex. These carpets depict a mise-en-abîme of worlds within worlds. Carpet scholars sometimes suggest that the center or the deepest layer represents heaven; often the motifs become increasingly refined as they approach the "divine" center. A mystical view could see these carpets as lessons that all of reality is illusory, but that the universe has an underlying Structure.

Another group of carpets begin to set their patterns free from central organization and permit independence to their individual motifs. These are Caucasian carpets, woven in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Caucasus (a region at the time loosely politically organized but with basic allegiance to Iran). In Caucasian

carpets life seems to begin not from a Center but from the smallest point, from any point whatever: it self-organizes, mutates. The oddness and particularity of the forms in Caucasian carpets suggests they each evolved in their own way. In the final chapter of *Enfoldment and Infinity* I compare Caucasian carpets to generative algorithms, algorithms that respond to new information and come up with results that could not be prefigured in the algorithm's initial state.

Material Algorithms: Carpet as Machinic Phyla

So carpets figure the universe. But even the most strictly ordered, hierarchical carpets produce singularities where idea meets matter. No two motifs can be exactly the same when they are executed on a loom with a certain thread count, with wool or silk of a certain diameter, by hands of weavers with varying skills and interests. My favorite example is the medallion and star carpet, Eastern Anatolia, 16th–17th century, from the Ulu Mosque of Divrigi-Sivas, now in the Vakiflar Carpet Museum, Istanbul. Each floral motif, boxy arabesque, and (Chinese-derived) cloud band is different from the others. Unlike the carpets I described above, these motifs do not seem to emanate from the center, a stiff little blue medallion. They refuse to be subordinated to the "transcendental" center, as though they've heard of heaven and they want none of it! This carpet insists that there is something in material that resists idealism, that has its own ideas of how to develop. It reminds us that matter to be formed has "an entire energetic materiality in movement, carrying *singularities* or *haeccities* that are already like implicit forms that are topological, rather than geometrical, and that combine with the forces of deformation: for example, the variable undulations and torsions of the fibers guiding the operation of splitting wood," together with variable intensive effects, such as porosity and resistance (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 408–409). A carpet, arising from the meeting of ideas (designs, algorithms) and matter in the hands of the weaver, is a *machinic phylum*: "materiality, natural or artificial, and both simultaneously; it is matter in movement, in flux, in variation, matter as a conveyor of singularities" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 409).[3] The weavers have to follow the material and let its singularities guide their hands; yet they are also introducing (not imposing) ideas to material, and rolling matter and idea together in forms that will be slightly different each time.

3 In *The Fold* Deleuze characterizes Leibniz's third order of infinity as an intensive series of qualities that are possible but not necessary, which constitute "the real in matter: texture of a substance, timbre of a sound, malleability of gold, etc. (1993, 47). If the world is included in the soul, the monad, it is creased in matter (1993, 102).

Embodied Response

What does contemplating these patterns do to our bodies? On the one hand, it enlarges us. We are wired to perceive pattern, for pattern makes order out of a chaotic universe. Our brains look for patterns in images with low information content.[4] Our brains are constituted to seek order; they create order out of chaos. Our brains protect us from meaninglessness.

So it seems that the patterns of carpets confirms the certainty of embodied subjectivity, by giving us pattern where we look for it. A phenomenological view suggests that engaging with a carpet enlarges our capacity for perception.

I suggest all carpets appeal to an embodied response at levels from the molar to the molecular.

Some carpets invite an identification with figure and narrative, just as movies do. Some Safavid Persian carpets take advantage of extremely high thread counts (or pixels) to depict delightful scenes borrowed from paintings of people hunting, playing music, and relaxing in gardens, as well as all kinds of animals. As much as a Douglas Sirk film, these carpets invite a narrative identification with figures, which operates on a molar level.

Some carpets even command an acknowledgment of social hierarchy: we see this in carpets with heraldic symbols woven by Muslims in Spain in the fifteenth century for Castilian nobility. Yet these carpets undermine hierarchy by imbuing the fields of floral and geometric motifs under the heraldic shields with subtle liveliness and framing the whole with quasi-Arabic writing.

Carpets can also invite us to identify with the riotous, fecund life of plants, as in the so-called vase carpets of Safavid Persia.[5]

Moving from a molar to a more molecular level, "below" figurative and symbolic images, we encouter carpets that appear entirely abstract, populated by lines that curve languidly and twist together smartly, by jagged, energetic lines, and by oscillating relationships of figure and ground. Feeling along with these forms we (I, anyway) find that the abstract pattern of a carpet itself appeals to shared embodiment. We could call this relationship empathy, in the term of turn-of-20th-century theorists Theodor Lipps and Wilhelm Worringer for an "enjoyment of the self projected into a body or form:" suggesting that people "empathize" with abstract forms insofar as those forms undergo experiences that we too might

4 Patricia Pisters 2009, 224–240. Pisters refers to C. Bach and M. Poloschek, "Optical Illusions," *Advances in Clinical Neuroscience and Rehabilitation* 6: 2 (2006): 20–21.

5 I describe these at length in Chapter 10 of *Enfoldment and Infinity* (2010).

undergo (cf. Morgan 1996, 317–341). We can relate to a line, feel the way a line feels. Thus thinking like a carpet invites experiments in corporeal perception. Where figuration invites identification through the comparison of the body beheld with one's own body, ornament appeals to a different kind of embodied relationship. We can even feel along with the expressive rhythms of line in space, as in the wonderfully "independent" carpet from the Ulu Mosque discussed above.

The above is a phenomenological view, which I like a lot. It argues that abstract pattern appeals to our bodies: perhaps to confirm the embodiment that we already have, but also, I think, to gently expand it and invite us to take on new kinds of embodiment. However, as we shift from a molar to a molecular level, we may also find that pattern does not confirm what we already are; rather it undoes our bodies' usual ways of being. This is especially so because pattern appeals to rhythm. Rhythm unmakes and remakes the body – as in *Written on the Wind*, when the "bad" daughter Marylee dances with such energy that she "causes" her father to fall to his death on the stairs.

Here I look to Deleuze again, on rhythm. Deleuze argues in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* that representation speaks to cognition, confirming what we already know. But the kind of image he calls the Figural bypasses the mind to appeal directly to the nervous system. Deleuze holds out for the nervous system as the one site in our body that is not colonized by clichés. Perception itself is already informed by habit and social custom: this is where Deleuze parts company with phenomenology. Sensation, attacking the nervous system directly, is the only way we can feel something that does not address "us" as already formed. Thus the figural does not address the body we already have, but makes us a new body.

Are the non-figurative patterns of carpets and other designs in Islamic art capable of seizing our nervous system? At first it seems the answer is no, because Deleuze doesn't find the Figural in forms that are non-figurative to begin with, such as the arabesque, geometric, and other symmetrical patterns of carpets. It would seem such patterns only achieve the "mathematical sublime." (See the discussion in Chapter Seven of *Enfoldment and Infinity* [2010].)

The violence of the Figural lies in the way it approaches conventional embodiment and then radically departs from it, taking the viewer's normal conception of embodied being with it. You can see the violence of the figural in the bizarre not-quite-creatures of Caucasian dragon carpets, which rear their stringy heads in Chapter Ten of *Enfoldment and Infinity*.

But does the Figural have to come as an assault? J.M. Bernstein finds the Figural in the colourful and schematic figure paintings of Matisse (2008, 37–55). But

Bernstein finds a violence in Matisse's paintings in that they disembody the image, decreasing the corporealization of figures while increasing the corporealization of the painting as a whole (Bernstein 2008, 49). Matisse liberates the line, giving it "an uncanny expressive vitality of its own," independent of figuration – which is the power Deleuze and Guattari attributed to the abstract line. And as we know, Islamic carpets profoundly inspired Matisse's search for patterns that would envelop the figure and absorb it.

I think we should attribute the power of the Figural to the non-figurative, or not-quite-figurative, patterns that invaded Western painting from the East. Islamic aesthetics were the undoing of European figurative art. The uneasiness of the Figural often results directly from a confrontation of a molar-scale, figurative image with the rhythmic energy of the abstract line.[6] Whether the carpets themselves are Figural probably lines in whether a person comes to them with a figurative mindset in the first place. Someone accustomed to figurative images may encounter a Figural shock; someone who has spent more time surrounded by non-figurative images is less likely to.

Thus our bodies can indeed respond to non-figurative works, like carpets, with shock and a feeling of coming undone. We may feel ourselves being rearranged, becoming less molar and more molecular; we may feel ourselves as masses of living points that connect to the entire universe. We may find ourselves thinking like a carpet.

Conclusion

Might thinking like a carpet offer a model of ethical being? If so, it would be a mode of being that keeps on changing, powered by a force that, while coming from within, exceeds the bounds of the individual. This is what Deleuze was after in his final writing, *A Life*. Is it too much of a leap to hold up this process of perpetual individuation as a model of political organization? John Rachjman writes, "We should judge political regimes (including democratic ones) in terms of the space they allow for 'multiplicities' and their 'individuations' – for the time of 'a life'" (2000, 82). Modestly I would like to suggest that thinking like a carpet may help us model, with our thoughts and our bodies, the relationships between points and the universe; and it may give us some courage for the tranformations that being open to the universe will bring.

6 Chapters Three and Four of *Enfoldment and Infinity* (2010) examine in detail this "invasion" of Islamc aesthetics into Western art from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

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Seeing to Believe – Sensing to Know
From Film Form to Perceptual Environment

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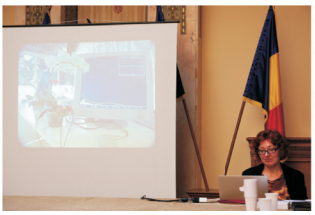
Abstract. Keynote talk given at the *"Cinema of Sensations" International Conference* organized by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, between the 25th and 27th of May, 2012. (The photos of Yvonne Spielmann illustrating the article were taken by Ágnes Pethő and Ferenc Boné, and are reproduced here with their permission.)

Keywords: multisensory experience, interactive installations, Seiko Mikami, Gina Czarnecki, Masaki Fujihata.


Theories and histories of film perception generally review film experience in relation to the projection of light images onto a large scale screen. With the institutionalized form of film viewing in a cinema theatre we view the world as it exists on the remote screen from safe distance. Based on this viewing situation, the discussion of image perception refers to paradoxical phenomena produced by the cinematic apparatus itself: that we are seeing a series of still images on the filmstrip as a representation of continuous movement, on the one hand; and that we are at the same time recognising the persistence of our vision which is a necessary prerequisite of the film experience, on the other hand.

This refers back to "gestalt theory" and the discovery of the persistence of vision made as early as around 1912 by Max Wertheimer. He, in scientific experiments verified the illusion of movement which occurs in the perception of two separate, fixed points or lines seen consecutively. Both parameters, the

perception of movement and the persistence of vision, are combined in the film apparatus to constitute the effect of an uninterrupted, ordinary film viewing experiences. The fusion of the two mechanisms sustains our enjoyment of what is represented and gets reinforced in the use of the representational function of time based moving images. However, the apparatus's moving function and the perceptional consistency have also been dealt with separately. In a wider view of visual culture, the angle of sensory perception that gives rise to the illusion of consistency in the filmic image does in principle refer to a system of believing what you see. If you see things in motion you believe they are moving despite the fact that moving is an effect of the combination of individual frames that are presented at a certain frame rate. Here, perception equals visual "evidence," whereas the cognitive knowledge of the underlying constructedness of moving images triggers our intellectual capacity to understand coherence in vision as we perceive it. Throughout the history of vision in modernity both aspects, the sensing and the knowing have been subject to various experiments within and out of cinematic performance of moving images.

One

In modernity, we can roughly identify two major conceptual frameworks that have been guiding the discourses about visual recognition. They are grounded in emotional and sensational response on one end and in thought processes on the other. The first operates as a belief and witness system where you believe what you see, because you are culturally and socially trained to accept visual representation as representation of visual facts. Herby, we adapt to the presumption that any representational form of an image, be it in film, television or new media, bears a referential connection to the unfolding of the represented events in real time and space. The second discourse is based upon intellectual engagement and expert knowledge. We reflect mixed, multisensory experiences, and our own physical presence in relation to both the cognitive viewing condition and the functions of the media. On these grounds we make sense of what we perceive at a specific moment in time and space.

For long time, the two ways of visual recognition had been attributed to diverse aesthetic concepts and schools. While subjective, sensual, and emotional "feelings" guide the primary accent of seeing and believing, the other, the objectifying, scientific, and measurable accentuations of sense data foster the knowledge based appropriation of visual and furthermore multimodal stimuli. The divergent tendencies get highlighted in different approaches of modern

painting, most prominently executed in the paradigms "to paint what you know" and "to paint what you feel," notably referring to the conceptual understanding of painting as science or imagination.

In a historical view, it is English landscape painter John Constable (1776–1837) who in the first decades of 19th century in a series of lectures on landscape painting had proposed to paint after nature in an almost scientific way. He understood painting as a scientific production of art and not as a composition out of imagination. Constable, concerned about "The decline and revival of landscape," wrote: "Painting is science, and should be pursued as in inquiry into the laws of nature. [...] In such an age as this, painting should be *understood*, not looked on with blind wonder, not considered only as a poetic aspiration, but as a pursuit, *legitimate, scientific, and mechanical*." (*John Constable's Discourses* 1970, 69.)

Soon thereafter photography and its technique of the variable eye that can take many shots of the same event in succession ("serial photography") had succeeded as a new art form. The expression of a variety of shots which have equal value and correspond to a variety of visual impressions meant a formidable challenge to the ruling idea of exactness in the depiction of nature in the painterly image. In result, we recognise a shift in painting that departs from objectifying science and moves towards subjective impression. This conceptual transformation strikes especially the genre of landscape painting. By the end of 19th century, what counts is the elusiveness and liveliness of the moment or many moments. The image concept that represents variability in sight is driven by the artists' expression of an immediate impression.

The most prominent examples are Claude Monet's impressionist paintings. The philosophy of his time to express one's own perception is best highlighted in the "series" paintings of *Haystacks* (1890–91) and *Rouen Cathedral* (1892–1894). Monet painted the same subject from variable points of view and under varying light and weather conditions, depending on the time of the day. These paintings in series not only refer to the cut in time as introduced with the interval in photography and film. More important, they ascertain sensual experience and subjective views of an eye-witness who describes respectively paints natural phenomena the way he/she experiences them sensorially at a certain moment in time and space. Clearly, there is a plenitude of such moments. This 19th century approach toward seeing and vision is led by the convincement that visual representation of development in time has to follow the concept of compound image. This concept, then, is essentially exposed with the techniques of photography and film in the 20th century. The compound image

has not only manifested a "new" and futuristic vision in the paintings of Russian Constructivism, German Expressionism, and Italian Futurism, it later becomes the standard of contemporary digital image compositing in the 21st century.

Because of the composite and variable nature of modern imagery, it comes as no surprise, when the togetherness of the two above discussed concepts, scientific, and sensual, was prominently conceptualised in film theory based on montage. Sergei M. Eisenstein in his reflections on the organisational principle of montage in formalist film praxis and theory understands the formal composition of diverse facts as a way to visibly construct difference and antagonism in film. In this, difference within the shot which is the smallest unit of montage, between the shots, and in-between the sequences has a dual meaning: it mediates and separates between contrasting, conflictuous, and heterogeneous views of reality. The contrasting composition results in film aesthetics of collision. Its form shall provoke the audience emotionally and intellectually at the same time. Eisenstein's famous montage principle of abstract concepts gets realised in the idea of an "intellectual montage" that is essentially grounded in a view of the world as compound and changeable. This notion departs from Eisenstein's earlier "montage of film attractions" which he then replaced by pathos (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925) inasmuch as pathos is further replaced by ecstasy (*Ivan*, 1944) which is meant to activate the viewer's emotional and intellectual responsiveness. By pairing "pure feeling" and "sensation" with awakening, the formalist filmmaker and theoretician Eisenstein aims in two directions. He wishes to emotionalise thinking and to initiate creative ecstasy. That is because he believes in dialectics between the language of logic and the language of emotion: "Abstract cognition divorced from directly active effectiveness is unacceptable to us." (Eisenstein, 1988, 155.) Following, intellectual cinema becomes a matter of synthesis, convergence, and togetherness. Eisenstein concludes: "The new art must set a limit to the dualism of the spheres of 'emotion' and 'reason.'" (1988, 158.)

Two

Since the early days of filmic attractions, it was felt that film experience should attract senses and emotions via closeness and directness of the presented events. At the same time the cinematic experience was such that mental engagement relied on the physical distance to the screen so that audiences felt close to the presented scenery on the one hand and would reflect the viewing process of the cinematic presentation on the other. The former describes an expansive

and intentionally immersive media strategy. In was step by step improved by filmmakers and producers with the aim to establish film as a dynamic medium "bigger than life" that supersedes neighbouring art forms and media. The latter aspect of distancing the viewer from the identification with the presented spectacle to some degree goes hand in hand with the before described strategy of emotional overpowering. When both are not balanced, audiences may become too scared about plunging into presented events. For example, when physical distance and reality border between us, the viewers, and them, characters and action on screen gets too much conflated in today's applications of Augmented Reality, this will have destabilizing and resultantly dangerous effects on our reality awareness. Differently, the duality of seeing and knowing is rather enforced in the regular film viewing situation. By experience we have learnt to know that things from the screen that approach us much too big, too near and too fast cannot reach out across the media border, not even in immersive cinematic 3D.

In cinema, the fixed spatial distance to over-life-size screens; the temporal fixity of events that unfold in the course of the film or nowadays digital projection of film form; plus the reassuring certainty that we can leave the movie theatre any time, in short our knowledge about the constructedness of the presented illusion constitutes an uncircumventable condition. It is safeguarding our joyful embeddedness into foreign, strange worlds of viewing. This construction has proved to guarantee the stability of the cinematic institution. The interplay of nearness and distance and nearness combines two components: knowing that what we are seeing and hearing are media effects while we sensorially enjoy the constructed perceptual environment as if in real life. With the latter diversification of film beyond cinema, such as in multiple projections, expanded screen installations, and the incorporation of filmic projecting into interactive and participatory environments, we have entered the realm of digital computers. Here, the previously distinguishable parameters are heavily conflated and remediated. They not only appear in novel constellations, they also to serve different needs.

Nowadays we need to discuss how technological novelties are dynamically embedded into cultural imaginations about perceptual experiences, be it in film, in virtual reality, augmented reality, and all kinds of human-machine interactions that stress embodiment and active participation more than before. In view of media evolution from film to expanded media, we learn from research into convergence and remediation, that media development does not mean inventing the "new," but rather refashioning an existing network inclusive of physical, social, aesthetic, and economic components. As Bolter and Grusin put it: "For

this reason, we can say that media technologies are agents in our culture without falling into the trap of technological determinism. New digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media which are embedded in the same or similar contexts." (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 19.)

In many fields of film practice, we find artistic examples that refashion respectively readdress filmic principles in other media forms. They purposefully expand the viewing experience beyond the formal constraints of cinema. From an intramedial perspective, experimental film practices of the sixties and seventies appear to be particularly fruitful in further contextualising matters of seeing and sensing. They shed new light to the issues as they were articulated in painting and cinema before. In experimental tendencies of structural film, in particular, viewing experiences are closely linked to scrutiny of the embodiment of the spectator. The viewer is also regarded as an acting participant insomuch as film performances merge with electronic media followed by digital technologies. Among the variety of endeavours in the contemporary creative arts that are responsive to emerging electronic media, notably film installations with multiple screens and variable interferences in structural film of the seventies already play a leading role when it comes to connecting seeing and knowing in today's art. These expanded cinematic forms foreshadow an interplay of conventional film forms with human-machine interaction that will get further enlarged in more complex perceptual environments that use computers.

To exemplify the intermediary position of experimental film of the structural direction, I wish to point out the radical analysis of persistence of vision as it has been demonstrated in the experimental film installations by Paul Sharits. In the history of film, it is Sharits who is pioneering expansive visual forms with film that resemble the open structure of video processing, when he violently analyses the materials of film and the cinematic apparatus by questioning perception and projection. Sharits's work drives film in the form of frames to the limits of cinematic performance. He expands the concept of projecting film with multiple screen installations and aims to immerse the viewer in temporally and spatially disturbing perceptual film environments. His interest in the persistence of vision leads him to create distortions of the standard systems of film projection. The approach is twofold: Sharits uses projection with variable frame rates in order to interfere with the viewing impression of apparent motion, and he inserts frame cuts to interrupt the image and disturb temporal development using flicker effects.

Sharits was interested to radicalise filmic development in time. The point was that the tension between our understanding of the filmic development in

time and the antagonistic, non-developmental concept of film as information "on light," is rendered sharp. Sharits's goal was to make the border between film and non-film perceptible by violently drawing the viewer's attention to recognizing at the same time the frames and their apparent motion. In this, Sharits focuses on the visibility of the transition from one frame to the next.

This is particularly evident in *Epileptic Seizure Comparison* (1976) [Fig. 1] in which the two screen loop projection is combined with the reflective walls of his specially designed film installation. Sharits explains how he wants to invert projection within the immersive space end confuse the viewer's emotional and analytic modes of perception. "Side walls must be smooth and be painted with reflective aluminium paint to exaggerate the frenetic pulsing of the screen images." (Sharits 2008, 353) Sharits, explicitly employs interval montage to merge performance and projection with the goal to destroying development. He superimposes two film strips (frames of a medical study on epilepsy and frames of pure colour) not to emphasize but to reduce action toward abstraction. Sharits uses the representational images of an epileptic seizure in a flickering structure of double projection of film that by itself resembles the rhythm of an epileptic seizure and immerses viewers into a performance of the projection of images of light and colour that withholds the flow of action.

The reduction of visual information through its pulsating rhythm blurs the boundaries of external sight and inner vision. With the reduction of development through variable speeds, reflection on the viewing process shifts from knowing to seeing inasmuch as Sharits visualizes the paradox of an individual frame in motion. Once we can see through the structure of projected film images and perceive the individual frame, but also know at the same time that the image in motion that we see is a necessary illusion, it will be harder for the viewer to interpret film movement in the sense of directional development. Sharits intervention is twofold: it generates awareness of the still frame and, at the same time, blurs the sense of differentiation.

Three

Following, I wish to point out positions in contemporary creative arts that rework the convergence of the two spheres of recognition, seeing, and sensing from the perspective of computer media and digital simulation. The questioning of visual recognition is an important factor in creative practices that investigate participation and action in multisensory and digitally modulated environments. In view of

densely networked media environments as they determine our contemporaneity and conflate the experience of present, past, and future, visual cognition as such has come under critique, particularly in multisensory experiments. A shift takes place in the key parameters of seeing and knowing when digital media render the familiar strange and question the objectification of subjective experience in essence. The necessity of cognitive understanding when faced with a virtual–real simulated reality is demonstrated symptomatically in the well-known science fiction film *The Matrix* (directed by Andy and Lana Wachowski, 1999). To remind: the central character, Neo, can only intervene as a force for renewal in the elastic transitions from virtuality to reality – filmically shown via computer graphics, green screen, and motion control techniques – because he understands the binary code behind the digital reality as columns of numbers, because he doesn't believe what he sees and perceives, but acts on what he knows from critical analysis. Visual, sensual understanding gives way to cognitive knowledge.

The task of critique of visuality is further sharpened in multimedia arts. Post-cinematic, multimedial, and large screen presentations examine the motivation of medical and military-industrial faculties to envelope simulated environments more and more seamlessly. They can show aesthetically, how feeling and seeing intentionally converge with the employment of augmented tools respectively composite viewing technologies, and also demonstrate inasmuch one-sided upgrade of sense perception rather cuts off our curiosity to get to know what is going behind the scenes, in the real reality devoid of the screens. My examples are: Gina Czarnecki's shifts of scale, Seiko Mikami's bodily encounter with machine behaviour, and Masaki Fujihata's advocacy to maintain difference and distance in sensing as well as in knowing as the basic condition for a living interaction.

While technical qualities of computer simulation and control have introduced the possibility of simultaneously virtualizing various processes at various places, "in actual fact" and without bothering about physical boundaries, British based media artist Gina Czarnecki researches the sectors of medicine and biology, where the intention is to undertake scientific interventions in the human body and the living environment. She focuses on the question of the normative scale applied to body shapes, mutations, infections, and viruses, and to this end she presents filmic installations with projected images of digitally simulated deviations and variations of physicality. Universal scaling for categorizing information concerning the human body, identity, and person dominate in biology, medicine, and genetics but also in aesthetics, and Czarnecki retranslates them from the general (global) scale back into the individual (local) scale.

Against this background, Czarnecki investigates the aesthetic beauty of digitally modified body images of dance movements, which she shrinks visually and knits together into something akin to meshes, until they lose any sort of subjectivity and appear like living cell structures. Her works *Spine* (outside projection, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2006) which uses material of the earlier *Nascent* (film version in collaboration with the Australian Dance Theater, UK, 2005), use variable projection in filmic installations on large-scale surfaces in urban spaces to illuminate correspondences between the biological and technological multiplications of manipulated life forms. Cosmetic and surgical modifications, prostheses, sex changes, cloning, and genetic "corrections" form common points of reference. When we, as audience, are confronted with the artistic selection of the naked bodies presented in the installation, this range of questions gains further significance as it engages with biomedical research in a direction belonging to ethnological and cultural politics.

In the moving images of *Nascent* [Fig. 2] as a filmic installation, digital composition of dance forms overlays and shrinks the bodies to abstract units of information. That is because changing the scale, together with reduplicating the image segments, makes the dancers into chains of bodies linked to each other, into blurred ribbons and pulsating light formations. The entanglement of people so presented tends much more to promote distancing, an effect underlined by an accompaniment sounding metallic and synthetic. The expression of some humanity does clearly persist so that border zones of virtualization and abstraction tip over into dehumanization.

That effect points explicitly to the procedure customary in scientific, biological-medical, and military operations of abstracting away from subjects, people, and their lives. In an interview, Czarnecki names the point of reference in which cognitive decisions made in virtuality based on sense-making of dehumanizing visual pattern have real effects on the life and death of individuals. "Science, law, medicine, and the military present images and we take them as authentic, but so many of them are artificially constructed. And art can present fact but it's always perceived as fiction. Medicine has been developing imaging technologies to prove the existence of something – scanning, the ultrasound, the infrared. I was on a train journey in the UK and I sat opposite a gulf war engineer and he said that 'of course we kill people but we see them as little green dots on the screen and we just zap them.'" (Czarnecki in Branigan, 2006.)

In this context, an aesthetic-poetic work, like Czarnecki's visualization of disembodiment, can count as a sharp critique of such linking of seeing and

knowing in operations that use augmented reality to produce scientific knowledge devoid of any sensitivity. The technological feasibility dominates in employing augmented reality for military and medical goals, and the dimension of the personal-subjective is suppressed in telerobotic perceptual contact.

The outside projection *Spine*, first installed in public space in Newcastle upon Tyne 2006 and measuring 25 by 17 meters, works in the opposite direction. In it, the personal–subjective aspect specifically corresponds to the location, resembles a model, and shifts into a dimension appropriate to exhibiting and viewing in the public sphere. With the use of the filmic material from *Nascent*, the digitally manipulated dancers here also occupy the foreground like masses of cells and are moving around naked. As a result, the medial presentation of *Spine* shows the personal aspect as an example of the shifting of boundaries from the intersubjective into the supposedly objective public sphere of activity, where the representation is cut off from familiarity and emotional responses. This discrepancy between representation and what is represented refers to the way computer technologies have invaded all areas of the media like a virus and are dominating our sense perception.

Another example gives Seiko Mikami with her large-scale spatial installation *Desire of Codes* (Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media, 2010, also exhibited at InterCommunicationCenter, Tokyo, 2011) that addresses our sense and sensibility in computer environments. It equally poses the question of what sort of "inherent behavior" the computer codes might have, particularly when their capacity to measure and move takes on an organic character.

On the wall of the installation space, Mikami mounted ninety devices that are equipped with search arms that have small LED pointers and with cameras and sensors to detect movement and sound of the visitors when they approach the wall. The whole structure is targeting us as if the technical apparatuses and the humans were different species entering into dialogue with each other. As the lights and the cameras follow the visitors' movements in space, the resulting effect is that the devices, which are driven by audible motors, move their arms "searching for" individual visitors like a buzzing swarm of mosquitoes. Various measuring sensor data (light, ultrasonic, and infrared sensors) are combined to create the responsive effect.

Each of the combined sensors and the cameras do capture and measure independently, but they are networked together in a computer system and attuned to each other in a sort of "group behavior." The audience for this "industrial invention" not only acts as an interface and has the difference but also the similarity

between themselves and the machine to be presented to its eyes and ears via extremely miniaturized interfaces. Because the devices resemble the size of toys, they become almost flattering interfaces, which appear harmless and handsome, and not like control and surveillance apparatuses. Notably is the cultural aspect of reference to miniaturized computers, electronic toys, and gadgets, which have spread like insects through the private and public sectors in Japan and South-East Asia. In her work, Mikami makes us aware of a close and personal relationship between the human perception in general and the individual senses and how they are affected, on the other hand. She also draws our awareness to the humanoid behavior of increasingly small and smart robots and further machine devices that are equipped with sensory instruments to detect us, target our behavior, and go after us. It is precisely the kind of interface that is built by Mikami herself and not using standardized mechanism, which evokes the experience of in-betweenness and makes us aware of our modes of perception in relation to the surrounding that is machine driven and operates by a chain of codes.

Mikami in the other two parts of the installation further explores her view of the desire of codes seen as a chain of behavior and response in correspondence to social behavior. Once we move away from the *Wriggling Wall* [Fig. 3] with its 90 units targeting at us, we find ourselves surrounded and equally targeted by huge, over-live-size six robot search arms that hang from the ceiling and reach into the space. The robot arms follow the task to express desire of codes by way of following and recording movements of the visitors. The arms are equipped with cameras and projectors, and simultaneously project the recorded footage onto the floor where we move. In the third part of the installation, the *Compound Eye* [Fig. 4] Mikami further focuses the anthropocentric effect of the miniature mechanical arms of the *Wriggling Wall* with their LED's trained on us like searchlights.

In the image structure of the *Compund Eye* imitating an insect's eye, current and past recordings of viewers can interfere via computer programs with data information from search engines in the Internet, which have access, in real time and permanently, to surveillance cameras in places all over the world. The model of the hexagon here becomes a permeable interface of global surveillance: it makes us aware of how personal experience is caught up in worldwide data transfer. The philosophy of the installation is testing our experience of the behavior of machines as it is driven by codes. We are also invited to think about the appetite respectively the desire of the code to randomly grasp and process data from anywhere at any time and "produce" endless chains of information input and output. The installation demonstrates its own structural components

such as repetition in the stream of data and thereby makes us aware of our own desire to create and produce something and at the same time shows our limits to influence and actually control the machine process with which we interact.

Another media artist from Japan, Masaki Fujihata, also reflects the interplay of seeing and sensing by employing scientific measuring instruments for art purposes. He uses perceptual instruments in radicalized ways as personally modified technologies and creates model-like *science-scapes* as a new form of interaction. This Masaki Fujihata tests out in the area of the contact almost made between orchids and us. The difficulty of synchronizing computers in networks, as is necessary for performing exact interactions between us and machines, forms the point of departure for this experimental arrangement with orchids.

With *Orchisoid* (Japan, 2001–2007) [Fig. 5] the attempt is made to communicate between humans and machines without any sort of coding. The setup is equipped with measuring instruments, as in a scientific laboratory. The interactive distance between individual plants is measured, together with their behaviour toward each other and their sensitivity to moisture, as when one of two plants standing close together is watered but the other is not. The plants are, in addition, tested for their sensitivity like bio-robots, lifted onto a hydraulic platform and "driven" in all directions at high speed, while projected images of a botanical garden run past them and imitate a "real" environment for the plants. The project was developed in collaboration with the botanist Yuji Dogane, and Fujihata sees it as standing at the juncture of robotics and nature: "In Botanical Ambulation Training footage filmed while walking through a botanical garden is being projected onto a wall. Orchids (mainly Cattleya) can see these projections from the baskets they are planted in. The aspects of tremor (acceleration, geomagnetism, inclination) in the images are being translated into impulses that shake the platform the flower baskets are sitting on, so that the flower baskets move perfectly in sync with the trembling of the images on the wall. Therefore, from the perspective of the orchids it must feel as if they were being carried in the hand (that actually holds the camera) around the garden. [...] What in the world could it be that the orchids are thinking while swaying gently on their metal pistons, watching pictures of a shaking greenhouse, and devoting themselves to 'reproduction activities?'" (Fujihata, 2007.)

This new sort of experimental arrangement would be misread as a simple critique of technology; it rather advocates dialogue that is based on difference and distance as the condition for real interaction. That is because, when the sensory contact becomes too close and too strong, the vitality in dialog is put at risk. To that extent, this demonstration with plants sensitive to contact has a

component criticizing the media by focusing on the ostensibly desirable removal of any distance and difference in all versions of touch media, something that here does not, however, appear as a goal or a way to more communication. On the contrary, Fujihata is in accord with Mikami and Czarnecki to provoke dialog across difference in aesthetically constructed perceptual environments so that in the interplay between sensation and knowledge something new and something different can arise.

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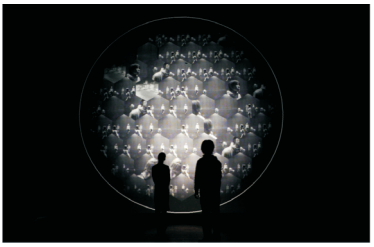

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Visuality and Narration in *Monsters, Inc.*

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Abstract. The overblown rhetoric concerning the "digital revolution" conceals deep continuities between traditional and new forms. As the example *Monsters, Inc.* shows established forms of narration can be used together with new forms of computer generated images. The complexities of this constellation are described by an analysis of the film.

Keywords: digital revolution, narration, computer graphics, neoformalism, Pixar.

When talk turns to changes in media constellations, one of the transformations most discussed in recent decades must surely be the omnipresence of digital media. This change has often been accompanied by overblown rhetoric suggesting a profound break with the past. There were voices predicting, for example, that digital images would lose all relation to the world, and that virtual reality would become indistinguishable from the world, or, at least, that completely new, interactive, hypertextual, etc. aesthetic forms would emerge. And yet it has become more apparent over the years that perhaps not everything is changing – and that perhaps many cherished aesthetic forms of composition and narration are still with us. We can still distinguish images which are intended to make reference to the world from those which do not do so, or not directly; in other words, fiction is still basically distinguishable from reality and many of the established narrative conventions are still in use.

Instead the question to be asked is what forms have been preserved or changed, in what contexts, and in what way. We need to switch from global theses to more detailed analyses illustrating continuities and discontinuities in individual cases. I would like to demonstrate this with the film *Monsters, Inc.* from Pixar, 2001. This seems to me to be well-suited as an example: firstly, it is one of those completely computer-generated films which thus stands paradigmatically for the shift to a digital media culture. In 1995, Pixar had produced the first of these films,

Toy Story, to considerable acclaim. Secondly, however, its relative intelligibility – it is addressed to children, after all – shows, prior to any theorizing, that there are evidently no radically new patterns of narration or composition in use here, these normally result in a deliberate reduction in intelligibility. The film thus seems to combine discontinuity with continuity. To investigate this, I will proceed as follows: In the first section I would like to make a few preliminary remarks about theory and method, to form the basis for the following analyses. This leads to the 2nd section, in which I take a look at the narrative structure of *Monsters, Inc.*, and to the 3rd section, which is concerned with the visual imagery of the film, and with whether and how this relates to the narrative structure. This brings me, finally, to the 4th section, in which I discuss the highly self-reflective nature of *Monsters, Inc.*, something which seems to me to be far from coincidental. It seems as though the film not only stands at the threshold between traditional and new forms, but also that it draws attention to this historical situation itself.

1. Transmedial and Transmaterial Forms

The thesis that the digital "new media" mark the start of a radical revolution which, at the very least, will turn media culture inside out, is problematic because, for one thing, it assumes that forms appearing in media can only arise from the specifics of their media. Only if this were the case would new media more or less automatically bring forth completely new forms. This, however, overlooks the fact that forms can also be *transmedial* (cf. Schröter 2011).

This means that there are forms which appear in identifiable guise in artefacts of varying media provenance. A relatively simple example is central perspective, which was developed around 1425 and codified for the first time (in mathematical terms as well) in Alberti's *De Pictura* in 1435. It is an optional procedure for the representation of a pictorial space, which is available to painting, but does not necessarily have to be followed (other cultures have favoured other procedures, e.g. parallel perspective, see below). In technical visual media which follow geometric optics, such as photography, film, or video, this mode of representation must be followed (borderline cases occur when certain kinds of telephoto lenses are used). In digitally generated images, on the other hand, central perspective is optional, since, as Friedrich Kittler (2001, 35) once put it, "computer graphics make optic modes optional at all." Central perspective is a mode of composition found in images across different media, and can be formally identified in a comparison of images by means of the diagonal vanishing lines, which lead to a vanishing point. In the

history of computer graphics, incidentally, the computer scientists who developed algorithms for representation using central perspective are known to have studied the relevant textbooks from the Renaissance (and later) and the instructions given there – some of which were already formulated in mathematical terms. This also shows that new media do not simply adopt older forms in a transitional phase – as is sometimes assumed – in order to get close to the audience. That may certainly play a part to begin with, but why should one forego established forms later on? Would it not be nonsensical to artificially restrict one's own creative options? And is this not even more the case with digital technologies which by definition, due to their programmability, have few specific forms of their own?

Another important transmedia form that can be used by very different media is narrative structuring of audiovisual media in time. Thus for example the narratologist Seymour Chatman (1981, 117, emphasis mine) once noted: "One of the most important observations to come out of narratology is that narrative itself is a deep structure quite *independent of its medium*." Admittedly this thesis has repeatedly been subjected to critical discussion, but it does seem to have some validity at least: if it were not so, there would be no film adaptations of literature. In section 2) I will outline the transmedia structure of the narrative in *Monsters, Inc.* Neoformalism seems a suitable theoretical framework for this; Bordwell (1993, 51), writes, for example: "As a distinction the fabula/syuzhet pair cuts across the media. At a gross level, the same fabula could be inferred from a novel, a film, a painting, or a play." Fabula is his expression for story, syuzhet his expression for the plot (more or less, in any case).

This does not mean, however, that all forms are transmedial, and equally available to all media. Painting and drawing have always also included modes of representation using parallel perspective, which have no vanishing point and which are still preferred in technical drawing and architectural drafting because they avoid changes in angle and relative changes in length (cf. Beil/Schröter 2011). Photographic media cannot represent such forms (they can only approximate them in the borderline case of certain telephoto lenses), since they follow the behaviour of the light, whether their mode of recording is chemical, electronic, analogue, or digital. Computer-generated images, on the other hand, since they can represent anything which is computable within a reasonable time, can also use forms based on parallel perspective. This means that it is necessary to analyse precisely, in each specific case, which forms have been connected with which other forms and in what way – and to which media these forms are available or unavailable.

There is, however, another point which must be considered when it comes to digitally generated images: insofar as such images are based on processes of computer simulation, they are not only able to pick up forms which are already transmedial anyway; they can also, partially and approximately, treat as form that element which has been considered, in the analogue media, as the other side of form, i.e. the *materiality of the medium*.

What is computer simulation? On the basis of collected or sampled data of *various* kinds it is possible to derive rules for or at least regularities in the behaviour of an object or process, a *theory* ("base model"). The base model is then translated into a computer-executable formalized model ("lumped model"). This formalized model must then be validated by aligning it with experimental data. Such procedures have been and are used for climate models, for example, or for other scientific prognoses (see Raser 1972). Now it is also possible to simulate other technological media. There are many examples of this, e.g. *computer-graphic photorealism*. Photorealism is simulation, because the qualities (particular features) of photographic media are measured and the computer models are based on these data. A simulated or *virtual camera* is a real camera which, in accordance with the available data, can be brought ever closer to its material prototype (if this is what is desired). This virtual camera is now used to take a virtual photograph of a virtual object field, which is lit by a virtual source of light. With regard to their visual appearance, images generated in this manner follow, insofar as this is desired and computable, the fundamental characteristics of chemical photography: firstly, the wealth of unintended details. Secondly, the effects caused by the camera optics must be mentioned. Computer-generated images could also obey other logics of projection, but if they are intended to be photorealistic they follow the linear or central perspective-based structure passed down through photography and film. Thirdly, the aim is to model the qualities of the photographic emulsion itself, e.g. the grainy structure of the image, particularly in enlargements or very light-sensitive films (cf. Schröter 2003).

Insofar as computer simulation can itself partially and approximately transform the materiality of analogue media into forms, I would speak here of *transmaterial* – in contradistinction to: transmedial – forms. Such forms are new, quite simply because the medium/form difference of the analogue media becomes a form itself in the medium of the digital. They are different from transmedial forms: transmedial forms point to no specific medium; transmaterial forms point to a media-specific materiality, albeit in a different medial context. So what is the situation with transmedial and transmaterial forms in *Monsters, Inc.*, a computer-simulated film?

2. Transmedial Narrative in *Monsters, Inc.*

If we first consider the transmedia structure of *Monsters, Inc.* on the level of the audiovisual narration, we can note – to preview the results – that the film follows the "classical Hollywood mode of narration" as described by Bordwell, Thompson et al. for Hollywood cinema from about 1917. This applies to the movements of the virtual camera, which could of course fly around at will: Craig Good (quoted in Siebert 2005, 182), responsible for the post-production of *Toy Story*, commented: "We wanted the audience to respond to traditional dolly and crane movements, not to make them dizzy." There has clearly been a process of transfer of established forms into the aesthetics of digital media. The narrative structure of *Monsters, Inc.* cannot be analysed in detail here. A few remarks must suffice.

Bordwell (1986, 18) writes: "The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals." Clearly this also applies to *Monsters, Inc.* There is no indistinct blurring of objectivity and subjectivity, as in many forms of what Bordwell (1993, chapter 10) refers to as the "art cinema mode of narration." Instead, a clear situation is established at the outset: Sulley and Mike work at the company *Monsters, Inc.*, after which the film is named, and are depicted as successful and, in this sense, career-oriented monsters; a subtle rendering of their facial expressions shows a psychological inner life which, for example, clearly associates success with enjoyment. And then, with the accidental entry of the small child (Boo) into the monsters' world, a problem arises which upsets the stable situation. For the remainder of the film Sulley and Mike try to solve the problem, i.e. to return Boo to her world, facing various complications on the way. And in the end, they succeed. The whole construction of the film serves to build up the causal steps of this chain of action as clearly and unambiguously as possible. Bordwell (1986, 27, 28): "Most explicitly codified into rules is the system of classical continuity editing. The reliance upon an axis of action orients the spectator to the space" and: "Most Hollywood scenes begin with establishing shots, break the space into closer views linked by eyeline-matches." This classic structure can be found in precisely this form in *Monsters, Inc.*

I will analyse one sequence. Before beginning their work at *Monsters, Inc.*, Sulley, the furry monster and Mike, his round, green friend, get ready in a sort of changing room: [Fig. 1] 1st shot: establishing shot, the space is established, along with a line of sight (eyeline match) between Mike and Sulley; [Fig. 2] 2nd shot: the antagonist, Randall, is introduced, a new line of sight is created between him and

Mike; Mike gets a fright and jumps over the bench to Sulley's side (incidentally, the psychological depiction of the characters can be studied particularly well by watching Mike's face here), the eyeline match remains in place, however; [Fig. 3–6] 3rd to 6th shots: a classic sequence of shot/reverse shot begins here, whereby the virtual camera always remains on this side of the eyeline, i.e. it observes the 180 degree rule; [Fig. 7] 7th shot: there is another long shot which makes the spatial configuration absolutely clear again. In short: the construction of the space is completely focused on consistency. The space is intended to be the stable background for the development of the causal chains of action by the protagonists and antagonists, and is not supposed to confuse matters by intervening itself. This is typical of the classic Hollywood film. Deviations from this, such as a conspicuously tilted line of sight [Fig. 8], are only permissible because this is a still from a hectic chase situation, Bordwell (1986, 27): "Stylistic disorientation, in short, is permissible when it conveys disorienting story situations."

In short: the film confirms the assertion that "classical narration quickly cues us to construct story logic (causality, parallelisms), time, and space in ways that make the events 'before the camera' our principal source of information" (Bordwell 1986, 24). But: in a computer-generated film there actually is no "before the camera" (unless we count the virtual space "in front" of the virtual camera, but that's quite metaphorically). It is significant that, during the closing credits of the film, (very amusing) "bloopers" are shown, constructing "pre-film events" with an ironic wink: the clapper board, a microphone in the picture, and finally an out-of-control machine which knocks over the "camera." Here *Monsters, Inc.* is of course ironizing its own mode of narration (and its "production culture," cf. Caldwell 2008) – in one of the "blooper" scenes a monster botches a dialogue, and is berated by his monster colleague: "You're messin' up this scene, we're never gonna work in Hollywood again." Precisely: classical Hollywood narration. In short, *Monsters, Inc.*, although completely digitally simulated, follows this classic narrative tradition.

3. Transmaterial Visual Imagery in *Monsters, Inc.*

The discontinuities must therefore lie on a different level. The obvious aspect is the visual imagery, the look of *Monsters, Inc.* [Fig. 9] is still organized using central perspective. Now computer graphics do not have to have central perspective, of course; unlike photographic media, the choice of central perspective in computer graphics is always a conscious stylistic decision, and here, of course, its purpose

is to make the cartoon image seem *photorealistic* at the same time. The reference to the simulation of photography is obvious in many respects: for example when Sulley observes Randall pursuing his machinations from under a table, and the table legs and edges in the foreground are out of focus [Fig. 10]; or the other way around, when the background is out of focus [Fig. 11]. In photographic optics (be it photography, film, or analogue, or digital video) such varying levels of focus are part of the *dispositif*, in simulated images, on the other hand, they have to be *wanted* and brought about deliberately, e.g. in order to achieve a photorealistic effect. Fig. 11 also shows another typical way of getting closer to the visual imagery of photography, marking a considerable difference from many cartoon styles – that is, the numerous apparently random surface details. It is hardly necessary to point out that the photographic monocular is evoked even in the logo of *Monsters, Inc.*, which is also one-eyed [Fig. 12]. This is taken to extremes – and here the meaning of the term transmateriality becomes particularly clear – when even *faults in photographic optics* are simulated, such as in Fig. 13, we see lens flares, which occur when shooting into the light with an optical lens system. But there is no material lens system in a simulated film. This effect is deliberately built in to reinforce the photographic appearance of the picture. (As an aside: there are programmes specially designed just to create such effects). So the point is: faults which result from the material specifics of media technologies behind the transmedial forms become transmaterial forms themselves. Here it is faults in photographic optics which are transferred into a completely different context, in this case the cartoon. For the visual imagery of *Monsters, Inc.* is not simply photorealistic: on the contrary, the film links photographic with cartoonish visual imagery, as can be seen in, amongst other things, the extreme colourfulness, especially of the shadows, see Fig. 12. This role of drawing and painting, the tradition to which cartoons and animation belong, is thematized intradiegetically at various points in the film, for example when the childish drawings produced by Boo point directly to the potential of *non-photorealistic rendering* (cf. Strothotte/Schlechtweg 2002, see Fig. 14). This hybrid form of image is the actual new visual/aesthetic achievement of the Pixar films (I exclude a few marginal predecessors in computer graphics research).[1]

1 Non-photorealistic rendering is especially interesting, since Kittler's (2001, 35) famous claim that "computer graphics make optic modes optional at all" does not cover drawn or painted pictures insofar they use conventions of representation (e.g. parallel perspective) that are not a form of optics – be it an optics describing the behavior of light (geometrical or wave optics), be it an optics describing the behavior of human sense perception (physiological optics).

Above and beyond this – and the significance of this element should not be underestimated – a further aspect plays a part in the visual imagery of these films and thus also that of *Monsters, Inc.*. Pixar, the firm behind *Monsters, Inc.*, was substantially built up with money from Steve Jobs, and does not only make money with films. Since 1989 it has also been selling software, PhotoRealisticRenderMan, based on the RenderMan standard. Pixar also defines the cutting edge of the computer graphics industry standard.[2] Seen in this light, the films are also advertising for the graphic achievements of Pixar. The technical state of play definitely determines the choice of subject of the films. Hence Friedrich Kittler (2001, 36) noted in 1998 "Not coincidentally, computer generated films like *Jurassic Park* do not even attempt to compete with the fur coats [!] in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*; they content themselves with armored and thus optically unadorned dinosaurs." But in *Monsters, Inc.* 2001 it was the rendering of fur and hair which was foregrounded, precisely because it had previously been difficult to simulate such complex structures convincingly.[3] This is the reason for the narrative digression of Mike and Sulley's banishment to the Himalayas: when Sulley attempts to reach a nearby village he falls from the sled and lies in the snow, and his fur is blown about by the harsh wind and gradually covered by snowflakes. This scene demonstrates what was then the state of the art in the simulation of moving fur-like surfaces.

Knowledge of this function of the Pixar films can in itself become an attraction for viewers. Thus neo-formalist film theoretician Kristin Thompson commented: "For me, part of the fun of watching a Pixar's film is to try and figure out what technical challenge the filmmakers have set themselves this time. Every film pushes the limits of computer animation in one major area, so that the studio has been perpetually on the cutting edge."[4] Certain elements of the film, then, are not simply subordinated to the narrative process. The lens flares, for example, have no function in the development of the causal chain, nor does Sulley's elaborate fur; furthermore this – in the words of David Bordwell – could at best be transtextually motivated, as something borrowed from a knowledge of the design of monster films. But they represent elements which can be understood in Kristin Thompson's terms as excess, or in Bordwell's terms as purely "artistically motivated" (Thompson 1986; Bordwell 1993, 36, 53, 164 and passim). These are

2 See: *http://renderman.pixar.com/view/renderman* [last accessed: 22. 08. 2012].
3 See: *http://renderman.pixar.com/products/whats_renderman/4.html* [last accessed: 22. 08. 2012].
4 See: *http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2006/10/08/reflections-on-cars/* [last accessed 22. 08. 2012].

elements which display their own fabricated nature and thus form a discourse about the state of development of the computer image, over and above the narrative. In this respect the new visual imagery of the Pixar films does in fact change the narrative. Although the narrative largely conforms to the "classical Hollywood mode of narration," it is – to use another term of Bordwell's (1993, 58, 59) – more "self-conscious" or "self-referential," since it does not merely conceal itself in order to seamlessly convey the story/fabula/information, as is usually the case in this mode of narration. Attention is increasingly focused on its own fabricated nature, to the point where one wonders whether the film's subject was chosen as a showcase for a specific new accomplishment of simulated visual imagery. The various processes of transfer, on the one hand of the form of photography into the digital image, and on the other hand of the form of classical narration into the arrangement of the digital images and sounds, therefore interfere with one another. That also means: different methods and theories have to be combined, here: media archaeology (Kittler) to explain the synthetic image and neo-formalist film theory (Bordwell, Thompson) to explain the narrative structure.

4. On the Reflexivity of *Monsters, Inc.*

The increased self-referentiality or self-consciousness of the narrative, which arises from its interference with the hybrid visual imagery (and the discourses surrounding this) in Pixar films and in particular in *Monsters, Inc.*, reveals itself in the many self-reflexive references, some of which have already been mentioned. There are many more levels and ways in which the film is reflexive. Thus in *Film Theory. An Introduction through the Senses* Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener (2010, 170–187) explicitly pointed out the role of the doors through which the monsters can enter the children's world in order to frighten them. This evokes discourses about the "portal to another world" which have, since the 1990s, referred directly to cyberspace and virtual reality (see Schröter 2004, 227). Furthermore, "Monsters, Inc." – i.e. the company our monsters work for – is an industry for the production of terror and (at the end of the film) laughter, so in this sense it is a reflection of the production of affect by the film industry. All that can be added to this precise analysis is that the motif of the door later expands into a massive archive of doors, a database; this in turn, to paraphrase Lev Manovich, introduces a new theme to the digital film: the logic of the database, which is typical of the new media (see Manovich 2001, 212). Furthermore, in the chase at the end of the film the doors function, as it were, as shortcuts through the diegetic

space, which is at the same time global space, and allow a sort of montage within the image, which in turn displaces and reflects the forms of spatial construction in classical Hollywood cinema. The motif of the door would be worthy of a more detailed commentary.

I would like to finish, however, by discussing something much more straightforward. *Monsters, Inc.* begins in a simulator. The sequence is established with sounds off-camera, indicating that parents have put their child to bed; in the establishing shot (which is in fact the third shot) we see the child sleeping. The door – that portal to the monsters' world – opens. A monster has entered. It rears up to frighten the child, the child screams, and what happens? The monster gets the most dreadful fright itself, trips over a football, hurts itself: in short, messes everything up. Then the light goes on. A technical voice off-camera repeats again and again: "Simulation terminated," and we learn that the child was only a machine. And in a further doubling of the theme of the door to another world, one wall of the apparent child's bedroom slides up and we see the trainer as she tries to explain to the monster-in-training (and to the other monster trainees who are watching) what he has done wrong, in the first instance, this is an allusion to the diegetic 4th wall. More important still: *it is a simulator*, just like those flight simulators which, in some respects at least, stood at the beginning of the development of certain forms of photorealistic computer graphics (see Schröter 2003). And one of the reasons why the simulator is established here is because it appears again later on. Sulley and Boo, on the run from the evil boss of the company – the classical evil capitalist of Hollywood cinema, later to be replaced by Sulley as the good capitalist – have apparently fled through a door into a child's bedroom. The evil boss, who is also behind Randall's machinations, wants to get hold of Boo, but when he reaches out to seize her from the bed it turns out that they are in the simulator. The evil boss is utterly confused. But that is not important any more, because he has just revealed his sinister plans to Sulley while in the simulator, thinking it was a child's bedroom. However, Mike was controlling the simulator, and has recorded the boss's crucial confession on a sort of video tape. This representation not only reflects back to another predigital visual form, in that the interlace lines are part of the simulation [Fig. 15]. More importantly, a turning point in the narrative is explicitly connected with the theme of simulation here. Here the interference between the narrative and the simulative visual imagery in *Monsters, Inc.* is itself thematized intradiegetically.

5. Very Brief Conclusion

I would like to come to a very brief conclusion. My analysis has attempted to identify two different processes of transfer in *Monsters, Inc.* – in the narrative and in the visual imagery – which interfere with one another and thus represent a complex reaction to the changing media constellation as it shifts towards digital media. In *Monsters, Inc.* one can clearly see that media change does not – of course – lead to completely new forms, but that old and new processes and forms appear in new constellations. And this necessitates perhaps unexpected constellations of methods – e.g. combining media archaeology (Kittler), production studies (Caldwell) and neo-formalism (Bordwell). Pixar films seem a worthwhile object for an interdisciplinary dialogue about intermedial processes of transfer within the changing media. Is it a coincidence that a sequel to *Monsters, Inc.* came to the cinemas in 2013, with the title *Monsters University*?

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Geography of the Body: Jean Epstein's Poetics and Conceptualization of the Body in his Unpublished Writings

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Abstract. Jean Epstein wrote many books during his life, but some of them were left unpublished. This unpublished corpus is of significant importance to understand his work and thinking. In this essay I address three of these books: *Ganymède* (a book on male homosexual ethics), *Contre-pensées* (*Counter-Thoughts*), a compilation of short essays on a wide variety of topics), and *L'autre ciel* (*The Other Heaven*), a literary work. My main purpose is to better understand a major motif in Epstein's thought: the human body. These writings show how his interest in physiology was profound and very important during his whole life, and how he always emphasized the material side of any psychology, identity, or thought. Secondly, they address the topic of artificiality and humanity. Epstein claims that what is specifically human is to evolve through specialization and reification, even if it were *against nature*. And thirdly, they fully disclose the inherent sensuality of some Epstein texts (for instance his descriptions of close ups); one of the major subjects of *L'autre ciel* is male homoeroticism. These unpublished writings shed new light on Epstein's film writings and must be considered in order to do a complete account of his work and thought.

Keywords: Jean Epstein's writings, film theory, body, sensuality.

Jean Epstein's work is varied, complex and hard to catch in too literal a sense (it is a matter of libraries and archives more than of bookshops and DVDs, even if in 2013 things are stirring up). Descending that mirrored staircase in a hotel near Mount Etna, Epstein saw himself multiplied many more times than in a three-sided mirror. Each reflection revealed something different and unknown about himself, and the sum of reflections revealed the multiplicity, elusiveness, and illusory nature of identity itself (Epstein, 1926). If those mirrors represented his work, and not his person as they did, we could say that there are still many more reflections awaiting. Some of these beautiful and carefully polished surfaces are

not out of print but unpublished, luckily not lost for us but preserved in the Fonds Jean et Marie Epstein at Cinémathèque Française.[1] Far from being reprises of published writings they constitute truly a dark side of his *oeuvre*; not dealing with cinema directly but constructing a corpus of thought and literature on multiple themes.

In this paper I will approach some of his unpublished writings focusing on one major motif of his work and thought: the human body. As these texts are unpublished and therefore not quite known, I'm obliged to try and develop an exegesis of them, even if in a restrained scope which no doubt will reduce their richness. The reason for studying these books is first of all because they are of interest in themselves, but secondly because they help to disclose – or at least to make more complex – meanings and motifs in Epstein's film writing and film practice.

1. Jean Epstein's Film Writings and the Body

Before we plunge into those unpublished writings, and in order to better understand their importance for Epstein's studies, I will briefly touch on some aspects of his published work. The body and the organism are key concepts in Epstein's writings, even if their importance decreases as we advance in his published bibliography.[2]

His early writing focuses not on cinema but on literature, philosophy, and the modern experience and subjectivity.[3] In these writings he develops a thesis in which humanity is approaching a new form of knowledge called *lyrosophie*. This new knowledge is a rebalancing of subconscious thinking and rationality, vindicating the former as a valid form of thinking and fighting against the idea of the latter as universal truth. For Epstein any mentality is related to the organism, he writes: "We should treat history as a biology of regimes of consciousness, and states of mind as organic states." (Epstein 1998b: 121).[4] The organic change

1 I thank all the staff at Bibliothèque du Film (Cinémathèque Française) for their knowledge, good work, and kindness. And the institution itself for preserving and making available to researchers those documents.

2 For a recent overview of Epstein work see the essays and the short reader included in Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul (2012).

3 His early writings are mainly composed by two books (*La Poésie d'aujourd'hui, un nouvel état d'intelligence* [*Poetry Today, a New State of Intelligence*, *1921*] and *La Lyrosophie* (1922), both published by Editions de la Sirène) and some essays published in *L'Esprit Nouveau* [*The New Spirit*], like the series of articles entitled "Le phénomène littéraire" (numbers 8, 9, 10, and 13 of the journal in 1921 and reprinted in Epstein [1998a]).

4 All translations are my own.

taking place in us and which announces the future advent of *lyrosophie* is due to the incrementation of fatigue in modern experience, caused by labor and social changes. Fatigue was a key concept for 19th Century physiology; one of its researchers was, for instance, Angelo Mosso, who was quoted by Epstein in his writings.[5]

In one of his very first writings on cinema, *Bonjour Cinéma* (*Good Morning Cinema*, 1921), film and particularly spectatorship are described in terms of nervous energy. Characters like Chaplin or Gish have a "photogenic neurasthenia" (Epstein 1921b, 102) and are one of the focus of the nervous energy that is irradiated in the movie theater. Moviegoing affects the nervous system and even creates a kind of dependence in its public, unlike other aesthetic experiences (Epstein 1921b, 107). Characterized in these terms, the movies become a privileged place for modern people, since that demanding nervous experience is something they all know very well from their everyday life. But the importance of the body in *Bonjour Cinéma* is not only related to a nervous experience but also to a carnal experience in a manner akin to the metaphors of tactile reception. The experience of seeing a face in close up is described as surpassing even tactile limits: "It is not even true that there is air between us; I eat it. It is inside me like a sacrament" (Epstein 1921b, 104). Spectatorship is conceived then – but not only – in his first approach to cinema as bodily reactions.

In his major theoretical film writings – books like *L'Intelligence d'une machine* (*The Intelligence of a Machine*, 1946) or *Esprit de cinéma* (*The Spirit of Cinema*, 1955) – this importance of the body is reduced. The main feature is to understand cinema as an alien thinking that smashes up anthropocentrism. Cinema sees the world differently and this alterity is its secret propaganda to which the masses are exposed. Spectatorship is conceived more in psychological than in physiological terms. However, the body is still important: it is one of the privileged subjects of cinema's experimentations. Slow motion reveals that the human body can have reptile qualities or even be like a stone. The close up penetrates inside the face, revealing its thoughts. The montage of different bodies reveals superhuman identities like familiar resemblances or illness. So the body is in front of the movie camera and is again and again scrutinized, by a camera that reveals unknown truths about it.

5 For an analysis of Epstein's early writings see Stuart Liebman *Jean Epstein's Early Film Theory: 1920–22* (PhD Dissertation, 1980). For an attempt to read Epstein's fatigue in its cultural context see also my essay "Estetas neurasténicos y máquinas fatigadas en la teoría de Jean Epstein" (2009).

2. Jean Epstein's Unpublished Writings

The Fonds Jean et Marie Epstein preserved at Cinémathèque Française is full of documents and drafts that help to understand Epstein's work and also contains several unpublished books. Focusing on these documents would be helpful to comprehend the importance of the body and the organism for Epstein's thought, quite particularly in relation to his early writings. There is, for instance, a bibliography (Epstein 1921c) related to *La poésie d'aujourd'hui* (*Poetry Today*) which quotes physiology books like *Physiologie du plaisir* (*Physiology of Pleasure*, 1886) by Mantegazza.[6] There is also a brief trace of an unfinished project called *Esculape*, which was intended to be a reader on medicine and physiology, and which was announced as "en préparation" both in *Bonjour Cinéma* and *La Lyrosophie*. Of this project there is only left, to my knowledge, a draft of the prologue, of which long passages will be reused in "Nous Kabbalistes" ("We Kabbalists"). Another field of study could be some literary manuscripts of his youth which could help relate Epstein to symbolist aesthetics, and its particular dialectics between *spleen* and strong sensation (see for instance the text entitled *Caritas Vitae*).

But much more important than this is, in my opinion, to highlight the fact that there are finished books there, and that they are not juvenilia but works written in his later years.[7] Here I will focus on the topic of the body and the organism in three of these unpublished books: *Ganymède*, *Contre-pensées* and *L'autre ciel. Ganymède* is dated by Marie Epstein as being written in the 1930s–40s (as she wrote on the cover of the document preserved). And she is quoted by Pierre Leprohon (1964, 66) saying that during his last years Epstein worked on *Contre-pensées* and *L'autre ciel* among other books. Of course we could argue if these are finished or unfinished projects, but their extension and their quality helps to defend their validity as works in their own right.

6 For an approach to a physiological aesthetics in fin-de-siècle France and its relation to some popular culture see, for instance, Rae Beth Gordon *Dances with Darwin, 1875–1910. Vernacular Modernity in France* (2009), particularly chapter three: "What is Ugly?"

7 To my knowledge the only approach to one of those unpublished books has been by Christophe Wall-Romana (2012) in his very rich essay "Epstein's Photogénie as Corporeal Vision: Inner Sensation, Queer Embodiment, and Ethics." In this essay certain aspects of *Ganymède* are discussed and used in order to re-read some of Epstein's film concepts, which are also read in the light of other theorists (like Walter Benjamin) or contemporary audiovisual practices (like the ones by Bill Viola).

2.1 *Ganymède*: *essai sur l'éthique homosexuel masculin par Alfred Kléber*

Ganymède: *essai sur l'éthique homosexuel masculin par Alfred Kléber* (*Ganymede: An Essay on the Male Homosexual Ethics by Alfred Kléber*) is a book on male homosexuality, written by Jean Epstein under the pseudonym of Alfred Kléber. It is a long essay of almost 300 typed pages, a fact that in itself shows the importance of that subject for Epstein.

The essay is mainly a vindication of male homosexuality and an attempt to delegitimize the public discourse against it. First of all *Ganymède* is a book on social rights, as it argues for allowing homosexuality to be a public and normal life, appropriating a "right to love" (1930–40, 274) that penal codes and society deny. Epstein's argument understands homosexual love in a Greek way, as an education of the young by the adults and dividing the couple into the lover and the loved. This classic and mythical understanding of male homosexuality is surrounded by other arguments maybe not that common. Artificiality is an important keyword in *Ganymède*. Epstein advocates that what is specifically human is to transform nature, to evolve through specialization. Homosexual love is an example of this as it completely separates procreation and love and also, in another sense, reifies procreation in an intellectual way. Homosexual love is then, for Epstein, a very human creation, a specialization of instinctual characteristics that lead to their transformation.

In the development of the essay we find some topics related to physiology and medicine.[8] In his early writings, Epstein had already criticized the concepts of health and illness as being too stable and Manichean, as both are intertwined with each other. Here the criticism has clear social and personal consequences. Of course *Ganymède* is against the medicalization of homosexuality and the discourses that treat it as an illness. First, even if it were an illness, Epstein criticizes the moral dictum against homosexuality, since illnesses have no moral character. Secondly, he writes against the pathological prejudice that medicine adopts, seeing illness and pathologies everywhere and extrapolating its patients to represent homosexuals (as heteronormativity – and Epstein almost adopts this term

8 The arguments on physiology and medicine are found mainly in chapters two (*Determination anatomique et physiologique de l'homosexuel* [*Anatomic and Physiological Determinants of the Homosexual*]), three (*Determination psychologique de l'homosexuel* [*Psychological Determinants of the Homosexual*]), and eight (*L'homosexualité n'est pas de l'hétérosexualité travestie* [*Homosexuality is not Transvestite Heterosexuality*]).

– is incapable of understanding homosexuality outside the masculine–feminine pair). Speaking of degeneration in relation to homosexuality is also contested by Epstein. He conceives it as being closer to some atavism using arguments by psychoanalysis – related to bisexuality in young desire – and embryology – related to the differentiation of the sexes. This atavism of homosexual desire found in our personal history (both physiological and psychological) is used by Epstein in order to argument for a naturalization of homosexual love. But, as I said before, he is much more interested in artificiality than in nature, considering the former as what is truly human. Consequently, he mostly conceives homosexuality against any degeneration as a future sexuality, because of its novelty, specialization, and complication of human functions. Epstein readers will recognize how his broad scope full of civilization and Utopian arguments is also adopted when thinking on sexuality, love, and desire. We find again, as in his philosophical and film writings, this particular juncture of past and future (atavism and Utopia) against the present. This formula can be rationality defeated by fatigue, actual cinema by its future form or heterosexuality eroded by homosexuality. Lyrosophy, cinema, and homosexuality approach us from the future.

Homosexuality is in *Ganymède* a biological condition, an identity of the self. This is another argument against medicalization: being congenital, it has no cure. And this is something maybe unfamiliar to Epstein readers, as cinema is mostly the realm of unstable identities (as one of his essays claims it is a liquid world: *Le monde fluide de l'écran* [*The Fluid World of the Screen* 1950]), but of course fighting for social rights demands stable identities from where to fight. Epstein claims that "every human fact is an indivisible triad: anatomical, physiological and psychological" (1930–40, 42), refusing a psychological understanding by thinkers that "push the contempt for the human organism, and want nothing to do with it. Wherever this mistake of separating matter and spirit prevails, any knowledge of man is impossible" (1930–40, 42). So we find again, as in his early writings, the importance of the "organic bases" and physiology for understanding the human self. This leads Epstein, for instance, to talk about endocrinology in relation to homosexual desire. And also about heredity, claiming that there is a common consanguinity among homosexuals that reveals its hereditary character and its deep rooting in the soma. This physiological thought is sometimes used for misogynous arguments, claiming that differences between the sexes make it impossible to adopt the particularities of homosexual love in heterosexual couples (even if in some paragraphs we can understand that this will be possible in the future, but still there are long misogynous passages not to be

overlooked).[9] Because homosexual love, as Epstein theorizes it, is not only a love radically separated from human procreation but a reification of desire in which physical pleasure needs intellectual satisfaction. It is a neurosis, a kind of illness in Epstein's sense – i.e. a natural condition, – shared by a particular elite of sensibility: "One can compare this more complete love, love not only by the senses, but also by the mind, to some neuroses, like brain-cardiac ones, characterized by the growing and sensible interdependence of an organ of the vegetative life, like the heart, with the brain. The love we are talking about is a brain-genital neurosis, an influence of the brain over the automatism of sexual function, in brief, an illness as a well known aphorism says." (1930–40, 61.)

The argument on homosexuality as a specialization and a kind of Utopian sexuality[10] leads Epstein to think of procreation in two senses. The first one is understanding the existence and the importance of an intellectual procreation (as being conscious and more human – i.e. artificial – than the procreation of the species). Secondly, ruminating about artificial reproduction, as a kind of pathogenesis in humans that will lead to a future epoch that will look back at us as primitives: "Our time, in which mating is necessary for procreation, will seem then farther away than for us the age when presence was needed to see or hear someone." (1930–40, 119.) The imbrication of technology and humanity allows us to overcome some conditions of human experience. Eroding what can be thought of as fundamental conditions, now superseded by their technological reifications (be it the conditions for sharing and space or for biological procreation).

Ganymède shows us how physiology, the body, and the material side of the self were important for Epstein's thought throughout his life. If we include *Ganymède* in his complete works, the lack of physiological arguments in his film writings is balanced by its presence in this and other unpublished works. It helps as well to better understand his early thought on fatigue and his ruminations on medicine and pathology, making clear that medical discourses can be against fundamental personal characteristics like desire and sexuality. Finally, this book points to artificiality and humanity in a paradoxical way at first glance. For Epstein what

9 Epstein's misogyny is also related to symbolist and fin-de-siècle literature (the fracture between women and the ideal expressed by Lord Edwald and Edison in *L'Éve future* (*Future Eve*, 1886) by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam that leads them to love an android where they only talk to themselves or the disdain for the real Sibyl Vane by Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's novel). Epstein's discourse on artificiality could be related to symbolism, as well, particularly his comparison with flowers and gardeners as perfecting nature present in *Ganymède*.

10 See for instance *Ganymède*'s last chapter entitled *Le present et l'avenir de l'homosexualité* (*The Present and Future of Homosexuality*).

is more human is artificial and somehow *against nature*. Cinema as a prosthetic perceptual organ falls inside the realm of artificial, and therefore of the human and of the future.

2.2 *Contre-pensées*

Contre-pensées is a work composed of 239 short texts on a wide variety of topics and in a style close to the essay. Full of acute observations and wit, the text does not follow a straight argument like *Ganymède*, but develops a kind of personal dictionary of thoughts, arranged alphabetically in the book. It is a text open to interpretation – with ironic fragments and ambiguous propositions – with some recurrent motifs. One of the various motifs in *Contre-pensées* is, once again, the organism and the body.

The materiality of spirit or thought is emphasized again and again. Some texts deal with physiological motifs. He writes on the pituitary gland as commanding the whole organism (influencing his psychological and rational side) and being affected by visual and olfactory sensations (*Hypophyse* [*Pituitary Gland*]).[11] Maternal love is said to depend on this gland and on the presence of magnesium in the organism (*Amour-maternel* [*Motherly Love*]). In a text entitled *Pisser* (*To Pee*) thought itself is understood as a secretion of the nervous system: "psychic life is a residual product of any physiological activity." Any medium of expression is understood consequently, in this short text, as a hygienic measure in order not to be intoxicated by our own waste.[12] As in *Ganymède*, Epstein emphasizes the influence of physiology on every human act and takes for granted that mental superstructures are consequences of physiological equilibrium. In a text entitled *Feu* (*Fire*) he says that the discovery of fire and its consequences on our diet evolved our thought. The history of mentalities is, again as in the former quote of his early writings, a matter of biology and mutation (see as well the text entitled *Mutations*). Even our personal history is marked by these mobile ties between the psychological and the physiological. Epstein concludes that the identity of the self is only an illusion, as biology explains that our organism is renewed completely every seven years (*Prescription*).

Sensation is also present in *Contre-pensées*. In *Anesthesie* (*Anesthesia*) sensation is separated from consciousness and memory, as anesthesia somehow

11 Since this is an unpublished book, it is non paginated and arranged alphabetically. I will give as a reference the title of each text.

12 For similar arguments also see the texts: *Entropie*, *Mots-croisés* and *Saint-Janvier*.

is capable of blocking the memory of pain but the body in a chirurgical operation still reacts even if in a numbed and slowed way. In *Musique* (*Music*), Epstein conceives music as capable of a sensual relation with the organism. Music can exalt our instincts and feelings, seduce the organism or break its nervous system; in a similar way as cinema was conceived in his early writings as a distributor of nervous energy, and spectatorship in terms of bodily reactions. When talking about the senses (*Sens* [*Senses*]) Epstein includes introspection or coenaesthesis, the inner sensations of our own body. This could be as diverse as the classification by Alexander Bain that is quoted in his text: muscular sense, muscular pain, nervous pain, respiration, circulation, digestion, hot and cold, and electrical sensation. Epstein includes also "la cénesthésie cérébrale" which is not the content of the thinking but the sensation of being in the process of thinking. Consciousness is also one of our senses; it has its material side.

Our body constructs our psychology and thought not only in a physiological way, but also in giving us our basic scale for understanding. Abstract constructions like the decimal system arise from the scale of our body and our ten fingers (*Nombres* [*Numbers*]). "All abstractions of the human spirit […] are functions of the corporeal size of the species," writes Epstein in *Dimensions*, and "they are only valid at human scale." This is a key concept for Epstein and his fascination for what is *infiniment petit* or *infiniment grand*, what exceeds the human world. The interior of our body is also an example of this *infiniment petit*. Physiology is then doomed to face the unknowable, as it faces an ultramicroscopic world (*Libre arbitre* [*Free Will*]). This conjunction of understanding and the body stresses the importance of cinema (or other technologies), as they can show us a non anthropocentric reality.

Artificiality is also a concept we can find in *Contre-pensées*, as was found in *Ganymède*. Spirit, psychology, etc. are not only related and arise from human physiological features, but they are also derived and present in any complex system, be it organic or technological. Epstein claims that quantity leads to quality (the combination of material parts creates immaterial characteristics). A car, or a plant have their own psychology derived from the relation between its composition, an immaterial function due to its material parts (*Automobile* and *Esprit* [Spirit]).[13] Speaking about a non human psychology or understanding is not a metaphor for Epstein but a reality.

13 Even in my restrained thematic approach, *Contre-pensées* overflows the extent of this essay. We can find there thoughts on medicine, pain, progress, or imitation which are of interest for us. For instance, imitation (conscious and unconscious) is conceived by Epstein as one of the motors of artificiality and imitation was as well a key feature of 19th Century psycho-physiology.

Contre-pensées gives us a compilation of Epstein's broad knowledge and interests in his later years. Again we can see that physiology was important for him during his whole life. Here too the material side of the organism is vindicated as being very important for his psychological or rational side. Of course the interest of a text like *Pisser* [*Piss*] is to incarnate thought even in a scatological way, echoing a transmutation of values and a fight against rationality as universal knowledge, present in his early writings and in his film writings (*Le cinéma du Diable* [*Devil's Cinema*, 1947], for instance). We could have this in mind in order to think about cinema. How cinema affects us, also means how cinema affects our body. Of course Epstein wrote on cinema during the same years and did not use, at least explicitly or in a central way, these kinds of arguments. How these arguments are implicit in his film writings or not, is a task that must be undertaken, but falls unfortunately outside the extent of this essay. What is explicitly present in Epstein's film writings is the conception of cinema as an "intelligence" (as expressed in the title itself of his book *L'intelligence d'une machine* [*The Intelligence of a Machine*, 1946]). *Contre-pensées* makes even more clear, as I have already said, that this is not a metaphor for Epstein but something literal: any complex materiality creates an intelligence and a psychology.

2.3 *L'autre ciel*: Adored, Ecstatic, and Sacred Bodies

Unlike the other unpublished works I deal with here, *L'autre ciel* is a literary piece. It is composed of short non-narrative independent texts. The main focus of the book is the human self, conceived as bearing an interior secret that constitutes his most intimate truth and structures his whole self. This secret must be found "inside, and in the flesh, because the soul is incarnated" (EPSTEIN229-B89, 39). The human (male) body is celebrated in the whole book through desire. Overtly homoerotic, the vocabulary regarding otherness (the title itself) is a common feature as it is also a kind of personal subtext (evident, for instance, in a text entitled *Evangile de Jean* [*Gospel of John*]). The poetic powers of Epstein are here at their height and his celebration of an ecstatic and sacred body sheds new light on his insistence in the body in his film writings.[14]

14 As with his other unpublished writings, there are many aspects that could be related to his film books. One of the texts composing *L'autre ciel* is entitled *Le mystère de Narcisse* (*The Mystery of Narcissus*). In this text Narcissus experiences a multiple mirror gaze, where he sees himself "as he has never seen before" (EPSTEIN229-B89, 5). Personal revelation echoes the filmic revelation present in his film writings.

One of the key features of *L'autre ciel* is ignorance. The conscious knowing of not knowing anything is one of the revelations human beings must face. The text *Le cirque des vains martyrs* (*The Circus of Vain Martyrs*) describes a kind of ritual or show with characters like the goddess of Reason, God, the Devil, or Nero. One of the last performances is by a Dionysian troupe commanded by Orpheus and composed by all kind of ecstatic bodies: "There were mujiks, American shakers, epileptic deacons, turning dervishes, ecstatic nuns, venerable killers, masturbated lamas, all the fanatics of all drunkenness, screwing each other, mutilating each other, eating their sexes, celebrating love's mysteries." (EPSTEIN229-B89, 27.)

After that a Sphinx discloses the secret dictum: "The only mystery is that there is no mystery. The only answer to all riddles is that there is no answer. The secret of everything is nothing. That is why one is obliged to keep it. There is nothing to say, because nothing can be known. All truths are nothing but symbols. In pain, pleasure is canceled, and conviction, and even sincerity are faded. There only remains one desire: the desire of nothingness. And no one has ever been able to satisfy it." (EPSTEIN229-B89, 28.)

The male body is closely and exhaustively celebrated in, by far, the longest of the texts composing *L'autre ciel*: *Le tribunal de l'adoration* (*The Tribunal of Adoration*). This text travels around the body describing its limbs one by one, in a description full of eroticism echoing the lover's gaze. In a style close to Epstein's description of filmic close ups, every part of the body is seen isolated and revealing equivalences with landscapes, architecture, vegetal, or animal life, or machinery.[15] This slow and close description stops at and underlines every entrance of the body, be they closed (like the eyes or the navel) or open (like the mouth). Usually disgusting aspects of the body (for instance strong odors of the feet, the mouth or the armpit) are not refused but celebrated as inebriating. Of course the end of the trip around the body is the phallus and the anus.

The phallus is an atavistic and monstrous organ, which makes any civilization of love only a surface effect (*Ganymède* is an Apollonian celebration of homosexuality, *L'autre ciel* its Dionysian side): "The true merit of love, if there is one, is to love knowing completely this ugliness of love, accepting that the

15 Some of this equivalences are for instance: breasts that move like waves (EPSTEIN229-B89, 6), the teeth form a "*sainte-chapelle* of a crystal-animal *flamboyant* style" unrivaled by any building (EPSTEIN229-B89, 12), "the tongue is the only leaf, fleshy and carnivorous, sensitive and prehensive, of the most voracious plant" (EPSTEIN229-B89, 11–12) or the inside of the body that makes its synthesis "in stills and pipes, which have the colors of dawn and the shapes of abyssal monsters" (EPSTEIN229-B89, 17).

sublimity of the beloved includes or erases all that is disgusting in the flesh, such a piety supposes a state of grace, a trance, an archaic state; going back in human history to a more pure animal level, which persists better in sexuality than anywhere else and refuses any idealization of voluptuousness."(EPSTEIN229-B89, 19.) The semen is its fruit, described in its color, flavor, and smell.

The anus is the logical conclusion of the text, the place where any learned shame must be broken: "This crater signals the extreme border, that which the piety for the integrity of a god incarnated can not surpass in physical explorations […]. Here, total devotion breaks any learned shame, in order to reach true human respect, against which the only mortal sin will be to despise whatever it was of man." (EPSTEIN229-B89, 20.) And where one can face the sacred: "There is no more severe prohibition than that on excremental lava [lave excrémentielle]. The most powerful horror is related to it. In a censorship so profoundly rooted, universal and absolute, one must recognize the character of the sacred [le caractère du sacré]." (EPSTEIN229-B89, 20.)

Le tribunal de l'adoration (*The Tribunal of Adoration*) celebrates the whole human (male) body and ends with: "One must learn to revere both left and right sides of divinity, the evil as much as the good, and to obtain rapture [ravissement] where ordinary people does not derive anything but fear and shame." (EPSTEIN229-B89, 21.)

Both motifs highlighted here (the knowing of ignorance and the celebration of the whole body) form a third text entitled *Evangile de Jean* (a title which evokes, as was said, personal resonances). This text explains a cult that teaches "that we know nothing of what we think we know, neither about things, others, or about ourselves. In the human soul and body, they venerate the highest expression of the mystery of this ignorance which becomes conscious of itself." (EPSTEIN229-B89, 23.) Guarded by cyclops, they search in the body the roots and reflections of this secret. The movements of life are "all studied, all, even the most modest, by the set of normal, accelerated and slow-motion cadences, by variable enlargements, by discovering unusual angles" (EPSTEIN229-B89, 23). The cinema – cyclopean eye capable of all these powers – seems explicitly called up here.

The last paragraph of *Evangile de Jean* is again a close description of the body where everything is transmuted to the entire realm of nature; and this transmutation – experienced through framing and studying the body – achieves the realm of values and the moral: "everything is changed, avoiding conventions, enriched by new values, by uncountable truths." Concluding that "God is everywhere in man, and mostly in this center of consciousness which notices

him but does not understand him; which is in itself the Holy and gets scared of himself as if it was a stranger." (EPSTEIN229-B89, 25.)

In *L'autre ciel* we can see many of the main strands of Epstein's thought in a new light. The absence of universal truths and the relativity of any knowledge is something that cinema teaches us, as Epstein theorizes it. But it is something that can also be known in an ecstatic approach to the body of the other, as that Dionysian troupe or the close adoration of the body suggest. Values are transmuted, learned shames are broken, right and left confused, and all becomes lovable, adored, and sacred.[16] *Evangile the Jean* links both ideas to cinema. Its role is then to teach and show us our mystery, discovering it first in our body. The erotic, inebriating, and revolutionary role of detailed and close viewing in desire, contaminates one of Epstein's major themes in his film writing: the close up. *L'autre ciel* fully discloses the inherent eroticism of his theorization and film practice.

3. Conclusions

The three unpublished works of Jean Epstein discussed here are of significant importance for our understanding of his work. One can see that his early interest in physiology and the organism was not lost but remained very important in his entire lifetime, and this knowledge makes possible a new reading of his film books. A second conclusion regards the importance of artificiality for humanity. Cinema is sometimes described by Epstein as a prosthetic organ and as having a spirit (as this is an immaterial function of related material fragments). In that sense it is, as homosexuality may be, an artificial human creation (something at the core of humanity itself and something approaching us from the future). Thirdly, the sensuous resonances of some fragments of his film writings (its description of human bodies seen through cinema) or of his films can be fully illuminated. After having read *L'autre ciel*, the lover's gaze echoes the film's gaze. And finally, Epstein's unpublished writings give us many reflections on the organism and the self, and a celebration of the body in all its aspects that forms a corpus of work of interest in itself, even if he were not the important filmmaker and film theorist that he is.

16 The sacred was a very important concept in Epstein's thought, influenced by readings such as Mircea Eliade. Chiara Tognolotti's dissertation traces a path through Epstein thought, using his "notes de lecture" preserved as well at Cinémathèque Française, and the idea of sacred turns to be the final conclusion in her narrative of Epstein writings and even filmography (referring to *Le Tempestaire*). The sacred, as *L'autre ciel* shows, is not only what the word recalls in common language but includes in an explicit way all that is forbidden, all that is rejected and low like bodily excretions.

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Avoid Contact with the Eyes and Skin, May Cause Irritation: Agnès Varda's *La Pointe courte* (1954)

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Abstract. When, through highly atypical financial and creative means, French filmmaker Agnès Varda's first feature film *The Pointe Courte* (*La Pointe courte*, 1954) first appeared on cinema screens, a fragment of contemporary commentators thought it hampered by "defects," "blunders," and "follies." Its perceived infirmity compounded further by a "rather irritating intellectual dryness," implying contact with the film may cause itching. A more material, rather than intellectual engagement with the film, then, may offer a means to overcome such reservations; a piste this article pursues. In doing so, I draw on the thought of contemporary French thinker Jean-Luc Nancy and his proposition that all images are flowers and the mobilised look such thinking engenders which oscillates between an optical gaze and a haptic graze. A look mobilized thanks to the contact it makes with wood's textured, internal ornament and which undoes the material myopia by which the film's existing critical landscape has itself been hampered.

"It must be said here that wood is one of Agnès Varda's key materials, one of the leitmotif images of her films."[1]
Jean-Luc Godard, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 1959

Contemporary and occasional collaborator, Jean-Luc Godard here asserts how wood constitutes Agnès Varda's filmic material *par excellence*; the very first image of Varda's very first feature film *The Pointe Courte* (*La Pointe courte*, 1954) affording us such a ligneous inference through the exposed wood grain that greets a spectator's eyes. [Figs. 1–4.] Varda too has implicated her own oeuvre in this pastoral register, this time on the other side of the camera, playfully conceiving her cinematic audience as fields of spectators. Hemmed in by the space of the

1 Please note that throughout the article all translations are my own. Original French reads: "Il faut dire ici que le bois est un des matériaux-clé d'Agnès Varda, l'une des images leitmotive de ses films."

auditorium, Varda considers these fields as vital and fleshy ears of corn, blowing in the winds of her projected images; their autonomy supposedly harvested by the combines of light, sound, and movement, as well, of course, as by more material offerings (Varda 1994, 7). Ethically speaking, such talk raises concerns, for any consideration of wood as Varda's "key" cinematic material potentially implies the imposition of a hierarchy of engagement with her filmic images. Yet, as I will argue here, far from grounding her first feature film into a system which privileges certain perceptions over others, Varda's relationship with wood in fact makes the image available to a whole spectrum of perceptual engagements.

The Intertextual Travels of the Flower

Spectatorship for Varda, then, is a case of plant life, whereby viewers are capable of being sensuously modified by the spoils of the image, and a select film history demonstrates a similarly perennial relationship between cinema and botany. The Lumière Brothers' *The Sprinkler Sprinkled* (*L'Arroseur arrosé*, 1895), arguably the very first narrative film, is set within a garden, whilst the very first colour film, recently "rediscovered," includes images of three children waving sunflowers. More playfully, it could be said that Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) is driven by such a flowery inclination in its hunt for the mysterious Rosebud, while footage of Loie Fuller's mesmerizing skirt dances is equally evocative of this contingency; the shapes conjured by the ethereal mix of movement, light, and fabric fleetingly adopting floral-like forms. Her luminous textile swirls filling our eyes with tiny arabesques and often begging the question: What are we looking at? Just as the exposed grain of wood of *The Pointe Courte* does when a spectator first lays her eyes upon it. [Figs. 4–6.]

A brief survey of Varda's body of work also reveals such enigmatic florid bursts. Sunflowers feature prominently in the opening sequence of *Happiness* (*Le Bonheur*, 1965), uncannily and unblinkingly looking out at an audience, as the "corny" spectators look on to them. In her two-hour voyage through Paris in *Cleo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7*, 1962), the sight of a tree hints at its arboreal permanence, as if today, 50 years since its conception a spectator could visit that very spot and take in its now greater majesty. Most intriguing of all, however, at least for myself, are the closing moments of *Opera Mouffe* (*L'opéra-mouffe*, 1958) during which a young, pregnant woman – a potential doppelganger for Varda who was pregnant with her first child at the time of its production – heartily consumes a bunch of flowers. [Figs. 7–9.]

In his essay on the uncanny, Freud noted how the represented double can operate as "the uncanny harbinger of death" (Freud 1989 [1919], 142), yet here the double is invested with fecundity, not simply in its depiction of pregnancy, but also in light of its correspondences with this wider bucolic web. For like the spatiotemporal interconnection that the exchanged look between sunflower and spectator, and the sight of Cleo's tree, trigger, her consumption of the flower gestures towards an interrelation between the body and the flower. As I watch these petals become pulp I am always reminded of Gilles Deleuze's adage-like sentiment that: "It is through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought" (Deleuze 1989, 189); a position that resonates with a major shift in film theory, and what I have identified as Film Studies' *fleshy* turn.

This *fleshy* turn has seen modes of spectatorship that strive for more bodily readings of film emerge, for instance, through appeals to tactility, the olfactory, or sapidity. In a recent article on the state of film theory in France, Sarah Cooper too highlights the "measure" of importance Deleuze's two volumes on cinema enjoy beyond "the French context" and among the proponents of this *fleshy* turn (Cooper 2012, 381); noting his particular influence on cultural theorist Laura U. Marks's own highly influential work on touch and the haptic. Very broadly, Marks's thesis centres on "haptic looking" and its tendency "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). In other words, it is a modality of seeing which declines "being pulled into narrative" (Marks 2000, 163) in favour of a more contemplative relationship with the image as a whole. For our purposes here though we are interested in the interstices between the French context and this ever-growing cinema of the senses. Rather fittingly, Cooper refers to what we could call, following my own taxonomy, the French *fleshy* turn, casting Jean-Luc Nancy as a leading figure in the "abiding interest in film" (Cooper 2012, 379) France's philosophical intelligentsia continues to show. The author of one volume on the cinema of Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, of numerous articles on individual films, and an occasional embodied filmic agent, putting his own self at stake by entering the body of film and appearing on-screen, Nancy is likewise part of one of France's modern-day cinematic power couples thanks to his "intermittent dialogue with the work of Claire Denis" (Cooper 2012, 379). A dialogue in no way restricted to his critical, textual interventions on her work for Denis has responded cinematically to Nancy's writings through the 2004 feature

film *The Intruder* (*L'Intrus*). Very loosely narrating a heart transplant transacted on the black market, the film consists of "blocks of sensations" (Beugnet 2007, 168), instead of observing a more conventional narrative logic, a structure which works to prise the seat of cinematic perception from vision alone as per the objectives of Film Studies' *fleshy* turn. This coincidence of concerns, however, is not the whole story of Nancy's suitability for adoption by the *fleshy* turn, for careful analysis of his most dedicated study of the medium, *The Evidence of Film* (2001) characterises his cinema as an undoubted cinema of the look; the number of mentions of the word *regard* attesting to this very proposition.[2] Yet it is also undoubtedly a very particular kind of look given that the impetus of Nancy's most extensive engagement with film is to witness "a mobilized way of looking" (Nancy 2001, 26) emerge, the nature of which cannot be understood by considering his work on film in isolation, for any specificity of his discourses on cinema are caught up with his wider contribution to the canon of aesthetic thinking. Therefore to speak of a Nancean ontology of film we must bear in mind his ontology of the image because one reciprocally informs the other, a contact which itself, as I will show here, not only places his thought into contact with Film Studies' *fleshy* turn, but likewise into contact with that intertexual (and intermedial) traveller, the flower.

A Little Living Piece of Material Cinema in the Palm of Your Hand

My reading of Nancy's image ontology situates its foundation in the critical contact he makes with the flower and his claim that "every image superficially flowers, or is a flower" (Nancy 2003, 16).[3] There is of course nothing new in electing a particular trope to determine specific phenomena in Film Studies, with the mirror, picture frame, and window, the dominant three (Sobchack 1991, 14), and at first sight Nancy's flowering image may itself appear metaphorical in its intention. However, it is far more than a mere figure of speech within the Nancean vernacular, for its evocation constructs an organic, material, sensuous image: its blooming silky petals calling to be caressed; its blossoming ostentation risking a greedy picking; its efflorescing scent inviting closeness or chasing away; much like the rich surfaces of the cinematic image flowering into view and so appealing to the *fleshy* turn's models of spectatorship. However, a survey of the

2 *Regard* is most frequently rendered as look or gaze in English.
3 Original French reads: "toute image est *à fleur*, ou est une fleur."

state of this turn reveals that all is not so rosy, and in the wake of the reception of her ideas on touch and the haptic, Laura U. Marks used a guest editorial piece to issue a call to action to all newcomers to her thought."My purpose in theorizing haptic visuality was not to condemn all vision as bent on mastery, nor indeed to condemn all mastery, but to open up visuality along the continua of the distant and the embodied, and the optical and the haptic. As I have already witnessed the appropriation of my haptic ideas for what seem to me proto-fascist, new-age celebrations of feeling, irrationality, and primordial ooze, I take advantage of this moment to beseech those who are newly encountering haptic thinking to keep alive the dialectic with the optical (Marks 2004, 82)!"

Indeed visuality's sliding scale has been central to Marks's project since her debut monograph *The Skin of the Film* (2000) where she issued a somewhat softer warning: "The difference between haptic and optical vision is a matter of degree. In most processes of seeing, both are involved, in a dialectical movement from far to near. And obviously we need both kinds of visuality: it is hard to look closely at a lover's skin with optical vision; it is hard to drive a car with haptic vision (Marks 2000, 163)."

In resisting illusionistic depth and narrative, then, we should not decline an optical gaze entirely, but instead make room for it alongside a surficial graze. Like the resonance shared with Denis's work, Nancy directly, though accidently, responds to Marks's call to action in his handling of the flower and the sensory appendage this treatment realises. Prefacing his claim that all images are flowers, or at the very least flower, with a more general observation, Nancy comments how: "The flower, it is the very finest part, the surface, that which remains before us and which we only very lightly touch" (Nancy 2003, 16).[4] It is the availability of the image's surface first to vision and then, at the very least, to a partial touch, that primes Nancy's flowering image for such sensory appendage, the tripartite haptic figure at this light touch's linguistic core further accommodating this embellishment. For it does not simply denote two separate bodies coming into a mutual contact, but rather it connotes multiple modes of touch, for example, "to raze," "to brush," "to caress," whilst also articulating the more definite haptic gesture, "to pluck." In the first of these tactile instances, then, there resides a preoccupation with a superficial or shallow contact, in the spatial sense of the term, as opposed to implying a sense of the insincere, the cursory, that brushes up against, caresses, indeed grazes the exposed surface of its co-present other,

4 Original French reads: "La *fleur*, c'est la partie la plus fine, la surface, ce qui reste devant et qu'on effleure seulement."

like we may the petal of a flower, while it simultaneously occasions a hungry gaze which seeks to master this tiny piece of nature by plucking or plundering its micro bouquet. Phenomenologically, however, it plumbs further depths than this surficial frisson and prehensile picking, for it likewise describes a coming forth from latency, which may bloom into a "brilliant display," or which may work more generally to make manifest formerly "hidden agencies;" an efflorescence that completes this haptic triptych.[5] Nancy's flowering image thus oscillates the sensory reception to the image between both vision and touch, between a gaze and a graze, bridging the entire visuality spectrum that Marks wishes to see acknowledged by ontologies of the image, and in turn placing a spectator onto the edges of these sensations too, meaning that our look effectively, and quite literally, mobilizes thanks to this oscillation. If wood, then, is Varda's filmic material *par excellence*, the flower could almost be thought of as the sensuous image *par excellence*; a little living piece of material cinema in the palm of your hand.

Two Worlds, One Vision

This mobilized way of looking, however, demands some form of leverage which Nancy locates exclusively in the figure of the director, but which I believe can originate in the material surrounds of the image: in the textile surfaces which line interiors and clothe protagonists, in the edifices which deck out landscapes, in the items which litter the spaces and places the film takes in, as well as, in fleshy touches, that is, the hands and faces of the onscreen bodies. These surrounds therefore mobilize our look by the cleaving in two of cinematic perception that Nancy's flowering image admits and are in turn mobilized by this very same look.

This sense of cleavage brings us nicely to our interest in wood and to *The Pointe Courte* for the film is effectively two films in one; recounting the daily lives of the residents of the eponymous fishing village and their struggle against sanctions imposed by health inspectors, and the visit of two Parisian "outsiders," contemplating a potential end to their four year marriage. Wood and the structure of the film can, then, be split along the length of their faithful grains, yet by design each faithfully clings to itself along the length of this very grain. In her most recent work, on enfolding and unfolding aesthetics, Marks too has worked with wood, like Nancy, and I hope myself, shaping it into a figurative and a

5 Definitions of efflorescence derive from "effloresce, v.". OED Online. September 2012. Oxford University Press. *http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59763?redirectedFrom=efflorescе (*accessed October 10, 2012).

theoretical material to think through, or indeed *not* to think through as the case may be, categorizing it amongst the order of the *machinic phylum*. "The virtual is the truly infinite ground against which the fewest actual entities emerge. It consists of all that cannot presently be thought; it is an asymptote for thought: "the powerlessness at the heart of thought." Most materiality is virtual too. My notion of the materiality is…closer to Deleuze and Guattari's characterization of the *machinic phylum* as that material that, like the grain of wood, guides the artisan to invent and to come up with thoughts that she would not have had in the absence of this obdurate, densely enfolded material. Materialistically, we could call the virtual 'thought's powerlessness at the heart of wood'" (Marks 2010, 7).

Marks's words here recall the anonymous plank of wood that welcomes a spectator to the diegetic world of the film, its looped node and striated contours constituting formal rhymes to the enfolding and guiding properties of wood privileged by Marks here. Much more than a visual representation, however, of a singular wooden plane, this first image is made up of a series of simultaneous visual, aural, and kinetic moments that beautifully illustrate the mobilized and bifurcated look Nancy's flowering image affords.

Quickly establishing the privileged material relationship with wood in which it implicates the filmic body at large, these very moments grant us this ligneous inference not only through the wooden surface which heralds the image track, but equally through the soundtrack that floods a spectator's ears, composed of a medley of woodwind instruments – which by their very physicality betray this privilege; and the camera which tightly and statically frames the exposed wood grain of the visual track, suggestive of the immovability of a rooted tree. The block of wood thus forms a block of sensations, its internal, textured ornament mobilizing the look to bring "vision as close as possible to the image; by converting vision to touch" (Marks 2000, 159). Yet Varda's filmmaking approach here does not realise this sensory slippage by declining vision as such, rather this wooden image-box overspills the visual regime in a gesture that does not seek to elevate more marginal sensory data above others, but instead to make space for them. This sense of the wood grain spilling over beyond the ocular and of the subsequent splitting of the pictorial is accomplished by the simple sequence which begins with this intimate establishing shot. Unfolding further with a steady camera pan to the left, which traces the grain until it expires, the sequence then transitions onto an additional series of wooden surfaces, which slowly resolve into the walls of settlement buildings, before we, the camera and the spectator, slowly advance along a path together until we chance upon a suited man beneath what the film's second

protagonist reveals to the uncultivated spectator is a fig tree. Upon encountering this suited man the camera's mechanical neck cranes a little and then relinquishes its view of him in favour of a more rustically attired figure who quickly reports the suited man's presence in The Pointe-Courte. In electing to follow this second man the camera retraces its original steps, coiling around and taking a spectator back with it. A coiling movement that enjoys both an intelligible and a sensible function, ostensibly opening up lines of sight, and thereby permitting us entry into the profilmic world, whilst sensuously modifying vision. In essence, it plumbs down into the materiality of the image for it splits along the grain of both an optical and tactile mode of seeing, without annihilating either, just as Nancy's flowering image prompts the filmic image to border on the edges of touch and vision, in turn placing a spectator onto the edges of these sensations, too.

This phenomenon is better understood if we append two further Nancean reflections on the ontologies of cinema and images to his flowering images. The first relates to his thinking over the impact of editing on the life force of a film, which he perceives not as an exercise in binding meaning and holding it fast, but rather as an exercise in a creative yielding. "The finished film," according to Nancy, "is never the only imaginable," with "each film host to an abundance of others" (Nancy 2011, 82).[6] This abundance emerging from the fact that in proposing one particular point of view via its "final" edit, the film "distances" its material from a multiplicity of other possible or latent films "each just as much imaginable (as the "actual")" (Nancy 2011, 82).[7] As such the finished film is merely a placeholder for a multiplicity of others which ectoplasmically halo it as a "floating aura." Thus brimming with alternatives Nancy's wider image ontology further attests to such bounty when considering the cascade of inference with which even black and white text is rich. Rendered as a threadless weaving in his vernacular, Nancy again returns to the flower to illuminate his thinking in relation to the "overspill" such textual enunciation enacts. For example, in the statement "*Je dis une fleur*" the "movement of the needle in the stitch automatically ties *dire* to *fleur*" (Nancy 2003, 128), but thanks to the cascade of inference enfolded within this simple statement our engagement with it does not cease with this most obvious needlework and this first silken fibre seeps new

6 Original French reads: [1] "le film terminé n'est jamais le seul film imaginable," [2] "Chaque film est riche d'autres films."

7 Original French reads: [1] "il reste certainement chaque fois des possibilités que le montage final écarte." [2] "si du moins on ne parle que de l'état "fini" du film, autour duquel et après lequel continue à flotter une aura de possibles qui sont autant d'interprétations imaginables."

meanings auratically floating within its ectoplasmic halo.[8] *Dire* and *fleur* thus threadlessly weave themselves as: "to say" and "to speak," "to sing," "to evoke," and as "flower," "scent," "petal," "finial," "wilting," "flora", and "flame" to produce an immaterial, yet palpable, tapestry.[9] In both cases, then, any yielding occurs thanks to the floating aura that ectoplasmically haloes each phenomena and wherein resides the abundance of possible films, constituted from anything from the axed acetate strips lying on the floor of the editing room to the actual splitting of reality according to the infamous many-worlds theory of quantum mechanics, and from whence the formerly impalpable textual filaments may emanate and consequently be threadlessly woven together to form an immaterial tapestry. In a cinematic context, then, this threadless weaving could be annexed to Nancy's forked films for it permits a remapping of the off-screen space by means of an embroidering of the onscreen space with presences both imagined and sensed; perhaps once seen and now felt.[10] Accordingly then, they should prompt us to conceive of the filmic image as neither absolute nor latently exhausted, as neither final nor finial, for although technically the outermost plane of the film, the actual, visible image is in actuality a densely enfolded plane; its seemingly sheer surface in fact covered in tiny grooves, these micro folds flowering outwards towards our eyes to mobilize vision. The sight of wood during *The Pointe Courte*'s opening moments offering a very literal site to think through this supposition.[11]

The Pointe Courte's opening sequence behaves and is embroidered in this way through the camera's coil. For not only do its movements introduce us to

8 [1] Literally "I say a flower." Original French reads: [2] "ce mouvement du crochet dans la maille qui enchaîne déjà 'dire à fleur'."

9 Original French reads: "'dire' à 'parler', 'chanter', 'évoquer' et 'fleur' à 'parfum', 'pétale', 'fleuron', 'flétrir', 'flore' ou 'flamme.'" The mechanics of the phenomenon could be said to have a direct analogue in a visual context through Roland Barthes's elucidation of the photographic *studium* and *punctum*. Cf. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. 1981. New York: Hill and Wang.

10 Varda herself embarks on such an exercise in *Ulysse* (1982) wherein she revisits the three chief constitutive elements of a photograph she had taken decades earlier: a boy, now a man; a man, now an old man; and a dead goat; still dead. Creatively and discursively engaging with these three pillars of the original composition "each component of the image…come[s] alive and gain[s] a corporeal dimension in not merely one, but several possible 'alternative realities'" (Pethő 2010, 84); arguably by means of the floating aura of meanings that ectoplasmically haloes the then of the photograph being threadlessly woven into the now of the film.

11 Nancy's flowering image, and its corresponding phenomena, could almost be thought of as the obverse of Varda's *cinécriture*; a term conceived by Varda which addresses the choices she makes when shooting a film. In essence, what she decides to write into the cinema she authors. Nancy's flowering images et al. could be thought the opposing, yet complementary, processes for they treat, or indeed attempt to coax out, what emanates from this *cinécriture*.

the diegetic world, but they likewise materially mimic knot formation in the trunks and branches of trees as the smooth formation of straight growth lines, cinematically speaking the forward moving lines of the camera's movement, is interrupted by its backtracking. We thus acquire a sort of forked vision, as per Nancy's flowering image, because looking down the alleyway we intellectually understand our impending entry into the diegetic world, but our eyes, having brushed up against the wood grain in "function[ing] like organs of touch" (Marks 2000, 162), as well as through the interplay of visual, aural, and kinetic material, are now sensible to the forms of the wood's internal, textured ornament. Thus infused with its lignin patterns, our eyes threadlessly, yet palpably, weave its patterns back into the image despite the fact that its lignin fibres have been abandoned by the visual (and aural) track and are therefore no longer intellectually visible, but only sensibly in the camera's arabesque coil. Indeed it could be said that the visual image becomes grainier, not by means of a drop in visual quality or sharpness, which may elicit a more material mode of perception through an augmented sense of tactility, but by means of a thickening up of the image through the cascade of inference which carpets it. In essence, the exposed grain of wood of these opening moments supplies us with the material leverage we need in order to mobilise our way of looking so as to prise out the richness with which the image, and the film, is flush. By doing so this material leverage enables the grain of the wood to effloresce upon the body of the film and as such comes to materially and sensuously structure *The Pointe Courte*, permeating its visual, audio, and kinetic material like a refrain which prompts spectatorial oscillations between and upon the distinct moments of its return ensuring that our vision is always in flux; able to tap into the many potential alternate realities that inhere within a film and in no way inhibited by wood's obdurate and densely enfolded material, but rather mobilized by it.[12]

12 Interestingly, Alison Smith, in what remains the only book-length English language study exclusively dedicated to Varda's oeuvre, suggests that the film commences "with a tracking shot down the main street of the village" (Smith 1998, 64), rather than with the exposed and anonymous block of wood explored above; essentially deferring the start of the film until after all of the credits have rolled. In doing so Smith also risks overlooking the sense of this exposed wood grain, and the bounty of the image, which continues throughout *The Pointe Courte*. Similarly, Ginette Vincendeau highlights the role of this tracking shot within the film's opening minutes although she does recognise its timber preface. However, her suggestion that as the camera moves on from this first wooden pane that "a section of a tree trunk" is revealed wraps things up a little too readily. For I would suggest that Vincendeau's trunk is in fact a bench which we later catch a glimpse of through the grain-like coils the film realises in its exposition of the diegetic space; circularly swooping from one corner of The Pointe-Courte to another.

Further Wooden Whittlings

A sense of this exposed wood grain, and the bounty of the image, remains throughout *The Pointe Courte* thanks to the many circles and straight lines that fill its material surrounds. Sensible to the visual rhyme they share with its internal patterns through her inaugural encounter with its interior ornament during the opening visual, aural, and kinetic moments of the film, a spectator's eyes once again immaterially, yet palpably, weave these patterns back into the image. These geometrical echoes appear in both stories the film tells, hinting at the potential for proximity between the two narrative strands, and whilst some are quite simply articulated through an overt display of these grainy forms, for instance, a cat curled up asleep in a fishing net; an eel similarly wound up in a bucket; or planks of untreated wood running parallel to a rope washing line, others are yet more discreet. For example, planted amongst the costumes and accessories of the characters small-scale allusions to wood's ligneous design can be found, such as a smoking pipe, or the striped jersey and beret worn by a number of the small fishing town's inhabitants. More sophisticated than these, however, are the moments which demand a greater amount of threadless weaving. [Figs. 10–12.]

Ever present are the simple circles and straight lines that plainly deck out the film's material surrounds, but, like the opening moments of the film, in these moments these shapes transcend these material surrounds and enter the body of the film itself. Deftly demonstrating the intelligent interplay between form and content that film can accomplish, these instances once again consider the image a polymorphous entity ripe with far more than a predominant visual track. One of the most striking uses of this occurs shortly after Elle, the unnamed lead female protagonist of the purely fictional tale the film recounts, has arrived in The Pointe-Courte to visit the birthplace of her husband for the first time. As they journey to the shack that will be their residence during their stay, their walk is interrupted by the approach of a slow moving train and standing perpendicular to its passage they, and the spectator, are obliged to endure its cumbersome and metallic presence which comes to dominate the film's visual and aural tracks as it edges past them; a static camera recording the train's steady screech towards the edge of the screen until its cab fills its entire surface area. Transporting a spectator's view to the other side of the tracks, the body of the film refocuses on the trials of the couple quickly cutting to a slightly obliquely angled mid-shot. Whilst holding them here the camera then winds around them before stopping once again to permit them the space to walk off into the unknown distance.

Contemplated alongside each other, and with eyes sensible to the swirled knots and smooth contours of wood's internal ornament, the kinetic content of the image, here expressed by the train's slow forward motion, and the kinetic quality of the filmic body itself, here realised by the camera's semi-circular movement around the protagonists, work in mutual operation and threadlessly weave the woody texture back into the film, causing an efflorescence of wood's lignin fibres on the surface of the filmic body in defiance of the visual track's relinquishing them. [Figs. 13–15.]

The reciprocal play of the straight lines of the train's heavy movements and of the curvilinear motion of the camera can be witnessed at work again, but in a very different form, at a number of points during the film. Likewise concerned with shot choice, and consequently operating at the level of the filmic body, the fleshy touches that inflect the film's imagery, here the faces of the protagonists captured in close-up, act as the circles central to the immaterial tapestry threadlessly woven, whilst the series of vista shots seen throughout the film, essentially functioning as pseudo-establishing shots in their very literal capability of opening up The Pointe-Courte's locale, constitute the linear complement to the protagonists' round, fleshy faces. Two remarkable instances coincide with the early part of Elle's visit too, the vista shots effectively acquainting both spectator and protagonist with The Pointe-Courte. The first follows a brief enquiry into whether or not her face has changed in the five days since the couple parted and after some reassurance from Il and a lingering close-up of Elle's round face, he presents The Pointe-Courte to her, and the audience, by way of a steady pan to the left which opens up the narrow vista. A second example first opens on to one of these vistas, the sight of which is quickly interrupted by a cut away to another close-up of Elle's face; the pace of this change shunting the wood grain back onto the surface of the filmic body [Figs. 16–18].

A more lyrical example takes place later in the trip as the couple wander along the shoreline. Initially filmed in long shot, as the couple near the water's edge, a cut quickly installs the camera behind an abandoned, broken basket lying on the sand; its woven, circular form providing a diegetic although highly stylised frame to the couple's movements. As they pass in front of this wicker frame, its shape obviously reminiscent of the knot in the anonymous grain of wood, the camera dives through its cylindrical body so that we do not lose sight of the couple although we are denied a view of their bodies and must simply make do with their feet. Charting their walk at this ground level, a linear travelling shot remains focussed on their feet until a star-like shape, which we infer to be

the base of the broken basket appears in the foreground of the image; its spiked circular form stalling the camera's sideways movement and again recalling the knot of the film's timber preface. In completing this motion, this beach debris also completes the final stitch in the threadless weaving which sews the now absent lignin fibres of the opening wooden plane back into the onscreen space of the beach. The warp and weft of its immaterial tapestry gathering filaments as soon as the image acquires its wicker frame; these filaments bolstered by the travelling shot's mimicry of wood's striations; the sight of the basket's formerly missing base likewise forming the base of the purely sensible tree trunk that our mobilised look could be said to carve out through the sequence's visual and kinetic material. [Figs. 19–21.]

I should perhaps pause here for a moment because it could be said that this discussion privileges the couple's narrative too much at too great an expense of the villagers' tale. But this is somewhat of a wilful neglect, motivated not by disrespect, but by a desire to dispel, or at the very least to challenge the material dichotomy promoted by the prevailing canon of criticism surrounding the film. Whereas these two halves are supposedly narratively, thematically, and stylistically distinct, the film as a whole has been well and widely documented as "delight[ing] in contrasts […] and parallels" (Vincendeau 2008). Yet this pleasure it delights in draws up materially opposing territories, such as light and shadow (Varda), iron and wood (Truffaut, Flitterman-Lewis), black and white (Deleuze) which co-exist, but do not necessarily confer. These material schisms are largely gendered and the most significant for our purposes here is undeniably "the opposition of wood and steel" (Flitterman-Lewis 1996, 221). Visually articulated by the artefacts fashioned from these materials and scattered about the diegetic landscape, and aurally by means of these materials being worked by or as tools, Il is aligned with wood and Elle is associated with steel. However, through the continued efflorescence of the exposed wood grain throughout the film, I would like to suggest that this material divide is purely ostentatious, or at the very least, operates on a purely superficial level, in the insincere sense of the word, because in acquiring a look that plumbs down into the materiality and multiplicity of the image, mobilized by incorporating the ornamented insides of the wood grain it has brushed up against into our *regard*, our vision successfully splits along the grain of both an optical and tactile mode of seeing. A spectator therefore enjoys the practical advantages of each modality of seeing, as sketched out by Marks's call to action, whilst simultaneously benefitting from the creative freedom such relay grants in its enabling expired exposures to re-enter the onscreen image

and thereby acknowledging the abundance with which every film is rich, as per Nancy's forked film's theory and threadless weaving. As such, the exposed wood grain encountered in the first few moments of the film grants the spectatorial look the material leverage required to mobilize and it does so to such a degree that this look transcends any long-thought material myopia, essentially opening up the entire filmic body to the ligneous inference with which it pulsates. Like the block of wood, then, *The Pointe Courte*'s blocks of sensations are porous.[13]

As the couple's narrative unfolds the film illustrates such porosity via the ligneous crossover witnessed as the seemingly rekindled pair chat inside the wooden hull of a ship, with the formerly iron Elle wandering gaily within it. Admittedly, however, this wooden shell possesses an iron lining for it is dotted with nuts, bolts, and support rods; the film's material surrounds again delighting in contrasts, but pleasantly implying an osmotic parity. [Figs. 22–24.] Bearing these words in mind, it could almost be argued that wood, Varda's key cinematic material, functions as far more than a leitmotif, and a material one at that, but as a lining to the whole film, a lining which thickens, strengthens, and acquires new dimensions as the film plays on through the reciprocity between a hungry gaze that plunges into illusionistic depth and a surficial graze that is more concerned with texture than narrative teleology. The final moments of the film attest to this proposition.

The couple prepare to leave The Pointe-Courte for Paris, together. The village celebrates, together. As the celebration gets into full swing woodwind music fills the air and our ears evoking a sense of the wood grain which here occasions a diegetic and an extra-diegetic oscillation: the villagers jostle on the dance floor, whilst a spectator jostles with the very opening moments of the film when this music was heard for the first time. Through this aural material the film itself becomes a knot in the grain of cinema encased within itself, effectively enacting a final coil which materially returns us to the opening moments of the film. Yet *The Pointe Courte* does not leave us with any sense of being wrapped up for we do not know if the couple will remain together upon their return to Paris, nor whether any of the kittens will be saved from drowning following a child's request in its closing moments. Our final impression of the film thus splits according to Nancy's forked films theory, like the playground game of plucking petals from a flower: a kitten drowns, a kitten lives, she loves him, she loves him not.

13 Following the terms set out by Ágnes Pethő in her intervention on intermediality as metalepsis in Varda's *cinécriture*, this transcendence could perhaps be annexed to the threefold taxonomy she identifies as operative across Varda's oeuvre as a sensory metalepsis that effects a "jump between diegetic and non-diegetic worlds" (Pethő 2010).

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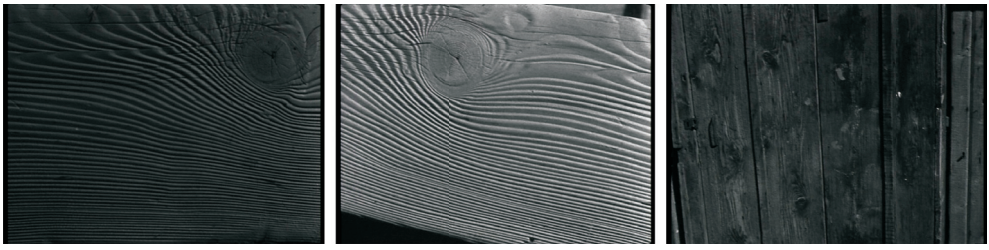
Figures 1–3. The anonymous and exposed wood grain of *The Pointe Courte*'s opening moments that initially greets a spectator's eyes.



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Figures 7–9. A brief survey of the enigmatic florid bursts across Varda's oeuvre.

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Figures 16–18. The juxtaposition of narrow vistas and close-ups of faces shunts the wood grain back onto the surface of the filmic body.

Figures 19–21. Our mobilised look could be said to carve out a purely sensible tree trunk through the sequence's visual and kinetic material.

Figures 22–24. Ostentatiously and superficially aligned with either wood or iron, as the couple's narrative unfolds, the film illustrates its porosity via the ligneous crossover witnessed as the seemingly rekindled pair chat inside the wooden hull of a ship, with the formerly iron Elle wandering gaily within it. Admittedly, however, this wooden shell possesses an iron lining for it is dotted with nuts, bolts, and support rods; the film's material surrounds again delighting in contrasts, but pleasantly implying an osmotic parity.

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Haptic Vision and the Experience of Difference in Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000)

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Abstract. This article investigates how, in her documentary *The Gleaners and I* (*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*, 2000), French director Agnès Varda relies on the establishment of *haptic* vision in order to merge the experience of her own body with the representation of another "body," that of people living at the margins of society and gleaning for food. In so doing, the article will bring out the director's social and aesthetic concerns by positing that Varda turns to a sensuous depiction based on the textural properties of the image to deter any form of instrumental vision regarding the representation of the body and its connections to pre-determined norms of conduct. The article will show that, in its portrayal of a socially and economically alienated group of people, as well as in the rendering of her aging body, Varda's *mise-en-scène* brings forth a tactile form of knowledge that calls for a humanistic approach, thus defusing any form of mastery of the gaze over the image.

Keywords: Agnès Varda, *The Gleaners and I*, haptic vision, documentary.

It is with the advent of the DV camera that Agnès Varda had the idea for her acclaimed documentary *The Gleaners and I*.[1] When it appeared in the mid-nineties, this type of handheld camera represented a new approach to filmmaking altogether, since its size and its technology allowed for a greater freedom on the director's part. Freed from the constraints of the traditional cinematic apparatus, the filmmaker could experience an unprecedented closeness to his or her subject as well as

1 Varda herself explains that the discovery of the digital camera was of paramount importance in her creative process and her desire to tackle the topic of gleaning: "There were three things [that interested her in filming the gleaners]. The first one was noticing the motion of these people bending in the open market. The second one was a program on TV. The third reason – which pushed me to begin and continue this film – was the discovery of the digital camera […]. With the new digital camera, I felt I could find myself, get involved as a filmmaker." (Anderson 2001, 24.)

immediacy between themselves and the world they were recording on camera. These elements proved to be of the utmost interest for Varda, whose background in the still image and the theater has always driven her to explore the narrative and visual possibilities offered by the film medium.[2] She then decided to embark on a journey across France in order to illustrate the different meanings the concept of "gleaning" covered in modern, consumerist French society (Vasse 2008, 190).

If, by recording the lives of people who glean as a means of survival or as a recreational hobby, Varda's primary intent is to offer a comment on French society at the dawn of the 21st century, the significance of her documentary cannot be limited to its social and economic discourse, for it offers a more complex structure, both narratively and visually. Thanks to the handiness of the DV camera, Varda also "gleans" moments from her life, since she incorporates a series of shots of her own aging body throughout the documentary, when we see her filming her wrinkled hands in a close-up or brushing her greying hair, or else reenacting the act of gleaning. These images carve out a space within the documentary that allows the filmmaker's subjectivity to infuse the social discourse of the film, resulting in an aesthetic of collage which, Ágnes Pethő says, "amounts to a genuine collection of media representations and also offers an authentic record of the passion driving the filmmaker herself to collect and assemble and display the 'booty' found in the world" (Pethő 2009, 53). The presence of such images blurs any pre-established boundary that might have defined the scope of the documentary, as the latter combines the objective task of filming poverty and social dismay and the more personal one of documenting Varda's own feelings regarding her body and the act of gleaning itself, in a fashion closely akin to the art of self-portrait. Varda herself points out to the kaleidoscopic nature of her documentary when she says: "I felt that although I'm not a gleaner – I'm not poor, I have enough to eat – there's another kind of gleaning, which is artistic gleaning. You pick ideas, you pick images, you pick emotions from other people, and then you make it into a film. Because I was also at a turn of age […] I thought it should be mentioned somehow." (Anderson 2001, 24.) As a result, her documentary presents itself as an intricate piece of visual work whose initial

2 Varda first studied art history before shifting to photography, and she landed her first job as an official photographer for the Théâtre National Populaire (TNP) in Paris. She had little knowledge of film techniques and was quite inexperienced when she directed her first feature film, *La Pointe Courte*, in 1955. Richard Neupert points out to this fact when he writes: "Her background in art, literature, and theater was much stronger than her knowledge of film history or techniques […]. Varda initially began filmmaking from a rather naïve perspective." (Neupert 2002, 57.)

endeavor is complicated by Varda's *mise-en scène* and the degree to which she blends seemingly heterogeneous elements within the film.[3]

However, what might first appear as a random assemblage of voices, places, and people actually proceeds from a thought-out humanistic and artistic undertaking on Varda's behalf. From a discursive perspective, the images that depict her filming her own body or reenacting the act of gleaning shall be considered as participating in the director's endeavor to deter any kind of hierarchy between the different social groups she records on camera. By choosing to shine a light on what is usually deemed as "improper" or "debasing" – the aging body or the act of gleaning – Varda favors fluidity, as her narrative is built around scenes that echo each other and call for an all-encompassing approach that bypasses socio-economic considerations. As Claude Murcia notes: "the mosaic structure and the absence of hierarchy it creates work to include marginalized and deprecated people within an 'egalitarian' and democratic patchwork: various types of outcasts stand alongside each other and are united by the film as being part of one large community defined by the act of gleaning" (Murcia 2009, 44 – my translation). From a visual perspective – our main point of focus – the intimacy and proximity felt by the spectator, when confronted to the different bodily scenarios instated by Varda, redefine the scope of the traditional documentary film,[4] as these images give rise to a form of knowledge that cannot be put into words, but only conveyed through a heightening of our senses by way of the textural properties of the image.[5] Varda's filmic approach thus understands the act of gleaning as a social, political, and *aesthetic* gesture. In so doing, she privileges a visual regimen where the relationship between the spectator and the images is based on a tactile mode of apprehension rather than through mastery of the gaze. By resorting to the "mute" significance of images to convey a sense of contact between the spectator and the representation, Varda's *mise-en-scène* unearths the multi-layered meanings connected to the objects and bodies recorded on film in order to express their "non-reducible" qualities.

3 In his article *Digression and return: Aesthetics and politics in Agnes Varda's Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000), Ben Tyrer explores the complex narrative structure of the documentary and the blending of personal matters with political and economic considerations (Tyrer 2009, 161–176).

4 The questions of truthfulness and objectivity are the defining aspects of the documentary films. As William Guynn notes: "Documentary asserts the 'realism' of its discourse as against the imaginary world of fiction. The documentary film manifests the inherent relationship between cinematographic technology and the real; it assumes its 'natural' function in relation to its 'natural' object." (Guynn 1990, 19.)

5 To borrow from Claude Murcia, we could say that the documentary's reliance on non-verbal cues to generate meaning opens up a form of knowledge that exists outside of language ("en-deçà du langage et du sens"). (Murcia 2009, 46.)

By showing what "gleaning" stands for in different social and historical contexts, Varda's initial will was to unveil the various meanings attached to this ancestral practice. What lies at the root of this undertaking is the acknowledgment that if in the past gleaning was a collaborative work that gathered people together, nowadays it is mostly endowed with negative connotations and stands for the dark side of capitalism and consumerist society. This contrast is made clear at the beginning of the documentary, through the iconography associated with the representation of these two periods of time. The first person interviewed, a middle-aged woman, recollects the time when, as a child, she went gleaning with the other women from her village. There is a strong sense of community and bonding that is expressed in her different memories of that time. Moreover, Varda connects these memories to images of paintings inspired by gleaning – the most famous of which being Francois Millet's *The Gleaners* (*Les Glaneuses*, 1857) – showing that, in the past, gleaning was considered a traditional aspect of rural life. The representation of gleaning in contemporary France that ensues acts as a stark counterpart to this somewhat idyllic depiction, as we see a series of shots representing people of all ages rummaging for food after a market day. The rap song that accompanies these shots reinforces the impressions of roughness and of social alienation that have come to qualify modern-day gleaning.

However, it would be wrong to see in the opposition of these two concepts a wish to conduct a didactic work of investigation. Instead, by confronting these two perceptions, Varda wants to bring out the shift in meaning that has been taking place over time regarding people's understanding of gleaning, and how we have come to perceive it in a unequivocal and negative light. In a similar way to what Jules Breton (*The Gleaner* [*La Glaneuse*], 1877) or Francois Millet achieved with their paintings, Varda uses art – here, cinema – to offer a reevaluation of this cultural and social practice by revealing what gleaning *means* to different groups of people. The director herself expresses her wish for a polyphonic approach when she says: "I think that documentary means 'real,' that you have to meet these real people, and let them express what they feel about the subject […]. *They* make the statement; they explain the subject better than anybody. So it's not like having an idea about a subject and 'let's illustrate it.' It's meeting real people and discovering with them what they express about the subject, building the subject through real people." (Anderson 2001, 25.)

With this documentary, Varda's goal is to avoid adopting a one-sided attitude when documenting the act of gleaning. To do so, she acknowledges the subjective part that lies at the heart of this practice: some people glean for survival, others for pleasure, and, for some, gleaning becomes part of a wider, artistic process. These

varied attitudes towards gleaning create a mosaic of faces and voices that makes it impossible to restrict the meaning of the objects being gleaned, as they move from pure commodity to being the bearers of people's (hi)stories.

The scene that best illustrates this aspect of the documentary takes place when Varda films people gleaning potatoes after harvest time. This most common tuber comes to symbolize very different histories and memories for the people interviewed: for some, it represents an essential part of their diet, as gleaning provides them with their main source of food [Fig. 1]. For the people who work in a factory in charge of packaging potatoes, these vegetables constitute an item that has to be evaluated according to very specific criteria: if the potatoes do not correspond to the right caliber, or if they are green or damaged during the harvest, they are considered improper for retail and are then brought back to the fields to rot or be picked up by gleaners [Fig. 2]. Then, for Varda, the discovery of heart-shaped potatoes offers the possibility to explore their textural qualities, as we see her gleaning potatoes and then filming them in a close-up that reveals the minute details of their cracked and dirty surface [Fig. 3, Fig. 4]. If the recourse to tactility is an aspect of the documentary we will deal with later on, it is possible to say that, in the scene we are analyzing now, this specific type of image works to extract the object of its traditional cultural environment to reveal aesthetic qualities that are commonly overlooked or ignored. These three different points of view serve to illustrate the director's intentions, that is, to reinstate the complexity of these objects and make it the heart of the narrative.

From this perspective, the social undertaking of *Les Glaneurs…* echoes Laura U. Marks's concept of "intercultural cinema," when she writes that "intercultural cinema moves through space, gathering up histories and memories that are lost or covered in the movement of displacement, and producing new knowledges out of the condition of being between cultures" (Marks 2000, 78). For Marks, intercultural films strive to expose the qualities that have been repressed or hidden in specific objects by the dominant culture. The aim of intercultural cinema is thus to unleash these qualities – or "radioactivity" – and make them the official discourse of the narrative: "they [intercultural films] may show how the meaning of an object changes as it circulates in new contexts. They may restore the 'radioactivity' of an object that has been sanitized or rendered inert through international trade. They may depict the object in such a way that it is protected from the fetishizing or commodifying gaze" (Marks 2000, 79).

This brings us back to the example of the potatoes; this humble food appears "re-endowed with history" (Marks 2000, 99) as the documentary focuses on the

different values it acquires, moving from one cultural group to another. When Varda decides to film the heart-shaped potatoes in a close-up, not only does she attempt to bring forth a sense of touch within the narrative, she also wishes to focus on the different layers of significance and memories attached to this vegetable. The purpose of the DV camera is paramount in this sequence, as it allows Varda to create a specific kind of "relationship" between her and the objects which, in turns, enables the viewer to see and almost touch these objects in a way that a more traditional cinematic apparatus would not have made possible. It is by considering the body of the spectator as a complex surface with which the film image can interact, that Varda has created a documentary whose meaning does not so much arise from *what* is being shown as to *how* it is being shown, focusing on the complex and multi-layered realities encapsulated by the objects on screen. It does so by acknowledging the various identities that trivial objects can conceal but also, as we are going to observe now, by resorting to a particular form of contact between the spectator and the images.

Varda's wish to question perception and pre-established conceptions does not only apply to the objects being gleaned. Indeed, the director is seen shooting her wrinkled hands in a series of close-ups, and even extreme close-ups [Fig. 5], and we also see her combing her greying hair [Fig. 6], or else lying on a couch. The questions that emerge from these scenes concern the meaning that we ought to give these images as well as their larger significance within the documentary. At first sight, it seems quite problematic to assign them a clear narrative purpose; even though we come to understand that they are part of the filmmaker's project to "glean" memories and events through the use of the DV camera – the latter acting as a form of video diary – this explanation does not suffice to give coherence to the two discourses that structure the documentary. We have, on the one hand, a multi-faceted depiction of modern-day gleaning in France and, on the other hand, what could be considered as some sort of filmed autobiography. We need to focus on the quality of vision that Varda is establishing in these images as it is through a sensual appraisal of the film images that Varda intends to *re-organize* vision.

In these scenes the DV camera gives rise to a specific kind of image, where our attention is drawn to the materiality of the shot, more particularly, through a heightening of our sense of touch. The involvement of tactility as the main vehicle for perception is precisely what qualifies *haptic* vision since "whereas optic images set discrete, self-standing elements of figuration in illusionistic spaces, haptic images dehierarchize perception, drawing attention back to the tactile details and the material surface where figure and ground start to fuse" (Beugnet 2007,

65–66). *Haptic* vision thus works as the "other side" of perception, giving way to a knowledge that is *felt* rather than *thought*. What it sought is a different kind of "being" in front of film images, where the spectator is physically aware of his or her body while sensually involved with(in) the fiction. That kind of involvement calls for a radically new approach to images, as they no longer appear to convey a single, pre-determined meaning or truth, but rather invite the viewer to experience the images through what I call "sensuous memory." What I mean here is that, whenever films resort to *haptic* vision, the viewer does not come into contact with the images using a set of external and pre-established concepts, but through personal affects and memories stored in his or her senses, and which the images activate by enhancing the textural qualities of the objects present on screen.[6] In so doing, the film disrupts any attempt of a fetishizing look, as the viewer can only rely on his or her physical involvement to literally *make sense* of the images.

It is this unpredictability between the film and the viewer that rules Varda's *mise-en-scène* when we see her filming her own body, or as she reenacts the act of gleaning. Whenever the camera is letting our gaze linger on the spotted surface of her wrinkled hands or on the rough texture of potatoes being gleaned, the ideological barrier between the viewer and the cinematic space starts to waver. We are never put at a distance from the potatoes or from Varda's body, but are instead pulled towards them, as the evocative power of *haptic* vision asks us to emotionally invest the representation with the memories stored in our own sensations. Varda's *mise-en-scène* engages with the viewer on a deeply intimate level, as its emphasis on surfaces echoes personal and subjective experiences on the spectator's part. This closeness between the spectator and the images, combined with his or her physical and emotional involvement, make for an apprehension of the onscreen world that is removed from any external considerations. *Haptic* vision reaches for autonomic reactions manifested in the skin, thus opening new means of understanding and renewing cinema's pledge "to go beyond culturally prescribed limits and glimpse the possibility of being more than we are" (MacDougall 2005, 16).

6 As Laura U. Marks aptly points out, the focus on tactility, that emerges whenever *haptic* vision becomes the *modus operandi* of the *mise-en-scène*, does not necessarily aim at one specific organ on the viewer's body. Tactility can then generate bodily responses that are connected to other senses, thus triggering powerful memories stored in our sense of smell, our hearing or our vision: "Touch need not be linked explicitly to a single organ such as the skin but is enacted and felt throughout the body […]. As a material mode of perception and expression, then, cinematic tactility occurs not only at the skin or the screen, but traverses all the organs of the spectator's body and the film's body" (Marks 2009, 2).

In Varda's documentary, the physical involvement that is required by *haptic* vision also serves as a unifying device between the different discourses that constitute the narrative. Varda's documenting of her own body as well as of modern-day gleaning come together when analysed through the concept of *haptic* vision, as they offer a counter-discourse regarding utilitarian doctrines surrounding aging, poverty and mass consumption. We must now observe this more political statement through the film's tactile reenactment in order to understand "how […] characters or the camera or the viewer perform particular kinds of touch, and what kinds of relationships among them do particular styles of touch imply?" (Barker 2009, 25). By resorting to *haptic* vision, Varda calls for a humanistic approach, asking us to feel things and understand them through a proprioceptive, non-judgmental approach. As our previous analyses tended to put forth, we do not stand as passive onlookers when we witness Varda filming her own body or gleaning food. We are instead drawn into the materiality of the film image so that we *become* the director's aging body, or the gleaners bending to the ground to reach food.

This idea of becoming the "Other" finds a visual translation within the documentary in the scenes where Varda, holding the DV camera with one hand, films her other hand. Two scenes are especially relevant; in the first one, we see her gleaning potatoes [Fig. 7], and in the second – one of the most striking scenes of the documentary – we see the camera tracking along her hand in an extreme close-up, so that at some point, we do not perceive a hand anymore, but a surface of veins and wrinkles, whose imperfections are heightened by the use of the *chiaroscuro* [Fig. 8]. This original use of the subjective camera – where the spectator is given the illusion of personal experience – is based on the conception of skin as "a meeting place for exchange and traversal because it connects the inside with the outside, the self with the other" (Barker 2009, 27). It is on the implications of such a carnal relationship between the viewer and the image that we need to focus on in order to understand how *haptic* vision is used to complicate the sense of touch and make the viewing experience one of mutual exchange and constant reevaluation.

For this contact to happen between the viewer and the film, an ideological shift needs to take place, where the projection screen is no longer perceived as a barrier between the spectator and the images, but rather as a membrane that allows interaction and reciprocity. If viewer and film are on an equal stage of footing, pre-conceived meanings do not take precedence over perception, allowing "the surface of the cinema screen [to] function[s] as an artificial organ of

cognition. The prosthetic organ of the cinema screen does not merely duplicate cognitive perception, but changes its nature" (Buck-Morss 1994, 48). The use of *haptic* vision thus gives access to another dimension of perception, as it strives to create a continuum between the spectator and the images through a feeling of mutual recognition.

To express the kind of bond that seals this relationship, we wish to refer to Jennifer M. Barker's take on Merleau-Ponty's concept of "flesh" and its possible application in regards of the physical involvement that accompanies the film-viewing experience. For Merleau-Ponty, "flesh" is not restricted to the dermis that covers the body but also implies a mode of being based on the interdependency between human beings and the material world embraced by their field of vision. When applied to cinema, Barker argues, this concept allows for a "dialogue" between the spectator and the film, for neither of those instances stands above the other, but instead exist in a state of inclusion: "To apply Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh to film theory is to contest the notion of either an ideal spectator, who accepts a meaning that is already intended by the film, or an empirical spectator, for whom the meaning of the film is determined solely by personal, cultural, and historical circumstances. Flesh insists on a spectator who is both at once, who joins the film *in the act of making meaning*." (Barker 2009, 26–27 – my emphasis.)

According to Barker, an exchange takes place between the spectator and the film whenever the *mise-en-scène* allows the symbolic barrier between the projection screen and the audience to become porous, so that the knowledge to be gained from the images is generated by a mutual impregnation between viewer and film. This sense of discovery *through* the image is the structuring device in the scene where Varda films her own hand. As she is scrutinizing her hand with the camera, she says "I mean this is my project: to film with one hand my other hand." As she comes closer to record the minutest details of her skin, she adds: "I feel as if I am an animal I don't know." What we are witnessing here is a (re)discovery of her own body by Varda through the technology of the DV camera, and her mixed feelings of amazement and horror at the sight of her own decaying flesh are powerful indicators of the renewal of meaning allowed by *haptic* vision.

The same process is at work in the scene where Varda films with one hand her other hand gleaning potatoes as she is bending to the ground, repeating the ancestral gesture that has been illustrated in many paintings and photographs. The shooting scale she uses whenever she films other people gleaning – mostly medium or long shots – no longer prevails when she is the one reenacting it. In

a camera movement that mimics the gesture of the gleaner bending to pick up food, we see her hand reaching for potatoes and putting them into her satchel. Once again, the use of the subjective camera creates a higher degree of adherence between the spectator and the image so that we are no longer in a position to simply observe the onscreen world. We are physically engaged in the act of gleaning and the use of *haptic* vision, which allows us to feel the roughness of the potatoes' skin, conveys a sense of touch that takes precedence over any form of understanding. This tactile form of knowledge brings us back to what we discussed in the first part of our analysis; by filming herself gleaning potatoes and by emphasizing their textural qualities, Varda offers a social discourse that is not conveyed through words, but through the expression of the memories encoded in this vegetable. It is through *haptic* vision, and its ability to translate experiences that cannot be put into words, that the documentary becomes a repository of individual knowledge and defuses any form of instrumental vision. Gleaning is thus not perceived as a socially alienating act, since we are invited to "experience" it. Consequently, the images of gleaning are not just standing before our eyes, but are also moving us through a process by which "the viewer's skin extends beyond his or her own body; it reaches towards the film as the film reaches towards it" (Barker 2009, 33).

As this article tried to put forward, by choosing to make *haptic* vision the privileged mode of perception in specific sequences of the narrative, Varda makes her documentary a living and breathing entity, whose meaning is never set and well-defined, but evolves according to the "symbiosis" that takes place between the audience and the images. This relationship between viewer and film is conveyed by the nature of the images that unfold on the screen, and the bodily investment they require on the spectator's part. Varda's desire to reveal the multi-layered significance of the world she records on camera aims at offering a vision unencumbered with social and economic considerations. Her *mise-en-scène* asks us to engage in the fabric of the film and to experience the world it presents before our eyes. We enter the documentary the same way we would enter a dimly lit place: unsure of what lies ahead and relying on our senses to guide us through the unknown.

Varda's experimentations with the visual and narrative possibilities offered by the DV camera in *Les Glaneurs…* are in keeping with the unceasing desire to venture into uncharted filmic territories that influenced her entire career as a filmmaker. As Richard Neupert recalls: "Varda even coined the term *cinécriture* for her brand of filmmaking, which features carefully constructed image-to-sound

textual relations" (Neupert 2002, 56). A pioneer of the French New Wave, Varda has always challenged traditional film techniques, and the documentaries she directed are no exception to the rule.[7] Whether it be with *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (*Diary of a Pregnant Woman*, 1958), *Documenteur* (*Mockumentary*, 1982), *Jane B. par Agnès V.* (*Jane B. by Agnès V.*, 1988) or, today, *Les Glaneurs…*, she has always considered the film image as a discursive tool whose meaning arises from the interaction between the filmmaker, the viewer, and the onscreen world. This lead her to come up with the term "subjective documentary" (Bluher 2009, 177) to define the particular relationship her works have with the concepts of "truth" and "reality" that traditionally shape our understanding of the genre.

When discussing nonfiction cinema, Marie-Jo Pierron-Moinel uses the concept of *cinéma du regard* ("cinema of the gaze") to define a type of documentary whose significance mainly arises from a sensitive and highly subjective appropriation of the onscreen world by the viewer. A similar kind of relationship between the audience and the representation is at work in *Les Glaneurs…*, as Varda's *mise-en-scène* creates an intimate bond between the director, the viewer and the film image, making the documentary a journey of self-discovery rather than the neutral appraisal of social and economic realities. According to Pierron-Moinel, modern documentary is best understood as "a way of experiencing the world [that] sets itself up as a means of producing knowledge by combining sensations with understanding through one's gaze" (Pierron-Moinel 2010, 223 – my translation). By questioning our ritualized ways of experiencing the world, Varda asks us to reconsider our position as citizens but, more importantly, as living, breathing and *feeling* human beings. By creating a space where subjectivity and difference can be expressed freely, she points out to a form of knowledge that is not rooted in our intellect, but deep within *our-selves*.

7 By some aspects, the works of Agnès Varda are reminiscent of the aesthetic and narrative concerns of *cinéma vérité* in the way they both tackle the question of "reality" in film. An "offspring" of the New Wave when it appeared in France in the early 60's, *cinéma vérité*'s main concern was to use film techniques to offer a representation that was a close as possible to life itself: "*Cinéma vérité* to its practitioners is a process of discovery – discovery of the truth […]. In true *cinema vérité* filming, there is no formal plot, no preconceived dialogue, and, with few exceptions, no questions are either posed or answered by the filmmaker" (Issari and Paul 1979, 15).

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Of Artists and Models. Italian Silent Cinema between Narrative Convention and Artistic Practice

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Abstract. The paper presents the author's research on the representation of painters and sculptors, their models and their art works in Italian silent cinema of the 1910s and early 1920s. This research deals with both the combination of optical (painterly) vs. haptical (sculptural) cinema. It also problematizes art versus the real, as well as art conceived from cinema's own perspective, that is within the conventions of European and American cinema. In addition to research in these filmic conventions the author compares how the theme manifests itself within different genres, such as comedy, crime and adventure films, diva films and strong men films. Examples are : *Il trionfo della forza* (*The Triumph of Strength*, 1913), *La signora Fricot è gelosa* (*Madam Fricot is Jelous,* 1913), *Il fuoco* (*The Fire*, Giovanni Pastrone, 1915), *Il fauno* (*The Faun*, Febo Mari, 1917), *Il processo Clemenceau* (*The Clemenceau Affair*, Alfredo De Antoni, 1917) and *L'atleta fantasma* (*The Ghost Athlete*, Raimondo Scotti, 1919). I will relate this pioneering study to recent studies on the representation of art and artists in Hollywood cinema, such as Katharina Sykora's *As You Desire me. Das Bildnis im Film* (2003), Susan Felleman's *Art in the Cinematic Imagination* (2006) and Steven Jacobs's *Framing Pictures. Film and the Visual Arts* (2011), and older studies by Thomas Elsaesser, Angela Dalle Vacche, Felleman and the author.

Keywords: Italian cinema, art in film, representation of painters in film, intermediality.

The spectators and in particular the women seeing the film shed torrents of tears, and didn't see the film just once but twice, three times or more. The world lived in happy times then, when the only preoccupation was love. (Nicula 1995, 61.)[1] This

1 I owe thanks first to Giovanna Ginex, and then to Claudia Gianetto (Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Torino), Mario Musumeci, Franca Farini (Cineteca Nazionale, Roma), Anna Fiaccarini, Andrea Meneghelli (Cineteca di Bologna), Livio Jacob (Cineteca del Friuli), Rommy Albers (EYE Filmmuseum, Amsterdam), and Ágnes Pethő (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania).

example of the emotional, even tactile film experience stems from the Romanian collector Emil Constantinescu. He refers to the success of the Italian silent film *Odette* (Giuseppe De Liguoro, 1916), starring Italian diva Francesca Bertini. She was the most popular Italian film actress of the 1910s and early 1920s, especially in Romania, as Romanian film historian Dinu-Ioan Nicula has shown. Nicula writes that though Transylvania could not see these films during the war, as it was part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire then, the rest of Romania could. And so they cherished the epic *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914), adventure films with figures like Maciste, and the diva films with Bertini.

One particular aspect within the highly emotionally charged field of Italian silent cinema is its relationship to the representation of art and artists during cinema's transition from fairground amusements to entertainments for middle-class audiences in fashionable movie palaces, and from vaudeville style to one closer to theatre and painting. In particular, Italian silent cinema was typical in its dynamic of explicitly referring to and appropriating such former media as the theatre and visual arts. Two main topics will be treated here, first the *narrative conventions* around the representation of art and artists, and second, the relationship between the off-screen, "real" *art world and its visual representation* in film. I will treat both *painting* and *sculpture* here which, despite their *formal* differences, are quite close in the ways that they are *narratively* treated. How did Italian silent cinema represent art and artists? What does this tell us about cinema's own perspective and problematization of art versus the real? How are art objects treated as physical, touchable objects? And how do these objects function as stand-ins for characters out of reach (the Pygmalion effect), no longer alive (the ancestors' portrait gallery), or destined to die (Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or Edgar Allen Poe's *Oval Portrait*)? And secondly, what happens when we correlate the *filmic* conventions of representation with *art historical* investigation? As this territory is rather new for Italian silent cinema, it might be useful to have a brief look at an area that has been thoroughly researched by scholars: classical Hollywood's representation of artists and their works. (See Sykora [2003], Felleman [2006], and Jacobs [2011].)

Narrative Conventions: Dangerous Portraits

In *Hitchcock's Motifs* (2005), Michael Walker categorizes the meaning of painted portraits in film: 1) the power of the patriarchal (sometimes matriarchal) character or portraits of fathers who founded empires; 2) the power of the family tradition, as with the gallery of ancestors; 3) the lost love (like a lost wife); and 4) the

desire of the beholder (Walker 2005, 320). Such connotations often occur when the portrait is a young woman and the spectators admiring her are men, as in *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944) or *The Woman in the Window* (Fritz Lang, 1944). When the portrait is painted within the filmic narrative, desire is the most usual association, even when the classic gender division of male artist and female model is reversed. Within all these categories, the dominant idea is that the portrait's subject is of lasting importance. In order to obtain this status, however, the character needs to die first, either before or during the filmic narrative. In the American cinema of the 1940s the painted portrait is often linked to murder and suicide. Painters kill their models, in particular when the latter are young, and thus murdered victims remain visible by their portraits. Suicide occurs just as often with painters as with their models.

The association of painted portraits with violent deaths was a central theme at the 1991 conference "Le portrait peint au cinéma/The Painted Portrait in Film," held at the Louvre, whose proceedings were published in the journal *Iris*. Thomas Elsaesser (1992) emphasized here the feeling of fatality that looms over so many painted portraits in films. Having a painted portrait is a hazardous enterprise for a young female character. The portrait ignites passions in the painter or in other men, which may lead to violence or self-destruction. Other men can observe the woman of their dreams without limitation and this may be more embarrassing when they are not her choice.[2] This was recently confirmed in Susan Felleman's book, *Art in the Cinematic Imagination* (2006), where she takes a gendered perspective of male necrophilic desire in classical Hollywood cinema.

Dangerous Portraits in Italian Silent Cinema

Now I wish to turn to some examples of Italian films from the 1910s, and *their* conventions of representing art and artists. This is the result of screening film prints in Rome, Turin, Bologna, and Amsterdam in 2011. On basis of the excellent reference books on Italian silent cinema by Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli (1991–1996), I established beforehand which films were important to my research. Like most silent era films, just a few titles in my long list survived in Italian and foreign film archives.

First: a few films in which the painting or the sculpture creates mishap, just like in the American films of the 1940s. In the drama *Il fuoco* (*The Fire*, 1915) by

2 See in the same issue also Felleman (1992), who deals with American cinema of the 1940s as well.

Giovanni Pastrone, a poor painter (Febo Mari) falls in love with a *femme fatale*-like rich poetess (Pina Menichelli). She takes him to her castle and has him paint her portrait, lying on a sofa and teasingly covering her face, as if not wanting to be painted [Fig. 1].[3] The undulating pose is clearly inspired by Alexandre Cabanel's *Venus* (1863), but it is also close to a long series of dressed and undressed women stretching themselves out on a sofa, bed, ocean wave, etc., both in painting and in cinema, offering themselves to the observer (e.g. Pedro Almodóvar's recent *La piel que habito* [*The Skin I Live In*, 2011] and its quotations from Titian's *Venus*, Goya's *Maya*, Manet's *Olympia*, and so on). Within the plot of *Il fuoco* the portrait functions as *catalyst*. It is crowned with a first prize at a Salon, the model thus inspiring the artist to make a masterpiece (a typical narrative convention in the examples I viewed). But soon after, the lady is warned that her husband is returning, so she flees the castle, drugging the painter. He is desperate, even though she warned him previously that their affair would be passionate but short, like a flame. When they meet again by chance, she refuses to recognize him, causing him to go mad.[4] Another good example is *Il quadro di Osvaldo Mars* (*The Painting by Osvaldo Mars*, 1921) by Guido Brignone. His sister, Mercedes, plays a countess who discovers that a daring painting is about to be exposed publicly, showing her in a Salome outfit and not much more [Fig. 2]. When the painter, Osvaldo Mars (Domenico Serra), refuses to withdraw his new masterpiece, she slashes the canvas to pieces, but is also accused of murdering the painter afterwards. In the end, we learn that the painter loved a lookalike of the countess (also played by Brignone), a farmer's wife who leaves her husband and child to climb the social ladder. It is this woman whom Osvaldo Mars painted and over whom he committed suicide.[5]

In both *Il fuoco* and *Il quadro di Osvaldo Mars*, the painted portraits are *negative* catalysts. In *Il fuoco* the artistic triumph means the end of the painter's love affair,

3 See my own article (Blom 1992).

4 The narrative convention of an artist going mad over a *femme fatale* was repeated by Febo Mari in his film *Il tormento* (*The Torment*, 1917) with Helena Makowska as the *femme fatale* and Mari himself as the artist. Makowska was often type-casted as *femme fatale* in the Italian cinema of those years. The press praised her beauty but condemned her rather inexpressive acting. In real life she must have been a kind of *femme fatale* as well. The Argentinian sculptor César Santiano, collaborator of Bistolfi, made a daring, lascivious nude sculpture of her in 1916, but in 1919 he committed suicide because of her (Audoli 2008, 26–29).

5 The Salome attire seems to have been inspired by theatrical costumes of Salome performances in the Belle Époque, or at least by their depictions by painters such as Vladislav Ismaylovich, Leopold von Schmutzler, and Clemens von Pausinger. One is also reminded of an inter-filmic relationship with actresses wearing Salome attire in earlier films such as Lyda Borelli in *Ma l'amor mio non muore* (*Love Everlasting*, Mario Caserini, 1913) and *Rapsodia satanica* (*Satanic Rhapsody*, Nino Oxilia, 1917).

while in *Il quadro di Osvaldo Mars* the scandalous painting is destroyed because of its potentially damaging implications for a noble lady's reputation. This latter narrative trope is also present in an earlier short film, *Il ritratto dell'amata* (*The Portrait of the Beloved*, Gerolamo Lo Savio, 1912), in which a painter named Alma (a hint at Alma Tadema?) finishes a historical portrait of a lady by giving it the face of an English diplomat's wife with whom he has fallen in love. She notices it and quickly paints the face black, though the artist manages to wash the paint away. When unpacked at the lady's home, everybody is embarrassed, and the husband explodes and chases his wife out of her home and away from her child. Their child creates a reconciliation in the end – a classic narrative convention. So the message here is that even if legitimized because of a historical or mythological setting, portraits of the well-to-do in daring outfits risk ruining one's reputation *and* that of one's family. Thus, the model, too, may risk both this symbolic and physical loss. In the short, *La modella* (*The Model*, Ugo Falena, 1916), a non-professional model (Stacia Napierkowska) is picked up from the street because she is more genuine, more authentic, and more honest than a professional model – a common *topos* in silent cinema. She poses for a statue of an almost naked woman holding a chalice, set on a pedestal, and falls in love with the sculptor, who is also her protector [Fig. 3].[6] When the statue, however, is publicly exposed, the girl is mocked – another common occurrence in silent films dealing with artists[7] – by a former model fired by the artist and now taking revenge by slandering the newcomer. Fortunately a painter friend mediates, restoring both the girl's honour and her relationship with the sculptor. In both *Il ritratto dell'amata* and *La modella*, then, the artwork may damage one's reputation and one's lover, but the mutual restoration of honour *and* love remains a narrative possibility.

Destructive Art Works

Paintings or sculptures might also mean the end of life, though, in a more irreparable way, causing death and mutilation. Their physical presence, their literal weight has serious consequences for protagonists and/or antagonists. First, paintings and sculptures may function as avenging saviours of damsels in distress. Often the artwork is venerated by the protagonists as it portrays

6 I noticed that the statue was recycled one year after in the sculptor's workshop in *Il processo Clemenceau* (Alfredo De Antoni, 1917), shot at the Caesar Film studios of Rome.

7 Another example of a model jealous of a newcomer is *Amore sentimentale* (*Sentimental Love*, Cines, 1911).

deceased heroes. In the Francesca Bertini vehicle, *Il nodo* (*The Knot*, Gaston Ravel, 1921), the poor girl Agnese (Elena Lunda) is adopted by the painter Lelio Salviati (Carlo Gualandri), who paints her portrait featuring her holding flowers. Agnese sacrifices herself for the good of the painter and his lover, the marchioness Della Croce (played by Bertini), whose mean and unfaithful husband (Giorgio Bonaiti) tortures her and refuses a divorce. Knowing she has a terminal disease, Agnese pretends to be the lady and dies in the burning of the marchioness's garden house. The lovers are temporarily freed, until the husband discovers his wife hasn't died when hearing her sing a familiar tune. Here, *sound* betrays her – a curious plot device for a silent film. The film concludes with a struggle in which a rifle accidentally shoots the cord of the life-size painting, killing the evil marquis, allowing the absent girl to save the lovers a second time from beyond the grave.[8] Likewise in *La notte che dormii sotto le stelle* (*The Night I Slept Under the Stars*, Giovanni Zannini, 1918) – a film that survives only in an incomplete print – the girl, Fiamma (Lina Pellegrini), is abducted and raised by gypsies following a fire in her home when she is a child. She ends up being raised by her uncle, both being unaware that they are family. The brutal gypsy foster father, Giacomo (Sergio Mari), pursues the girl, however, and pushes her into helping him to rob the family. When she refuses, a statue of a bearded old man that the girl has been cherishing, and for which she feels an inexplicable attachment, saves her from being molested by the bad guy.[9] She throws the bust on the villain, killing him [Fig. 4]. Of course the bust is a portrait of the girl's dead father (whom we never see in the film). Through its physical weight, the artwork here too liberates the protagonist from the clutches of evil, allowing the good supporting character to help beyond death.

In contrast to the trope of artwork as moral avenger, the physical weight of the statue may also have a negative effect on the *protagonist*. In *La Gioconda* (Eleuterio Rodolfi, 1916), based on a play by D'Annunzio, Mercedes Brignone is Sylvia, the wife of sculptor Lucio Settala (Umberto Mozzato). He has fallen in love with his *femme fatale*-like model Gioconda Danti (Helena Makowska), who models for an ecstatic, Symbolist-like statue [Fig. 5]. The women fight over the same man, but when the enraged Gioconda throws Sylvia against the sculpture for which she has modelled, the poor wife tries to save her husband's work from

8 The film has been restored by the Cineteca Nazionale in Rome.

9 While the style of the bust is quite general and even banal for late 19th century sculpture, Fiamma's pose when she venerates the statue is more striking and is reminiscent of paintings commissioned to commemorate lost relatives, such as those by Francesco Hayez. It is also similar to late 19th century funeral sculpture.

falling, ruining her hands forever. This extreme sacrifice makes the sculptor repent and return to her.[10]

In considering the destructive force of artwork in Italian silent cinema, there are a number of films in which the effigy of the model causes her serious trouble, with even stronger consequences than in *Il ritratto dell'amata* and *La modella*.[11] Here the artist confuses his work with the model, or he believes himself entitled to create and also to destroy it; and, likewise, to give life to his model, launch her image, but also to destroy her when she becomes unworthy. So when the model becomes spoiled and a spend-thrift as a result of her artist's success, and cruelly dumps him for a richer protector, the artist goes berserk and takes revenge. This narrative convention recurs in a few Italian silent films. In the short, *L'idolo infranto* (*The Broken Idol*, Emilio Ghione, 1913), the artist (Alberto Collo) has become poor and a drunk after the loss of his model/lover, but is unable to sell the bust with her likeness as it represents his work – and his love. The once gold-digging model (Bertini) now feels sorry for the man's downfall and wants to surprise him, so she secretly replaces the bust with herself. When the drunken artist comes in and sees her smiling in the reflection of a mirror, he thinks even the model's bust mocks him; so he destroys the "sculpture," realizing too late what he has done. In a later film with Bertini, *Il processo Clemenceau* (*The Clemenceau Affair*, Alfredo De Antoni, 1917), a similar scenario, though more complex, was devised. Here the sculptor Pierre Clemenceau (Gustavo Serena) confesses in a flashback how he met his model, the impoverished aristocrat Iza (Bertini); how she dropped him first for a rich count before returning, marrying and having a child with him; but then how she cheated on him again because of her lust for money and adventure and her disgust over a morally restricted middle class life (represented by the artist's mother). This function of the artist's mother is also a recurring *topos* in many Italian silent films.[12] First, the man destroys the bust he made of her, as it functions

10 Despite the opening of film archives around the globe, no print of the film has yet been found, but extant original postcards provide a visual impression. I hold many of these in my own collection.

11 This was a *topos* rather common in the cinema of the 1910s, also outside of Italy. In the Russian silent film *Umirayushchii lebed* (*The Dying Swan*, Yevgeni Bauer, 1917) an artist obsessed by death in art is inspired by a ballerina dancing the Dying Swan. But when she is too cheerful as a model, he kills her, permitting him to pose her correctly for his artwork.

12 A good example is *La madre* (*The Mother*, Giuseppe Sterni, 1917), starring Vitalia Italiani. It was based on the play *La madre* by the Catalan writer Santiago Rusiñol, which Vitaliani had performed with great success all over Spain in 1907, before having it adapted for the screen a decade later. Actually, Vitaliani had been a regular performer of Rusiñol's plays around the 1900s, to great acclaim in Spain, and in particular in Barcelona. The film *La madre* was rediscovered at the EYE Filmmuseum not too long ago.

as a stand-in for her physical presence but also as a symbol of his love [Fig. 6]. Then when the model returns to him a second time (in torment over her conduct and desperately missing her child), he kills her since he cannot cope with her behaviour and is unwilling to believe in her moral contrition. Just like in *L'idolo infranto*, the man realizes afterwards what he has done in blind rage. So the artist creates and destroys the model, just like he creates and destroys the artwork.[13]

Narrative Convention vs. Artistic Practice

Of course, the above-mentioned narrative conventions are not just cinematic conventions, but have predecessors in art, as Steven Jacobs has explained in *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (2011), in his analysis of the narrative conventions in artists' biographies by, for example, Kris and Kurz, Von Schlosser and Wittkower (Jacobs 2011, 43–47). Still, after discussing all these narrative conventions on the filmic representation of art and artists, one wonders: do these films still have some correlation with the off-screen, real art world, or are they only *simulacra* – self-contained, filmic clichés alive only within the diegesis of the films? When starting this research, my hypothesis was that most of what I would encounter would be just *cinema's perspective* of art and the art world, a very coloured and biased perspective, using that world to create a milieu in which things were permitted which ordinary mortals – that is, the cinema spectators – were not supposed to do. Relatively few props were necessary to express this milieu, to stage a set recognizable as an artist's workshop. Sometimes these props were copies of famous classical sculptures, such as the *Capitoline Venus*, the *Laocoön Group*, Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabine Women*, or copies from 19th century popular sculptures once famous and now forgotten. Other props were just coarse, hastily made artworks, only serving to decorate the set of the artist's studio. This generalization of the artist's studio in Italian silent cinema characterizes short *comedies* in particular. As the comedy genre represents the world in a farcical way, this is expressed in the set design of the artist's workshop or in the art that he makes. Modern art is often ridiculed.[14] Representational strategies in the dramatic

13 We see this narrative convention of the artist who creates and destroys his model in the Italian silent film *La chiamavano Cosetta* (*They Called Her Cosetta*, Eugenio Perego, 1917). Here a sculptor (Amleto Novelli) is devastated when he discovers his *femme fatale*-like model (Soava Gallone) has caused his only son to commit suicide over her, at the foot of the father's statue representing her beauty. The artist crushes his model under his own statue.

14 Examples are a.o. *La signora Fricot è gelosa* (Ambrosio, 1913) and *Robinet è geloso* (*Tweedledum is Jelous*, *Ambrosio*, 1914).

features of the 1910s and early 1920s are, however, more complex. Not only do we see more diversification in the workshops of poor and established artists, but both are also more closely modelled on images of real workshops, though rather those of non-avant-garde artists of the turn-of-the century or even before.

The emphasis on the non-avant-garde workshops also goes for the art represented in the films. The paintings and sculptures in dramatic features of the 1910s are mostly not the art of that decade but the later decades of the 19th century, either the more naturalist styles in painting or sculpture or the more Salon-like academic versions. This is perhaps not surprising as cinema needed a conventional, reassuring version of art for its lower and middle class audiences, who were mostly little acquainted or favourable to the many -isms of the 1910s: Cubism, Futurism, etc. Moreover, naturalist art was itself strongly based on and aided by photography in order to "catch reality" as closely possible. Naturalist art was widely visible in public buildings such as city halls (Weisberg 2010). Moreover, the established art of the late 19th century, the academic art of orientalists and idealists, as well as those of the naturalists had been massively reproduced and distributed through the rise of illustrated postcards from the 1890s onwards, as well as by illustrated magazines, thanks to the introduction of half-block reprography. Paintings and sculptures hitherto visible only to social elites were now freely available everywhere, even more than during the introduction of the etching.[15] They were now used on the covers of matchboxes, cigarette and chocolate boxes, etc., and thus transformed into iconic images. They became part of the collective memory, providing a repertoire of images for filmmakers to draw upon (nowadays we no longer have any notion of that collective memory.) Just to give an example, when in *La madre* (Giuseppe Sterni, 1917), the artist (played by Sterni himself) is working in a shared studio, he is working on a painting that depicts the biblical *Flight to Egypt*. It is a copy of naturalist painting by Maxime Dastugue, *La Fuite en Egypte* (1889), made after Dastugue's trip to Egypt the same year [Figs. 7–8]. Dastugue's painting was popular well into the 1910s and 1920s through reproductions on postcards and in illustrated magazines. There is also a practical explanation. Within a film's plot, paintings and sculptures were often used as portraits of characters, so audiences had to be able to recognize them otherwise their function as meaningful props would be lost.[16] To

15 It suffices to have a glance at modern digital shops like eBay and Delcampe to notice the enormous divulgation of these postcards of late 19th century and early 20th century painting and sculpture.

16 This goes both for short comedies like *La signora Fricot è gelosa* and *Robinet è geloso* and dramatic features such as *Il processo Clemenceau*. The plot would fail if recognition of the statue as a portrait of one of the characters was not possible.

find the pictorial equivalents of paintings or sculptures represented in the Italian cinema of the 1910s, one has to look therefore at late 19th century portraits or even at the monumental sculpture in Italian graveyards, such as that by Giulio Monteverde (*Angel*, 1882). There is, however, a flipside to this. In the 1910s and early 1920s several Italian artists collaborated with the Italian cinema industry, either as set and costume designers (such as Duilio Cambellotti and Camillo Innocenti), as poster designers, or as creators of the art works visible in films. Thus, contemporary artists created art for film sets. While film historical research has focused too narrowly on the infrequent collaborations between the avant-garde of the Italian Futurists and the professional film industry, this other, vaster territory has hardly been explored. Let me provide two examples. For *Il fauno* (1917) by Febo Mari, a kind of reversed Pygmalion story – a woman falling in love with the statue of a male faun – the Piemontese sculptor Giuseppe Riva made the statue, even in multiple versions (Audoli 2008, 18–61) [Figs. 9–10].[17] Riva stood in a late nineteenth-century representational tradition of the Faun that was present not only in Stéphane Mallarmé's famous poem, but also in sculptures in- and outside of Italy like Antonio Bezzola's *The Idol* (1891). Thus, an iconography was already there, only the form was altered. Finally, the bust of Francesca Bertini's character in *Il processo Clemenceau* that was destroyed by its creator, was based on an identical real bust of Bertini made by the Neapolitan sculptor Amleto Cataldi which was published in the renowned Italian art journal *Emporium* in 1917, the same year the film was released [Figs. 11–12]. (See Geraci [1917]. The bust of Bertini is depicted on pages 166 and 170.)

In conclusion, we can say that, while more research is necessary, Italian silent cinema was surely not only looking backwards but also keeping an eye on the artistic present as well. In that sense the presence of art works and artists in Italian silent cinema was not only linked to particular narrative conventions, but also to the art world outside of the filmic diegesis. Following Jens Schröter's categorization of intermediality, we can define the representation of one medium (art) in the other (cinema) as *transformational intermediality*, but intrinsically we are also dealing with *ontological intermediality* as well, as the cinema is redefined through its comparison with painting and sculpture (Schröter, 1998). While the pictorial invites us to make a comparison between the cinema and the framing and deep staging in figurative painting, the sculptural refers to cinema's ability to sculpt as well – but with light rather than stone.

17 Actor turned director Febo Mari had often scripts about artists such as *La gloria* (*The Glory*, 1916), in which a sculptor ruins his own statue, and *Il tormento* (1917), see note 5.

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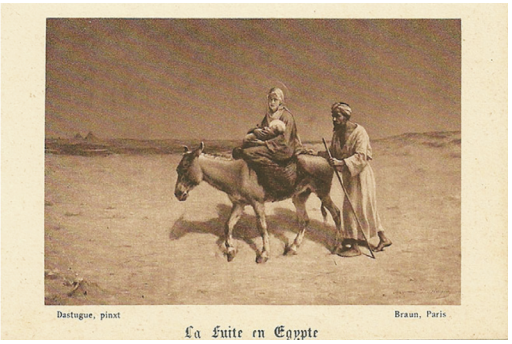

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The Body as Interstitial Space between Media in *Leçons de Ténèbres* by Vincent Dieutre and *Histoire d'un Secret* by Mariana Otero

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Abstract. This essay examines the ways in which the representation of the body in painting is the starting point of a broader reflection on the plasticity of the medium in two French autobiographical films. In *Histoire d'un secret* (*Story of a Secret*, 2003) by Mariana Otero and *Leçons de ténèbres* (*Tenebrae Lessons*, 2000) by Vincent Dieutre, the body is indeed at the centre, albeit in very different ways. The first is a documentary about the director's mother who died of the consequences of an illegal abortion in the late sixties. She was an artist and her paintings, many of which depict lascivious female nudes, pervade the film. The second is a self-fictional essay that weaves together narrated episodes of the film-maker's story as a homosexual and drug addict with close-ups of Caravaggist paintings which tend to focus on bodies in pain. Whether prefiguring death and embodying the absent body through the latent evocation of maternity in the first case, or looking back into figural art in the second, both films point to the plasticity of the medium through the representation of matter, that is, paint and, ultimately, the body. The way in which both film-makers resort to light, the close-up, and, as far as Dieutre is concerned, the diversity of film formats, embodies what Deleuze defines as the haptic gaze to explore cinema's own materiality. In addition, the presence of the paintings introduces the issue of intermediality which modestly points to a *mise en abyme* of the broader question of cinema's shifting ontology.

Keywords: body in painting and in cinema, haptic gaze, intermediality, Vincent Dieutre, Mariana Otero.

In his self-fictional essay film, *Leçons de ténèbres* Vincent Dieutre[1] embarks on a journey across Europe, from Utrecht, to Naples and Rome, in which he undertakes

1 Vincent Dieutre, born in 1960, is a French film-maker whose work is often described as pertaining to Queer cinema. His films tend to be constructed like self-fictions in which he intertwines stories about his homosexuality and his former heroine addiction with images of – often derelict – urban settings. *Leçons de ténèbres* (France, Les films de la croisade, 2000) is his second feature length film.

a sensory exploration of Caravaggism, and successively meets two men. From the voice over narrative, the viewer understands that the first is his partner who joins him on the trip, while the second is a stranger encountered in a gay cruising park of Naples. Throughout the film, Vincent, alone or accompanied, visits museums and churches so that paintings, many of them depicting Christian scenes of the Passion, are omnipresent.

On a rather different note, Mariana Otero's[2] *Histoire d'un secret* is a personal film about a childhood trauma of which she has no recollection: the death in 1968 of her mother, Clotilde, an event that remained buried under secrecy and lies for over twenty years. The film-maker only discovered the truth in her thirties, when her father eventually confessed that Clotilde had died of the consequences of an illegal abortion. She had been a painter and as a result, Otero gives her mother's work a prominent place in the film. Coincidentally, a significant proportion of these paintings represent human bodies, notably female nudes.

This essay seeks to explore, through these two case studies, the significance of the paintings and the ways in which their presence in the films contributes to emphasising the materiality of the medium. A preliminary hypothesis is that this process takes place via the physicality of the body. It thus not only enhances sensory affect and haptic vision, but also underscores intermediality, which ultimately points to a reflection upon cinema itself. If the comparison of these two films may come across as rather eclectic, the juxtaposition of their differences and similarities proves extremely useful. Indeed, despite and beyond their specific and very different narratives as well as aesthetics, both films point to similar questions about sensation in relation to cinema and art in general, while showing how the body works as a conduit for sensory perception.

Bodily Presence

The Body in Pain

The paintings appearing in Dieutre's film include pieces based on biblical scenes, such as Guido Reni's *David with the Head of Goliath* (1605, Musée du Louvre, Paris); or on Greek mythology, such as Dirck van Baburen's *Prometheus Being Chained by Vulcan* (1623, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Yet, not only do Christian

2 Mariana Otero, born in 1963, is a French documentary-maker. Unlike Dieutre, whose work is almost entirely centred around his persona, *Histoire d'un secret* (France, Archipel 35, 2003) is Otero's only film so far focused on a personal issue.

scenes seem predominant, but the religious connotation is also explicit for the film's title, *Tenebrae Lessons*, refers to the lessons based on the Old Testament's *Book of Jeremiah* which are sung in Church during the Holy Week. To give a few examples, the film opens on a close-up of Caravaggio's *Christ at the Column* (ca. 1607, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen); later, we see a still, full screen shot of Gerrit van Honthorst's *Saint Sebastian* (1623, National Gallery, London), and one of Dirck van Baburen's *Crowning with Thorns* (1623, Catharijneconvent, Utrecht). But Vincent's interest is not restricted to painting: as he wanders in the Church of Saint Cecilia in Rome, the camera also lingers on the statue of *Saint Cecilia's Martyrdom* by Stefano Maderno (1599–1600, Chiesa di Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome). In other words, these works tend to focus on suffering and violence.

From a narrative point of view, this depiction of pain enhances Dieutre's expression of his own suffering and existential malaise as a homosexual addicted to heroin and surrounded by friends dying of drug overdose and/or AIDS during the early 1980s. As for Clotilde's paintings in Otero's film, it is hard not to see in the curvy nudes an implicit hint at maternity and, by extension, an unwitting metaphor for her own undesired pregnancy. As such, the paintings thus bear the hidden clues of her untold pain and agony as a result of her failed abortion [Fig. 1]. The expression of pain and suffering contributes to emphasising the presence and material reality of the body. In keeping with this, Georges Canguilhem writes that for the ill person, "the state of health is the unconsciousness in which the subject is of his own body. Conversely, the consciousness of the body arises from feeling the limits, the threats, the obstacles to health" (Canguilhem 1993, 52, my translation). *Doleo ergo sum*, as it were, "I suffer therefore I am," for pain asserts the reality of existence. This is particularly significant for Dieutre – and homosexuals at large – as he strives to assert his place in the world, having been "hidden and invisible" (Dyer 2002, 15) for years: to stress suffering thus grounds him in the reality of existence.

Yet, Canguilhem's point has some relevance in Otero's case as well. Obviously, what is at stake here is not Clotilde's consciousness of her own body for she is dead; but her suffering, which is implicitly relayed by the paintings and their materiality, harks back to the reality of her existence, of her *having-been-there*, by opposition to her death which may have seemed unreal to Mariana and her elder sister Isabel. And indeed, we learn early in the film, that the family first told them that Clotilde was simply working in a different town. It is only a year later that their grandmother, faced with Isabel's insistent questioning, eventually admitted that she was in fact dead. In other words, it was as if Clotilde had not

died but merely vanished. Mariana thus feels the need to make her mother's life (and death) real and visible and endeavours to bring her body back to the surface – metaphorically, that is. In this sense, the film's final sequence which stages a public exhibition of Clotilde's paintings certainly acts as an exhumation of her body in lieu of the mourning ritual that the daughters were denied.

Erotic Bodies

Clotilde's paintings convey stark erotic presence, which necessarily points to the physicality and sensuality of the body. At one point in the film, a conservationist examines the paintings and notes Clotilde's particular predilection for the representation of female flesh and pubic hair, which constitutes a landscape in its own right, as she puts it. George Bataille posits that the difference between a "simple sexual activity" which consists of reproduction and eroticism is a "psychological quest independent of the natural goal" (Bataille 1986, 11). In this sense, the abortion that led to Clotilde's death comes across as a marker or sign of eroticism as prefatorily defined by Bataille, that is, as "assenting to life up to the point of death" (*ibidem*). This is also in keeping with Dieutre's representation of eroticism, which is necessarily envisaged from the angle of his assumed, exposed and expressed homosexuality. In his film, the intertwining of his personal story (narrated in voice over) with images of Caravaggist painting presents eroticism as inherent to suffering.

Furthermore, the religious motifs painted by Caravaggio also contain for Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit a certain degree of eroticism. Commenting on his *Calling of Saint Matthew* (1600, Chiesa San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome), they argue that the artist "proposes continuities between what we would ordinarily think of as vastly different categories of experience: the erotic come-on and Christ's summoning his future disciple to follow him" (Bersani and Dutoit 1998, 26). To put it differently, Caravaggio introduced humanity – in its most physiological and worldly aspects – into the religious motif. As far as Caravaggism is concerned, the erotic charge is also manifested through the contrast between suffering and pleasure, both located in the physicality of the body. Yet it also emanates from the intrusive and insistent gaze of the camera's close-ups on body parts in the paintings [Fig. 2]. Like images stolen at a glance, these close-ups provide a fragmented representation of the body, thus evoking sensation more vividly.

The Haptic Gaze

As a result, many elements in both films seem to be working towards emphasising the physicality of the body and, by extension, matter. For Dieutre, the Caravaggesque mode of representation becomes a starting point for his own personal sensory explorations within the moving image. As for Otero, it partakes perhaps less of a self-conscious aesthetic choice than of a desire to *touch* her mother, as it were, not only through her paintings but also through the process of film-making, by way of the haptic gaze, for instance. On a formal level, the use of light and the close-up in particular partake of this attempt to produce a tactile image.

Chiaroscuro

Dieutre makes an interesting use of the Caravaggist *chiaroscuro*. The film is almost entirely shot at night or indoors so that the light always comes from an artificial source. Just after the opening sequence, Vincent appears in a dark room or in what resembles a shooting studio; the only source of light comes from a small light projector (held by a technician), which hovers back and forth over and around his naked torso: light is thus mobile. [Fig. 3.] The projector's movements are entangled with those of the handheld camera. The *chiaroscuro* thereby created sculpts the body and echoes Caravaggesque representations of the body, while enhancing the haptic gaze. Similar sequences in which Vincent is filmed with another man are dispersed throughout the film like extra-diegetic moments. However, if light is often said to emanate from a divine source in Caravaggesque painting, here it appears as a diffuse expression of emotion caused by the sensation of the bodies.

In Otero's film, one sequence strongly resonates with Dieutre's *chiaroscuro* scenes: a lateral tracking shot of the street at night, filmed from inside a car, reveals in low-angle the succession of light beams from the street lamps. After a cut, a painting by Clotilde (a female nude) appears on screen; it is placed inside the car, thus intermittently illuminated by the passing lights so that a streak of shadow keeps going back and forth over it [Fig. 4]. The lighting creates amber shades which underscore the skin's colour in the painting. At the same time, it also creates a *chiaroscuro* setting whose emotional charge takes on a melancholic tone, just as in Dieutre's *Leçons*. In his book *L'attrait de la lumière* (*The Attraction of Light*, 2010), Jacques Aumont describes a scene in *Ordet* (*The Word*, *Carl* Dreyer, 1955) in which a dark living room is illuminated by car lights through a window on the side, while a woman is agonising in the room next door. For Aumont, this

light is Death passing by and he adds that "it suggests to us a figure of light – and 'figure' here is to be understood in its full meaning, that is, of *figura*, of modelling and intentional artifice" (Aumont 2010, 47). In a similar way here, death and the secret that characterise Clotilde's story are suggested through a figure of light, whereby the *chiaroscuro*, as intentional artifice, models and physically marks the body in the painting.

The "Tactile Close-up"

To come back to the close-ups briefly mentioned above in relation to eroticism, both films similarly display the paintings in extreme close-up as if the camera were trying to penetrate inside the canvas, as if the image had depth. In *Histoire d'un secret*, as the conservationist thoroughly examines Clotilde's paintings, she scrutinises the canvases' quality and size, then starts to analyse their preparation and the painting technique. She infers from her observations that Clotilde seemed much more interested in paint and colour than in the precision of drawing, and that she probably used thick applications of paint and vigorous strokes while the shapes are vague and suggested, rather than accurately outlined. In other words, Clotilde's painting technique emphasises texture. The woman's explanations are intertwined with close-ups on the canvases, which reveal their pattern as well as the thick texture of the brushstrokes [Fig. 5]. As a result, Clotilde's technique and Mariana's close-ups coalesce into matter and physicality, one sustains the other; and as Béla Balázs puts it, "the magnifying glass of the cinematograph brings us closer to the individual cells of life, it allows us to feel the texture and substance of life in its concrete detail" (Balázs 2010, 38).

During her observations, the conservationist regularly runs her fingers along the contours and lines of the paintings, as if to enhance her comments, thereby re-enacting by the same token Clotilde's own gestures over three decades earlier, in an attempt to understand, almost like a detective, how the painter may have proceeded [Fig. 6]. Similarly in *Leçons de ténèbres*, Vincent runs his hands along the contours of a painted body. Later in the film, he transposes these gestures from the paintings onto his own images, onto his lover's face for instance [Fig. 7]. Laura Marks's expression of "tactile close-ups" (Marks 2000, 172) is very appropriate here. In fact, Otero and Dieutre's *tactile close-up* brings the viewer extremely close to the surface and even gradually becomes literal touch. However, if the term "tactile" in Marks's expression may appear as synonym with haptic, it seems to be understood instead as partaking in the broader spectrum of what she

describes as *haptic visuality*. In addition, the expression also serves the purpose of spelling out the property of such visuality which "functions like the sense of touch" and in which haptic images "engage the viewer tactilely" (Marks, 2000, 22). Similarly, in the films described here, the hands and finger gestures come across as a way of making explicit and magnifying the sense of touch inherent to the films' haptic images. After all, the fingertips are nothing but the index itself and as modelling tools, as it were, they are constitutive of the *Figura* as defined by Erich Auerbach, that is to say, in very simplified terms, the cavity of a mould or an imprint.[3] Let us not forget either that Peirce defined the index in terms of physical connexion – and not mere analogy. Interestingly enough, Otero shows seven black and white photographs of her mother in the film, which follow one another in full screen mode and stand outside the diegetic space, by contrast with a scene in which the characters would have held them and looked at them. All are group photographs so that the viewer is not even sure if Clotilde is present in them. As a result, their iconic and indexical property is undermined and fails to satisfactorily evoke Clotilde to Mariana who cannot remember her mother, not even what she looked like. Hence the paramount significance of the paintings, for they are the only physical link, through their tactility, with Clotilde. As a result, touch establishes here a connexion, via the figure and the index, between pictorial and filmic images, as well as between mother and daughter.[4]

Seeing Through the Skin

Balázs also argues that the close-up can reveal details that the normal eye does not see, "it exposes the face beneath the surface" (Balázs 2010, 103). This resonates strongly with Mariana's search for traces of her mother, as the close-ups on the canvases look like an attempt to uncover the secret, to detect the hidden detail *beneath the surface*. Throughout Dieutre's film, we also see recurrent images of pierced bodies, starting with the different representations of the Christ's own body as well as that of Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows, as in Gerrit van Honthorst's *Saint Sebastian*, cited above, or in *Saint Sebastian aided by Saint*

3 Against all odds, *finger* and *figure* have a different etymological origin, despite the apparent resemblance of the former with the Latin root (*fingere*) of the latter. *Finger* stems from common Germanic and, while its pre-Germanic antecedent is uncertain, the word tends to be related to the root of the number five. See *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1991, 932).

4 Of course, the paintings also point to artistic creation as another level of connection between mother and daughter.

Irene (Trophime Bigot, ca. 1620, Pinacoteca, Vatican). It is as if the camera were also trying to penetrate the canvas and the body, by extension, to check out its mechanics inside, akin to a doubting Thomas sticking his finger inside the wound of the resurrected Christ.[5] Similarly, Otero is very explicit about her intentions in this respect for she writes in the film's script that, thanks to editing, she wants us "to 'enter' in the painting" (Otero 2006, 91).

This, in turn, raises the question of the surface and, most importantly, of its depth. The attempt to see through the skin of the image harks back to Jacques Rancière's criticism about the surface as ontologically bi-dimensional: he argues that the pictorial surface is not a mere "geometric composition of lines," but also corresponds to a certain distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004, 15). Rancière adds that it should not be opposed to depth, but rather to the living – that is, to the living act of speech. The point here is certainly not to argue instead that pictorial and film images are necessarily or ontologically three-dimensional. More important is the fact that these cuts in the surface, as attempts to look *beyond the surface*, seem to underscore the notion of passage – from one surface to another for instance – which bears some common traits with Rancière's idea of different forms of expression being combined, such as "the intertwining of graphic and pictorial capabilities" (*idem*) which took place in the Renaissance. For him, such movements "inspired a new idea of pictorial surface as a surface of shared writing" (*idem*). In keeping with this, the passage through the surface described above draws attention to the combination of different media as a surface of "shared writing," or in this case, of shared filming.

In-between Media

Intermediality as a Figure of Sensation

While the images of pierced bodies mentioned above certainly elicit emotional and physical reactions, the endeavour of both film-makers – and Dieutre perhaps more explicitly – also denotes a fascination for the medium and its materiality. In other words, it is not only the blood and/or the erotic gaze in close-up which cause sensation, but also the passage from one state to another, as well as from one form to another. Sketching a line between Tom Gunning's cinema of attractions and Gilles Deleuze's logic of sensation, Eivind Røsaak reminds us that the figure

5 See for instance the Caravaggio's version, *The Incredulity of St Thomas*, (1601–1602, Sanssouci, Potsdam), even if the painting does not appear in *Leçon de ténèbres*.

of sensation arises in the in-between (Røsaak 2006). Deleuze argues indeed about Francis Bacon's painting that the sensation lies between figurative representation and abstraction.[6] As for Gunning, as far as early cinema is concerned, sensation is related to the medium and to the passage from stillness to motion. For Røsaak, this space between stillness and movement is "an emotional space […] where the audience is transported from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the canny, to the uncanny. The emotions are specifically linked to the appearance of motion, which transforms the emotion into a state of shock." (2006, 322). Yet, as he examines the time slice effect in a sequence of *The Matrix* (Andy & Lana Wachowski, Warner Brothers, US, 1999), Røsaak posits that new technologies have somehow reversed the process so that the emotional shock, while it still arises in the in-between, emerges this time in the passage from motion to stillness, used as we are today to movement and speed. His argument is also interesting in that it emphasises the relevance of the medium specificity combined with the notion of passage from one state to another, in other words: *in-betweenness*.

Something of that order seems to be happening in Dieutre's film, as our gaze is caught upon static camera shots, which break the flow of the handheld camera movements to reveal an empty backstreet, a wall, scenes of a city at night, or the still image of a painting. The viewer's emotion thus arises in the passage from the moving film image to the delayed moment of contemplation of pictorial and picturesque – in the etymological understanding of the term – images.[7] Yet, Bellour's pensive and/or Mulvey's possessive spectator has somehow given way to a bewildered one. Moreover, the uncanny or the sensation effect does not merely come from the stilled moment of contemplation, it is also linked to painting. In the introduction to her book *Cinema and Sensation*, Martine Beugnet describes the opening scene of *Leçons de ténèbres* in which Vincent faints in a museum after looking at Caravaggio's *Christ at the Column*. Dieutre himself described this reaction in an interview[8] as the physical consequence of the power that painting can have on a human being, while Beugnet rightly argues that it

6 Deleuze in fact attributes this idea to Bacon himself who speaks of sensation as – among other things – the passage "from one 'order' to another, from one 'level' to another, from one 'area' to another." (Deleuze 2003, 36.)

7 See in this respect Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x Times a Second*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), especially *Chapter eight: Delaying Cinema*, 144–160. Her point whereby new technologies have redefined our modes of viewing is particularly pertinent here: when looking at *Leçons de ténèbres* in fast forward mode, the contrast between the flowing of the moving images and the pauses on the paintings and other "picturesque" shots becomes particularly striking.

8 Vincent Dieutre, *Interview with Pascal Bonenfant*, in *Leçons de ténèbres*, bonus track of the DVD release (2004).

points to a "sensory awareness" and that "to let oneself be physically affected by an art work or a spectacle is to relinquish the will to gain full mastery over it, choosing intensity and chaos over rational detachment" (Beugnet 2007, 3). This emotional shock could also be understood as a manifestation of the abject in the sense that Julia Kristeva ascribes to it: the "*abject*, […] the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 1982, 2). Vincent is drawn to the painting, but at the same time – or *because*? –, he is confronted with an emotion that he cannot comprehend and which is beyond rational meaning. His collapsing is thus due to his attraction for something whose overpowering effect he cannot rationalise.

Involvement with the Medium

Vincent's wanderings throughout the city at night allow him to play at recreating typically Caravaggesque settings and motifs, as he films the cities' poor areas, or the frenzy of urban nightlife. At one point, he buys smuggled cigarettes from an elderly woman and a younger man – both presumably homeless. The transaction takes place in a street corner of Naples around a fire, so that the light comes from the flames, at the centre of the image. On other occasions, Vincent and his partner are sitting in busy, dimly lit restaurants. In one such sequence, Vincent's partner takes the candle from the table and holds it above the menu while they talk to the waiter. Such mises-en-scène are redolent of the numerous Caravaggesque representations of players, drinkers, and other revellers sitting around tables in taverns. Finally, Dieutre also makes connections by juxtaposition, through editing, between scenes he films and the paintings. Drawing from Laura Marks, Martine Beugnet argues that the effect of such *mimesis* is a sign of involvement with the object of the gaze, and this, in opposition to the world of abstraction. Marks adds that "through mimesis we can not only understand our world, but create a transformed relationship to it – or restore a forgotten relationship" (Marks 2000, 141). This last remark could not apply more accurately to Otero as she strives to *restore her forgotten relationship* to her mother by also miming the latter's painting through her own film-making. The film's recurrent panoramic tracking shots of Normandy's countryside echo Clotilde's painted landscapes, especially in Otero's treatment of colour and light. On one occasion, Mariana even places the painting of a landscape on an easel in the middle of a meadow; on another, she brings family and friends to the flat in which the family lived for a while and asks her mother's former models to explain and mime how they had posed for her. And last but not least, Clotilde's gestures

are repeated in front of the camera by the conservationist, as already mentioned, as well as by Mariana's uncle, also a painter.

As for Dieutre, the *chiaroscuro* sequences in the studio, which seem to mime Caravaggesque bodily gestures, similarly point to a physical involvement with the medium. And *physical involvement* is to be understood here in the literal sense, for, indeed, both camera and light projector turn around and encircle the protagonists. This involvement enables the film-maker Vincent to come to terms (or at least try to) with his narcissistic crisis and to ascertain his place in the world, as he puts it in the film's opening sequence. Yet, there is perhaps another dimension to these particular sequences. Staged in a studio or dark room, they stand outside the diegesis and come across as visual interludes. Thus isolated, they are comparable to the way in which Gilles Deleuze sees the circle and the oval in Francis Bacon's work: it is about isolating the Figure without compelling it to "immobility but, on the contrary, render sensible a kind of progression, an exploration of the Figure within the place, or upon itself. The relation of the Figure to its isolating place defines a 'fact:' 'the fact is…,' 'what takes place is…' Thus isolated, the Figure becomes an Image, an Icon." (Deleuze 2003, 1–2.) To a certain extent, Vincent Dieutre takes Deleuze's point to the letter as he isolates the Caravaggesque Figure, and literally explores its mobility by turning it into a moving image.

Furthermore, Dieutre's formal experimentations with the medium and play with mimesis are also self-reflexive, exploring his status and work as an artist as well as his strategy of using film as a sensory experience. Generally, he tends to resort to different film formats and technologies to organise his narrative structure, in this case, he uses a video, a Super 8, and a 35mm camera. While this aesthetic choice also has narrative implications which will not be developed here, Dieutre explained that varying formats allowed him to achieve a diversity of image textures. The digital camera, which is used for most of the film, gives the image an impression of immediacy and relative closeness to the filmed object because it is handheld, and thus evocative of a journalistic and documentary style for instance: we are physically there with the characters, as it were. The Super 8 is used essentially in the studio scenes and, by contrast with the video and the 35mm formats, confers on the images a very distinctive "dirty" grain that echoes the canvas texture and the patina of age characteristic of the 17th century paintings. In fact, the haptic sensation obtained in these sequences through *chiaroscuro* lighting (as discussed above) is here reinforced by several factors: not only does it enhance tactility through its image quality, but the very materiality of

the film strip draws attention to matter in general. In addition, because originally designed as an amateur format, the Super 8 format tends to be associated to handicraft. As for the scenes filmed on 35mm, they correspond to the long static sequences of urban settings. The neat and limpid image quality gives them the appearance of cinematic tableaux, as it were. Moreover, the camera's immobility (notwithstanding the image's own movement) places such sequences at the same level, in narrative terms, as the stills of paintings inserted in the film, for they similarly arouse sensation and provide moments of contemplation. Through this strategy of conspicuously alternating film formats, Dieutre subverts the codes and conventions traditionally attached to each of them, but most importantly, he also shows that their function and significance is not only contextual, but also fully contingent to the historical moment. In other words, the status of such formats shifts and evolves in time and in relation to one another.

Mise en abyme

If the paintings provide a material and sensory dimension in Dieutre and Otero's films, they also enable the directors/protagonists to stage a *mise en abyme* of the viewing experience [Figs. 8–9]. Indeed, to watch them looking at the paintings brings the viewers back to their own position as spectators and thus emphasises the reflexive dimension in the art experience in general and in cinema in particular. This is what Vincent Dieutre also refers to when he explains his intention with this film. This is not to posit that the *mise en abyme* of the spectator position takes place through intermediality exclusively; in any case, cinema abounds in counter-examples of characters watching films within the film and which lead to similar effects. What the interplay with media allows is perhaps a shift in the nature of the viewing experience: it is about questioning our position as spectators in relation to art, but as *feeling*, rather than *understanding* spectators, to paraphrase Philippe Dubois for whom the Figural partakes more of *seeing* and *sensing*, than of *perceiving* and *understanding* (Dubois 1999, 248).

Ágnes Pethő's application of ekphrasis to film is very appropriate here: a film is ekphrastic when the "embedded art form" – in this case the paintings – corresponds, among other things, to the manifestation of "a medium that is different from that of the cinematic image in which it is embedded. In short, an ekphrasis requires the perception of intermedial relations, as 'transformative inscriptions' or 'figurations' of mediality in a work" (Pethő 2010, 213). In Dieutre and Otero's respective film indeed, the paintings are not merely part of the

diegesis. While they are paramount to the narrative, they are also constitutive of its aesthetics and make the medium conspicuous by contributing to the process of *mise en abyme* for instance, which ultimately harks back to the broader issue of the cinematic medium. At the same time, the paintings point to materiality: for both film-makers, their personal coming to terms with loss and absence is thus expressed through their film-making and is counterbalanced by a focus on matter, texture and presence.

The body functions here as a sort of sensible interface between the paintings and film. In a way, the body itself is a medium which constitutes an instance of inscription – and even of self-inscription in these specific case studies – of sensations and emotions. Indeed, as Deleuze puts it, "the body is the Figure, or rather, the material of the Figure" (Deleuze 2003, 20). In this sense, the body is the Figure which, in turn, is the *mould*, in which sensation is inscribed. Suffering and eroticism thus come across as the physical manifestation of such inscriptions, while the cinematic device relies on the haptic gaze to point to materiality and sensory affect. If in-betweenness is considered as a figure of sensation, it certainly applies to intermediality, which, in these specific films, combines the in-betweenness of media with the balance between movement and stillness, between the visibility and invisibility of the gay man, or between the absence and haunting presence of the mother who died in secret.

For Jean-Marie Schaeffer, the body, as it has been represented in Western European culture because of its Christian roots, is embedded in the dialectic relation between matter and abstraction: Christ is the incarnation of God in a human body, hence simultaneously real flesh and image (of God). This explains why we can equally say that "our understanding of the body is an understanding of the image, and our understanding of the image is an understanding of the body" (Schaeffer 2006, 62). In other words, the image is where the body comes to constitute itself. Interestingly enough, Philippe Dubois also reminds us of the paradoxical duality of the Figure which is simultaneously concrete (as imprint, index, etc.) and abstract (as image and icon) (Dubois 1999). In the films discussed here, the body is represented through paintings, it is therefore *always already* a body as image. At the same time, many elements work towards emphasising the carnal dimension of these bodies, by way of the texture and tactility of the media. In other words, it embodies, so to speak, the tension between abstraction and materiality, which is exactly where cinema lies, that is to say, in the interface between image and reality, between abstraction and concreteness.

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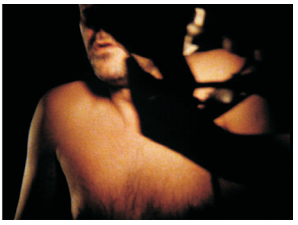

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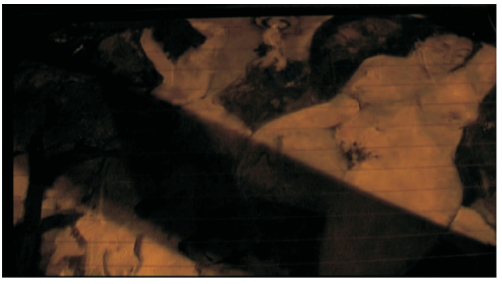


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Sensations of Dysphoria in the Encounter of Failing Bodies: The Cases of *Karaoke* by Donigan Cumming, *Last Days* by Gus Van Sant, and *Drunk* by Gillian Wearing

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Abstract. The essay examines films and video installations that present the figures of suffering bodies and trigger strong dysphoric sensations through empathy: *Karaoke* (1998) by Donigan Cumming, *Last Days* (2005) by Gus Van Sant, and *Drunk* (2000) by Gillian Wearing. In addition to strong pathemic strategies that intensify the reception of the image, these artworks also contain counter-pathemic elements that distance the viewer from pathos. These long, moving, close examinations of pathemic physical states not only project the viewer into a frozen, insistent, and fascinated gaze at the suffering body and place him or her in a mirrored passive position but also offer an opportunity to move from sensation to sentiment, and then to sensitivity toward and experience of various stages of the empathetic response.

Keywords: Body, pathos, counter-pathos, empathy, dysphoria, video art, Donigan Cumming, Gus Van Sant, Gillian Wearing.

In this essay, I discuss films and video installations that present figures of the sick, dying, or intoxicated body and that trigger sensations associated with fear of death and physical decline. In the presence of these suffering figures, the viewer feels discomfort in his or her own body through an empathetic response. The viewer's strongly dysphoric bodily sensations come to signal his or her empathetic bond with others – a bond that he or she may accept or reject when it provokes dysphoric sensations. I argue here, as I did in my recent book *L'insistance du regard sur le corps éprouvé. Pathos et contre-pathos* (*The Insistent Gaze upon the Afflicted Body: Pathos and counter-pathos,* Tremblay 2013a), that these film and video works act as spaces for the viewer to negotiate and exercise empathy and the accompanying dysphoric sensations.

In the artworks under examination here, the body appears pathemic, failing, troubled, suffering, and weak in its postures, movements, and appearance, allowing an empathetic contact with the viewer's body. Using the bonding power of the pathos conveyed by the suffering figure, along with long observations strategies, these artists practise an art of the encounter with the other represented, rather than an art of the narrative. They do so through an attempt at "reaching the bodies before the discourses," as Deleuze puts it in his book *The Time-Image* (Deleuze 1989, 172).

Artists and filmmakers who use the figure of the suffering body obviously want to provoke dysphoric sensations and empathetic responses, but many of them today are reluctant to use such pathos-loaded figures without questioning or disrupting their effect. Given that pathos is well known to trigger automatic responses and sensorial schemas, many artists, including Bertolt Brecht, have tried to use counter-strategies to free the viewer from these reflex-based bonds. But how does one keep the viewer from being overwhelmed without making the emotion-triggering device ineffective or risking a loss of empathy?

Pathos and Counter-Pathos

The rhetoric of pathos is a proven vector for inspiring fascination and sensation in the viewer. The posture of the engaged, emotional viewer indicates an intense, passionate relationship with the images in which the viewer is captivated, eyes riveted to the artwork. Through empathy, the viewer associates his or her own body with the bodies experiencing physical and emotional pain on screen.

The term "pathos" is used here in the sense of "the suffering happening to someone." Something that conveys pathos is pathemic, and something that disrupts and counteracts pathos is counter-pathemic. As Mériam Korichi defines it in her book *Passions*, "The Greek meaning of the term [pathos] refers primarily to the idea of 'suffering' or 'pain,' as revealed in the Homeric sense of *pathein* – to endure a treatment or be punished – but the pain is not necessarily intended in the physical sense and the meaning is specific to the designation of mourning – *penthein*, the same root as *pathein*, meaning 'to be in mourning, to lament the death of someone' – so that *pathema*, 'what happens to someone, suffering, misery, disease' refers not only to the idea of a passive state, but also to the significance of this passivity, this suffering." (Korichi 2000, 238, our translation.)

Korichi establishes in this definition that the pain happening to someone takes on meaning in the eyes of a witness; it is experienced by an outside viewer. The

figure of the mourner can be associated with the viewer who feels pain through another's pain, to which he or she is the passive witness. Pathos is revealed as a relational device between the sufferer and the viewer – as an emotion-carrying device, moving from one body to another.

Not only do the three artworks discussed here display suffering bodies but they also show movement both toward and away from the pathos conveyed by those figures. The former direction of movement creates a fusional empathetic response to the suffering figure, whereas the latter creates a distance that reduces the dysphoric sensation and can favour self-observation of empathetic somatic responses. Viewers can thus experience sensory fascination before being released from the overwhelming power of pathos. Counter-pathos is created by the distancing made possible by diverse strategies, such as activation of doubt, and the inclusion of signs of *mise en scène*, repetition, different versions or emotional treatments of the same scenes, comic relief, ruptures, and offering a very long and repeated observation time that can foster self-examination and reflection. This is particularly true in video art installations and a certain form of auteur cinema, in which reflexive practices take the viewer's role into consideration and make the viewer aware of that role.

Phoria and dysphoria – pleasure and displeasure – are disseminated primarily through bodily empathetic sensations before they become the object of conscious perception and analysis. The point of contact with the viewer highlighted by Wearing, Cumming, and Van Sant is, above all, the human body's ability to communicate through its postural and kinesthetic dimensions. Pathos is expressed through the non-verbal performance of the lead actor in Van Sant's *Last Days,* who, like Wearing's drunken figures in *Drunk*, loses control over his body in the repeated and extended motion of falling. Both *Last Days* and *Drunk*, because they communicate mainly through the body, bear similarities to contemporary dance practices, especially to choreographer Pina Bausch's dance-theatre (*tanztheater*).

Pathemic postures and movements make bodies appear empty, lacking intentionality, caught in fate, displaying motion failure. These bodies' characteristic postures are bent backs, bowed heads, hanging arms, curved chest, sitting or lying position, clumsiness, tilting of the head and body, slumping. Their movements are the fall, stumble, tumble, trip, and drop. They stagger, totter, surrender, and quit as if they have lost self-control, are disabled, or are too heavy or weak. Their functionality is disturbed, as limbs and organs do not perform as expected. Their sensori-motor schemas are disrupted. Their postures and movements come to signify disorder, weakness, contingency, vulnerability,

loss of control, resignation, and the foreshadowing of a death to come, the sight of a still body bereft of life.

Through detailed examinations of pathemic body states offered by filmic strategies such as the long take and repetition, these artworks offer the viewer the opportunity to move from sensation to sentiment to sensitivity. Sensations happen in the viewer's body; sentiments, in the viewer's mind – that is, on a more reasoned stage; sensitivity refers to the broader social ability to bond with others.

Karaoke

Karaoke,[1] *by Donigan Cumming, a video loop presented as a larger-than-life projection in a gallery, uses pathemic and counter-pathemic strategies at two very distinct moments.*

The camera first lingers in a very tight close-up – at an "intimate distance," as the anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1966) would put it, or a haptic distance – on the face of an old man whose physical appearance leads us to believe that he is in agony. His eyes appear opaque and blind, and he seems to breathe with difficulty through an open mouth as he passes an atrophied tongue over his parched lips and swallows painfully. In the background, we hear music, a simple and joyous song, the lyrics of which are incomprehensible. The camera begins a slow pan down the prostrate body, finally revealing the man's foot as it beats in time to this strange music. Then, the camera pans back up to the old man's face – and we understand that this is the same shot as the first, but reversed, as the music plays backwards. The work is divided into two parts: in the first part, we identify strongly and empathetically with the agony of the reclining body; in the second part, we revisit our initial judgment as we discover the old man's foot expressing his enjoyment of the music.

The use of the extreme close-up on the dying old man's body induces haptic perception. The intimate distance into which the viewer is projected allows him or her to capture the details of the skin – its wrinkles and folds – the dryness of the mouth, the veil that covers the eyes and indicates that vision is no longer possible. This intimate distance of the haptic perception of a dying body is unusual and brutal for the viewer, who is drawn in and cannot escape. As in an intimate relationship, personal boundaries come into contact and intertwine.

1 *Karaoke* is part of a video installation titled *Moving Stills* (1998), by internationally renowned Canadian artist Donigan Cumming. For three minutes the camera is focused on a dying old man lying on a bed, panning down and up his body. This three-minute video is projected in a loop with two other videos, each of which shows a character crying and displaying despair, also shot in close-up (*Petit Jesus* and *Four Storeys*).

Marks (2000, 188) has explained, "The haptic is a form of visuality that muddies intersubjective boundaries." Such a perception, as induced by Cumming, is an imperative and invasive prescription to see and recognize the Other.

"Tactile epistemology involves thinking with our skin, or giving as much significance to the physical presence of an other as to the mental operations of symbolization. This is not a call to willful regression but to recognize the intelligence in the perceiving body. Haptic cinema, by appearing to us as an object with which we interact rather than an illusion into which we enter, calls upon this sort of embodied and mimetic intelligence. In the dynamic movement between optical and haptic ways of seeing, it is possible to compare different ways of knowing and interacting with an other." (Marks 2000, 190.)

The forced encounter through haptic visuality makes the viewer's body react and engage in an empathetic relationship marked by dysphoria. These dysphoric feelings that invade the viewer's body make him or her feel the strength of his or her sympathy, as well as the ambiguity of the attraction-repulsion duality that characterizes it.

The viewer, at first overwhelmed by dysphoric emotion and expecting to share only pain and discomfort with the man in the video, is later relieved to discover that the man enjoys the music that is playing. Upon this realization and reversal, the viewer is partially relieved of the automatic response of his or her mirror neurons in front of the dying old man. That beating foot is a snub to death – and to the viewer's propensity to pity and reduce the other. The recumbent figure comes to life and indicates that life overcomes the immobility of death.

During the unfolding of *Karaoke*, dysphoria first enters the viewer's body through empathy with the dying body; then phoria arises through cognition, pushing the dysphoria aside. Dysphoric sensations are invasive, and the disruptive strategies employed by Cumming can help to counter their powerful effect.

Last Days

Useful to our discussion is Deleuze's observation that the sensori-motor schemas of characters' bodies in post–Second World War films are broken. The film character is no longer a hero with a purpose and a task in a grand narrative but a figure wandering in a world from which he is alienated, as the camera follows him. The character of Blake, inspired by the tragic figure of Kurt Cobain, in Gus Van Sant's *Last Days* is certainly an example of that wandering figure. *Last Days* bears an aura of pathos in its reference to the actual suicide of the well-known and beloved musician.

Blake appears to be unaware of himself and barely says a word throughout the film. Obviously, communication here occurs not through words but through the body. It is through the body that we perceive Blake's mental state and his relationship or lack of relationship with places, objects, and others. Falls, collapses, and losses of consciousness punctuate his journey until his very last fall to his death at the end. Throughout the film, we are witnessing Blake's body break down – emptied of its power, its intentionality, and, ultimately, its consciousness. Not only do his actions not seem to have any purpose but his whole body indicates, through his postures, the decomposition of his motor schema. Since we are informed that Blake is a character inspired by Kurt Cobain, we can therefore already consider that he is a dead man – a walking dead man.

From the beginning, Blake appears small, fragile, and lost in a forest landscape through which he moves with difficulty. Dressed in simple, dirty red-and-white pyjamas, his presence in the forest seems anachronistic. When he finally arrives at a house and picks up a shovel, he slips and falls again before going to dig up a box that we guess contains the drugs that he has tried to stop using and which he will consume right after. We are witnessing Blake's slow slippage toward his own obliteration and his being overpowered by the death instinct.

The figure of the suffering body of Christ is frequently evoked; Blake appears particularly skinny: when he washes in the river, we can see his bones through his skin. When, intoxicated, he goes to his bedroom with a bowl of cereal, falls backward onto the bed, and then awkwardly raises his head and upper body, it looks as if a soul is leaving a dead body. This scene foreshadows the final scene of his death, when, through a superimposition effect, we see his ghostly body emerging from his dead body and rising. The reference to Christ is also openly made earlier in the film, when Van Sant brings in two Jehovah's Witnesses who explain the role of the sacrificial lamb – which is, according to them, to take the place of Jesus – and then shows us Blake walking on all fours like a lamb.

Later, when Asia opens a door against which he has fallen asleep, Blake falls again in a heap, making her fear that he is dead. The scene is repeated from two different points of view: inside and outside the room. Another repeated scene is the one of his arrival at the house from the forest; the first time, he is wearing a white T-shirt, whereas the second time, he is wearing a red-and-black striped sweater like the one that Kurt Cobain wore on the day of his death.

With these repetitions and variations, Van Sant borrows radical strategies from experimental film and video art to create a disrupted fictional time apart from action-image and the conventional linear narrative. These strategies break up the

naturalism of linearism and suggest multiple points of view and interpretations. The temporality that Van Sant creates throughout *Last Days* is one of slow observation and pathemic time. As they follow Blake, viewers are left to linger in pathos and witness his slow physical decline. This process is expressed in the repeated and extended movement of the fall and by the body losing its power and drive. The exaggerated duration of Van Sant's takes on the failing body bears a pathemic effect and acts as his *pathosformel*.[2]

Some counter-pathemic elements can be observed in the absurd apparition of the Yellow Pages salesman and the Jehovah's Witness brothers, whose anachronistic presence makes us laugh. These characters also play the role of a normative background against which the difference of Blake's behaviour stands out.

Drunk

Similarly to Van Sant with *Last Days*, British artist Gillian Wearing slowly observes, in exaggerated duration, falling intoxicated bodies in her video installation *Drunk*.[3] She asked real alcoholics living in the street to come in her studio to be filmed on a white background. The resulting films are exhibited in galleries in a monumental three-channel video projection that renders the subjects larger than life. They stagger, urinate, fight, and fall asleep on the floor. Here, the failing motor skills of the bodies are emphasized by isolating them against a white background. The viewer can identify, beyond the identity of the persons depicted, with body failure as a common, shared space experienced by everyone to different degrees.

But the identity of the alcoholics, their clumsy bodies, can also provoke counter-pathemic laughter and reduction to caricature. The responsibility for the empathic link is thus returned to the viewer. If the viewer identifies with the people on screen, the pathos in this work is effective. Only the extended duration, the loop presentation, the bodies magnified by monumental projection, the displacement of the drunks into a studio, and the effect of the space of art mediation can offer a slight distance: the drunks' movements appear choreographed and almost graceful as they exhibit disturbed bodies whose restraint and self-control have deserted them.

2 *Pathosformel* is a German word used by art historian Aby Warburg to describe the formulas of pathos in artworks. See discussion later in this text.

3 Gillian Wearing, *Drunk*, three-channel video projection, black and white, with sound, 23 minutes, 1999. In a larger-than-life projection, real drunk people stagger and fall in a white studio. Wearing is a conceptual artist from Great Britain who won the Turner Prize in 1997.

Pathemic Time

In these three works pathemic bodies are caught up in pathemic time – a doubling or tautological strategy that subjects both the viewer and the represented figure to the long duration of dysphoric experiences. The frozen repetitive time of this pathemic strategy afflicts the passive viewer through the use of the long take in all of the works, the repetition of the loop in the video installations, and the variations on the same scene repeated in *Last Days*.

Pathemic time does not unfold and cannot sustain the development of a tragic, heroic narrative but can only express a passive enduring of time. The duration offered to pathos by the long take and the video loop acts in the same way as the imposition of the pathemic posture on the human figure: it slows things down to an almost stationary state, it stretches and repeats. Pathemic time bears insistence. It insists and stares at the filmed figure and projects the viewer into a staring, attentive position (Tremblay, 2013a).

In *Karaoke*, the recumbent figure of the emaciated, dying body evokes the corpse to come as well as the image of the dead Christ lying wrapped in his shroud. This image provokes fear of impotence and weakness and of one's own death. According to art historian Aby Warburg, pathos, by the strength of the emotions it stirs, has configured and modelled representations throughout history. Emotions imprint matter, set it in motion, in the emblematic sculpture of the Laocoön. Warburg names this phenomenon *pathosformel*, or pathos formula, an energy based on passion, fear, and fascination that emerges not only in iconographic themes but in a work's formal and aesthetic qualities – for example, in the movement of the twists and folds of the clothes and draped fabric and in the tormented bodies of the Laocoön (Tremblay 2013a).

In the video and film works of Cumming, Wearing, and Van Sant, the passion or fear derived from pathos does not imprint its movement on matter as it did in the statues of antiquity, but is translated into the frozen, fascinated gaze at – the slow and repeated observation of – emaciated, failing bodies. A fascination with pathos ties the viewer's gaze to this image, as do the repetition of the looped presentation and the long take, all of which enclose the subject in an endless temporality that could be associated with purgatory. Repetition and the emphasis of the insistent gaze embodied by the camera and the editing become figures of the fascinated gaze. This slow, repetitive observation is the sign of a temporality affected by pathos. One could say that in these time-based artworks, Warburg's *pathosformel* gives shape to time rather than matter. This shape – or "energy," as Warburg would put it

– carries the fear of death and decay. Although, unlike the characters in Warburg's corpus of study and the ancient portrayals, the characters depicted here are not tragic heroes but resolutely modern anti-heroes whose fate and misfortune provoke fascination. The meaning of their fate is not provided by a narrative but remains rather opaque in the long, slow observation time of this insistent gaze.

The empathetic response engages the viewer's entire body in a relational dynamic. Empathy here is kinesthesic (through movement) and thymic (through pain). Kinesthesic and thymic empathy trigger activity in the areas of the viewer's brain linked to the gestures, movements, and pain that he or she witnesses. If a figure is slowly falling, the part of the viewer's brain linked to that movement reacts, just as one might yawn if one watches a person who is yawning. As neuroscientist Tania Singer and her colleagues have observed,[4] empathetic reactions are produced in the area of the brain concerned with that action but do not use all of the area, as does the brain of the person actually performing the action. Even if empathy unfolds, what is felt is not the same as what is observed. Moreover, the viewer can modify (reduce) his or her reaction with awareness.[5] When experiencing fiction, the viewer perceives emotions as true and subscribes to them through empathy, but he or she can also remain aware that it is a work of fiction and therefore maintain distance and the possibility of controlling his or her emotions.

Because the viewer agrees to follow the rules of fiction and to momentarily believe the reality of his or her emotions, empathy can occur. Fiction offers an empathetic exercise based on the suspension of disbelief. Faced with documentary images of people in difficulty presented in the gallery, however, one cannot avail oneself of the mediation of the actor. Perceiving the truth of the people represented on screen, the viewer is instead placed in the uneasy position of the voyeur. Gazing at such documentary figures in video installations, he or she can choose either to escape or to take on the voyeuristic role and immerse himself or herself in its accompanying fascination and dysphoria. In either case – entering

4 "Our data suggest that empathizing with the pain of others does not involve the activation of the whole pain matrix, but is based on activation of those second-order re-representations containing the subjective affective dimension of pain." (Singer and al. 2004, 1161.)

5 "Consistent evidence shows that sharing the emotions of others is associated with activation in neural structures that are also active during the first-hand experience of that emotion. Part of the neural activation shared between self- and other-related experiences seems to be rather automatically activated. However, recent studies also show that empathy is a highly flexible phenomenon, and that vicarious responses are malleable with respect to a number of factors – such as contextual appraisal, the interpersonal relationship between empathizer and other, or the perspective adopted during observation of the other." (Singer and Lamm 2009, 81–96, 81.)

the movie theatre or the gallery – the audience knows that dysphoric emotions may be part of the viewing experience. Art and fiction generate emotions, without calling upon the urgent and immediate obligation to act or the threat of real situations. Both prepare people, to a certain degree, to experience pain to themselves and others. In this expansion of viewers' emotional experience, the figure of the suffering body plays the role of a key immediately opening the doors of empathy. Distancing strategies close these doors slightly to render reception more bearable and reasonable. This possibility of reasonableness in the empathic response offered by the artwork promotes ethical deliberation regarding the viewer's reactions vis-à-vis the pain of others.

As the viewer watches a film or video installation, the experience of relative pain by empathy also creates displeasure reactions in his or her brain. In these three artworks, one can observe three different kinds of pain; first, the pain of the figure represented on screen; second, the viewer's own empathetic pain, similar to but different from the one experienced first hand by the figure represented; third, the viewer's pain of experiencing displeasure by empathy (secondary displeasure). This secondary displeasure is added to the dissimilar pain experienced in empathy, as Jacques Fontanille (2007, 39, our translation) points out: "It is a question not of directly sharing the pain or pleasure of others but of managing the indirect products of its exhibition to us, which I shall call secondary pleasure and displeasure."

Empathy appears to be based not on altruism but on the desire to relieve oneself of dysphoria. Reactions as diverse as looking away, fleeing, staring, and reducing and diminishing what is perceived are manifestations of the same process of experiencing and trying to relieve oneself of the dysphoric sensations felt through empathy. Both the artist filming and the viewer watching experience these reactions. In the filmmaker's case, they translate into enunciation and aesthetic strategies.

The slight distance of counter-pathos offered by *Karaoke,* and in a lesser way *by Last Days* and *Drunk,* allows the artists and their audience to create a space in which it becomes possible to "manage" secondary dysphoria. In the long duration of pathemic time, the viewer becomes attentive to his or her own empathetic responses. The distance offered by the experience of a pathemic time doubling a pathemic representation along with a movement against pathos, allows us "to feel ourselves feeling," as Vivian Sobchack (2004, 77) puts it, and to observe the progress and changes in sensations and emotions from a fusional disturbing state to a relatively more distanced, reasoned position. In these artworks, sensations

and emotions not only are part of the cognitive experience but become their very subject and object of examination. In the case of the video loop in the gallery space, because viewers are free to stay in front of the projection or leave, they can modulate the duration of their exposure to pathos. On another level, they can try to modulate their internal reactions to the pathos by creating "emotional armour" for themselves.

Unlike in Brechtian strategies, pathos here is not countered at the very beginning, at the root, which would render the figures non-credible and the pathos ineffective; only later on, after allowing pathos to unfold and touch the viewer, do these artworks bring him or her to observe and reconsider what has happened. Being touched and then distanced allows for cognition with emotion and contact, away from simple cynicism and indifferent distance. The awareness of the action of pathos and empathy in the viewer's perception is made possible first by bringing forward the body figure and its powerful affects and then through repetition, variations, a slow and long observation process, and ruptures of pathos with humorous elements. Through this process, these works propose an encounter in which the viewer's empathy is revealed, tested, and becomes part of a process of self-examination.

This experience of dysphoria and phoria, felt successively, in the double movement toward and away from pathos observed in *Karaoke* reveals ambivalence. This ambivalent position, which both binds us to and frees us from the suffering of others represented, forms a new space for deliberation and the negotiation of pathos along the axis of the empathetic bond. The figure of the suffering body plays the role of an agora, a common space, in which encounter, self-awareness, and empathy can be tested in simulation and sensations experienced through empathy, with their bonding role, and become the object of embodied sensitive observation and ethical deliberation.

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Affective Realism and the Brand New Brazilian Cinema

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Abstract. The restricted vocabulary that is often applied to discuss Contemporary Brazilian Cinema (aesthetics of hunger, marginality, national allegory, identity, bad consciousness) reveals a sort of generalizing approach that ignores the films' singularities and overlooks diverse affiliations. Works by young Brazilian filmmakers such as Irmãos Pretti, Eduardo Valente, Rodrigo Siqueira, and Sérgio Borges are a real challenge for the critic inasmuch as they escape this vocabulary and propose other questions. The films made by this young generation bypass traditional themes like urban violence and historical revisionism, thus demanding we rethink the political potency of Brazilian Cinema. Moreover, these films are not concerned with images of Brazil, pointing out to a post-identity politics that go beyond narratives of nation, class, or gender. This proposal aims at discussing this Brand New Brazilian Cinema (Novísssimo Cinema Brasileiro) and its affective realism. No longer a referent for a sociological truth about Brazilian society, realism is taken as something that the image does, i.e., as an affect that challenges the viewer's response-ability. This paper discusses two films (*No meu lugar* [*Eye of the Storm*, Eduardo Valente, 2009] and *O céu sobre os ombros* [*The Sky Above*, Sérgio Borges, 2010]) in order to assess the political relevance of the notion of realism, in its relationship with affect.[1]

Keywords: Brand New Brazilian Cinema (Novísssimo Cinema Brasileiro), realism, affect.

Retomada, "rebirth," is the label that is often used to describe a revitalization of Brazilian cinema after a crisis engendered by the extinction, in 1990, of Embrafilme, the most important funder for Brazilian cinema, controlled by the State. For half a decade film production in Brazil was a precarious affair. However, with a new legislation that allowed investments by private companies

1 I wish to thank CAPES (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior) and Unisul (Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina) for granting me funds and paid leave, respectively, for my postdoctoral reasearch at Centre for World Cinemas (University of Leeds). This article is a partial result of this research.

through a system based on tax waiver, funding was again available and this new configuration not only favored the return of veteran filmmaker but it also created a space for the emergence of a new generation of directors (Walter Salles, Beto Brant, Fernando Meirelles, amongst many other). The Retomada, with its connotation of a renewal, may sound like a label that conveys the wrong idea of a uniform development of the film industry in Brazil since then. On the contrary – although film production has survived the near "blackout" of the early 1990's, the new form of funding via tax waiver has engendered at least two competing views among film critics and academics in Brazil: one, hurriedly celebrated the diversification of the production, an attitude that betrays an allegiance to market and state discourses; the other group, nonetheless, cautiously tried to avoid generalizations, instead focusing on each film in particular so as to extract possible relations that could eventually lead to a broader understanding of the contemporary scenario (Nagib 2002, Oricchio 2003, Debs 2004, Eduardo 2005). A decade and a half after this shift in the production cycle, the latter attitude is still a valid approach towards the comprehension of what is now being called the Brand New Brazilian Cinema - the films of young filmmakers, a second generation after the Retomada.

The expression Novíssimo Cinema Brasileiro (Brand New Brazilian Cinema) has been used by film critics in Brazil to describe the emergence of new directors but it would be misleading to say it bears any connection with Brazilian New Cinema (Cinema Novo), either in aesthetic or in political terms. Therefore, I'm using the expression to describe a new generation of filmmakers whose logic of production and circulation is relatively independent from industrial patterns. Some of the main aspects of the productions I am referring to here are: a) the films are mostly funded by public money, via tax waiver and direct financing coming from regional and national government, even though some of the films are completely independent of public money, adopting a totally independent attitude towards filmmaking; b) the films have a limited circulation in commercial circuits but they can be seen on public and cable TV (though not on primetime) or through alternative means of distribution; c) collective work is valued and shared authorship seems to put a dent on the figure of the author; d) the younger filmmakers are distancing themselves from the tradition of the struggling individual artist and of the director who speaks for a subaltern group (so closely associated with the 1960's and 1970's generations); e) as a consequence, contemporary films do not carry out totalizing discourses about individual or groups nor do they seem to reach any encompassing interpretation of the nation.

Bypassing traditional themes in Brazilian cinematography such as urban violence and historical revisionism, the Brand New Brazilian Cinema demands we rethink our parameters and reassess their political potential. Furthermore, there seems to be an interest in images that are not "images of Brazil," indicating a post-identity politics which extravasates the contours of narratives of nation, class, race, and gender. This is a cinema that tends not to judge national "reality," opting for singular configurations, not allegorical ones. Although it is certainly not my ambition here to reach universal classifications, I want to trace some of the lines of force of this recent cinema and map a few points of escape from ubiquitous aesthetics and thematics. I identify a number of paradoxes that seem to feed the power of the image in these recent productions. Finally, I will briefly explore two films and finish with some methodological considerations, which, I hope, could be extrapolated to other cinemas.

In dialogue with audiovisual forms such as Hollywood genre film and exploitive TV news programs, a number of Brazilian films produced (roughly) between 1995 and 2010 have approached filmmaking through an allegedly "realist" standpoint and were saluted as a "rediscovery" of Brazilian society through which filmmakers exposed their critical social awareness. The use of the expressions "reality" and "reveal" is pervasive[2] when referring to the approach described here, indicating a belief in the possibility of a true "revelation," of an objective expression of the world. Interestingly, in these circulating discourses about Brazilian films, the constructed "reality" of the film is taken as reality itself.

This problematic is addressed by a number of Brazilian scholars. Lúcia Nagib, for instance, in *A Utopia no Cinema Brasileiro* [*The Utopia in Brazilian Cinema*], explores *The Trespasser* (*O Invasor,* Beto Brant, 2002) saying that "*O Invasor* is a work of fiction. However, fiction can reveal more than the document through critical analysis. […] Marina's character […] is, perhaps, the film's main revelation as a symptom of late capitalism" (Nagib 2006, 177). The trope of the revelation is textually present. Moreover, even if Nagib's study of the fate of utopia in Brazilian cinema questions the way contemporary films deal with a national project, it eventually falls into a rather non-analytical praise of filmmakers like Walter Salles and Fernando Meirelles, who have an "international" career. She says: "If the Brazilian utopia is far from being realized, the Brazilian cinema utopia, at least in aesthetic terms, has taken place" (Nagib 2006, 21). The cinematic utopia: the

2 If we take the example of criticism about *City of God* (*Cidade de Deus*, directed by Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, 2002) in major periodic publications, we will see that the idea of the film's revelation of Brazilian society is present in *Bravo!* (July 2008), *Revista de Cinema* (November 2003), and *Veja* (October 2002), to name a few.

recognition in a world market and the capacity to talk about violence and social convulsion in a "realist" way that is palatable for domestic and foreign audiences.

Esther Hamburger in *Violência e pobreza no cinema brasileiro recente* [*Violence and Poverty in Recent Brazilian Cinema*] analyses contemporary films that stress the visibility of poor, black dwellers of slums and periphery. She argues that when television and cinema bring these subjects to public attention, they intensify and stimulate a struggle for the control of visibility, for the definition of which subjects and characters will have audiovisual expression. Her approach, however, deals in term of stereotypes – how to correct or diversify the production of the images of poor violent people. What such truth-oriented perspective neglects is the fact that what is said to be "true" or not about a given community is not easily unveiled or wholly unproblematic.

A different account of the issues discussed here is given by Ismail Xavier. In *Da violência justiceira à violência ressentida* (*From Vengeful Violence to Resentful Violence*), he argues that contemporary films resist the temptation to romanticize criminals like works in the past. The objective is to undermine the criminal's representativity (as a "spokesperson") in contrast with the violent characters of the past – mainly from the 1960's and 1970's – whose violence, although unequivocally criticized, still resounded as a justifiable response to social injustice. In this text, however, Xavier reveals a nostalgic reference to filmmakers of the past, as if they, like the criminals they produced on the screen, also held the legitimacy for social criticism. He states that "the 1960–70's metaphors […] transformed the rifle into a camera, the left-winged filmmaker into a proto-guerilla confronting the media, and associated the aesthetics of violence to the wars of national liberation. The emphasis now changes and introduces a cinema whose unfoldings are more problematic because this modern instrument can corrode relationships and has unpredictable consequences (Xavier 2006, 66–7)."

What I find controversial about his argument is the qualification of recent works as "more problematic." This characteristic implies a "less" problematic past, which would portray violence and poverty in a more "adequate" way. To a certain extent, this is the same argument put forward by Ivana Bentes in her discussion of the "cosmetics of violence" as opposed to the "aesthetics of violence." Bentes defends that recent Brazilian films are resuming Cinema Novo themes such as poverty and violence, but without the political inflection of social denounce. For Bentes, contemporary cinema, on the contrary, makes a spectacle out of misery and violence, increasingly "consumed as a 'typical' or 'natural,' albeit helpless element" (Bentes 2007, 243).

In her account, violence emerges as a new urban folklore, with its stories of crimes, massacres, and horrors. A new "brutality" that does not create spaces for complicity or mercy. Such random, meaningless violence eventually becomes a spectacle, representing the ultimate scission between favelas and the rest of the city. Moreover, there is no political discourse like in the 1960s (Bentes 2007, 249). What is different from the Cinema Novo context is the fact that presently the images of violence are also being appropriated by the marginalized subjects which conventional cinema demonizes. She concludes the article by stating that "there are many aesthetics of violence, with diverse ethics and consequences: affirmative, reactive, resistant, they can be symptoms and expression of forms of living, valuing and thinking" (Bentes 2007, 254). Although Bentes makes an important point by making reference to the different appropriations of images of violence, in these texts she stills reverberates the prominence of the "images of violence" as a "good" or "bad" representation.

When society and its vicissitudes are portrayed in films like *City of God*, *Mango Yellow* (Amarelo Manga, Claudio Assis, 2002), *Carandiru* (Hector Babenco, 2003), *Lower City* (Cidade Baixa, Sérgio Machado, 2005), and *Elite Squad*, and *Elite Squad: The Enemy Within* (*Tropa de Elite* and *Tropa de Elite 2 – O Inimigo Agora É Outro, José Padilha*, 2007 and 2010) they are contained in the representation of the urban space as a symptom of a naturalist impulse, an impulse that looks for legitimation by bringing to fore the "truth" about the "reality" in Brazil. In this sense, those films are reinforcing a consensus on the "appropriate" way to look at a given reality.

We can, for a final example, refer to Fatima Toledo's collaboration in the preparation of actors for *City of God*, *Lower City*, *Elite Squad*, among other contemporary films. In an interview to *Piauí* magazine entitled *How Not To Be An Actor*, Toledo defends that actors should not prepare for their roles according to Stanislavski's "What if…," which, according to her, is based on the "possibility of not being" (Toledo 2009, 54). She does not deny it that actor can "not be," but she argues that "being immediately awakens the sensorial. It's real! It's like in life!" (Toledo 2009, 54.) For Toledo, people are becoming desensitized and the expression "What if…" serves as a sort of security device that prevents people from acting. This search for the "real" is also present in her directorial debut, to come out in 2010, and which, according to the Piauí article, is provisionally entitled *Sobre a Verdade* (*On Truth*).

As we can see, there has a been a strong discourse in Brazilian film culture that appeals to a "real" constructed as "immediate," as if the characters were directly "denouncing" reality. Such search for the real – that can also be perceived in

the increasing production of documentaries – is, however, more often then not, coated with an aesthetic or narrative varnish to prevent from a traumatic encounter. Realism becomes a way to achieve a certain general truth about society, whose evils are artfully denounced. The group of films I dub Brand New Brazilian Cinema has taken a different approach towards realism, which is now associated with the affective force of the image, renouncing the efforts to form a "critical" image that explains society to the viewers.

In an upper middle-class Rio de Janeiro home, a deliveryman and his girlfriend, the housemaid, are caught red-handed by the owner of the house as they were trying to steal from the family she works for. The deliveryman takes the man as a hostage. A police officer who happened to be passing by invades the house in an attempt to stop the crime. His rashness leads to the hostage's death. This is how *Eye of the Storm*, directed by Eduardo Valente in 2009, starts. The story, however, does not unfold in a straightforward way. What we have in the first minutes of the film are images of the police officer entering the house, but we do not get to know what is happening inside, for what we see is a long shot of the façade. Violence is only heard, as off-screen sounds indicate that something has gone terribly wrong.

We are then taken into the coexistence of three temporalities: a) Zé Maria (Márcio Vito), the police officer, deals with the consequence of his intervention immediately after the crime; b) the hostage's family returns after five years to the scene of the crime, as widow Elisa (Dedina Bernadelli) tries to finally come to terms with the death of her husband; and c) deliveryman Betão (Raphae Sil) and housemaid Sandra (Luciana Bezerra) in the weeks before the murder. This narrative organization molds the film into an account of the capacity to articulate memory. Characters have very few interactions in a diegetic present and the story is only intelligible through a "common," a "community" that is created by the film's materiality. Narrative dispersal, then, is not a function of space, but of time. Films like *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2004) and *Babel* (Alejandro Gonzáles Iñarritú, 2006), for example, emphasize the (semi-)synchronous temporality of a geography that has to be re-imagined from narrative plots that are scattered across space. *Eye of the Storm*, on the contrary, stresses the re-articulation of disperse temporalities in the (semi-)homogenous space of Rio de Janeiro.

Furthermore, Valente's film explores narrative dispersion, but it is not so much concerned with the reconstruction of the truth about the crime, as a police report would be. Jacques Rancière (1996, 41) opposes politics to police – for him, police is a set of processes that produce aggregation and consent in societies, that organizes powers, the distribution of places and functions and the systems that legitimize

such distribution. Although *Eye of the Storm* does not totally refuse narrative intelligibility, it still lends more force to the images per se instead of stressing a need to clarify/justify actions. What is most important are the intensities that traverse the characters and characterize the image: silences, replicated gestures (lit cigarettes, bodies lying on the couch, talks on the phone). The film's politics has a lot to do with how the film memory is constructed: it is figured in the tension, created in the cinematography, between dimming images and insistent glimmer of people and things. Memory thus becomes a fine cloud of fireflies. The image is a battlefield where dark endeavors to engulf forms and forms are made to redefine themselves following re-framings and camera movements.

Without dismissing Giorgio Agamben's theorization about the coming community as an arena of the "common being/ being common" (but still thought of in terms of a messianic kingdom), I would like to explore the fireflies metaphor following George Didi-Huberman's discussion of the image as something that resists, like fireflies resisting in their fight both against irrational dark and the blinding light of spectacle. For Didi-Huberman the image of the fireflies evokes signals emitted by intermittence, the very precarious like of a community of those who remain (Didi-Huberman 2011, 149) and that share with the image the fact that they are very little: remains or fissures (Didi-Huberman 2011, 87). As in Valente's film, we have the notion of a community whose memory/history is not a totalizing horizon but, rather, a function of glimmers.

It is no accident that one of the most remarkable reconfigurations in the film is the father figure. The totem, the speech of the law, is in crisis. The dead father reappears in dreams and in home video images, a ghost, or rather, as will-o-the-wisp, ignis fatuus, cold light that emanates from the decomposition of organic matter. Zé Maria's relationship with his daughter is nearly incestuous and is threatened by his inability to deal with the consequences of the crime. Betão's father figure is his decadent alcoholic uncle. The film seems to suggest the dissolution of central figures, undertaken by both the narrative's agency and by the representation of the redistribution of social roles.

One of the most telling instances of the working of affects in *Eyes of the Storm* is, in fact, an apparently unimportant scene with Betão and his uncle. As in other sequences in the film there is little verbalization. The conversation is actually quite awkward, vacillating. The topics are never fully developed as uncle and nephew seem to fumble with words. The scene is marked by a graceful interaction that is not meant to be functional in the narrative but that exudes affect. Even when portraying unprivileged people, the film does not focus on description of

their social status or comment on injustice; on the contrary, it explores pauses and shadows, relying on affect in order to engage the spectator.

At the end of *Eye of the Storm* a song works as a post-scriptum. The lyrics say: "lá onde tudo acaba / longe da fala / tudo que afeta / é aqui" (there where it all ends / away from speech / all that affects / is here). Here we may have a hint that helps us understand the original title in Portuguese: *No Meu Lugar* can be literally translated as "in my place." As the song suggests, there is a place "where it all ends" and where "all that affects" is. This is the place where affect opens up the present for the reconstruction of memory through the very subtle, ever fragile glimmer of the image and of the characters, who are not agents in a narrative that emanates from the centre. In fact, they disperse events in affects which are small lights, forms that emerge in spite of all. This is the fireflies' movement, the paradoxical image that unfolds between the memory that fades and the memory that resists.

Another paradoxical image can be seen in a film released shortly after *Eye of the Storm*. In it, three lives look through a bus window. Three affection-images of characters who roam through the city. We watch them with apprehension, trying to find a scene, a narrative line that would situate them. And we are denied that. What we are given are instants (once again, glimmering) of lives embedded in subtle everyday plots. Their lightness is unbearable. That is the burden of *The Sky Above*, directed by Sérgio Borges.

The Sky Above portrays the lives of three lower middle-class people – a transexual prostitute and academic, a hare krishna telemarketing operator who loves football, and a disillusioned writer from Congo who has a disabled child. The multilayered characters are not portrayed as exotic/victimized others. In a way, Borges's films radicalize the performative immanence of film as images and lives are completely imbricated. The static shots with few re-framings leave a lot of space for the subtle variations in gestures and speech. The film is not about giving voice to the marginalized other; rather, it is concerned with the presentation of the intensities that form the lives in question. There is nothing programmatic, or "critical" in the sense of an impulse to explicate some kind of social evil.

Elena del Rio comments about performance that "in its fundamental ontological sense, performance gives rise to the real. While representation is mimetic, performance is creative and ontogenetic" (del Rio 2008, 4). So performances in the contemporary Brazilian cinema I am referring to are not a matter of registering the ephemeral, but of creating something new, new affects, new worlds. In *The Sky Above* the actors' bodies are extracting something new from the image in a process that Elena del Rio summarizes as such: "Thus the body simultaneously figures

as a normative structure regulated by binary power relations (on a molar plane of formed subjects and identities) and as an excessive, destabilizing intensity responsive to its own forces and capacities (on a molecular plane of impersonal and unformed becomings)" (del Rio 2008, 9). Del Rio also dismisses the idea that the performative force of films would be restricted to certain genres or filmic forms. She says: "Rather than depending upon a particular kind of film (a stabilizing condition inimical to the very disruptive function of the affective-performative), the eruption of affective-performative moments is a matter of a constantly fluctuating distribution of degrees of intensity between two series of images: those belonging to explainable narrative structures, and those that disorganize these structures with the force of affective-performative events" (del Rio 2008, 15).

Therefore, both fiction and documentary films can be affected by the forces of performance.

Indeed, if we take some of the recent documentary films produced by young filmmakers in Brazil, we will be able to see performance in the very core of a profound critique of truth. These films allow us to observe that not only does performance disorganize narrative strictures/structures, as proposed by Del Rio, but it is also a function of the image: we could say that the image itself is "performing" something. *The Sky Above* insists on static framing (we rarely see re-framings or de-framings) and its mise-en-scène values the subtle variations in the characters' lives, never the grand gestures. Blocs of everyday situations are presented without narrative coherence, as if the film were accepting life's irresistible contingency.

But what is even more troubling in Borges's film is the fact that these situations were staged by the characters for the camera. The film's realism is, then, the reality of those performances, of their coming to the world in a temporality that the film preserves without submitting it to a functionalist logic. The strength of its image in the very vaporous state of these lives. In this movement, world and image merge. And that brings the second paradox: the paradox of the critical potential of that which is rarefied.

These are some of the possible lines of force of a realism that is being refashioned in recent Brazilian films. These works are marked by an in-betweenness at the intersection of the impulse to keep a certain distance in order to see the world and to be immersed in it, in its intensities. They make us face paradoxes but don't immobilize us; on the contrary, they com-move us with their contradictory forces. The question that underlies this recent production is exactly how to grasp political configurations from such dispersive, fragmented, diffuse forces. Dispersion seems

to evoke dissolution. Subtlety can look like weakness, impotence. However, what interests me in the study of the politics of affects in the Brand New Brazilian Cinema are the connections between these affects and the complex social processes and issues like the reconstruction of memory and the possibility of creating a world along with the image are examples of such connections.

Considering that representation works by means of immobilization, and spatialization, it conveniently becomes a process through which we "interpret" the always implied referent. The analogies and correspondences it creates between elements are produced to the detriment of their differences, movements and changes. However, we can argue that the affective potential of film is not that it resembles the objects it represents (the iconic nature of cinema). This potential would lie in the capacity of the film to defy the limitations of the intellect, drawing us not to a chain of action and reaction, but to a zone of indeterminacy between perception and action, one that leaves us with no straight forward "response" to the images.

In this perspective, the body no longer reassures reality, identities or self – on the contrary, it is exposed to variations, fluxes, and mutations. This much more complex understanding of what a body can do surpasses the widespread simplification that "the body thinks". What this platitude fails to perceive is that the variations and intensities that traverse the body force us to think about something that, from its origins, belongs to the sphere of the unthinkable. The body makes us think about that which is not thinkable.

Affects emerge in the cinema I am talking about both in the creative encounters in the filmmaking processes and in the reconfigurations of relations between characters that suggest new models for being together. And it is affect that is at stake when our response-ability (to use Marco Abel's terminology) is at stake as spectators. Cinema may thus become, as Nicole Brenez puts it, "that creature haunted by heterogeneity which, more than knowing itself, prefers to verify that something else is still possible (a body, a friend, a world)" (1997).

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The New Realistic Trend in Contemporary World Cinema: Ramin Bahrani's *Chop Shop* as a Case Study[1]

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Abstract. In the last two decades there has been an international resurgence of realistic films, i.e., films directed by filmmakers who believe in the ontological power of reality and, at the same time, in the capacity of the medium's expressive scope for building a story without undermining the viewer's impression of reality. On the one hand, this new movement is a rehabilitation of the cinematic Realism that throughout the history of film has touted cinema as an open window to the real world, a view particularly exemplified by Italian Neo-Realism. On the other hand, this new trend has given new life to the Realist film theories championed mainly by André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer. Bazin defines the Realist style as "all narratives means tending to bring an added measure of reality to the screen" (1971, 27). In the article titled *Neo-Neo Realism* (2009), A. O. Scott discusses a number of filmmakers whom he categorizes within the new Realist trend in contemporary American independent cinema. Among these is Ramin Bahrani, director of the film *Chop Shop* (2007). Bahrani is a US-born filmmaker of Iranian origin, based in New York. Abbas Kiarostami is one of his main points of reference. Kiarostami, as Scott notes, "refined the old Neorealist spirit through the 1990s and into the next decade." Bahrani himself acknowledges this influence with his desire to make "an Iranian-style movie here in New York."

Keywords: Ramon Bahrani's *Chop Shop*, realism, contemporary American independent cinema.

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Introduction

"What is more real in our universe than a man's life, and how can we hope to preserve it better than in a realistic film?" These words are Albert Camus's, and with this quote Roy Armes opens the first part of his book titled *Patterns of Realism*, which he wrote about Italian Neo-Realism in 1971. With his rhetorical question, Camus identifies two of the main bastions upholding any Realist project: on the one hand, the object of study is reality itself, which is the reference point throughout the creative process; and on the other, reality is constructed according to certain expressive codes that define a particular style, which is known in the different forms of artistic expression – painting, literature, and film – as the Realist style. This is all with the intention of representing as accurately as possible, returning to the words of Camus, the reality that has aroused the interest of an author who, for whatever reason, has been drawn to it.

Nevertheless, although it may be among the author's intentions to capture reality as honestly as possible, that representation can never be an exact reproduction of reality, as the nature of representation in itself prevents this. Thus, André Bazin (1971, 26) speaks of the "illusion of reality;" however, that illusion, according to the predicates of the French critic himself, should be as close as possible to its referent, of course within the "limits of the logical demands of cinematographic narrative and of the current limits of technique," since, as Colin MacCabe notes (1976, 9), "for Bazin, as for almost all Realist theorists (among others, Lapsley and Westlakem 1988, Bill Nichols 1991, and Brian Winston 1995), what is in question is not just a rendering of reality but the rendering of a reality made more real by the use of aesthetic device." Thus, according to these theorists, Realism is a set of conventions and norms for representing reality transparently, thereby achieving what Stephen Prince (1996, 31) calls the "reality effect." This set of codes is known as the Realist style.

It is an undeniable fact that over the last two decades the international film scene has seen a significant number of independent films with an authorial tone that have taken the real world as their point of reference, approaching that real world through the application of a Realist style. These films have had a notable impact both at major festivals and with international critics. An example of the latter is the article written by A.O. Scott (2009) of *The New York Times* titled *Neo-Neo Realism*. In this article, Scott, one of the most renowned critics in New York City, echoing the expression used to define Italian cinema of the post-war era, describes the new Realist trend in contemporary American independent

cinema as Neo-Neo Realism.[2] This new movement began in the early 1990s and although it would have a worldwide impact it developed mainly as a national trend in certain countries. Perhaps the one that has had the greatest impact has been the Iranian movement, with internationally acclaimed directors like Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and Jafar Panahi. As will be discussed below, Iranian films have been among the main sources of inspiration for the director of the film examined in this article.

As noted above, the main point of reference for this type of film is the work of Italian film-makers such as Roberto Rosellini, Luchino Visconti, and Vittorio de Sica, who, after the end of World War II, "by taking their cameras out into the streets and forgetting the dead rules of conventional film-making, come face to face with reality again" (Armes 1971, 20). Thus, the dramas were found on the streets of a Europe destroyed after the war; all that was needed was the ability to observe this mutilated reality to find the seeds of possible stories that told of the terrible consequences for a society torn apart by military conflict. It must be said – and herein lies the main ongoing influence of Italian Neo-Realism – these directors knew how to approach reality the right way. They did this through a Realist style that could both reproduce and represent reality on the screen in an authentic manner, avoiding the artificiality that characterised studio film prior to World War II.

However, "the creative treatment of actuality," to appropriate the famous expression attributed to John Grierson, can be traced back to the early 1920s, to two film-makers for whom reality was also the benchmark: André Antoine and Robert J. Flaherty. Nonetheless, unlike their predecessors, the Lumière Brothers, rather than merely reproducing reality, these film-makers construct it creatively, taking storytelling strategies from the fictional narrative style of popular cinema, which was already dominant by that time. *La terre* (*Earth*, André Antoine, 1921) is the result of years of filming in the Beauce region south-west of Paris. In order to avoid the artificiality of stories acted out in the studio, Antoine travelled to the Beauce region to adapt the Émile Zola novel of the same name, set in this French region in the late 19th century (the novel was published in 1887). Thus, Antoine's work (both his films and the plays with which he began his career) was influenced by the Naturalist and Realist postulates of 19th century literature represented particularly by Zola and fellow French writer Honoré de Balzac (see Erich Auerbach 1946).

2 Scott's critique focuses mainly on productions released in 2008 and 2009, made, among others, by So Yong Kim, Ramin Bahrani, Lance Hammer, Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck, and Kelly Riechardt.

As Quintana (2003, 69) points out, Antoine's adaptation of *La terre* establishes one of the basic elements of cinematic realism: "the difficulty of finding a balance between film reproduction and the rhetorical processes of reality construction that are characteristics of fiction." Indeed, in *La terre* this balance was not fully achieved. Both the artificiality of an excessively forced interpretation, which undermines the authenticity of the story narrated (the actors were not real peasants but actors from the Comédie Française and the Odéon Theatre in Paris), and the excessive dependence on dramatic structure detract from the more realistic scenes where rural life in this region of France takes the central role. As a result, "the most interesting moments in *La terre* occur when the drama takes second place and the dominance of the landscape reduces the bodies of the actors to the status of mere figurative extras" (Quintana 2003, 70).

On the other hand, this adulteration of reality through excessive dramatization of the narration is less of a problem in the film shot in this same period by Robert J. Flaherty. In his case, referential reality is much more distant and exotic than in the case of Antoine. The Barren Lands and the Eskimos who inhabit it were the subject of the *Nanook of the North* (1922), Flaherty's first film. As Robert Sherwood (1979, 16) notes, "Mr. Flaherty had to spend years with the Eskimos so that he could learn to understand. Otherwise, he could not have made a faithful reflection of their emotions, their philosophy, and their endless privations." An Eskimo, Nanook, was the one selected to become the character. Thus, unlike in Antoine's film, a real person is the protagonist of the plot constructed to represent reality. Through tracking Nanook's life, Flaherty vested the movie with temporal continuity as well as dramatic structure. But unlike Antoine, Flaherty manages to achieve a perfect balance between the reproduction of reality and its dramatisation, thereby successfully conveying the illusion to spectators that everything shown on the screen is real.

To differing degrees, these two films and the works of Italian Neo-Realism can be considered examples of what Bazin defined as the Realist style, which he describes as "all narrative means tending to bring an added measure of reality to the screen" (1971, 27). These films are also points of reference for the new resurgence of the Realist style in contemporary film, a movement which in turn has revived an interest among film theorists in cinematographic Realism. Thus, in recent years a significant number of essays have been published on this question, which, after being disparaged by the dominant theoretical movements of the 1960s and 1970s, has now regained a certain prominence in film studies. Indeed, in the past few years, and very especially in 2011, the Realist film theories championed

in the 1940s by André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer are resurfacing in the work of Richard Rushton (2011), Dudley Andrew (2011), Bert Cardullo (2011), and Lúcia Nagib (2011), among others. Contemporary Realism was even the topic of the special autumn issue of *Cinephile*: *The University of British Columbia's Film Journal*, edited by Shaun Inouye.

In short, the purpose of this article is to examine the codes that define the Realist style today, and how through the application of this style filmmakers can ensure, on the one hand, a perfect balance between the reproduction and construction of reality and, on the other, that this very dramatisation, developed with the purpose of eliciting an emotional response from the spectator, does not undermine the authenticity of reality on the screen, but, on the contrary, keeps the illusion or effect of that reality unadulterated, so that spectators experience the stories told as true stories. In order to assess the relevance of the Realist style in contemporary film, I have analysed a contemporary film by a director who, according to Scott, forms part of the new Realist trend in contemporary American independent cinema. The director is Ramin Bahrani and the film in question is *Chop Shop* (2007).

Bahrani is a US-born filmmaker of Iranian origin. He has tried, despite the considerable distance involved, to keep in touch with his cultural roots through contact with the well-known Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, whom we could define as his film-making mentor and who, as Scott (2009) notes, "refined the old Neorealist spirit through the 1990s and into the next decade." Bahrani himself acknowledges this influence through his desire to make "an Iranian-style movie here in New York."[3]

Real Life as Subject

As MacCabe (1976, 9) notes, "by the criteria of one of the great Realist critics, André Bazin, for a film to be realistic, it must locate its characters and action in a determinate social and historical setting." The specific reality dealt with in this film is relatively unknown; the Willets Point neighbourhood in Queens, although paradoxically it is located in the city most often portrayed in the history of film, New York City. Willets Point is one of the most neglected areas of Queens, popularly known as the Iron Triangle for its chop shops. "Chop Shop" in the local slang means an undercover workshop where cars are broken up for spare parts to be sold on the black market, thus making the whole area an authentic junkyard, a particular diegetic universe, full of dismantled cars and unpaved dirty streets

3 This quote is taken from an interview with Scott, and is quoted in Scott's article.

in which the puddles only dry up during the hot days of summer. [Figs. 1–2.] The film lifts the curtain by placing this real location in context. The director chooses a setting outside the neighbourhood to focus on the distant skyscrapers of Manhattan, as if letting the audience know from the beginning that this is, although it does not seem like, a story set in New York City. [Fig. 3.]

Later in the movie, Bahrani also uses another First World symbol, the nearby City Field (the new stadium for the New York Mets baseball team), as a contrast to the Third World-esque Willets Point. [Figs. 4–5.] For Bahrani it was paradoxical to observe how quickly you could migrate from a place of despair to another where you could read on a giant billboard "Make Dreams Happen". Bahrani confesses he was curious to know "what dreams can happen in this place?," or in other words, how can the American Dream be so close yet so far away for those who live in Willets Point? Indeed, in this city one is constantly aware of the geographical proximity of such socially and culturally distant worlds.

It was, in fact, precisely this gray world of poverty that inspired the director to make the film. Thus, reality was the inspiration for the story. As Alain Cavalier points out, movies are born of an encounter. Bahrani's cinematographer, Michael Simmonds, came to Willets Point looking for a spare part for his car, immediately fell in love with the place and told Bahrani about it. After visiting the neighbourhood in the winter of 2004, Bahrani, whose first reaction was: "My God, this place is the world, the world in 20 blocks," motivated by that inner drive to understand a subject, whether it is far away or just around the corner, decided to make what would be his second feature film, *Chop Shop*, a project that came to fruition three years later.

As Jean Rouch claimed in his first short film, *Initiation à la danse des posseder* (*Initiation into Possession Dance*, 1949), "an essential condition for portraying reality is to be a part of it." Of course, Flaherty had already done this before him. It took him three years to shoot his first film, *Nanook of the North* (1922). Thus, as Rouch himself suggests (1962), "Flaherty believed that, in order to film some men belonging to a foreign culture, it was necessary first to know them." Likewise, as Viestenz (2009, 544–545) observes, the ethos of "first living, then filming" is posited not only by Flaherty but also by Christian Metz (1999, 356–359) in his essay *Aural Objects*: "In order for me to have tried to dismantle the 'objects' which so strike the native […] it was necessary that I be that native myself." Bahrani himself admits in his film's pressbook that he spent a year trying to become part of the world of the Latino children who spent their time in the workshops or roaming the streets of Willets Point. As Roy Armes points out (1971, 187), "the

basic material is experienced at first hand by the film-maker before the film is elaborated. De Sica studied the shoeshine boys before making *Sciuscià* and Rossellini went to Berlin before beginning work on *Germania anno zero*."

Thus, the observation of reality allowed him to pick and choose what interested him most: the kids. Bahrani himself admits in his film's pressbook: "I became increasingly interested in the lives of these young boys who worked and lived amidst grown men, in this very tough location. I wanted to know who they were, what kind of dreams they had, and how they managed the challenges and decisions that most of us as adults never have to face." Thus, the main character in *Chop Shop* is Ale (Alejandro Polanco), a child growing up on the street, who has to struggle with the hostile environment. Even though Ale is Latino, speaks Spanish, and is not a professional actor, he doesn't really belong to the group described above. He was born and grew up in Manhattan's Lower East Side. However, Bahrani knew how to solve this problem by sending Ale to soak up the local atmosphere. He thus spent six months in Rob Sowulski's shop – the real owner, who also plays himself in the film – before shooting started, learning firsthand the skills he would need rather than merely performing them in front of the camera. Ale points out in the film's pressbook: "Every day I would get like $30, I learned how to sand down cars, paint cars, and how to fix dents. I even learned how to drive! It was really hard but a lot of fun." He thus managed to become part of the neighbourhood, making friends and getting respect from adults to the point that, as the director says, "People in the Iron Triangle thought we were making a documentary about Ale, a boy who worked there, because they'd really seen him working there for so long." [Fig. 6.]

We can find the narrative of the child growing up on the street who has to struggle with a hostile environment in Vittorio de Sica's *Shoeshine* (*Sciuscià*, 1946), Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero*, 1948), and Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (*The Forgotten Ones*, 1950). As Bahrani himself recognizes, "if [Luis Bunuel's] *Los Olvidados* were to be made today in America, it would be made here," referring to Willets Point. Moreover, Ale reminds us of Alexandre Napoleon Ulysses Latour in Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1948), or, more recently, the leading children in contemporary Iranian Realism, for instance, Ahmed in Abbas Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987), Mina in Jafar Panahi's *The Mirror* (1997), Massoumeh and Zahra Naderi in Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple* (1998), to name a few. All of these children are real people from the reality that has been selected as subject, who are picked out to become the protagonists of the plots developed in the film. As Bazin notes (1971,

24), "The non-professionals are naturally chosen for their suitability for the part, either because they fit physically or because there is some parallel between the role and their lives." Bazin's words can be applied to anybody, whether an adult or a child. In the specific case of children, given their innocence and lower level of awareness of the mechanism of filmmaking, their performance may prove much more spontaneous and therefore more genuine. It is therefore no surprise that a film genre that aims for naturalness in its representation should have a preference for stories in which children are the protagonists.

Another hallmark that defines the Realist style is the focus on everyday routine. As Bill Nichols notes (1991, 165), "Realism builds upon a presentation of things as they appear to the eye and the ear in everyday life." Thus, in *Chop Shop*, through the point of view of Ale, the audience can see how the characters break up, sand, polish and paint cars, change tyres or lure customers to their shops and also show people in their time off, having fun playing dice or enjoying barbecues, while the ever-present Latin music can be heard blaring out in the background. As Bordwell points out (2009), *Chop Shop* features "a greater sense of 'dailiness.'"

Combining Threads of Routine Structures with Dramatic Structure

The reality in which these children live is not easy; on the contrary, it is full of travails and challenges that they have to face. Such conflictive situations are the perfect pretext for unfolding dramatic structures in the film. Thus, in Realist films there is a place for both dramatic structures and the threads of routine structures. Indeed, part of the success of this type of film lies in the ability to combine typically everyday activities with dramatic episodes. This balance is achieved by alternating moments in the film in which routines occupy the foreground with moments in which such routines move into the background. Generally, everyday activities play a more central role at the beginning of the film, where the presentation of the context and the activities carried out in that context are the focus of attention. As the story develops, these activities lose their importance, giving way to dramatic episodes. Nonetheless, scenes of everyday activities not only serve the purpose of presenting the reality in which the action occurs but also of planting information that will be of relevance later on in the narration when more dramatic situations unfold. As Bordwell notes (2009), "most of the routines establish a backdrop against which moments of change and conflict will stand out." To illustrate this point, Bordwell makes reference to the scene in which Ale and his buddy Carlos

discover that Ale's sister, Isamar, "has become one of the hookers who service men in the cab of a tractor-trailer [...]. Bahrani's script motivates their discovery by explaining that they habitually spy on the truck assignations [...]. In two later scenes, the truck-stop becomes an arena for conflict."

This situation proves very moving for Ale. As Greg G. Smith notes (2003, 102), "dense configurations of emotion cues to mark scenes in which characters make important *recognitions*." This recognition situation also marks a shift in the character's hardships. Although Ale's situation is not easy, he has a close friend, gets a job, gets a home, and, ultimately, gets his sister to live with him. Things are going well (positive value) and, moreover, he has a goal to improve his situation; as many cognitive film theorists point out,[4] goal-driven plotting is central to unfolding an emotional film structure. He wants a better life for Isamar and for himself, and so he works hard to save money to buy a van, which will be repaired to convert it into a push cart to sell food on the street. From this emotional turning-point to the end of the film, the character's situation goes from bad to worse. As is very common in classical narrative, the crisis unfolds in the climax, the peak dramatic moment, when Ale is faced with the most emotionally charged situation.

Ale ultimately decides to face the situation involving Isamar. Having so decided, he heads off again to the truck stop with the intention of putting a stop to his sister's activity. The moment is filled with emotion, mainly due to the fact that what is at stake for Ale is of vital importance to him, because, as Ed S. Tan notes (2009, 44) "without concerns, there can be no emotion; conversely, emotion signifies that some concern of the individual has been affected." At the same time, the scene seems real. And this is due mainly to Bahrani's style of direction. With the purpose of eliciting an authentic reaction from Ale, Bahrani took advantage of an incident that the youth had experienced when he was only nine years old. At that age, he witnessed a murder that seriously disturbed him. Bahrani thus took a fake gun and gave it to the man who was enjoying Isamar's services, telling him to put it to Isamar's head in order to add an element of terror to the situation. The strategy achieved its aim, striking an emotional chord in Ale. The anger provoked by his memory resulted in an aggressive response to the man with the fake gun. As Bahrani (Richard Porton 2008, 46) himself wonders: "is Ale's reaction acting or is it a documentary reaction to an event? It doesn't matter. There's only one question that matters: does it work and is it a good story?"

4 On character's goals, see Greg M. Smith, *Film Structure and the Emotion System*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Carl R. Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (University of California Press, 2009)

After this intense moment, Bahrani allows time to go by for the situation to cool down. Time for both Ale and Isamar to reflect about their situation; time to allow not only the external actions but also the internal action of the characters to unfold. Time for what Robert Bresson calls (1997) "sculpting the invisible winds through the motion of waves;" in other words, to make visible what is invisible, in this case the emotions of the characters. Thus, after the stormy night, the new day brings calm. With the dawn, a hopeful situation arises. A moment charged with emotion for the characters has passed, and reconciliation is extremely important to both. As Nichols points out (1991, 155), "emotional realism selects aspects of a scene in accordance with their emotional importance to characters." Just a few seconds are necessary to provoke this emotive moment, for three main reasons: firstly, as already stated, what is at stake for the characters is very important; secondly, after a series of negative situations, the mood of the narrative needs to be broken with a positive one (that is, after conflicts, a moment of pleasure is experienced at the end, even if the situation staged is as minimal as the return of a smile to the characters' faces and pigeons taking flight) [Fig. 11]; and thirdly, Ale's goal is partially achieved. As Bordwell points out (2009), "so we have an open, somewhat ambivalent ending – another convention of realist storytelling and modern cinema (especially after Neorealism). Life goes on, as we, and many movies, often say."

Searching for Naturalness and Authenticity

The prior cohabitation with the reality to be filmed, as noted earlier, and the subsequent rehearsals held in the same locations not only serve to start shaping the dialogues and actions, but also to begin structuring the plot to be acted out by the three children in this reality chosen as the context for the plot. Thus, in addition to allowing the children to begin assuming their roles in the story and establishing the relationships between them, the rehearsals helped them to begin adapting to the environment so that to some extent they begin to feel part of the reality of Willets Point. At the same time, the rehearsals were performed on camera, thereby mitigating the dreaded "camera effect." This is a key point, especially in cases where the characters are being performed by non-professionals. Thus, in *Chop Shop* the rehearsals also served to accustom the three children to the film equipment so as to reduce their consciousness of its presence during shooting. One of the essential purposes of all this preliminary work is to achieve the highest degree of naturalness and authenticity possible in the final product.

So that these two qualities would not be lost during filming, Bahrani and his cinematographer decided that they should apply documentary techniques. Thus, the actions in every scene had to be kept as simple as possible. As Bahrani expressed it: "In almost all of our conversations about how to shoot it, we would say, 'What's the simplest way?' Almost every scene is one shot, with sometimes quite complicated mise-en-scene, even though it may appear simple." Bahrani thus follows Bazin's theory (1971, 65) on the importance of respecting "the actual duration of the event." In this context, the words of film-maker Trinh T. Minh-Ha (2007–2008, 228) become especially relevant: "Real time is considered more 'credible' than film time, so that the long take [...] and to edit a minimum or not to edit [...] is considered the most appropriate [way] to avoid distortions in the structure of material." Another strategy that brings the film closer to reality is to allow the actors to improvise when shooting a scene. Bahrani would avoid saying "action" or "cut," in order to capture spontaneous footage of both the actors and the location. Sometimes even the crew could not distinguish between the script and the improvisations. Moreover, he often aims for spontaneity by changing the situation without telling the actors. As Vertov believes, the only way to make the sequence more real is precisely through spontaneity. Nonetheless, spontaneity was not the only strategy that Bahrani used during shooting; control was also extremely important. As Scott points out (2009), "transparency, immediacy and a sense of immersion in life are not the automatic results of turning on a camera but rather effects achieved through the painstaking application of craft." Thus, the camera movements, composition, and details into the frame were also adjusted and controlled by director and crew.

Therefore, another of the hallmarks of the Realist style is the tension between scripted situations, which are acted out by the characters, and unscripted situations that arise from the spontaneity of the moment. This is particularly true in unstaged public scenes where the only controlled aspect is the action of the main character. This happens in the scenes in which Ale and his friend Carlos sell candy on the subway or when Ale is waiting for his sister on the platform. In the first case, a small crew with a hand-held camera is the only way to shoot the scene without altering the environment in which the action unfolds. [Fig. 7.] In the second case, the effect is achieved by using lenses in a selective approach that keeps Ale in focus at all times, even though he often disappears into the crowd waiting for the train. [Fig. 8.] Both scenes are especially reminiscent of the Neorealist scenes. As Roy Armes (1971, 191) notes, "streets, crowds and railway-stations, the countryside and the sea all provide marvelously expressive

backgrounds for the film to use and the sense of life going on beyond the limits of the frame is one of the great qualities of this new cinema." Bazin, (2004, 313) referring to such scenes, said: "The subtlety and flexibility of the camera movements in these tight and crowded spaces, and the natural behavior of all persons in frame, are the main reasons that make these scenes the highlights of Italian cinema."

Conclusion

Chop Shop is a film that exemplifies the rebirth in the last two decades of a Realist trend in contemporary world cinema based on a belief in the ontological power of reality. This is the seed of the story, which is nurtured and grown through the contact that its author has with this reality throughout the creative process. Moreover, this reality is the real background in which the plot unfolds. And this reality can also become the foreground of the film, and can even change the plot during shooting. Thus, the tension between reality and fiction is one of the key aspects of Realism. Indeed, the question of how to integrate fiction into the real world without undermining the viewer's impression of reality is one of the main concerns of cinematic Realism, as the foremost purpose of this type of cinema is to make the film look real.

To achieve this, film-makers apply the Realist style, a set of conventions and norms which tell the story in the context of the real world using devices that are closer historically to the documentary genre and which allow the reproduction of reality so that what is filmed doesn't seem staged, but has the appearance of life unfolding before the camera. I refer here to the documentary's impulse for attaining that utopia of authenticity: making the film look real. On the other hand, this style also involves the dramatization of reality using devices from fiction to achieve character engagement (on this topic see the work of cognitive film theorists, especially Murray Smith [2004], Noël Carroll [2007], and Amy Coplan's works [2009]), which is central to the spectator's emotional response to a film. The proper balance between these two devices is crucial to the success of the Realist approach to reality, since the more realistic the effect achieved in the film, the truer the emotions that surface on the screen.

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Unsettling Melodies: a Cognitive Approach to Incongruent Film Music

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> "One cannot listen and look at the same time. If there is a dispute, sight, as the most developed, the most specialized, and the most generally popular sense, always wins. Music which attracts attention or the imitation of noises is simply disturbing."
>
> Jean Epstein (*Magnification*, 1977, 15)

Abstract. *Incongruent film music* is a soundtrack, either diegetic or non-diegetic, which expresses qualities that stand in contrast to the emotions evoked by the events seen. The present article aims at covering two interconnected areas; the first is comprised of a critical recapitulation of available theoretical accounts of incongruent film music, whilst the second part of the paper offers an alternative, embodied-cognitive explanation of the audio-visual conflict which arises from this particular type of incongruence. Rather than regarding it as a phenomenon that works through disrupting conventions, we stress a perceptual-cognitive reason behind incongruence's emotional strangeness.

Keywords: film music, affective congruence, polarization, incongruence, cognitive-ecological theory.

The remarkable torture scene from Quentin Tarantino's 1992 black comedy crime film *Reservoir Dogs* is a cinematic moment that has worked its way into the collective memory of moviegoers over the last twenty years. It depicts Michael Madsen's gangster character, "Mr Blonde," torturing a police officer that is being held hostage, seemingly for no other reason than for his own sadistic pleasure. When the scene culminates violently in Madsen's cutting of the helpless cop's right ear with a razorblade, this shocking event is not the only contributor to the scene's idiosyncratic, memorable qualities. The clear and foregrounded presence of a "bubble gum" pop song, which happens to be on the radio, conspires with the visuals as an evenly disturbing choice. From the moment when Mr Blonde turns on the radio,

the song, Stealer's Wheel's *Stuck in the Middle with You*, immediately calls for attention. As the cop loses his ear and is doused in inflammable oil, the unbearably light song remains constantly present, adding an emotive quality that feels highly inappropriate to the horrific events it accompanies. It is precisely this phenomenon that is of our interest here. We will refer to it as "*incongruent film music*," a musical track in narrative film, either diegetic or non-diegetic, which expresses qualities that stand in sharp contrast to the emotions evoked by the events seen.

Conflicting soundtracks generate an emotional impact that is of a substantially different nature than the affect of traditional, congruent film scores. Yet, despite their often memorable status, these salient moments have not often been described as a specific affective device. The goal of this paper, first of all, is to contest the assumption that the striking effect of such music arises merely or mainly from its novelty and estrangement from film music's conventions of congruence. After all, if it were only for such music's unexpectedness or self-consciousness to create an audio-visual shock, the practice would already be out-dated given its presence in a wide array of (more or less "mainstream") films. Secondly, although the instances of musical incongruity may differ in some respects, we believe that there are overlapping resemblances in the emotional impact that these scenes attempt to invoke. Yet, rather than providing any typology, tracing a history of cases or investigating cultural origins and implications, this paper focuses on the perceptual-emotional conflict that incongruent film music forces us to endure. More precisely our aim is to analyse and explain how audio-visual incongruence works on our multi-modal cognitive processing, interpretation, and emotional evaluation. We propose that the particular affect produced in the emotional collision of music and visuals results from a distinct cognitive interplay. This interplay, as we argue, results from our (evolutionary) propensity to perceive and process cross-modally, combining sensory data from different senses pre-consciously. Looking at cognitive and ecological underpinnings, our approach will explain the practice and effect of incongruent film music that precedes any culturally influenced interpretation. This cognitive approach also enables us to define incongruent film music as a historically recurring strategy of audio-visual affect in its own right. Lastly, such a perspective helps to re-evaluate conventional assumptions on congruence that are implied in many earlier theoretical accounts on film music.

In different forms, incongruent film music can be found throughout the history of narrative film soundtracks,[1] in fact, some instances have become highly

1 By focusing on classical narrative film, we mean to exclude not only documentaries, but also, more importantly, other traditions of non-classical, artistic filmmaking.

prominent in narrative film history. One can think, for example, of scenes in the films of Stanley Kubrick (e.g. Vera Lynn's *We'll meet Again* in the final scene of *Dr. Strangelove* [1964], Malcolm McDowell's sadistic rendition of *Singing in the Rain* in *A Clockwork Orange* [1971]), or the violent climax of the baptism scene in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* [1972], when the church organ accompanies the assassinations). The practice can moreover be found recurrently in classical Hollywood movie scenes as a means of ironic comment. Musical-emotional incongruences also recur in more explorative narrative cinema, like in the films of David Lynch (such as the song *In Heaven*, performed by "the lady in the radiator] [Laurel Near/Peter Ivers] in *Eraserhead* [1977] or the playing of Roy Orbison's *In Dreams* in *Blue Velvet* [1986], which outrages Dennis Hopper's Frank Booth character), or the shockingly unexpected, and seemingly unmotivated, appearance of Naked City's *Bonehead* in the exposition of Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997 and also 2007), to name just a few.

Yet, as we will prove shortly, traditional film music theory uncritically and persistently builds on assumptions of how, in order to be emotionally effective, classical narrative cinema's film music should remain congruent and subordinated to the images and the story. This is in accordance with the view that film techniques, such as editing, supposedly should remain "invisible" and subordinated to narrative action, and in this way, film music's role has been constrained to be that of an unnoticed emotive manipulator. According to this somewhat uncritical view, film music should remain at all times "unobtrusive" – to be "heard" only on a subconscious level. Conflicting music then, as these studies assume, could point directly to a film's artificiality and its manipulative intentions – a simple explanation which foregrounds non-diegetic music's fundamentally unnatural role in any story world.

One of the theoretical works that most enduringly represents this view is Claudia Gorbman's eloquently entitled *Unheard Melodies* (1987). Gorbman's widely acclaimed book is firmly rooted in the 1970s and '80s paradigm of psychoanalytical film theory and its reliance on conceptions of film viewing as a "suspension of disbelief." Jeff Smith, in his 1996 article *Unheard Melodies? A Critique of Psychoanalytic Theories of Film Music*, aptly shows how the idea of unobtrusiveness in film scoring has fundamentally shaped psychoanalytic

Experimental film, art cinema, and other avant-gardes have long since experimented with a broad range of incongruent elements, including sound and image. The reason for exclusion is that such films lack the mimetically evoked immersion and emotions that classical narrative films exploit, making them different objects of study that are (for now) outside of the scope of this paper.

film theory's accounts of film music. For Gorbman, film music has a crucial role in strengthening viewers' immersion and attaching them emotionally to the visually presented fiction. Crucially, she argues for a central position of the "unheardness" in film music's affective capabilities. According to Gorbman, the double functions of film music are to *semiotically* prevent viewers from finding unclear or ambiguous signification, as well as to *psychologically* enhance their immersion by means of film music's capacities to bridge visual discontinuities and propel the flow of events and narration (Gorbman 1987, 58–59).

The view proposed by Gorbman entails that it is only by means of congruence that the music in narrative film can enhance viewer immersion. After all, it is congruence that helps music to remain unobtrusive and supplemental to the narrative. As Gorbman notes, "were the subject to be aware (fully conscious) of its [that is the music's] presence as a part of the film's discourse, the game would be all over" (Gorbman 1987, 64). From this psychoanalytical point of view, congruency is not only regarded as the most common mode of film scoring (which it undoubtedly is), but is also deemed to be a necessary precondition in order for film music to be emotionally effective. However true this may be for the majority of film soundtracks, this explanatory framework is not able to unfold the emotional affect of incongruence.

Even though our viewing experiences prove that incongruent film music does not necessarily break immersion as radically as psychoanalytic accounts presume, its salience may put the viewer in a troubling emotional state or bring semiotic confusion. Whilst cheerful sounding tunes do not complement explicit violence either psychologically or semiotically, we can relate to our own confrontations with scenes in *Reservoir Dogs* or *The Godfather*, where neither displeasure nor disturbing awareness of obtrusive techniques blocked our emotional experience and narrative involvement. Although we were consciously *aware* of the collision taking place, this awareness did not divert but rather enhanced these scenes' emotional effects. In conclusion, we strongly feel that the somewhat logical, but still problematic stance of psychoanalytic theories on musical-emotional congruence provides some untenable assumptions in these cases.

Modes of incongruence in film music have been observed by many film theorists over the years. Scholars and critics have mostly noted a practice that is labelled by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson as "*ironic contrasting*" (Bordwell & Thompson 2008, 302). Claudia Gorbman similarly describes how directors have often used (mostly diegetic) appearances of (mostly popular) songs to achieve a contrasting irony towards the accompanied narrative events (Gorbman 1987, 23–

24). Drawing on what Michel Chion called such music's "anempathetic" relation to the fiction (Chion 1994, 8–9), Gorbman notices a sense of irony arising from the music's unawareness or indifference to the unfolding dramatic developments. In this way the incongruent music comes to function as a kind of authorial ironic comment that expounds the narrative action.

Defining incongruent film music as ironic contrast allows for many examples – see the previously mentioned cases of films by Stanley Kubrick for instance. Yet, there are several arguments against reducing incongruent film music's manifold functions to being merely ironic. First of all, in his article *Popular Songs and Comic Allusions in Contemporary Cinema* (2001) Jeff Smith has rightly noted that in these cases irony functions more often linguistically than musically. To achieve an ironic effect, popular songs in film (either diegetic or non-diegetic) often create a play of meaning through bisociative implications of a song's title or lyrics (Smith 2001, 428). In such instances, the sense of irony is not primarily triggered by incongruent musical emotions, but mostly as a result of noticed lexical ambiguities – like indefinite pronouns in the songs' title or a lyrical shift of meaning, for example from figurative to literal (e.g. the re-contextualized meaning of being "stuck in the middle with you" during *Reservoir Dogs*' torture scene). Our second argument presents a perhaps more obvious point, according to which, not all incongruent film music is felt to be ironic. Although many examples provide clear emotional collisions between their musical and visual tracks, they do so without any trace of irony (see the light classical music that accompanies the assassinations in *The Godfather* or the explicit torture scene in Chan-wook Park's 2003 film *Oldboy*, which is countered with a light Vivaldi piece from *The Four Seasons*). Moreover, even when an ironical component seems to be present, "irony" may sometimes be hardly sufficient to fully cover the complex emotional impact of the audio-visual collision. In *Reservoir Dogs*, for example, the gruesomeness of the torture of cutting off someone's ear is simply too abject to hold a merely ironic relation to the music by use of some comic effect. Actually many viewers have experienced this scene as not being amusing at all and, to some extent, have even considered it revolting.[2] It seems to us that in these cases feelings of irony serve more as a "naturalization" of an emotional conflict. We will consider the sensation of irony to be one possible hermeneutic result from the felt conflict of incongruence, where the likelihood

2 Multiple accounts exist of viewers walking out of the first *Reservoir Dogs* screenings in 1992 because of this specific scene – see John Hartle's illustrative article in the *Seattle Times* (Hartle 1992).

of such a response depends on the viewer, the context of the narrative situation, and the nature of the music.

Aiming for a more thorough investigation related to functions of incongruent film music, we propose a shift in the explanatory perspective. The first key question is "how can we be, at the same time, *aware* of musical incongruence, as well as being emotionally *affected* and manipulated by it?" Although audio-visual incongruence can surely create a sense of confusion or disturbance, we argue that it does so *within* our immersive experience of the narrative world, and not by wholly disrupting it in some Brechtian fashion. As noted, much of the problematic points in psychoanalytic approaches to film music emerged from the discrepancy between the music's ability to give clear cues and bits of narrative information on the one hand, and notions of its supposed "inaudibility" to avoid a rupture in the immersion on the other (Smith 1996). We agree with Smith that an appropriate theory should not reduce the viewer to a passive receptacle who treats all the presented emotions as its own, but acknowledge a dynamic relation between musical information and the viewer. In his article *Movie Music As Moving Music* (1999), Jeff Smith provided approaches to film music from a cognitive perspective, attempting to theorize the relation between film music and emotion while overcoming some of the problems of psychoanalytical methods (Smith 1999, 148). Drawing from the work of Smith, who builds on Peter Kivy, Joseph D. Anderson, and Annabel J. Cohen, our proposed framework brings together the findings of key researches in the field of film, music, and cognition. This will enable us to study film music on the fundamental levels of perception, cognition, and emotion, thereby bypassing the untenable theory that discards incongruence in psychoanalytic approaches.

According to Smith it is too often overlooked that all emotions are composed of both affective and cognitive components (Smith 1999, 155). Following Peter Kivy's division between music as *expression* and music being *expressive of* (Kivy 1989, 12–26), i.e., between primary feeling and recognizing emotions in music, the distinction is between emotions that are *evoked* by a scene and its accompanying music (e.g. creating empathy, offering the spectator emotional *arousal*), and emotional components that are *communicated* by film music (e.g. indicating a character's emotional state, thus influencing the viewer's *judgement*). Affect and judgement "each may take precedence over the other at different moments to produce a range of possible responses" (Smith 1999, 156). Because of its reliance on psychological immersion, psychoanalytic theory tends to overlook these dynamics of communication, presuming that viewers claim all associated

emotions as their own. We can note that in the case of radical audio-visual incongruence, music never seems to directly *arouse* the emotions expressed through its own musical qualities. What is more, cheerful music accompanying visual brutalities does not make us *feel* more cheerful (on the contrary).

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the questions raised by psychoanalytic theory regarding audio-visual incongruence and immersion. As Gorbman presumes, one would think that in highly conflicting situations viewers would instantly decide to discard the accompanying music as incongruent, conflicting, or simply mismatched in order to consciously marginalize its emotional impact. Yet, we can note that film viewers still tend to accept even clearly conflicting music as referential to the images. How else for instance could *Oldboy*'s non-diegetic Vivaldi piece affect us at all? At this point it is crucial to ask what compels us to accept such music as referential to the images, without harming our immersion in the fiction and our (partial) belief in its realism.

Convention has trained viewers to know and feel that musical accompaniments tell us something useful about how to interpret and evaluate narrative situations. Our reliance on film music's "usefulness" is partly habitual. Yet we must also note that this dependence too has a strong cognitive-ecological origin. In his 1996 book *The Reality of Illusion: An Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film Theory* Joseph D. Anderson reminds us of this aspect: "we are programmed by evolution to check and cross-check our perceptions multi-modally. […] The simple addition of musical accompaniment provides a second modality against which to check our impressions and provides confirmation on at least two levels" (Anderson 1998, 87). But why should we do this when the musical addition is clearly "false" and has seemingly no motivated role in the diegesis? Building on Lawrence Marks's (1978) multimodal theory, Anderson overcomes this question by arguing for an evolutionarily evolved cognitive process that binds sound and visual together, thus creates a percept of a single event (Anderson 1998, 86). On a basic cognitive level the sounds and images are perceived by film viewers as coming from *one* source – a single instant generating our perceptions. This is not strange if one considers the idea from an evolutionary perspective. The real world's natural environment never offers false sounds or artificially added music, and thus, ecologically speaking, anything we *hear* must somehow be part of the same situation we can also *see*. Detecting synchrony is a crucial part of our experience and perception of everyday reality.[3] In any case of film sound, synchrony masks

3 Synchrony alone is sufficient for the human processing system in linking the auditory and visual elements as one event. Multiple researches show a fixed tendency or even

the "true" non-diegetic source of the sound. When looking at a film, viewers are ecologically, even evolutionarily, biased in seeking for synchrony as a means to connect sound and image.

The presumption that all information originates from one coherent source can easily lead film viewers to search for patterns and correlations for bridging the modalities. After all, to unify our perceptions into something coherent, we must distil and interpret an unambiguous meaning from the multi-modal flows of information. With film music we favour congruence, as an inclination towards seamless connection being our basic perceptual disposition. We would argue that this bias of a single generating instant is what makes us readily ascribe the music, in terms of emotional or narrative information, to whatever is happening onscreen. For this reason, music and narrative images tend to conflate on a pre-conscious, or "unheard," level.[4] Music cognitivist Annabel J. Cohen has similarly suggested that in the cognitive selection and determination of narratively "useful" information, the semantic meaning of the musical track is detached from its acoustical source (Cohen 2001, 262). The music's semantic components are deemed useful as a source of relevant information and are processed separately in terms of their assistance to understanding what is seen. The acoustical dimensions, on the other hand, generally remain consciously unattended by cognition (although they do steer our visual perception in certain directions, for example, through temporal correlations). We suspect that immersion-breaking audio-visual collisions may be prone to emerge primarily when the incongruence concerns the music's fundamental acoustic or temporal elements. For example this may be at the heart of our estrangement when large deviations in rhythm or clearly flawed synchrony occur, as happens in Jean-Luc Godard's asynchronous or abruptly pausing soundtracks.[5] Verifying this claim would nevertheless require deeper, preferably empirical, research.

Everything considered, we assume that the binding of sound and image achieves an interpretational influence before it would be consciously evaluated as disruptively mismatched. Nevertheless, as Anderson too notes, following the

necessity of recognizing and attributing synchrony that is already present in very low-level, bottom-up, processes of multi-modal perception (Spelke 1979, Hummel & Biederman 1990, Revonsuo 1999).

4 Presumably, it can only be on the basis of such traits and "flaws" in human cognition that film music has been able to gain its status as an almost unquestioned realistic effect in the cinema, despite its lack of mimetic abilities that we would objectively consider "realistic."

5 See for example the recurrently interrupted extra-diegetic music in *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965) or the temporal disjunctions of sound and image in *La Chinoise* (1967), *Weekend* (1967), and *Passion* (1980).

initial comparing of rhythm, meter and temporal congruencies with the visual, "there is comparison of the tone and emotion of the sounds and/or music with the event unfolding on the screen, perhaps the very emotion of the music confirming or denying the validity of the viewer's response to what is seen" (Anderson 1998, 87). For incongruent film music, this emotional response becomes the most significant, bringing about the question: how does incongruent music influence and impact viewers' visual perception and emotional evaluation?

There is no need for theoretical explanations to realize that it is always the music that exerts a great deal of influence over the emotional qualities of an image, whereas the visual content is hardly able to alter the emotional affect in the music. Music's emotive meaning is thus constant; that of the visual track is relatively unstable and changeable. This insight is at the core of the two cognitive processes, *affective congruence* and *polarization*, that Jeff Smith (1999) distinguishes as the two overarching affective functions of film music. In the process of *affective congruence* the music emotionally matches the visual and narrative events, thereby heightening the viewer's emotional experience. When the emotional and semantic qualities of the visual and narrative events are largely similar to those expressed by the music, they reinforce each other, possibly leading to a stronger arousal of emotions in the viewer. During *polarization*, on the other hand, the emotive qualities of music and the visual are not unambiguously matched – i.e. they do not express exactly the same emotional meaning. This is not to be confused with the incongruence we are concerned with in this article. As for polarization one should think of a slight discrepancy, or perhaps an emotionally "neutral" image accompanied by music that is expressive of some emotion. This audio-visual constellation leads to an interaction in which "the affective meaning of music moves the content of the image towards the character of that music" (Smith 1999, 160). Annabel J. Cohen has conducted various experiments on this process, for example, by testing the effects of different accompanying music on the evaluation of short animated films presenting moving geometric figures (Cohen & Marshall 1988, Cohen 1993). In these cases the emotive qualities that viewers ascribed to the film were moved towards the qualities expressed by the music. In this sense film music functions as a semiotic signifier, guiding viewers' judgements. Cohen explains how the music guides us through the interpretation of an image, directing viewers' attention (since temporal congruencies tend to steer viewers' attention), consequently altering the perceived meaning. As Jeff Smith concludes, auditory elements systematically shape the denotative and affective meanings of the visual (Smith 1999, 161).

Incongruent cases seem to disregard this general rule. Even though incongruent music may feel disorienting, unsettling, or ironical, when it stands in clear conflict with the visual, music does not move the visually perceived towards its own contrasting emotional qualities. It is likely that whenever the audio-visual incongruence becomes radical, the natural processes of congruency and its corresponding modes of affect are suspended. Empirical findings back up this assumption. For example Annabel J. Cohen noted that when music and visuals are in clear conflict, the musical affect is marginalized and the visual information tends to take precedence over the audio (Cohen & Marshall 1988). Although this only describes a tendency and not a fixed mechanism, it is assumable that when primary, cognitively impenetrable, tests of audio-visual correlation fail, viewers generally tend to rely on the visual information over the audio.[6] This could be an underlying reason of why violent images are specifically effective in creating and maintaining audio-visual incongruence: violent images are viscerally strong and emotionally unambiguous hence capable of resisting the interpretational polarization of the accompanying music. The lack of these effects demonstrates that audio-visual incongruence is different from Smith's category of polarization.

But what functions remain for the conflicting music then? Anderson notes that "If musical and visual information are in conflict in any of these instances [i.e. in *synchrony*, *rhythm*, or *emotion*], the conflict will force the viewer to go back and re-evaluate earlier reactions, to reinterpret the patterns and the significance of the filmic events" (Anderson 1998, 87). Yet, re-evaluation does not seem to be at the core of incongruent film music. While watching *Oldboy*, we do not re-evaluate or reinterpret the whole film, nor the particular scene of torture because of the incongruent music. Anderson's statement seems to be directed more at the narrative implications, rather than at any emotional effect. Marilyn G. Boltz (2004) offers another suggestion, following empirical tests on film music and cognition in terms of our interpretation, emotional affect and memory. The results of Boltz's experiments with viewers watching short clips paired to diverse musical soundtracks show that mood-congruent pairs of film and music are jointly encoded, leading to an integrated memory code. This encoding underlines our argument on how film and music tend to be coupled strongly in cognition.

6 In cases of narrative films, on the one hand, the primacy of visual information over the audio could include, even be reinforced by, viewers' *narrative* interest. On the other, *ecological* point of view, visual information's dominance could be easily justified from an evolutionary perspective, as it could refer to survival skills, which dodge those very rare situations, when nature's voices aren't reliable to the dangers of the – seen – environment.

"A joint encoding," according to Boltz, "may be more likely to occur in cases of mood congruency in which musical affect can direct viewers' attending toward those aspects of a film with a similar connotative meaning and thereby integrate music and film into one coherent framework" (Boltz 2004, 1196). As for cases of incongruence, Boltz's findings suggest that viewers tend to perceive conflicting film music as separated from the visuals. After all, "the emotive meaning of [incongruent] music conflicts with that of the film, so that it is not always clear where attending should be directed or how the conflict of information can be resolved within one interpretative framework. Given that music and film seem relatively dissociated from each other in this situation, each may be encoded independently of the other" (ibid). However, we are bound by justice to say that this finding refers only to a tendency measured in short clips viewed under rather unnatural circumstances. Even Boltz herself notes that in an immersive, full-length narrative fiction film, the outcomes may be different: "On an experiential level, the use of ironic contrast often seems to result in a vivid memory of the film information. For example, ironically contrasted scenes from *A Clockwork Orange* are very memorable, perhaps even more so than they would be if they had originally been accompanied by mood-congruent music" (Boltz 2004, 1203).

Concluding the above, it is not some separate encoding or a disjunction in memory representation that makes incongruent film music an emotionally powerful audio-visual strategy. Nevertheless, there is a key notion in Boltz's statement that, when film music remains highly incongruent, it is not clear for viewers *where* to direct their attention or *how* to solve the emotional problems within a single interpretative framework. In relation to Boltz's conclusion, Anderson's remark, originally concerning silent films, may be applicable to incongruence too: "Consider the possibility that the absence of the opportunity to confirm our perceptions cross-modally might account for our discomfort in viewing a silent film without accompaniment. If we are programmed by evolution to check and cross-check our perceptions multi-modally, the inability to do so might well make us fundamentally, vaguely uneasy" (Anderson 1998, 87).

Crucially, the cognitive accounts of film music – whether it is Smith's affective congruence and polarization, Cohen's and Boltz's experiments or Anderson's ecological considerations on multi-modality – all point to the same processes of viewers seeking to interpret in favour of congruence. Essentially, these processes are nothing but economically driven attempts to bridge the gap of multimodal information in order to create a single, clear, cognitively consonant meaning. With incongruent film music – although the possibility to cross-check our perceptions

and interpretation is essentially given – these very processes fail on us as the audio-visual discrepancy blocks our shortcutting meaning-making routine. Although the music presents itself as a source of information (relying on our cognitive and habitual disposition), incongruent film music obstructs the process of cross-modal testing, since the affective qualities of information offered are in unanticipated conflict. We would argue that in the clearest cases of incongruent film music – that is when no affective polarization takes place or the conflict can not be inferentially resolved in terms of simple ironic allusions – the felt result follows from the evasion of the processes of correlative interpretation. The role of incongruent music is therefore one of a deliberate disturber of unambiguous meaning making and a clear-cut judgement. Sonic perception's failure to confirm or even disconfirm visual perceptions creates some vague uneasiness, an unsettling feeling, similar to the one as described by Anderson concerning silent cinema's soundless viewing experience. Due to audio-visual incongruence, which makes finding correlation between information from multimodal sources difficult if not impossible, a thwarted perception of a scene results in emotional uneasiness.

On the basis of these findings and sources, our paper concludes in a three-step explanation on the elemental functioning of incongruent film music. Note that this is not a definitive description of all instances, but rather principles that generally seem to surround cases of musical incongruence.

1.) *The music is presented as an aspect of the visual*. We argue that it is on the basis of both acquired convention and our cognitive disposition that one readily and pre-consciously ascribes emotional qualities in music to images. Following this viewer bias, filmmakers further justify incongruent music's place by means of stylistic devices. The most common is a method, through which incongruent music gets some diegetic validation. A good example is a diegetic song, only "accidentally" played on the radio, appearing at an inappropriate moment, as seen in *Reservoir Dogs*. Incongruence's conflict may become less jarring by calculated editing that creates temporal congruencies and correlations between music and visual. This can be achieved through rhythmic scene pacing (as can be seen in the case of *Oldboy*) or by smart crosscutting (as happens in *The Godfather*, where the church organ music originates from the baptism scene, yet is increased in volume after each cut to the assassinations). Such stylistic tricks create a stronger and more convincing perceptual and evaluative connection between the emotionally colliding audio and video tracks.

2.) *Our cognition attempts to bridge the multi-modal gaps.* It is when we try to bring together two contradictory flows of input, the same way we automatically

do in cases of congruence (cf. Anderson's single event perception), the emotional conflict becomes tangible. It becomes salient because the emotional gap between visual events and contrasting music holds emotional implications that are too strong to be seamlessly naturalized.

3.) *The conflict is upheld or even climaxed*. Incongruent film music disturbs unceasingly our emotional response to the given scene. We tend to feel somewhat "uneasy" because it seems as if our senses are letting us down. Confronted with emotionally contradictory flows of information, one cannot apply a single interpretative framework to the unsettling experience. This is the moment where the sense of irony or comedy may arise, since such feelings result precisely from a sustained or sudden incongruence. Incongruence's uneasy experience may necessitate further viewer response, such as different inferential strategies and interpretations that serve to naturalize the conflict, for instance ascribing it to an (implied) author persona or treating the conflict as symbolical.

It seems that when incongruent music is not guiding us towards a singular emotional response (through an inferential shift producing "a judgement" – cf. Smith), in order to resolve what exactly is happening, the situation requires the viewer to focus more on the visual aspects of the actual narrative event. In this case, following an ecologically determined trajectory (cf. Cohen & Marshall 1988), the viewer is exerting an inferential effort to derive meaning from the visual track *only*. Thus, ultimately and somewhat paradoxically, incongruent music may emphasize and strengthen the power of the image on its own.

Conclusion

This preliminary explanation is only a first attempt to connect all the different modes of incongruence and the cognitive-emotional responses they evoke. We can conclude that although psychoanalytic theorists were right in claiming that incongruent film music creates "uncertainty," they fell short in explaining the exact nature as well as the emotional consequences of such a complex audio-visual stimulus. A mere conflict between inconsistent semiotic interpretations cannot fully explain why incongruent film music recurrently invokes feelings of uneasiness. Rather than regarding it as a phenomenon that works through disrupting conventions, we stressed a perceptual-cognitive reason that ensures incongruence's emotional strangeness. The consequence of this conclusion is that the effect of incongruent music cannot be fully habitualized through overuse of the practice. It even seems that the previously described unsettling impact is

at the heart of all radically incongruent cases, even if they are considered comic or ironic. Other possible emotional and intellectual responses, we would argue, arise from this initial uneasy sensation.[7]

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7 Further research on incongruence could apply this hypothesis to more specific scenes, testing how it may give rise to different felt and understood types of meaning. Other research may be directed to the question of whether immersion and film music's naturalness are as unstable as psychoanalytical theory implies. It seems that more severe disruptions are required to really break the audience's absorption in the fiction. Furthermore, it could prove interesting to see whether the differences between perceiving diegetic and non-diegetic music, related to their incongruent use, are as different as assumed. Although the difference between the two is very clear on an inferential level, they may just function differently while underscoring incongruently, since we essentially deal with non-diegetic film music, either perfectly congruent or highly conflicting, as an informative aspect of the diegesis.

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