Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

Film and Media Studies

Volume 8, 2014

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Scientia Publishing House

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae
Film and Media Studies
Vol. 8, 2014

The Cinema of Sensations II.

Contents

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 7–20

Frames, Windows, and Mirrors. Sensing Still Bodies in Films by Manoel de Oliveira

Hajnal Király
University of Lisbon
E-mail: hajnal.kiraly@gmail.com

Abstract. In the case of Oliveira's *Doomed Love* (*Amor de Perdição,* 1978) (an adaptation of the homonymous classic Portuguese novel), Bresson's model theory provides an adequate theoretical model for a melodrama in which characters, 'hit by fate,' are following their destinies as if 'under hypnosis.' Besides a typically frontal, iconic representation of bodies thoroughly framed by windows, doors, and mirrors, in this and many other films by Oliveira, the intermedial figure of *tableau vivant* also reveals the movement-stillness mechanisms of the medium of film by turning, under our eyes, the body into a picture. His *Abraham's Valley* (*Vale Abraão,* 1993) is also relevant for a fetishistic representation of (female) feet and legs. This visual detail, somewhat reminding of Buñuel's similar obsession, is not only subversive in terms of representation of socio-cultural taboos, but is also providing a compelling sensual experience of both the body and the medium.[1]

Keywords: Manoel de Oliveira, intermediality, *tableau vivant*, representation of bodies.

Towards an Oliveirian Aesthetics of Stillness

At the beginning of the 1970s, after an absence of nearly 25 years, Manuel de Oliveira made his return to filmmaking and established his international reputation as a strange old man making odd, unbearably long, and slow films. The films that marked his return and brought him international recognition are commonly called the "Tetralogy of frustrated loves" by Portuguese critics and include *Past and Present* (*O Passado e o Presente*, 1971), *Benilde or the Virgin Mother* (*Benilde ou a Virgem Mãe,* 1975), *Doomed Love* (*Amor de Perdição*, 1978), and *Francisca* (1981). But the topic of doomed loves and dysfunctional marriages goes far beyond this

1 This article has been completed with the financial support of the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT), Portugal.

series, becoming an obsession for Oliveira, and also, as I will argue below, a pretext for staging on film and by film his original philosophy regarding image and movement and, respectively, visual sophistication and narration. At the beginning of the 70s this preoccupation was in line with a phenomenon characteristic to films made after the World War II, namely a preference for slowing down the movement and lingering over a static image which became, as Raymond Bellour (2002, 113) has remarked, one of the possible figures of cinema. Justin Remes in a recent article on the possible theoretical approaches to the so called "cinema of stasis" also points out that the "aesthetic force" of static films can be appreciated in a contrast with motion, still normative in cinema, although according to many scholars it is just one of the technical possibilities of film, just like sound and colour.[2] For both Bellour and Remes, as well as for all the ongoing discourse discrediting motion as a par excellence cinematic feature, Roland Barthes's essay on the Third Meaning is a constant reference: according to this, the third or obtuse meaning (identified also with the "cinematic" or "filmique") is "indifferent" and even "contrary" to the film movement (See Remes [2012, 265], Bellour [2002, 115], and David Campany [2007]). The subversive attitude of modernist and New Wave films towards a sometimes "hysterical" pace of spectacle has inevitably implied an increased preoccupation with the sensual qualities and magic effect of the single, static image. Starting from the 70s this has been also reflected in a film theoretical interest in spectacle and spectatorship, visual pleasure, the still(ed) image as attraction versus issues of narration. This preoccupation with the magic of the image has been since represented most prominently by Laura Mulvey (1975, 2006), then Tom Gunning (1990), just to be taken further later by Vivian Sobchack in a phenomenological approach to the filmic experience (1992, 2004). Together with the "possessive spectator" – the fetishistic spectator "more fascinated by image than plot" (Mulvey 2006, 164) – another type of spectator has been described: the "pensive spectator" introduced by Raymond Bellour, made aware of time and consciousness by a still image, in Bellour's example a photo and transforming the spectator of the classic cinema, "under pressure," into a pensive, contemplating one (2002, 75–80). This line of thinking is obviously marked by Deleuze's *Cinema 2* and the Time-Image concept, defining "a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent" (1989, 126–129).

As static films "demand prolonged engagement and meditation in a way that is often encouraged by traditional visual art" (Remes 2012, 266), art history and theory have become another direction of researching these films, mainly preoccupied with

2 He refers to a dialogue around *Defining the Moving Image* between Noël Carroll (2006) and Robert Yanal (2008).

placing them in a visual cultural tradition – mostly that of painting and photography. This kind of approach identifies painterly style and composition as a concentration of figurative meanings, corresponding to Lessing's "pregnant moment" (Bellour 2000, 119). As Pascal Bonitzer puts it, the "*plan tableau*," due to its allusive character of imitation can reveal a profound secret of film (1985, 30). He also distinguishes two kinds of film directors: those who believe in reality and those who believe in the image (a typically French distinction, he argues, that can be traced back to Bazin), these latter ones being the opponents of the (narrative) illusionism characteristic to cinema. Instead of narrative illusion they prefer the *trompe l'oeil*, the *plan-tableau*, and *tableau vivant* which, instead of reinforcing illusion, are rather de-masking it[3] (1985, 29–36). According to the famous statement of Deleuze, plans are "the consciousness of cinema" – not only because they are specific to certain periods of cinema, but also because the use of plans is approaching cinema to painting, its past, due to "framing" or "décadrage" as Bonitzer puts it (Bonitzer 1985). An image-centric approach characterizes the most recent film theory by Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener (2010), associating distinct senses to types of cinematic frames – windows, doors, or mirrors – thus realizing a phenomenological meta-theory when introducing a film history "through the senses."

This overview of the phenomenological, art theoretical, cultural-anthropological discourses[4] of the still cinematic image is far from being complete and only serves as a theoretical framework to the interpretation of two films by Oliveira, representative for his peculiar philosophy of cinematic image and motion. He is undoubtedly a director who believes in the magic of the image and although his narrative techniques are not spectacularly subversive, his stories either lack actuality, are unfinished, unbearably slow and stuck in details, merely serving as a contrasting background to a constant experimentation with the aesthetic possibilities of the image.

From Narrative and Emotional Excess to Visual Excess

Although the work of Oliveira, one of the longest in film history, extends through both above mentioned periods, that of preoccupation with narrative illusion and

3 Not surprisingly he takes as examples Godard's *Passion* (1982) and Rohmer's *Marquise de O…* (1976).

4 As, for example, Laura Marks has shown it, the "sensuality" of particular film images can be culturally coded and successfully used in the study of so called "intercultural films" as "trace of memory" and as an alternative to the more widespread "narrative memory" (Marks 2000).

motion before the Second World War and that of an increased interest in the figurative power of the still(ed) image after the War, he has always been an adept of this latter paradigm. This is why some of his critics, unable to place his work in any narrative tradition, chose to call him a vanguard artist.[5] His adherence to the aesthetics of the image can also explain his puzzling approach to melodrama, a pertinent genre in both the pre-war and after war era. Intriguingly, his preference for melodrama doesn't mean his sharing the tradition of classic or modernist melodrama either. In most cases he is adapting 19th century novels, romantic melodramas, without any actuality in the last quarter of the 20th century and modernist film (for example, dying of TB). On this incompatibility see also Francis Ramasse (1979, 66).

But these films do not work as classic melodramas either, due to their alienating, vaguely modernist style evoking Bresson's model theory, some films of Rohmer or Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961). Denis Lévy's observation on *Doomed Love* is valid for most films made by Oliveira after the late sixties: in these there is "gap between the character and the actor, the actor and the model, the frame and the scene and the world, the image and the text"[6] (1998, 51–53). In this particular film instead of a representation of social alienation we find an alienation between narration and image: the voice over is not interpreting images and images are not illustrations of the voice over narration. They are separate and independent entities, tools used deliberately by a director who started his career in the age of silent cinema. The emotional and narrative excess characteristic to the genre (often reflected in long, passionate dialogs) is transformed into a visual excess, manifested in an overwhelming use of frames, mirrors, and painterly compositions. Similarly, the impulse-passivity mechanism regulating the narration of melodrama is translated into a movement – stilled movement dynamics and a preference for *tableaux vivants*. At the beginning of *Doomed Love*, for example, there is a scene of a duel emblematic for both the basic narrative model of the actual film, the melodrama genre in general and Oliveira's concept of film, conceived as a dynamics, a "duel" between image and narration, stillness, and movement. This duel is registered with an intense camera travelling

5 Jonathan Rosenbaum, for example, considers Oliveira's *Doomed Love* a vanguard film (1995, 213–217). His first short documentary, *Douro, Faina Fluvial* (*Labour on the Douro River*, 1931) about the labour on Douro River, following the Soviet vanguard aesthetics of montage, the work of Dziga Vertov in particular and also Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, a Symphony of a Great City* (1927), is like an early ars poetica in this respect. He has never really moved away from experimenting with the aesthetic possibilities of the static image.

6 "L'écart entre le personnage et l'acteur, l'acteur et le modèle, entre le cadre et la scène et le monde, entre l'image et le texte" (translation by me, H. K.).

to the right and to the left, following the movement and exchange of swords of the duellists. Then a sudden, unexpected turn occurs, one of the duellists takes out a shotgun and shots the other: suddenly everybody and everything turns still, as if in a *tableau vivant*. This scene, besides being a concentration of the actual story (after a series of reciprocal insults Simão, the protagonist, who shoots his rival, Balthazar, is incarcerated and turns melancholic, passive) and of the psychological mechanisms underlying the melodrama genre in general (an increasingly tensioned confrontation of the hero with his circumstances, culminating in a dramatic turn, followed by stillness) is ultimately playing on the surprising effect of intense movement turned into stasis. As Gunning has repeatedly put it, both movement from still to moving images and the reverse, withholding briefly the illusion of motion is the apparatus's raison d'être, a source of attraction for spectators. Eivind Rosaak is reinforcing this when stating that "The relationship between the still and the moving in cinema is not simply a play with forms, but a way of demonstrating the abilities of a new medium" (2006, 321). Between still and moving images, in an emotional space between familiar and unfamiliar, canny and uncanny, emerge two qualities of the medium: the visual and the photographic on the one hand, and the narrative ability on the other. The deepest pleasure of cinema may reside in these attractions rather than in the way the story is narrated. In this respect becomes the title of Oliveira's film, *Doomed Love* a definition, as Jonathan Rosenbaum has half-mockingly observed, of *acute cinéphilia* (1995, 216). In the so called melodramas of Oliveira instead of melodramatic tensions, strong emotions are created in the interstice between media and different forms of representation, in accordance with Gunning's "astonishment principle" (Gunning 1990). However, this only involves "a subtle shock of subverted expectations" and engenders introspection – concludes Justin Remes (2012, 268). Oliveira himself confessed his "intention of affecting and moving spectators without any dissimulation of the artifice"[7] (2009, 38). Thus, instead of representing strong emotions, he is representing what Laura Mulvey calls the "death drive:" that of a doomed couple, of the narration hurrying towards an end, and finally the tendency of the moving image to freeze and return to an earlier state, that of photography or painting (2006, 67–84).

In *Death 24 x a Second* Laura Mulvey approaches this movement-stillness dynamics in films and primarily melodramas from a psychoanalytical point of view, insisting upon a metaphoric relationship between the Freudian death drive and the tendency of cinematic narration and movement to turn still or

7 "Émuvoir et convaincre sans dissimuler l'artifice" (translation by me, H. K.).

freeze. She is citing Garrett Stewart: "Into the (metonymic) chain of continuity, continuous motion, of sequence, of plot, breaks the radical equation stasis equals death, the axis of substitution, the advent of metaphor" (2000, 25). Her conclusions regarding the medium-specificity of this dynamics resonate with those of Gunning, Sobchack, and Rosaak: "Just as the cinema offers a literal representation of narrative's movement out of an initial inertia, with its return to stasis narrative offers the cinema a means through which its secret stillness can emerge in a medium-specific form" (Mulvey 2006, 79). What we have here is a multiple metaphorical relationship, a *metalepsis* between the death drive as desire to return to an earlier state, the urge of all narration towards an end and what Mulvey calls "the abrupt shift from the cinema's illusion of animated movement to its inorganic, inanimate state" (2006, 70).

Framed Bodies

In *Doomed Love, Francisca* (1981) or *Abraham's Valley* the frequent use of tableaux vivants is anticipating the final and definitive stillness of death, narration, and cinematic movement. In *Doomed Love*, after a dynamic first part dominated by the actions of an impulsive protagonist, both lovers are incarcerated: Thereza is closed away in a convent and Simão is imprisoned after killing the cousin of Thereza. Starting from that moment they both become increasingly passive, as if paralysed by their fate. They are literarily "fading away," growing pale and white, turning the film image into its own negative. This effect is reinforced by a "fading away" of the very materiality of the medium too: Oliveira used 16 mm film, excellent for poetical purposes but not very enduring. By becoming increasingly aware of the *texture* of the image while contours of things and human figures become blurred, we are actually getting closer to what Laura Marks calls *haptic visuality* (2000).

As typical for the genre, the characters of Oliveira's melodramas are often trapped between social restrictions, rivalry between families, are reduced to stillness due to illness (often Tuberculosis), are jailed, closed up in a convent or in a house. This is how "framing" and at times multiple framing becomes another metaphor of entrapment: characters are captured, framed, transformed into pictures and tableaux vivants meant to symbolize paralyzing social conventions, mostly related to religion or family roles. In *Doomed Love*, the image of bars becomes a recurrent metaphor of the melodramatic situation, the inability and helplessness to step out of it: the lovers are often shown behind bars, and Teresa is even "framed" as a conventional picture of Virgin Mary or a catholic

saint [Figs. 1–4]. The tableau vivant, called an "oxymoron" by Pascal Bonitzer, a sphinx, a composite monster playing "guessing games" with the spectator-Oedipe,[8] has the similar double function of a coded image in *Abraham's Valley* (a Portuguese version of *Madame Bovary*), as both an embodiment of the Oliveirian aesthetics of cinematic stillness and a critique of a rigid bourgeois social order. These tableaux show Ema, the protagonist in suffocating family reunions, at the church or around dinner tables. She is *beautiful as a picture* – and men are looking at her *as at a picture*, when trying to decypher her enigma (weather she is adulterous or just extravagant) in long, ekphrastic monologues. She is also trapped between a traditional image of the self and womanhood (represented by a tryptich family altar) and a "modern version" of this, a trifold mirror in which she is contemplating her glamourous self [Figs. 5–8].

Frames and mirrors are constant metaphors of the Oliveirian cinema after the 70s and they are also often interchangeable in a *trompe l'oeil*: a door or a window frame can be mistaken for a mirror by the spectator or conversely, a mirror appears as a frame opening to another space. This both refers metaphorically to the narration (in the ball scenes from *Francisca* to the illusionary character of wealth and power of aristocracy, or in *Doomed Love* to the assumption that the lovers contemplating each other through opposite windows *as if in mirrors* are soul mates) and becomes a complex self-reflexive figure of Oliveira's approach to cinema. As Vivian Sobchack has put it, "the metaphor of the frame is emblematic of the *transcendental idealism* that infuses classical formalism and its belief in the film object as *expression-in-itself* – subjectivity freed from worldly constraint" while the metaphor of the mirror entails "a critical judgment of the cinema that is as damning as it is descriptive. It condemns the very ontological being of cinema as substitutive (rather than expansive) and deceptive (rather than disclosing)"[9] (1992, 17). The frequent interchangeability of (door and window) frames and mirrors can be interpreted as an allusion to the curious position of Oliveira's cinema between a classic formalist and a self-reflexive, modernist tradition. Mirrors in Oliveira's films are not only figures of "pure representation" – as Pascal Bonitzer puts it (1985, 69) – by simply doubling the characters and scenes, but are constantly revealing the illusionary, *trompe l'oeil* nature of filmic representation.

8 "Le tableau vivant, cet oxymoron incarné est un monstre composite, un sphinx, qui pose de devinettes au spectateur-oedipe. Que veulent dire ces tableaux? Pourqui sont-ils lá? A quel mistere, á quel culte secret, á quel crime renvoient-ils?" (Bonitzer 1984, 32.)

9 Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Haneger in their *Film Theory. An Introduction through the Senses* (2010) are taking these metaphors as representative for particular chapters of film theory and are using them as central concepts in their original film theory.

As mentioned above, one of Oliveira's main concern is to thematize both the stasis and the motion *in the image* as illusion (the film doesn't stop turning) by halting the action and using *tableaux vivants* as "pregnant moments" of narration. By doing this, in accordance with Justin Remes's argumentation, he is defining time and not movement as essence of cinema, something that distinguishes it from photography and painting (Remes 2012, 265–66).

Doomed Love for instance presents a neat distinction between the Deleuzian movement-image characteristic to the first part of the movie, full of actions and dramatic turning points, as well as the time-image setting in with the incarceration of the protagonists, their turning still, meditative, and resigning. Long shots of their frontal images are taking over the scenes of action, while they are reciting the contents of their exchanged letters. As Francis Ramasse pointed out, in the second part of the film participation gives place to contemplation, emotion to intelligence, and what has been proper melodramatic pleasure becomes intellectual and often "cinéphilique" pleasure (1979, 66). Posing has a similar time effect in *Abraham's Valley*: the sudden halt of action or walking increases the spectatorial consciousness of time. Ema, the protagonist, is a female dandy, posing relentlessly, according to the rules of what Mulvey calls "delayed cinema," favouring a fetishistic spectator, who is more fascinated by the image than plot. For Ema a party-scene or a social event often functions as a catwalk: she walks in, not looking at anybody while everybody is watching her, then she stops, posing, as if in front of a voyeuristic "possessive" spectatorial gaze (Mulvey 2006, 161–163). As Simone de Beauvoir has put it: "Male beauty is an indicator of transcendence, that of woman has the passivity of immanence: only the latter is made to arrest the gaze and can therefore be caught in the immobile trap of the reflective surface, the man who feels and wants himself activity, subjectivity, does not recognize himself in his fixed image" (1975, 527–28).

In film, a pose is both revealing something of the nature of photography – as Barthes pointed out – and functions as a *pause*, a sudden emergence of time in a flow of events and actions. According to Laura Mulvey it "allows time for the cinema to denaturalize the human body" (2006b, 164). In *Abraham's Valley* posing woman and still image become syononyms due to their passivity: men (husbands and lovers) are away "with business," only the placid, feminine image remains "in the frame," as a prey of spectatorial gaze. There is no way out, no possibility of change or action for Ema: her sportscar, just like her feet and legs, are not vehicles of action, but fetischistic objects making her appearance more attractive *for male collectors*.

Feet and Legs. Fetishistic Image vs. Narration

"Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at […]. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female" (Berger 1972, 47). John Berger's statement, so often quoted by feminist criticism of visual culture finds, in fact, a paradigmatic representation in film history: in the classic melodrama genre, for example, the action and motion set off by men is often delayed, stopped, or derailed by a mesmerizing female appearance, femme fatale, or vamp. According to a definition from the Oxford English Dictionary, cited by Elizabeth Wilson, the meaning of the very term *glamour*, of Celtic origin, is closely related to "occult learning and magic" (grammar, grammarye): "when devils, wizards or jufflers deceive the sight, they are said to cast a glamour over the eye of the spectator" (early 18th century) (2007, 96).

As already discussed above, in *Abraham's Valley* Oliveira celebrates cinematic stillness through an innovative thematization of fashion: glamour and subsequently *posing* become, once again, allegorical representations of the oscillation between stillness respectively stability and movement or contingency. Ema, the protagonist is constantly posing and looking into mirrors: she is "half doll, half idol."[10] Just like in many other films by Oliveira, the highly artificial quality of the image is meant to counterbalance here the "motoric" imperfections of movement and narration, just as Ema's glamorous appearance is meant to hide her physical defect: she is limping. While this is part of the magic, the fashionable "asymmetrical body" making her *appearance* even more disturbing,[11] at times when we see her walking, it appears as a noisy intrusion into the still image. Similarly, narration, the intervention of a voice over narrator or movement often seems to be disturbing the quiescence of the image. As an alternative, Oliveira is modeling a silent, invisible observer, when one of the female characters, walking bare feet along soft carpets, is making a full circle around the scene that we are watching, without the others noticing her. In *Abraham's Valley* the rather fetishistic significance of feet and legs is evocative of some films by Luis Buñuel's (*Tristana*, 1970, most evidently) and by one of his disciples, Pedro Almodóvar (his *Live Flesh*, 1997, for example). Although Oliveira has been often compared to the former in terms of a subversive attitude towards the Catholic Church and the middle class morality, the social critique in his films has been always subdued by highly aesthetical considerations regarding the image,

10 On the "woman as spectacle" see also the article of Valérie Steel on *Fashion and Visual Culture in Fin-de Siècle Paris* (2004, 320).

11 On the relationship between the asymmetrical body and fashion see John Harvey 2007, 65–94.

movement, and narration. Instead of overtly critical representation of social and religious taboos, he merely uses a vaguely comic or ironic effect achievable by juxtaposition or comparison of images, as in the case of a contrastive fetishistic and non-fetishistic presentation of feet and legs in *Abraham's Valley* [see Figs. 9–10].

As many times during his career, in the case of this film Oliveira used the intermediation of a homonymous novel by Augustina Bessa Luís, a Portuguese version of *Madame Bovary*, with an interesting switch: here is not Hippolyte, the stable boy who has a limp, but Ema. According to the interpretation of Mary Donaldson Evans, this transfer is an allusion to Ema's sensuality, in accordance with the old superstition that one doesn't know anything about pleasure if she/he hasn't slept with a limping person (2005, 24).[12] In a scene where Ema is approaching the bedroom of her husband with a candle through a long dark corridor (which also became a widely used metaphor of sensual connotations in film history), because of the limp her face lit by the candle light appears as if pulsing of desire. In the last scene of the film, in a representation of death drive as desire to regress to stillness, we see Ema dressed as her younger self and her limp becomes a euphoric "floating" through orange trees. On the small pier she steps on a broken board, falls into the water and drowns. The death drive associated with the compulsion to repeat – in this case a moment of youth – leads to stillness that appears as a consequence of a mistaken step (a possible allusion to the adulterous past of Ema), *a bad move*.[13] The film closes with the image of still water marking, according to Laura Mulvey, a point of narrative halt, but also a point "beyond narratability" that also suggests "a return of the repressed stillness in which cinema's illusion of movement depends" (2006, 78–79).

Conclusion

In my essay I was arguing that after his return to filmmaking in the early 70s, Manuel de Oliveira has been using the genre of melodrama as a pretext to conceptualize, to stage on film and by film an aesthetics of stillness, mainly theorized starting from the 70s, by scholars more preoccupied with the visual effect of the static image than the narrative illusion. The metaphor of death drive (that of narration hurrying

12 Donaldson-Evans quotes Montaigne, who in his essay *Des boiteux* translates an Italian proverb: "Celui-lá ne connait pas Vénus en sa parfaite douceur qui n'a couché avec la boiteuse" (2005, 24).

13 Donaldson-Evans also refers to an essay by Florence Emptaz about the importance of the role played by feet and footwear in the novel. Emptaz sees in Hippolyte an emblem for Emma's moral claudication, his "disequilibrium an image of the adulteress's *vertu chancelante*" (Emptaz, 23—81).

towards an end and of the moving image regressing to the earlier state of photograph or painting) appears in Oliveira's melodramas as "a displacement," "illuminating another context through refiguration, highlighting certain relations of structural or functional resemblance." A double metaphor or *metalepsis*: a trope of a trope, a sheme referring back to other figurative scheme (Sobchack 2004, 205). In *Doomed Love*, as well as in *Abraham's Valley*, the emotional excess of melodramas is translated into a visual excess of frames and mirrors: the characters are not only trapped by social conventions, regulations, illness, or a motoric defect, but their bodies are framed and captured as pictures, as sensual objects exposed to the gaze of a possessive (and pensive) spectator. Image and bodies are interchangeable: the "decomposing" images of *Doomed Love* are standing for the fading bodies of the unhappy, dying protagonists. In the spirit of Vivian Sobchack's *Carnal Thoughts*, we can say that in *Abraham's Valley* the image of Ema's transformation and her transformation of the image are reversible phenomena. Cinema is not only showing make-up, but *it is the make-up*, "able to 'fix' (in the doubled sense of repair and stasis), to fetishize and to reproduce faces and time as both 'unreel' before us" (Sobchack 2004, 50). Accordingly the limp, both a defect of the body and of narration techniques and moving image, is not only responsible for the anti-diegetic effect, but is transforming the film into "an expression of experience by experience" (Sobchack 1992, 3).

References

Barthes, Roland. 1985. The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Several Eisenstein Stills. In *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, 41–62. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1975. *The Second Sex*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Bellour, Raymond. 2002a [1990]. Le spectateur pensif [The Pensive Spectator]. In *L'Entre–Images. Photo. Cinéma. Vidéo. Les Essais* [*Between-the-Images. Photo. Cinema. Video. Essays*], 75–80. Paris: Éditions de la Différence.

Bellour, Raymond. 2002b [1990]. L'Interruption, L'instant [The Interruption, the Instant]. In *L'Entre–Images. Photo. Cinéma. Vidéo. Les Essais* [*Between-the-Images. Photo. Cinema. Video. Essays*], 109–134. Paris: Éditions de la Différence.

Bonitzer, Pascal. 1985. *Décadrages – Peinture et Cinéma* [*Décadrages – Painting and Film*]. Paris: Cahiers de Cinéma, Éditions de l'Étoile.

Bukatman, Scott. 2006. Spectacle, Attractions and Visual Pleasure. In *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven, 71–82. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Campany, David, ed. 2007. *The Cinematic*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Carroll, Noël. 2006. Defining the Moving Image. In *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An Anthology*, eds. Carroll and Jinhee Choi, 113–134. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1989. *Cinema 2*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Donaldson Evans, Mary. 2005. A Medium of Exchange: The Madame Bovary Film. *Society of Dix-Neuviémistes* no. 4: 21–34.

Elsaesser, Thomas and Malte Haneger. 2010. *Film Theory. An Introduction Through the Senses.* New York: Routledge.

Emptaz, Florence. 2002. *Aux pieds de Flaubert* [*At the Foot of Flaubert*]. Paris: Grasset.

Gunning, Thomas. 1990. The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde. In *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative,* ed. Thomas Elsaesser, 56–62. London: British Film Institute.

Harvey, John. Showing and Hiding: Equivocation in the Relations of Body and Dress. *Fashion Theory* vol. 11 no. 1: 65–94.

Levy, Dennis. 1998. Manuel de Oliveira. *L'art du cinéma* no. 21/22/23, 51–53.

Marks, Laura. 2000. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Mulvey, Laura. 1975. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen* vol. 16 no. 3 (Autumn): 6–18.

Mulvey, Laura. 2006a. The Death Drive: Narrative Movement stilled. In *Death 24x a Second*. London: Reaktion Books, 67–84.

Mulvey, Laura. 2006b. The Possessive Spectator. In *Death 24x a Second*, 161–180 London: Reaktion Books.

Oliveira, Manuel de. 2009. Acte de filmer et conscience filmique dans mon cas particulier [Act of Filming and Film Consciousness in my Particular Case]. In *Trafic*, Autumn: 35–38.

Ramasse, Francis. 1979. Le melodrame en question (*Amour de perdition*). *Positif* no. 223 (October): 65.

Remes, Justin. 2012. Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis. In *British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 52 no. 3 (July): 257–269.

Rosaak, Eivind. 2006. Figures of Sensation: Between Still and Moving Images. In *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven, 321–336. Amsterdam University Press.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. 1995. A Masterpiece You Missed. In *Placing Movies: The Practice of Film Criticism*, 213–217. Berkley, LA: University of California Press.

Sobchack, Vivian Carol. 2004. *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley, London: University of California Press.
Sobchack, Vivian Carol. 1992. *The Address of the Eye: a Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Steele, Valerie. 2004. *Femme Fatale: Fashion and Visual Culture in Fin-de Siècle Paris. Fashion Theory* vol. 8 no. 3: 315–328.
Yanal, Robert. 2008. Defining the Moving Image: A Response to Noel Carroll. *Film and Philosophy* no. 12: 135–140.
Wilson, Elizabeth. 2007. A Note on Glamour. *Fashion Theory* vol. 11 no. 1: 95–108.

List of Figures

Figures 1–4. In *Doomed Love* the image of bars becomes a recurrent metaphor of the melodramatic situation, and Teresa is even "framed" as a conventional picture of Virgin Mary or a Catholic saint.

Figures 5–8. Tableaux vivants in *Abraham's Valley* showing Ema in suffocating social reunions or trapped between a tryptich family altar and a "modern version" of this, a trifold mirror.

Figures 9–12. Comic effect achieved by a contrastive fetishistic and non-fetishistic presentation of feet and legs in *Abraham's Valley*.

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 21–40

‘Own Deaths’ – Figures of the Sens*a*ble in Péter Nádas’s Book and Péter Forgács’s Film

Katalin Sándor
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania,
E-mail: sandorkati17@gmail.com

Abstract. The paper examines the figures of ‘sens*a*ble’ intermediality in Péter Nádas’s book, *Own Death* (2006), an autobiographical account of the author’s heart failure and clinical death and in the screen adaptation of the book by Péter Forgács with the same title (*Own Death*, 2007). The book and the film problematize the cultural, discursive, and medial (un)representability of a liminal corporeal experience (illness, death) in which the very conditions of self-perception, bodily sensation, and conceptual thinking appear as “other.” In the film corporeal liminality and its medial translatability are not only thematized (e.g. through the untranslated German word *umkippen* ‘tip over,’ ‘fall over’), but shape the embodied experience of viewing through the use of photo-filmic imagery, still frames, fragmented close-ups, slow motion, or medially textured images. These do not only foreground the foreign, undomesticable experience of the body and “own death” as other, but also expose the medium, the membrane of the film, and confer the moving image a “haptic visuality” (Marks). The haptic imagery directs the viewer’s attention to the sensuality of the medium, to the filmic “body,” enabling a “sens*a*ble” (Oosterling) spectatorship, an embodied reflection on the image, on the “sensual mode” (Pethő) of becoming intermedial.[1]

Keywords: sens*a*ble intermediality, photo-filmic, stillness, Péter Nádas, Péter Forgács.

Towards a “Sens*a*ble Intermediality”

Not so recent shifts of emphasis in the humanities (cultural studies, anthropology, literary, and art theory, film studies, gender studies etc.) referred to as corporeal turn or as sensuous scholarship directed the attention towards the role of corporeality, sensuality, and embodiment in social, cultural, and artistic practices, in the constitution of the self and intersubjectivity, in the unsettling relationship

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

of the self and the Other – from social, anthropological, cultural, political, ethical, or aesthetic perspectives. The cultural hierarchy of the senses and the dominance of the paradigm of vision have been challenged by foregrounding other senses like smell or touch or the synaesthetic aspect of perception. In 1997 Paul Stoller proposes from an anthropological perspective a "sensuous scholarship" that is both analytical and sensible, and can be an alternative to the disembodied perspective and bloodless language of the Eurocentric scholarship that textualizes the body it tries to critically liberate from the Cartesian tradition and the body–mind dualism (1997, xiv–xv).

Laura U. Marks in her phenomenological approach to film speaks about haptic criticism and relying on Deleuze and Guattari, as well as on E. Riegl intends "to restore a flow between the haptic and the optical that our culture is currently lacking" as a consequence of post-Enlightenment rationality (Marks 2002, xiii). Marks aims at approaching vision not only in terms of distance and disembodiment but as a form of contact, as an embodied sense "to maintain a robust flow between sensuous closeness and symbolic distance" (2002, xiii). Haptic vision is interested not primarily (or not only) in conceptual meaning-making and narrativity, but in the sensuality of the medium, and together with optical vision requiring distance and abstraction, it shapes the unsettling experience of perception.

Turning to the corporeal and the sensual does not result in a naïve concept of a direct, culturally, or ideologically neutral, unmediated accessibility of the body, materiality, or corporeality. The perceiving subject "is itself defined dialectically as being *neither* (pure) consciousness *nor* (physical, in itself) body" (Madison, quoted in Sobchack 2004, 4). The lived body never coincides with itself, never achieves a stable identity, being continually shaped by historical and cultural systems (Madison, quoted in Sobchack 2004, 4). This is also what Vivian Sobchack (relying on existentialist phenomenology) underlines by the concept of embodiment in her phenomenological approach to moving image culture (2004).

Approaches to intermediality have also been sensitive to the scientific shifts of emphasis that do not only thematize corporeality, the embodied subject, or the sensual aspect of social and cultural practices, but try to rethink the perspective, the methodology, and the terminology of research. Henk Oosterling (2003) relying on post-structuralist philosophies of difference conceives intermediality as sensational, as the reflectivity of the "sens*a*ble," as an ongoing transition between presence and absence, between the sensual and the discursive. Reflectivity is never merely conceptual or discursive but opens up towards the thinking body (Lyotard), the unrepresentable, the sublime, the non-discursive, the subversively material.

Ágnes Pethő reflecting on theories of intermediality and phenomenological film theory points several times to the structural and the sensual modes of becoming intermedial within cinema. The sensual mode "invites the viewer to literally get in touch with a world portrayed not at a distance but at the proximity of entangled synesthetic sensations, and resulting in a cinema that can be perceived in the terms of music, painting, architectural forms or haptic textures" (2010, 99).

The In-Betweenness of Cinematic Stillness

Sens*a*ble cinematic intermediality can be related to figures of stillness and slowness in film: to the (temporary) release of the moving image from narrative functions and its arrest in a still frame (photo-filmic or painterly) that foregrounds the sensuous, tactile, and textured qualities of the image "palpable" through vision. The stillness and the intermediality of the photo-filmic or the painterly triggers the awareness of imageness, of filmic materiality in the spectator, disturbs medial transparency, and questions the idea of self-enclosed medium specificity.

Laura Mulvey considers that stillness in the moving image, as well as "the process of delaying a film inevitably highlights its aesthetics and the illusion of movement, and the hidden presence of the filmstrip on which the illusion depends" (2006, 185). Moreover, "the delay, the association with the frame, may also act as a 'conduit' to the film's uncertain, unstable materiality torn between the stillness of the celluloid strip and the illusion of its movement" (2006, 26). Through the ability to foreground filmic mediality and to expose 'film time' within 'cinema time,' which – as narrative time – usually conceals the first, Mulvey – following Bellour – links stillness and delay to a different spectatorial experience, that of the pensive spectator who reflects on the halted images of the film, not being hurried by the narrative flow (2006, 181–196). [2]

Withholding or suspending the narrative through still frames, close-ups, photo-filmic inserts makes room for a lingering, sens*a*ble, palpating gaze through which the surface, the (inter)sensorilaity, the hapticality of the image comes to the fore. Another possibility of exposing the sensuality of the moving image lies

2 Streitberger and van Gelder point out that "with the advent of digital technology, the boundaries between the photographic and the filmic image are constantly blurred, both technically – in drawing on the same software and hardware engineering – and perceptively – in leaving the spectator in doubt of the (photographic or filmic) nature of the image" (2010, 48). Therefore they agree with David Green's view according to which "the distinctions between the filmic and the photographic, between the moving and the still image […] will wither in the face of these profound shifts in the complex technology of the visual" (Green, quoted in Streitberger – van Gelder 2010, 48).

within slow motion cinematography. Slow motion according to Vivian Sobchack "has a particularly compelling quality in a contemporary »cinema of attractions« that is based primarily on intensely kinetic movement and speed" (2006, 337). Slow motion does not erase or eradicate movement but – as Sobchack points out – paradoxically hyperbolizes it, "forestalling" and "distilling" it to what seems its "essence" (2006, 337).[3]

Slowing down the moving image may denaturalize the transparency of the film and the unreflected naturality of the represented movement by disclosing the movement of the image, of representation itself in a media-reflexive way.

Still frames, photo-filmic imagery, and slow motion in cinema produce a sensation of suspended time within the unfolding temporality of the film. The sensual mode of becoming intermedial, as well as the self-reflexivity of the filmic image can be related to withholding 'cinematic time' or narrative time and leaving room for 'filmic time' that favors the sens*a*ble apprehension of the image both in its haptic and optical qualities, calling for the methodological approach of what Oosterling calls "sens*a*ble intermediality." The sens*a*bility of intermedial or heteromedial relations can be conceived as a dialectic (and a productive tension) between the sensuous and the conceptual, between sensation and embodied reflection in approaching cultural products or practices.

The Book as Corpus

Sens*a*ble intermediality can be a revealing research perspective for the discussion of the book *Own Death* by Péter Nádas published in English in 2006[4] and its screen adaptation, *Own Death* by Péter Forgács released in 2007. Nádas's book is an essayistic narrative about the writer's liminal experience of clinical death from the first signs of heart failure to the resuscitation, reflecting with philosophical sensitivity on life, birth, and body from the revealing perspective of death, on the embodiment and disembodiment of the self in its becoming, on the limits of conceptual thinking, on the unperceived, invisible sensations and workings of the carnal body and self-perception that come to the fore due to illness and the

3 Sobchack – following Ryan Bishop's and John Phillips's approach – perceives slowness not as qualitatively opposed to speed, but as a relative category: thus slow and fast "should be regarded as relative powers of the single category speed." (Bishop – Philips quoted in Sobchack 2006, 338.) For Sobchack "slow" and "fast" are not abstractions: "as relative powers, they are always beholden for their specific ascription not only to each other but also to the embodied and situated subjects who sense them as such" (2006, 338).

4 The book was first published in German (2002), and then in Hungarian (2004).

proximity of death. The narrative also exposes the way body, illness, and death are constructed by medical discourses and perceived in the space of social relations in which the body is never a self-enclosed biological entity but is inscribed by cultural, social, ideological, scientific etc. conceptions. A recurrent question of this reflection is the (un)representability of one's "own death" within and beyond culturally familiar and socially established metaphors, clichés, or conceptual language (e.g. how subjectivity or the body and illness are a relational experience even in the ultimate loneliness, how death and the body cannot be possessed and be one's own, only own and other at the same time). The title already points to the conceptual elusiveness of corporeality and death: instead of a clear relation of possession and a grammatical structure of genitive we read a gesture of detachment: "own death" – that is: own and impossible to possess at the same time.

In 2001 the text was published in a Hungarian periodical (*Élet és Irodalom*), then it was published as a book and the text was differently edited and made up. A series of photographs was inserted into the book: a series with its own story, temporality, and concept: Nádas, the author of the text had been taking pictures of the old pear-tree in his courtyard for a year. According to one of the most sensitive readers of the volume the heavy book-format probably did not do any good to the text, but the album-book certainly attracted more readers than the text in the periodical (Borbély 2007, 40). One can certainly agree that the intervention of photography really 'does' something to the text: it does not only become an ambiguous, indeterminate context for reading, but it displaces and opens up the very notion of the text and book itself.

In *Own Death* corporeal liminality and its medial (un)translatability are not only thematized (e.g. through the untranslated German word *umkippen* 'tip over,' 'fall over'), but shape the embodied experience of reading through the use of photographs dislocating the process of reading, through the repetitive interruption and fragmentation of the text traversed by white spaces, through the typographic isolation or "close-up" of certain sentences in the (meaningfully) empty space of the pages.[5] These do not only reflect on the foreign, undomesticable experience of the body, illness, or clinical death, but also disclose the medium, the "body" of the book.

The liminal experience of the body disturbs the conceptual system of language, the concepts of time, narration, and physical space, and confronts the subject

5 Orsolya Milián considers that these white spaces are the visible, typographic "breaths" of the text that relate to the narrator's "breaths" or loss of air, to the interruptions of the fragmented narrative or to the invisible breathing and temporality of reading itself (2007, 92–93).

not only with the unsettling proximity between death and life, but also with a certain loss of language. The elusive experience of being in-between life and death is described as being beyond conceptual thinking, beyond the realm of clear distinctions: as if thinking did not only happen within the body but with the body.[6] The liminal experience that is beyond familiar concepts but within the realm of a strangely abstract physical perception and remembrance makes any retrospective narration appear as an intervention, as a struggle to impose on liminality concepts of space, temporality, or sequence.

The book offers itself as a continuous enfolding, '*umkippen*' – and at the same time interruption – between the conceptual and the sensual, reading and viewing, words and photographs, speech and the unspeakable. The insertion of the photos is unsettling in many respects: the photos appear to mediate temporality and change, the life of a tree throughout a year by still images, by arresting time, by picturing pastness or the "own death" of time. The incorporation of the photographic series into the volume brings up the problem of the representability of the temporal and the liminal. It can be argued that not only the representation of the tree and temporal change becomes a metaphor of ephemerality, rebirth, and death, as Noémi Kiss rightfully proposes, acknowledging that photography is the abstract, conceptual signifier of death (2007, 86), but rather it is the modality of representation and the photographic medium itself[7] that can be related to the question of exit, absence, or passing: through the suspension of the flow of time, its encapsulation within a frame, and the indexical photographic trace whose presence affirms the absence of the referent.

Photographic representation as an image-act intervenes into the continuity of time and temporal change, slices up time and space into still frames. Photos as image-acts (see, for instance, in Belting [2011]) are not documents but ambiguous, unstable traces, records "of a fragment of inscribed reality that may be meaningless or indecipherable" (Mulvey 2006, 31). The photos in *Own Death* are not so much the archive of a recorded reality but rather the archive of the gaze[8] directed towards

6 "The universe as sensual phenomenon is entirely familiar while it remains beyond reach for concepts […] With a life rich in conceptual thinking behind me, I look back at what, for lack of concepts, I cannot think, since it happens for the first time." (Nádas 2004, 211.)

7 A vast amount of literature deals with the relationship between photography and death: Roland Barthes, André Bazin, Hans Belting, Susan Sontag etc. – to mention only a few.

8 In Hans Belting's anthropological approach photographs do not render the world but rather our gaze cast at it. Thus a photograph is actually a medium between two gazes, two looks: the one recorded by the photo and our own way of looking at it (Belting 2011, 145–167).

a visible slice of the world – a pear tree – in an almost ritualistic process of staying near the tree, of being with the tree for one year. The reader also has to stay with the elusive photos during the process of reading: with the polaroid and black and white pictures, with the different angles and the displacement of the photos on the page through which the unreadable, sensual aspects of the book are foregrounded. The book is not only an immaterial sign to look through but also a palpable, visible, corporeal object to look at.

At the same time the photographic and typographic arrangement of the book may divert the readability of the text, the deictic words, and the reference of some pronouns, as it happens in the line "The barking dogs of hell would want me to keep my mouth shut, to remain silent about *this*." (Nádas 2006, 23, emphasis mine, S. K.) In the mythological allusion the barking dogs of hell recall the myth of Cerberus, the tree-headed monster guarding the gate of hell, marking a point of transition and passage, a space of in-between. In this instance the pronoun might point to the liminal experience of heart failure and death, reminding us that death and the workings of the body are not only cultural taboos whose thematization is a socially regulated practice, but they also might entail a retreat from representation. Due to the arrangement of the text and the photograph, the pronoun may also point to the photographic image or to the white emptiness, the "silence" of the page, which also confronts the reader-viewer with something that cannot be completely translated, a photographic or a visual excess which nevertheless depends on or generates discourse. Another example of the diversion of deixis is the sentence: "It is happening *now*" (Nádas 2006, 143, emphasis mine, S. K.). The word *now* can deictically point to the elusive time of passage between life and death, to the indefinite temporality of the photograph or that of the white page, but also to the temporality of reading. The typographic isolation or "close-up" of the sentences de- and re-contextualizes the fragments, allows for alternative readings, and makes the sentences "palpable" in their verbal materiality. The sentence "Somebody pierced me with a beautiful gaze." (Nádas 2006, 159) is part of the passage narrating the happenings at the hospital, and it refers to the look of a doctor, presumably. Nevertheless, in its typographic isolation the sentence might confront the reader-viewer with his/her own gaze touching the very surface of the page or the photograph next to the text [Figs. 1–2].

The unnamable in *Own Death* is not only a thematic issue (e. g. related to body, illness, death) but also the unsaid, the unspeakable within language. The book format does not only speak about the loss of concepts, about the narrator's reluctance to reestablish social orientation, about his desire for the ungraspable

such as the memory of a perfume or the experience of some lack and absence, but the large white spaces, the empty pages visualize silence, amplify interruption, and rupture within representation itself. The photographs resist any caption, and their presence cannot be domesticated by adjusting them to the logic of the text. The interrupted sentences of the text, the interruptions themselves, as well as the non-semantic but meaningfully quiet, "airy" white spaces withholding the words (or taking a "breath"), the continual return and the displacement of the photographs can be addressed as an instance of sens*a*ble intermediality exposing the book as a corpus working through the otherness of the body, through the unnamable experience of (dis)embodiment and passing.

The Sensablity of the Filmed and the Filmic Body

Forgács Péter's film *Own Death*,[9] based on the book by Nádas, adapts/adopts the text and the photographic mode of the book by using discrete and still photographic frames, close-ups, blurred, faded images of bodies and textures, images of the pear tree, amateur found footage, slow sequences of movement, all of which confer the film a specific rhythm and expose the moving image as an archive of still frames. The photographs are at times interrupted by live action, and though Forgács uses images from amateur footage, the film consists mainly of material he directed himself. The smooth, even, non-dramatic narratorial voice-over of the film[10] is done by Nádas, the author of the book himself, who reads the text rather than acts it out, exposing the textuality rather than the dramatic aspect of the essayistic narration, performing a detachment from the narrated story and the narrated (that is: constructed and unavoidably fictionalized) self. In the film the role of someone suffering a heart attack is played by István Benkő which is another instance of distancing, overwriting the mediated presence of the authorial voice through the figure of otherness and absence.

Figures of "Double Vision"

"Double vision" is an explicit metafigure of the book and the film in many respects:[11] the text foregrounds the problem of perception and representation

9 The film won the Grand Prize for Experimental Films at the 2008 Hungarian Film Week.

10 In the English version of the film the text is recited by Peter Meikle Moor.

11 "A double vision that comes almost inevitably with my profession often impaired my sense of reality, and so I had to be on guard against my own perception" (Nádas 2006, 93). "It proved to be an amusing little advantage, useful in interpretation, that in my

through language and through the camera, raising even the question of the autobiographical context: the author-narrator's identity as a writer and photographer entails a professional(ized) predisposition (but also a distrust) towards the multifold perception, interpretation, and representation of the world or the self. Due to the liminal experience of the embodied subject in the proximity of death, there is an ongoing reflection on the elusive otherness of the own corporeality and self,[12] on the altered conditions of perception and self-perception, on the way perception constructs the perceived, as well as on the way the subject faces the limits of conceptual thinking and the incommensurability of sensations – all these emphasizing the act of mediated, retrospective, narrative meaning-making. The linguistic-conceptual and the photographic mode of perception and representation shape each other through the dialectic of approximation and distance in narrating the self and the liminality of experience. Seeing, visual perception is permanently foregrounded in the verbal narration and photographs, text fragments and white spaces are literally folded into each other on the pages of the book. The "meek" and reflexive irony of self-observation and self-detachment in narrating the "own death" dismisses the possibility of pathos and also presupposes a "double" (or rather multiple) vision, a displacement, a shift of perspective within the own as other, within narrating an elusive experience that cannot be possessed, only constructed through the figurations and detours of a retrospective, culturally embedded first person account.

The figure of double vision also shapes the filmic representation, the layering of narratorial voice-over or visual text fragments on the image, revealing the non-transparent, textured aspect of the image and the textual linkage of the film to the book [Figs. 3–4], as well as the intermedial endeavor of the adaptation itself. The act of telling and the act of seeing often overlap as in the sensual photographic close-up of an eye (a recurrent image throughout the film) occupying the whole frame, shown while the "mother" of all narrations" (Nádas 2006, 169), Polymnia is evoked in the text to help the narrator cross the Styx.[13] The film, while exploring figures of proximity and touch through a camera "palpating" the pores or the sweat of the skin, also adopts the perspective of double or multiple vision, of detachment, of gentle irony or reflexivity in dealing with the elusive in-

previous life I had been not only a writer dealing with the value and evaluation of words, but also a photographer who deals with the nature of light" (Nádas 2006, 221).

12 "My other self wanted to have firm control over this delicate matter" (Nádas 2006, 93).

13 "Mother of all narrations, Polymnia, hear my plea, let me cross the Styx with common words" (Nádas 2006, 169).

betweenness of birth and death or in reinterpreting certain cultural and literary metaphors, quotes or concepts. The text reflecting on passing, on exit, on the moment of leaving one's life is accompanied by the eroticism of slowness, delay, and partial disclosure in the found footage (?) showing the process of pulling down the zipper on a woman's dress.[14] The filmic images eroticize (rather than feminize) the experience of departure, of dissolution, and cannot be linked to a narrative function or to a definite origin: they only create a sensation, the sensation of slowness, of erotic processuality and fading [Figs. 5–7].

The Intermediality of the Photo-Filmic

The film adapting and adopting the photographic mode of the book becomes extensively photo-filmic, and it is not surprising that the use of still photographs reminds one of Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1963).[15] Vivian Sobchack discussing the use of photography in Marker's film which is made up of a series of discrete and still photographs emphasizes that the film *projects* phenomenologically as a temporal flow and an existential becoming and organizes the discrete photographs into animated and intentional coherence. This highlights "the difference between the transcendental, posited moment of the photograph and the existential momentum of the cinema, between the scene to be *contemplated* and the scene as it is *lived* (Sobchack 2004, 145). *La Jetée* in Sobchack's interpretation "allegorizes the transformation of the moment to momentum that constitutes the ontology of the cinematic and the latent background of *every* film" (Sobchack 2004, 148). Forgács's film, inquiring into the ontology and the "anatomy" of the body and death – and also that of a text, – exposes the ontology and the "anatomy" of the cinematic: the "body" of the film and the memory of the celluloid constituted of stills. However the still photographic frames are "carried away," displaced, contextualized by a temporal and narrative flow in a re-animated media archive, a moving photo-filmic album, conveying stillness in motion or the stillness of motion, performing and not merely thematizing medial acts of transition (the slowing down of the moving image and its inverse: the re-animation of the still photographs of the pear tree).

14 Nádas writes about the ambiguous commensurability of the experience of totality with religious or amorous ecstasy: "You are granted an experience of totality to which, in this vale of tears, only the ecstasy of religion or love can come close. And probably giving birth, for women. The more courageous of them will tell you that in those moments pain and pleasure melt into each other, turning the whole thing into a great cosmic, erotic adventure" (Nádas 2006, 201).

15 According to Scott Macdonald, Forgács's film is formally reminiscent of Marker's *La Jetée* (Macdonald 2011, 8).

Moreover, from the much broader context of artistic and cultural parctices – as van Alphen argues – the increasing use of photography, documentary film, home movies, archives, and family albums can be related to memory practices signalling either the celebration of memory and the desire to look back or a memory crisis and a fear of forgetting (2011, 59). In *Own Death* the memory practices through photography do not pertain to a broader cultural-historical recollection, but rather to the embodied – and culturally embedded – private remembrance both in its conceptual and sensual dimensions.

In Forgács's film the ongoing reflection on the altered conditions of bodily perception due to illness entails that the function of the filmic and photographic blur as a trace of media experience is twofold: using Joachim Paech's terms, the blur in *Own Death* has a cinematographic (*kinematographisch*) function that alludes to photography in a media-referential way, but it also has a filmic (*filmisch*) function[16] when it is used thematically: e.g. to suggest, but also to perform the disturbance of perception, of vision through the blurred moving image. The modulation between the blurred and the sharp within the same frame indicates an act of medial transition or medial event of difference within the image [Figs. 8–10]. Thus the blur as a medial figure can be related to the way in which the diegetic world and its medial articulation shape each other: thematically it signals the alteration of sensations and bodily perception through fluid images, and at the same time it disrupts medial transparency, making the medium observable in its opacity.

As illness and pain displace the transparency and the unreflected familiarity of the body, and make it both own and other, the close-ups of the body parts decompose the image and the concept of the body as a self-evident integrity and expose it in its pores, textures, and membranes with either an anatomic precision or on the contrary: as a blurred, ungraspable, evasive phenomenon. The close-ups or the faded, blurred images enable the intimacy and the hapticality of viewing, of seeing as palpation in Merleau-Pontyan terms which is both embodied and

16 Laura Mulvey uses the terms 'film' or 'filmic' in a somewhat different way – with a media-referential meaning – when she discusses 'film time' and 'cinema time:' "This affects the opposition between 'film time,' the inscription of an image onto the still frames of celluloid, and 'cinema time,' the structure of significance and flow that constitutes the temporal aesthetic of any movie, fiction or documentary. Usually, the second conceals the first, but when the forward movement is halted the balance changes. The time of the film's original moment of registration can suddenly burst through its narrative time" (2006, 30–31). Cf. "sie funktioniert einmal 'kinematographisch,' also medien-referentiell auf die Fotografie bezogen, und 'filmisch,' indem sie tematisch-sujethafte Aspekte (mentale Aufmerksamkeitsstörungen z. B.) formuliert" (Paech 2008, 350).

reflective. The still close-ups of the body parts are viscerally intimate images of the body but at the same time are abstracted, disconnected from the unity of a singular, self-same body or identity which they question and decompose, disclosing a camera interested in approaching and touching a surface [Figs. 11–16]. This may resonate with the narrated experience of not-yet-death in which the body experiences itself in its fragments, in its organs exposed by the pain, in its self-sameness and otherness at the same time. (The image of the body traversed by infusion tubes questions any clear-cut boundary between the biological body and the medically-technologically assisted and inhabited body.) Whereas in optical visuality the relationship between the viewer and the image may be one of mastery, in which the image can be isolated and comprehended, haptic visuality "implies making oneself vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing" (Marks 2000, 185). In *Own Death* the haptic images and close-ups of the fragmented body mark a withdrawal from the mastery of the image, pointing not only to the trauma of (clinical) death but also to that of representation.

Moreover, the close-ups also affect the temporality and the rhythm of the film, as well as the conditions of spectatorship. As Mulvey puts it, "the close-up has always provided a mechanism of delay, slowing cinema down into contemplation of the human face, allowing for a moment of possession in which the image is extracted, whatever the narrative rationalization may be, from the flow of a story" (2006, 163–164). The slowing down or the suspension of the flow of the story enables a sens*a*ble spectatorship through which the sensual and the discursive aspects of the image shape each other. The "own death" of the body is twofold: the carnal body becomes its own image in death and the body as image is arrested in a still frame within the moving image.

It is not only the bodies that are decomposed into visually palpable surfaces of close-ups, the film as a whole, as a transparent "body" is cut up and exposed as suturing together still frames, long segments being made up of a series of still photographs whose unsettling mode of existence is linked phenomenologically to the "qualities of presence and absence, present and past, now and then, a here before us now encompassing a there displaced in time" (Rodowick 2007, 56). The narrative or diegetic integration of certain frames is delayed, withheld for a sens*a*ble viewing lingering on the (temporarily) non-referential sensuality of the image. Some frames, for instance, display an abstract, blurred image with a fragile line crossing the surface, and even if we hear the sharp sound of an ambulance counterpointing the visible, and later on we hear the text about the

infusion disambiguating the fragile line, the images still remain suspended for a while in the indeterminateness of sensation [Figs. 17–19].

The experience of breathlessness and suffocation during the heart failure ("There was no air in the air…"[17]) is not thematically but "methodologically" adapted through slowing down the moving image (of a hand opening a window), through cutting it up into still frames arranged into a movement sequence reminiscent of the older technique of chronophotography. In this sequence the viewer experiences a suffocating – or on the contrary: air-giving (?) – sensation through the lack of movement in movement, through the paradox of still motion or stillness in motion [Figs. 20–22].

Along theoretical concepts that link the photographic index to death and pastness, photography in *Own Death* can be related to the uncanny in-betweenness of animate and inanimate, life and death: "the photographic index reaches out towards the uncanny as an effect of confusion between living and dead" (Mulvey 2006, 31). This ambiguity defines the aesthetics of the film that works through a text about the intertwining of being and non-being, birth and death, proximity and detachment: "My mother gave birth to my body, I give birth to its death" (Nádas 2006, 217). The first images of the film show the moments of a birth. The slow motion black and white shots do not document the biological moment of coming into life: the monochromatic quality and the slowness of the images denaturalize and de-mystify the body and the moment of birth (shown as both amazing and violent). The scene is exposed as the image of life and birth to look at in a film in which a body is about to deliver its death, resembling nevertheless a re-birth into the (cosmic) impersonality of being.

In the book the narrator alludes to Andrea Mantegna's painting, *Dead Christ* (c. 1480–1490), which is well-known not only because of the famous foreshortened perspective but also the "close-up" aspect of the image of the body in which even the hardened, dried skin around the wounds is visible, showing not an ethereal but an embodied, human, physical body of Christ.

In Nádas's Mantegna-allusion the perspective is inversed, the narrator is looking out on himself in an almost grotesque perspectival foreshortening (Nádas 2006, 231). This visual experience is linked – through the figure of double vision – to the techniques of observation: to photographic seeing and the awareness of an imagined camera-position beyond the conceptual world, higher than his own actual position, a distance that articulates the visual experience of the own body or subjectivity as other. The narratorial position and the modality of self-

17 "There was no air in the air: that was my problem." (Nádas 2006, 91.)

perception are shaped by a technical apparatus of seeing that requires distance and points to the unavoidably mediated aspect of the liminal experience. In the book the Mantegna-allusion is rethought not only in relation to the technical-photographic mode of observation but also in relation to medical discourses and technologies that ultimately reanimate the body: "They have burned the stamp of reanimation into the very flesh of my chest" (Nádas 2006, 255). Cultural, religious, medical discourses intersect in the almost palpable textual figure of the burnt seal on the body, the imprint of a technically assisted, secular resuscitation.

The film also incorporates the Mantegna-allusion and its inverse: the painting is re-enacted through bodies and through photo-filmic images [Figs. 23–25]. The head is not fully visible whereas in Mantegna's work the composition, the foreshortening leads to the head of Christ (and according to some also to his genitalia). The partial, distorted, blurred re-enactment of the painting can also be linked to the secularizing re-appropriation of the iconographic and cultural tradition in which the carnal and the filmic body are the media of "re-animation." Due to the unusual perspective and the significance of foreshortening, the Mantegna-allusion foregrounds the interconnectedness of viewpoint, representation and (self)perception, as well as the medial and cultural embeddedness of memory, of a visceral liminal experience and its retrospective narration. The photographic re-enactment of Mantegna is shown in the film after the professionalized photographic vision is verbally thematized in relation to light. The images accompanying this textual passage are sensual, textured, surface-based, and everything that happens at all, happens to and in the membrane of the film not in the diegetic world: the scratched skin of the film is media-reflexively exposed. The scratched, deteriorating and/but at the same time changing, "living" membrane of the film discloses the material fragility of the medium: it does not mediate images, but becomes the image of its own decomposition reminding the viewer of corporeal vulnerability [Figs. 26–28].

In this sequence and throughout the film there are inserts of Péter Nádas's and Lenke Szilágyi's photographs, as well as found photos and footage from the Private Photo and Film Foundation[18] and ECOFilm Association. The photos seem to be random imprints of an indefinite private, personal memory, resisting any unequivocal readability. In the appropriating context of the film about death and liminal corporeality the found photos and footage expose the body, often the young, alive, moving, and lived body of the other, producing a sensation of pastness,

18 The foundation is a unique collection of amateur films founded by Forgács himself in 1983.

of temporal detour, of random remembrance. The unsettling relation between the indexicality of the found footage and the photographic images and their ambiguity in the context of the film undermines the ontological certainty of the index and posits these images (and photographs in general) as unstable, indefinite traces. Ernst van Alphen – following Kaja Silverman's line of thought according to which Forgács's films are based on strategies of repersonalization rather than objectification or categorization – considers that in these films the function of the archival footage evoking the phenomenal world, vitality, enjoyment, or activities like dancing and playing differs from that of the archival practices: "Whereas the archival mechanisms of objectification and categorization strip images of their singularity, Forgács's archival footage keeps insisting on the private and affective dimension of the images" (van Alphen 2011, 61). In *Own Death* the found footage is also detached from documenting, objectifying functions, and – folding unto rather than illustrating the text – lingers in the indefiniteness of memory or remembrance related to the diegetic world. Nevertheless, the found footage together with the photo-filmic imprints or with the reminiscent technique of chronophotography also function as traces of media-historical memory: the found material cannot only be linked to the memory practices of an embodied subject but it also constitutes the memory of the film itself as a historical medium.

Sensable Reflectivity, Sensable Spectator

The intermediality and the reflexivity of stillness and slowness in Forgács's film are manifold. The photo-filmic images are linked (among others) to the question of the representability of the body eluding its own medial 'mummification:' the body is fragmented and exposed as a still image, as its own effigy, remaining ungraspable as a self-same totality. Still frames, fragmented close-ups, slow motion, or medially textured images not only expose the unnamable experience of illness or death in which the own (body) appears as other, but also uncover the medium, the membrane of the film.

The photo-filmic disrupts the medial transparency of the film by folding the filmic into the photographic or the pictorial and by arresting the temporality of the moving image through an almost album-like seriality. The insertion of photo-filmic frames, the slowing down of movement to a suffocating (or air-giving?) stillness in motion, the blurring of the images, and the detachment of the sensuous, haptic imagery from narrative functions – all these are part of a media-reflexivity which is not self-enclosed. What we see is rather a fold in which the modality of working through

the phenomenology of birth, illness, death, body, perception, and self-perception, as well as through their conceptual, cultural, or visual representability exposes the cinematic "body" with its constituent cuts, interruptions, inserts, frames, textures – without losing sight of the liminal experience of the carnal body and the embodied self. The experimental photo-filmic anatomy of the body, the close-ups of the pores of the skin stretch in front of the eye as surfaces the viewing of which cannot be but a sensually reflective experience calling not only for a pensive spectator (Bellour, Mulvey),[19] but for an embodied viewer, a sens*a*ble spectator, and the research perspective of sens*a*ble intermediality.

References

Belting, Hans. 2011. *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. Transl. by Thomas Dunlap. Princeton University Press.

Borbély Szilárd. 2007. Átbillenni, átbukni, átfordulni, leválni... (Leírás Nádas Péter *Saját halál* című könyvéről) [To Tilt Over, to Tumble Over, to Turn Over, to Peel Off…]. In *Testre szabott élet. Írások Nádas Péter* Saját halál *és* Párhuzamos történetek *című műveiről* [*Customized Life. Writings About Péter Nádas's* Own Death *and* Parallel Stories], ed. Rácz I. Péter, 40–64. Budapest: Kijárat.

Kiss Noémi. 2007. A fotográfia, az élet negatívja [Photography, the Negative of Life]. In *Testre szabott élet. Írások Nádas Péter* Saját halál *és* Párhuzamos történetek *című műveiről* [*Customized Life. Writings About Péter Nádas's* Own Death *and* Parallel Stories], ed. Rácz I. Péter, 79–91. Budapest: Kijárat.

Macdonald, Scott. 2011. Péter Forgács. An Interview. In *Cinema's Alchemist. The Films of Péter Forgács*, eds. Bill Nichols and Michael Renov, 3–38. Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press.

Marks, Laura U. 2000. *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses.* Durham–London: Duke University Press.

Marks, Laura U. 2002. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media.* Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Milián Orsolya. 2007. Saját helyek – fragmentum [Own Places – Fragment]. In *Testre szabott élet. Írások Nádas Péter* Saját halál *és* Párhuzamos történetek *című műveiről* [*Customized Life. Writings About Péter Nádas's* Own Death *and* Parallel Stories], ed. Rácz I. Péter, 92–103. Budapest: Kijárat.

19 Bellour's helpful and inspiring term "pensive spectator" – and the way Mulvey uses it – emphasizes rather the intellectual, cerebral aspect of the spectatorial activity.

Mulvey, Laura. 2006. *Death Death 24x a Second. Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion Books.

Nádas Péter. 2006. *Own Death*. Trans. by Salamon János. Göttingen: Steidl.

Oosterling, Henk. 2003. Sens(a)ble Intermediality and Interesse. Towards an Ontology of the In-Between. *Intermédialités* [*Intermedialities*] no. 1: 29–46.

Paech, Joachim. 2008. *Le Nouveau Vague* oder Unschärfe als intermediale Figur [La Nouveau Vague or The Blur as an Intermedial Figure]. In *Intermedialität – Analog/Digital. Theorien – Methoden Analysen* [*Intermediality – Analogue/Digital. Theories – Methods – Analyses*], eds. Joachim Paech and Jens Schröter, 345–361. München:Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

Pethő Ágnes. 2010. *The Passion for the In-Between. Cinema and Intermediality*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Rodowick, D. N. 2007. *The Virtual Life of Film.* Massachusetts – London: Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Sobchack, Vivian. 2006. "Cutting to the Quick:" Techne, Physis, and Poiesis and the Attractions of Slow Motion. In *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven, 337–351. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Sobchack, Vivian. 2004. *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Stoller, Paul. 1997. *Sensuous Scholarship*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Streitberger, Alexander and van Gelde, Hilde. 2010. Photo-filmic images in contemporary visual culture. *Philosophy of Photography* vol. 1 no. 1: 48–53.

Van Alphen, Ernst. 2011. Toward a New Historiography. The Aesthetics of Temporality. In *Cinema's Alchemist. The Films of Péter Forgács*, eds. Bill Nichols and Michael Renov, 59–74. Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press.

List of Figures

Figures 1–2. Photographs, white spaces, isolated sentences folding unto each other. (Péter Nádas: *Own Death*)

Figures 3–4. Text-layers on the image: suspending the transparency of the film.

Figures 5–7. In-between image and text, "pain and pleasure:" the slow sequence of pulling down a zipper accompanying the text about leaving one's life.

Figures 8–10. Blurred images mediating the disturbance of vision and exposing the medium in its opacity.

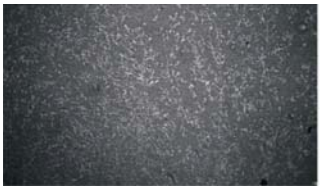
Figures 11–16. The body as image disjointed into close-ups.

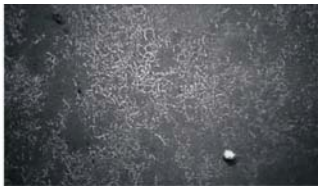
Figures 17–19. The images of the infusion tube suspended in the indeterminateness of sensation.

Figures 20–22. A hand opening a window: the visual paradox of stillness in/of motion.

Figures 23–25. The re-enactment of Mantegna's *Dead Christ* through the medium of the body and film.

Figures 26–28. Exposing the membrane of the film.





Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 41–58

The Sensation of Time in Ingmar Bergman's Poetics of Bodies and Minds

Fabio Pezzetti Tonion
Museo Nazionale del Cinema (Torino)
E-mail: fabio.pezzetti@libero.it

Abstract. Bergman's cinema does more than just focus on a personal reflection of the body as an emotive and emotional vector; his cinema, through the transitory fragility of the human body as represented by his actors, defines the possibilities of a perceptive horizon in which the experience of passing time becomes tangible. Even though the Swedish director's entire opus is traversed by this reflection, it is particularly evident in the films he made during the 1960s, in which the "room-sized" dimension of the sets permits a higher concentration of space and time. In this "concentration," in this claustrophobic dimension in which Bergman forces his characters to exist, there is an often inflammable accumulation of affections and emotions searching for release through human contact which is often frustrated, denied, and/or impossible. This situation creates characters who act according to solipsistic directives, in whom physiological and mental traits are fused together, and the notion of phenomenological reality is cancelled out and supplanted by aspects of dreamlike hallucinations, phantasmagorical creations, and psychic drifting. Starting from *Hour of the Wolf*, this essay highlights the process through which, by fixing in images the physicality of his characters' sensations, Bergman defines a complex temporal horizon, in which the phenomenological dimension of the linear passage of time merges with, and often turns into, a subjective perception of passing time, creating a synchretic relationship between the quantitative time of the action and the qualitative time of the sensation.

Keywords: Ingmar Bergman, perception of space and time, sensations.

Starting in the mid-1950s, the close correlation between Bergman's cinema and the possibility of representing time in film became evident. French film critique played a key role in this respect, highlighting a central aspect of a film opus in continuous evolution that went through various phases concluding with diverse outcomes (Rohmer 1956, Béranger 1957, Godard 1958, Hoveyda 1959).

Eric Rohmer noted how Bergman recognized cinema's ability to represent life and its unadulterated length, divesting it of intrigue and suspense, and showing

that life is, basically, monotonous (Rohmer 1956, 7). This became the defining trait of a type of cinema that represents a potential capitulation to a flow of time which captures every *qualitative* level and not just those which create strong dramaturgical and narrative dimensions (Steene 2005, 131–141).

In his critique of *Prison* (*Fängelse*, 1949), Jean Douchet analyzed the film from an ethical standpoint which considered Bergman's desire to explain the presence of hell which reigns on earth as the fulcrum of the filmmaker's poetics, and introduced the concept of "instant privilégié." To the French critic, this is a moment of equilibrium between the protagonists' realization of the cruelty and indifference of the world and the possibility of experiencing a moment of joy and peace – despite everything. Actually, more than an equilibrium, it is a suspension in the flow of the *pain* of time, which, as it crystallizes itself in an instantaneous dimension, removes those experiencing it from the chronological flow of time and places them in a privileged and abstract dimension which, nonetheless, is destined to disappear almost instantaneously (Douchet 1959, 52).

Douchet's reasoning is interesting and productive when it evokes the gaze, that act of looking which is so closely tied to how the gazer's face is filmed, and regards Godard's reflection that Bergman is the filmmaker of the instant (Godard 1958, 2). The Swedish director demonstrated not only the desire to use the cinematographic means in virtue of its fundamental ability to *mold* time, but also and above all, of the possibility it offers to subject time to a continuous metamorphosis which captures it qualitatively and develops it quantitatively by acquiring, mastering, and giving new meaning to conventional and proven narrative structures (for example, the flashback) and to a spatial dimension involving the mise-en-scène and the shots, above all of the face. This paper is based on the conviction that, even though Bergman's films are populated with figures who embody Time (in particular, the representation of Death, a pervasive presence in the Swedish director's filmography), the focal point of a reflection on the possibility of analyzing temporality in film lies in how the body and, more specifically, the face are represented.

Jacques Aumont suggests that Ingmar Bergman's mature filmmaking phase coincided with his invention of forms showing the process of possession and abstraction of the face, which no longer refers to a purely physical dimension but also embodies a subsequent level of the person's alteration. To Aumont, Bergman perfected these staging techniques of close-ups and full close-ups in his tetralogy of films shot on the island of Fårö – characterized by his study "of neurosis in its relation to the mental image,"– establishing a parallel between practices of

stylization and abstraction aimed at defining a limit of the subjective and memory-based dimension (represented by qualitative time), and its relationship with a spatial dimension as characteristic as that of the close-up (Aumont 2003, 170).

Bergman's creation consisted in perfecting what Aumont defined as the "hyper-close-up," in which the identifying form of a person (the face) is spatially constrained within the edges of the frame, thus liberating its clarity and expressivity (Aumont 2003, 170) [Fig. 1]. The Swedish filmmaker's opus progressively distanced itself from psychologizing ways of representing the human face and created a new way of staging the spatiality of the actor's body that also influenced the temporal dimension. Two frames are emblematic of the evolution in Bergman's use of the close-up in his reflections on time: the first features Maj-Britt Nilson (in the role of Mårta) and is taken from *Waiting Women* (*Kvinnor väntan*, 1952); the second is from *Cries and Whispers* (*Viskningar och rop*, 1972) and shows Liv Ullmann (in the role of Maria) visiting her bedridden sister in Agnes's "resurrection" scene [Figs. 2–3]. The narrative, psychological dimension prevails in *Waiting Women*; on the other hand, *Cries and Whispers* is based on the juxtaposition and clash between the deconstruction of the story and the characters, and the intensification of classical dramaturgy using pre-modern cinematographic technology (Neyrat 2007, 12). Although *Waiting Women* is constructed on three flashbacks, its temporality is linear. In *Cries and Whispers*, the temporal dimension is shattered and challenged, and there is no clear confine between the "real" world and the one created by the altered reality of dreams and memory; the close-ups of the protagonists lie at the junction of this problematic temporality, in a fluctuating structure generated by the interiority of the characters and by delving into the singularity of psychic time.

During the 1950s, Bergman believed that the close-up still had the value of *emphasizing* feelings: it traced them, underlining and rendering them explicit. Later, the close-up became an instrument for stylizing space and concentrating time. This can occur by shattering the temporal dimension, pushing it to the limit; in this dimension, a clear division is drawn between the "real" world and the one created by the altered reality of dreams, memory, the peculiarity of psychological time (Gervais 1999, 122).

It also occurs in the close-up of Märta reading the letter in *Winter Light* (*Nattvardsgästerna*, 1963), a close-up which blends together not just different temporalities but different experiential situations, as well (that of Märta and that of Tomas Ericsson). Thus, faced with what can technically be considered two equivalent planes, Bergman introduced a sideslip which tempers the passage

from one form of mise-en-scène to another and renders time visible through close-ups of the face (cf. Aumont 1992, 100) [Fig. 4].

The method used by Bergman to make time perceptible is to insist on the body, denuding it through a process of painful unveiling which is often accompanied by monologs, with the character gazing at the mirror image of his own conscience or that of others. A mirror which is not only metaphorical, since it becomes the tangible and privileged object in which the characters reflect themselves and reflect on themselves. The mirror is the instrument which separates face from body, isolating it. It enables one to choose the unique, identitary cipher of the body, isolating it and insisting on it: in Bergman's films, the face becomes a sensorial space on which the director's camera registers the passing of the instants. But, in his films, images of the face are not always accompanied by the use of a mirror: this might be the instrument which thematizes the use of the face, but its function is, in fact, to focus the gaze on what is being reflected. An equivalency can be established between the techniques used to stage the reflected image of the characters (which "doubles" the subjects, making them unstable, forcing them to confront themselves) and that of the full-face close-up shot of the characters. Thus, just like a mirror offers its own evidence to the person looking into it, the full-face shot offers the spectator the naked evidence of the character, providing a mirror-effect which tends to reflect a vision of pure time, objectively correlated to a distressing idea of mortality, of impending death.

Winter Light is perhaps the most evident example of this practice. In this film, Bergman proposes interesting stylistic features in his portrayal of temporality: the long scene in which the letter is *re-cited* by Märta Lundberg is, in the body-time of the film, a moment of otherness which, rather than interrupting the chronologically linear dimension of the film and its unity of time-place-action, indicates instead a possible and concrete elsewhere. That is, Bergman creates a double level of temporality, a fringe of the past that becomes crystallized in the present and places it under constant tension. Through this tension, he makes time manifest: it is as though he can visualize time and make it perceptible in the concrete experience of its flow. Regarding the relationship of cinema with time and becoming, Paolo Bertetto writes that "the filmic image is […] a moving image which shows the flows of things in space and time, produced by the mise-en-scène;" these images are able to also show "in a clear manner the temporal character of people and things. Everything that is visible appears in a temporal articulation and the things are distributed along the temporality of the flow. The moving image, therefore, very clearly articulates the procedural fluidity and the

spatial transfer of things, as well as the temporal character of the flow, of its state of being *chronos*" (Bertetto 2010, 159–160).

An austere and stringent film, *Winter Light* marks a radical break in Ingmar Bergman's cinematographic style: striving for intense stylistic perfection that revolves round the aesthetic pole of realism (Donner 1970, 119), *forced* into the three unities of time, place, and action, the film nonetheless tends toward a dimension of the abstraction of phenomenological reality which finds particular relevance in the filmmaker's pondered use of the close-up and its associated temporality. In fact, even when the mise-en-scène disallows the close-up, it is evoked by its very absence, as in the long scene in which the body of Jonas Persson, who committed suicide, is found. Filmed as a long shot – bearing detached and objective witness, – the scene depicts the impossibility of communication between individuals [Fig. 5].

By disallowing a close-up of the face, the emotional vector par excellence, it manifests the moral and human defeat of the pastor Tomas Ericsson and creates an ultimately excruciating sensation of passing time. The film is constructed in the present; what matters is the ongoing, unrepeatable moment in which existential solitude is experienced (portrayed by a simple mise-en-scène, in which the actor's body is the inevitable focal point of a plane which tends to annul itself in the void): to the characters in this film, time is pain; in fact, if the objective use of space contributes to creating a feeling of isolation, the subjective perception of time highlights the crisis of the present, which is full of suffering and doubt.

Bergman, through his work on space and the actor's body, achieved a more aware and mature confrontation with the possibilities of representing time. Time becomes *flesh*, it assumes a physical, emotional, and spiritual concreteness in bodies whose actions and decay are brazenly flaunted by the director [Fig. 6]. The many ill characters (in whom the illness undermining the physique is also the metaphor of an infirmity of the soul and refers to a spiritual dimension that is able to transcend the confessional and religious limits which have often been used to interpret Bergman's cinema) populating his films embody a private pain which is often viewed as universal. This pain, in its visual effects on the body, marks the inexorable passage of time which consumes and destroys, and which often does not even leave the illusory comfort of memory, because even memories are often bent to a logic of lies which reflects the inevitable moral, relational, and human defeat of the characters. The pastor Tomas Ericsson is emblematic of this approach; he constructs a fictitious memory that is a far cry from the reality of his personal relationship with his defunct wife. The inability to accept the painful

evidence of the failure of human and emotional relationships is the theme of *Cries and Whispers*, a film which is entirely constructed on the resurfacing of memories which are irreconcilable with the defensive reality which the protagonists have tried to erect around themselves.

Märta Lundberg's blistered hands in *Winter Light*, Ester's body wracked by consumption in *The Silence* (*Tystnaden*, 1963), and Agnes's cancer-riddled body in *Cries and Whispers* are only a few of the most obvious examples of an opus that is able to render the physicality of pain concrete and perceptible, of the mise-en-scène of bodies consumed by time and consecrated to consuming themselves in death. This ability of Bergman is even more exceptional if one takes into account that these three films belong to the period in his career during which he consciously espoused techniques of explicit stylization. If the mise-en-scène tends toward sobriety in the adopted solutions, these solutions insist on the actors (the true measure of Bergman's cinema), exalting their possibilities and capturing (and transfiguring) their physical concreteness. Thanks to his experience in the theater (where what counts is the *here and now* of the unrepeatable presence of a body determined by time and performing within a space), Bergman transferred to his films an awareness of their ability to also represent the flow of time, encapsulated in a body that is inevitably destined to be annulled: hence, the exceptional value attributed to the *instant*. Michel Estève stresses the fact that "in opposition to Sartre's thesis, according to which the present is nothing other than an escape, a flight from death and empty perdurance, Christian existential conception (to which both Bernanos and Kierkegarrd adhered) underlines the exceptional value of the instant, an intersection point between eternity and our temporality, the possible fullness of time and duration" (Estève 1966, 67).

But time which consumes the body is also time which corrodes human relationships: to stage and film the process with a camera that follows it throughout its duration means to tread a path that unveils the lie and leads to a dimension of annulment. And to work on the image in order to push it toward the limits of the void was one of the objectives Bergman pursued in some of the key films of his opus. Reflecting on the cinematographic images of Bergman's films of the 1960s, Jean Narboni writes that "long confined to the margins of his films, the silent forces and their power to *create* the voids surreptitiously slipped into their very texture, softening the outlines and blurring the boundaries" (Narboni 1967, 41).

Persona is the film which most explicitly confronts this limit, reflecting on the role of cinema as a device and the dimension inherent to the individual person. Enclosed between a prologue and an epilogue which thematize the meta-

cinematographic dimension, constructed almost entirely of close-ups and long takes, *Persona* is representative of the tension of research in Bergman's films from the 1960s, research which invests the meaning and the use of the close-up. An emblematic synthesis of a process of subtraction and abstraction (which veers toward destruction: of the screen, of the device, of the character, and of the narration), the film problematizes the correlation between the close-up of the face and the psychological dimension of the subject. In depicting Elisabet Vogler, Bergman highlights the parallelism between the physical dimension and what could, for simplicity's sake, be defined as the spiritual dimension of a person who is drawn toward his or her own depletion and annihilation. Aumont writes: "To represent a face, to draw a portrait (whether or not it belongs to the pictorial genre known as 'portraiture'), means to contemporaneously search for two things: resemblance and, again, resemblance. Visual resemblance, which can be empirically detected by the eye, which can be adjusted through artifices of the atelier, which can be analyzed in localized similitudes, in proportions; and the spiritual – or simply personal – resemblance, which cannot be detected but which can be sensed, which cannot be analyzed but which carries conviction" (Aumont 1992, 26–27).

This dimension of abstraction also regards the characters, whose faces undergo a process of metamorphosis which confounds their identifying contours, both from a physical point of view and from the point of view of their relationship with the surrounding world. To this regard, Steve Vineberg writes: "The mystery at the heart of *Persona* is the mystery of identity, articulated by Bergman and his two actresses chiefly in two ways. The first is the mirror exercise, in which we cannot say for sure which of the two women is the initiator and which is the responding mirror. The other is the metamorphosis, a process whereby an actor undergoes a dramatic mutation of some kind. […] The central image of *Persona* – the unforgettable 'mirror' shot in which the two women's faces merge – is, of course, an image of metamorphosis" (Vinenberg 2000, 124).

Persona intentionally creates a world that is suspended between the concreteness of reality and the impalpability of dreams, a complex sur-reality which ends up acquiring the traits of the subjective world of the protagonists, setting in motion a process of osmosis, by means of which the mental subjectivity of the characters tends to invade and dominate the objectivity of the physical world [Fig. 7]. *Persona* is a psychological battleground, on which the individual subjectivities of the protagonists fight for the expressive territory which exalts the individual and becomes the location expressing the soul: the close-up, the

location of the con-fusion between the objective dimension afferent to the world and the character's own subjectivity [Fig. 8].

In the foundational figure of the close-up and full close-up, Bergman experiments with the possibilities of a new type of cinema, freed of the urgency to confront reality and assuming aspects which are increasingly frayed, undefined, ephemeral. In a cinema on the threshold of life which always overlaps with Death (evoked, suggested, and ambiguously represented), an obsessive and constant figure casting its long shadow even in films consecrated to summertime and love, is embodied in a "last, powerful, and abstract image: time" (Aumont 2003, 126). Bergman confronted time by using two apparently different methods that are actually complementary and interconnected: thematizing and reflecting on the best cinematographic means for rendering time perceptible. Over the years, by working on the possibilities of and the many methods for staging an instantaneous temporality (able to capture life as it unfolds but also to concentrate on the precise instant in which it seems to suspend itself and hover in a dimension that is not within the jurisdiction of the chronological passage of time), Bergman constantly redefined the canons of his own film technique, passing from the extreme freedom and ease of the filmic with regard to the profilmic, to his desire to closely control the shots. By thus passing from the forms of a free cinema to those of a rigorous cinema, the director constantly expanded his own reflection on time and the possibilities of its representation, starting with methods of chronological analysis and ending with extreme forms of abstraction.

Like *Winter Light*, the film *Hour of the Wolf* (*Vargtimmen*, 1968), too, explores the duration of time but it also opens up to another reflection and a new level of ambiguity: reality (or rather: "here is time") which falls into a hallucinated dimension (or rather: "which time?"). Similar to *The Face* (*Ansiktet*, 1958) in both its thematic choices (the humiliation of the artist, the fusion of reality and the fantastic) and its stylistic ciphers (the continuous friction between objective and subjective elements, between various levels of reality and the possibility of experiencing the sur-reality of magic and dreams), *Hour of the Wolf* is the film which carries the hallucinatory dimension of Bergman's opus to the extreme. Like a true Strindbergian "ghost sonata," the film is populated by vampire-like characters moving within a mise-en-scène in which the confines of nightmares entwine with those of awakening.

The film also addresses methods of mise-en-scène and questions of temporality with which the director had already experimented in *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*, 1957). In fact, in *Wild Strawberries*, Bergman explicitly deals

with the theme of time. If his previous films had clearly displayed complex and sophisticated research on the portrayal of temporality, this film compares quantitative time and qualitative time, and clearly reveals the theoretic deviation which the filmmaker would imprint on his opus from then on. *Wild Strawberries* is the laboratory in which he experiments in depth with possible ways to render the constant fluctuation between the quantitative and the qualitative dimensions in how time is experienced. For example, observe how his flashbacks have more than just an evident dramaturgical function; they are also endowed with an added significance because his structuring of the film creates a virtual confusion in its temporal levels. In other words, Bergman gives the flashback a double role: it ferries the story from one temporal dimension to another, dimensions which are nonetheless characterized by a quantitative acceptance (time which has passed, which can be measured), and, at the same time, it creates a fracture in the chronological dimension, into which he inserts the qualitative experience of time. Moreover, in *Wild Strawberries*, Bergman begins to consciously display his own desire to create a type of cinema which studies the possibility of comprehending the many levels of reality: in fact, the filmmaker held that if cinema can pay attention to a strictly phenomenological dimension of reality (through a mechanism that exploits the illusion), it can also create a sur-real dimension. In other words, a dimension that contains phenomenological reality, but which is difficult to perceive. This highlighting of the sur-real derives from cinema's ability to deal with a plurality of times, above all with qualitative times which define the experiential horizon of the characters.

Let us now consider the construction of *Hour of the Wolf*, in order to try to understand how Bergman's work on temporality led to the re-definition of a particular type of film image which is characterized by its relationship to the ambiguous dimension of fantastic temporality. This re-definition is a type of confirmation, an institutionalization of a constitutive process of which traces can be found in past experiments since, as Jacques Aumont notes, already with *Persona* Bergman invents "a new statute of the filmic image. No longer an indication, a trace which is ontologically coupled to the appearance of reality. No longer fantasies or pure extravaganza. But rather the enchanted realism of interior images" (Aumont 2003, 161–162). *Hour of the Wolf*, which is born in a dimension of problematic and hallucinated realism, which develops in the ambiguous confrontation of the realities of the two protagonists (Johan and his wife Alma), which clashes and concludes with a horrific dimension that has almost an expressionist matrix, takes the intuitions of *Persona* and pushes them

toward the outer limit of obscurity. The light treatment in this film is carefully calibrated: the characters are engulfed and swallowed up by darkness, and light is constantly battling obscurity. Moreover, when light is present, the images are over-exposed to the point that everything is precipitated into a hallucinatory atmosphere of nightmares that are coming true.

The film opens with a monolog by Alma, who is looking straight into the camera [Fig. 9]. This *mise-en-scène* is important not just because it is repeated in the finale of the film, in which the woman is talking to an invisible listener, but also because it is preceded by the sounds of the scene itself being prepared. We can hear the prop men moving objects and movie cameras around on the set, we can presumably hear Bergman coaching Ullmann on how to interpret the scene. Thus, we are faced with a procedure of alienation which, on the one hand, makes it more difficult for us as the spectators of the cinematographic device Bergman is setting up, and, on the other, represents a *different* time with respect to the story which the film is about to present us. We are faced with an initial fracture of the film's temporal reality, or better, of the temporal continuity of the story's main level. We realize that the time of the filming is about to be substituted by the time of the film: and a very special film it is, with its fantastic and dreamlike dimension.

Within the framework of Alma's monologs which open and conclude the film (which support this framework and give it meaning, making us perceive the film as a story told by the woman), the story unrolls as a complete flashback. At first glance, *Hour of the Wolf* is the narration of Johan Borg's crisis, which he recounts to his wife after he has already died. We are confronted with yet another temporal level, a critical moment of the past: the past as a dimension of memory in which the recollections that are sparked bear the seed of ambiguity, of fallaciousness, of the possibility of not existing. From this point of view, the shot of Alma Borg as she observes the painting of Veronica Vogler on the wall in Baroness von Merkens's bedroom is emblematic. We know that the woman is looking at the painting but we don't see it and never will. The painting, the portrait which brings the past concretely into the present, is annulled, as is the period of time which could have been conserved in it: the only time which remains is the duration of the shot, which is filled with Alma's interior time [Fig. 10].

A further loop of this spiral evolution of time is proposed right after the apparition of the Old Lady (Naima Wifstrand), who tells Alma where she can find her husband's diary. This episode is of dual importance to the economy of the film: it is the first moment in which the dimension of ambiguity (which is a prelude to the fantastic) is linked to time. In what sense? In the sense that the

statute, the index of reality of the Old Lady, is never made clear. She might be a real presence but then again she might be a ghost. Or rather, it is possible that Alma, too, in virtue of her love and cohabitation with Johan, sees the same ghosts her husband sees (and, in fact, the film closes with this question).

Bergman insists on this element of ambiguity; rather than limiting himself to dialog (with the Old Lady's slip of the tongue, when she first says she is 216 years old and then corrects herself, saying she is 76), he uses a precise strategy in the mise-en-scène. First we see Alma taking a blanket outside and spreading it out on a table to air; then, when she senses that someone is standing behind her, she turns around and the movie camera pans until it comes to a stop on the Old Lady. From that moment on, we are authorized to believe in the actual presence of the Old Lady, except for the fact that the director never shows Alma and her together in the same frame. And when the old woman goes away, the doubt remains: Alma is shown on her own and the long shot seems to confirm that until that moment she really has always been by herself. The doubt that this sequence generates grafts a dimension of altered reality onto the fabric of the film; in this sequence, we are confronted with a moment of suspended and uncertain temporality, in which chronological, objective time is substituted by a dimension of time which is purely personal: the dimension of the character's interiority. However, it must be immediately stressed that, in the case in question, this is true only after the whole film has been viewed, because at that particular moment the narrative has not yet been developed enough for us to propend for either the real or the fantastic dimension. At this point in the film, we can only have doubts, no certainties – above all regarding Alma. It is interesting to note that, before this sequence, Bergman had proposed a reflection on the concreteness of the duration of time. Johan looks at his watch and tells his wife not to fall asleep before dawn has broken, after which he times one minute, as though to define a very precise horizon of objective temporality, which is tied to the seconds as they pass. From this point of view, time which never passes, which becomes an oppressive and unbearable weight, could be the key to our approach to the film [Fig. 11].

As mentioned above, the apparition of the Old Lady who reveals the existence of the diary leads to another twist, which undermines the temporal dimension which had been created such a short time before. In fact, as Alma reads her husband's diary, she activates three suspensions of the linear passage of time: her reading evokes three encounters Johan Borg had on the island, the first with Baron von Merkens, the second with his former lover Veronica Vogler, the third with Mr. Heerbrand. The nature of these suspensions (or flashbacks within the

principal flashback, which is the film itself), of these disturbing fractures which disrupt our comprehension of temporality, is ambiguous and it shifts the film from the dominion of reality to that of unreality, of mental creation, of dreams and desires. The facts recounted in the diary might have truly happened, but then again, maybe they didn't: they could have simply been imagined by Johan Borg, who, as we know, has been ill and hasn't completely recovered.

And, if the encounters with von Merkens and Heerbrand can be ascribed to the dimension of reality, in part because of the mise-en-scène of these encounters, Veronica Vogler's apparition leaves little doubt as to the nature of the protagonist's mental projections. In this scene, we see Johan sitting down and holding his head between his hands; the sudden appearance of the *other*, the image-body of desire, takes place at the edge of the shot. Until that moment, the shot had been dominated by a single temporality (which registers Johan Borg on a stony beach). But now it is filled with the *other*, her subjective time, the time of memory, of remembrance and desire that takes the form of Veronica Vogler, who is also the bearer of a message which highlights the horrific dimension of the film: unbeknownst to Johan, he is being observed by the creatures who populate the island and soon his nightmares will become real. In a single plane, Bergman manages to depict two different temporalities: this is yet another example of how the director's portrayal of time works on different levels. Moreover, as we have seen so far, this multiplicity of levels is reached by stages, and the cohabitation of different times defines an ambiguous difficulty in the relationship between real and imagined [Figs. 12–13].

The same thing happens during the story-confession that Johan tells to Alma after the dinner at the castle: the murder of the young man, who was first crushed against a rocky wall and then beaten to death with stones and thrown into the water. This story, which is depicted in coarse-grained, overexposed images which clearly portray a highly hallucinatory dimension, is yet another loop in the temporal spiral on which the director concentrates. It also corroborates that horizon of doubt, of ambiguousness which is fundamental to the film: the protagonist himself says that he doesn't know if what happened really did happen for real. On the surface, this flashback is similar to the previous three, but in the dramaturgical progression of the film, we are unable to note that it takes place after the turning point represented by the dinner at the von Merkens.

Why is this dinner, this moment which leads to the protagonist's denouement, so important? Because it is at this precise point in *Hour of the Wolf* that the protagonist's solipsistic dimension gets the upper hand. If, in fact, in the first

part of the film the dimension of time, of reality, and of that ambiguousness which could veer toward the fantastic was mediated by the figure of Alma, from this point on her mediation vanishes; or better, even when present – like in the sequence in the forest – her mediation is infected by the malady of Johan's demons. This passage takes place during the sequence immediately prior to the dinner sequence, when Johan returns home, sits down at the table, and listens to Alma's boring story of her shopping trip. Johan, in a close-up, turns and looks into the camera long enough for us to understand that it isn't just a look of affection, a look full of empathy and morality; from that moment on, the claustrophobic world of the film will be seen through that look. Johan Borg's mental images will populate the film and will decisively influence the temporal dimension and its continuous slipping between real and imagined.

In the sequence right afterward, when Johan confesses to his wife, Heerbrand shows up at Borg's house and invites the man to another party, where Veronica Vogler will also be present. When he goes away, he leaves a pistol on the table, since both he and Baron von Merkens are not sure that the painter can defend himself against the island's spells. At this point, after a dramatic confrontation between the husband and wife which ends with Johan shooting at Alma and grazing her with the bullet, the film opens up to a dimension of greater unreality. The subtle ambiguousness, which until then had traversed and bathed the happenings and apparitions in a dreamlike and disturbing light, opens up completely to the mental dimension, to the mise-en-scène of the protagonist's ghosts. This eruption of a hallucinatory dimension also defines a complex treatment of time, a fracture characterized by a new quality: time is no longer evoked (for example, by reading a diary or telling a story in the first person); time directly concretizes the interiority of Johan and, at a certain point, symbiotically of Alma, as well.

After the sequence described above, a sharp cut presents us with Johan wandering through the corridors of von Merkens's castle. Here he encounters various characters he had previously met and who now present themselves with their spectral and fantastic attributes: the Baron walks on the walls and the ceiling; Lindhorst takes on the guise of an enormous bird after conducting Borg to the door of Veronica Vogler's room; Veronica appears to be dead but then she reawakens, as all the guests of the castle observe her and Johan, and laugh. It is the moment of the final and definitive confession (in a film which is constructed like a continuous confession), when the masks fall. But the confession is interior, it takes place in the intimacy of the man's mind, which has come unhinged; he now

only sees what he wants to see. This is made clear by the way time is treated: after the end of this sequence of painful humiliation, there is a cut and we return to Alma as she starts telling her story once again to an invisible listener. The woman says that after Johan shot at her, he left the house but returned a few minutes later and then wrote in his diary for hours. Thus, there is a temporal incongruence between the sequence in the castle and the woman's story. Therefore, what we saw is a form of time which depicts the temporal dimension of the man's interiority. And this temporal dimension is made even more problematic and is pushed to a new extreme: it is this tension which concretely defines the suspended dimension of the fantastical ambiguity of *Hour of the Wolf*.

Let us observe the sequence of the *pre-finale* – which takes place in the forest – and briefly analyze how it is structured. It opens with Alma running through the forest as she searches for Johan. She finds him sitting on the ground and she hugs him [Fig. 14]. At this point, Bergman, with a fade-out, shows us that Alma is no longer with Johan: in fact, we see that she is with Baron von Merkens. We later see Johan being attacked by the guests of the castle; but then the forest is deserted, Johan has disappeared, and Alma is all alone. This sequence is emblematic of how Bergman uses time to define the horizon of the fantastic: he overthrows the character who is the vector of the interior temporality on which the second part of the film is constructed. If, until this moment, the time we saw portrayed was Johan's, the main protagonist of the sequence in the forest is the man who is attacked and wounded by his demons, but as seen through Alma's eyes.

It is a further example of the mise-en-scène of time: before, Bergman had shown us how the objective dimension of time could coexist on the same plane and in the same shot with its subjective dimension; here, he confronts us with the coexistence of two subjective times: Johan's and Alma's. In fact, he does even more – he adds another loop to that temporal spiral which is the basis of *Hour of the Wolf* – and does so by letting the woman's temporal dimension be invaded by her husband's. The times intertwine and blend together, making it impossible to distinguish reality from the hallucinated dimension of the fantastic and mental projections.

Bergman's research of time and his ability to make it slip from the objective to the subjective, from the concreteness of the duration to the immeasurable perception of its entirety, creates the indefinite outlines of a mental image which is frayed and ambiguous: an image in which reality can generate the fantastic, with all its demons and ghosts. Thus, *Hour of the Wolf* portrays the director's attempt to make a plurality of dimensions coexist, in which the borderline

between reality and the imaginary is cancelled out and leads to that equivalence in which the fantastic possesses the same ontological status as reality.

Starting in the 1960s, Bergman's films traverse new cinematographic territory, reflecting his increasing mastery of the use of the close-up and, at the same time, of the processes for staging a form of purely cinematographic time that is able to bring together the plane of reality with that of the imagination, memory, and dreams. From the union of an explicitly cinematographic technique like the close-up (and the full close-up) and a multifaceted method of representing time, Bergman ferried his own reflections on cinema toward abstraction, consciously and irreversibly. But, at the same time, he rendered increasingly explicit the emotional failure of his characters, who are unable to find authentic human contact, unable to let their faces be convulsed by spasms of emotion: forced, like Andreas Winkelmann in *A Passion* (*Passion*, 1969) to wear a neutral mask. A face-surface which reveals nothing and which seems to discourage even the evidence of the inevitable passage of time and life itself.

References

Aumont, Jacques. 1992. *Du visage au cinéma* [*Face in the Cinema*]. Paris: Editions de l'Etoile/Cahiers du Cinéma.

Aumont, Jacques. 2003. *Ingmar Bergman. "Mes films sont l'explication de mes images."* [*Ingmar Bergman. "My Films Are the Explanation of My Images."*] Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma.

Béranger, Jean. 1957. Les trois métamorphoses d'Ingmar Bergman [The Three Metamorphoses of Ingmar Bergman]. *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 74 (August/September): 19–28.

Bertetto, Paolo. 2010. *La macchina del cinema* [*The Machine of Cinema*]. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Donner, Jörn. 1970. *Ingmar Bergman*. Paris: Editions Seghers.

Douchet, Jean. 1959. L'instant privilégié [The Pregnant Moment]. *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 95 (May): 51–53.

Estève, Michel. 1966. Nattvardgästerna (Les Communiants) ou le silence de Dieu [Nattvardgästerna (The Communicants) or the Silence of God]. *Études cinématographiques* no. 46–47 (1st trimester).

Gervais, Marc. 1999. *Ingmar Bergman. Magician and Prophet*. Montreal & Kingston/London/Ithaca: McGill-Quenn's University Press.

Godard, Jean-Luc. 1958. Bergmanorama. *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 85 (July): 1–5.

Hoveyda, Fereydoun. 1959. Le plus grand anneau de la spirale [The Largest Ring of the Spiral]. *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 95 (May): 40–47.

Narboni, Jean. 1967. Ingmar Bergman: Le festin de l'araignée [The Feast of Blood]. *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 193 (September): 34–41.

Neyrat, Cyril. 2007. Le dompteur de démons [The Tamer of Demons]. *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Hors-série: 11–13.

Rohmer, Eric. 1956. Présentation d'Ingmar Bergman [Presentation of Ingmar Bergman]. *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 61 (July): 7–9.

Steene, Birgitta. 2005. *Ingmar Bergman. A Reference Guide*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Vineberg, Steve. 2000. *Persona and the Seduction of Performance*. In *Ingmar Bergman's Persona*, ed. Lloyd Michaels, 110–129. Cambridge/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

List of Figures

Figures 1–4. Close-ups in *Persona* (1966), *Waiting Women* (1952), *Cries and Whispers* (1972), *Winter Light* (1963).

Figure 5. *Winter Light* (1963): a close-up evoked by its very absence.

Figure 6. The pain, in its visual effects on the body, marks the inexorable passage of time which consumes and destroys.

Figure 7. *Persona* (1966): a world suspended between the concreteness of reality and the impalpability of dreams.

Figure 8. The close-up as the location of the confusion between the objective dimension afferent to the world and the character's own subjectivity.

Figures 9–14. *Hour of the Wolf* (1968).

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 59–78

Remediating Past Images. The Temporality of "Found Footage" in Gábor Bódy's *American Torso*

Judit Pieldner
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Miercurea Ciuc, Romania)
E-mail: juditpieldner@gmail.com

Abstract. Along Laura U. Marks's thoughts on the "disappearing image" as embodied experience, the article proposes to bring into discussion particular modes of occurrence of "past images," whether in form of the use of archival/found footage or of creating visual archaisms in the spirit of archival recordings, within the practice of the Hungarian experimental filmmaking of the 1970s and 1980s, more specifically, in Gábor Bódy's films. The return to archival/found footage as well as the production of visual archaisms reveal an attempt of *remediation* (Bolter and Grusin) that goes beyond the cultural responsibility of preservation: it confronts the film medium with its materiality, historicity, and temporality, and creates productive tensions between the private and the historical, between the pre-cinematic and the texture of motion pictures, between the documentary value of the image and its rhetorical dimension. The paper argues that the authenticity of the moving image in Gábor Bódy's *American Torso* (*Amerikai anzix*, 1975) is achieved through a special combination of the *immediacy* and the *hypermediacy* of experience. Bódy's interest in "past images" goes beyond the intention of experimentation with the medium; it is aimed at a profound, reconsidered archaeology of the image and a distinct sensing of the cinema.[1]

Keywords: Gábor Bódy, found/archival footage, remediation, embodied experience, optical and haptic visuality.

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

Introduction. The Disappearing Image as Embodied Experience

Whether simply belonging to the ever widening circle of spectators or to those being overwhelmed by the desire to also account for their spectatorial experience, our intimate relationship with the moving image can most probably be traced back to some early cinematic experiences – or to the experience of the early film. Those who once got mesmerised by the magic of film and have remained in its companion ever since, have formed their private history of the cinema, with "early films" occasioned by their first encounters with the medium, which may function as their private "cinema of attractions."[2] Without risking a solipsistic discourse, I wish to argue that no matter which films or media fulfil the role of our own "cinema of attractions," we share the embodied experience of the pure and unconditioned spectacle[3] as being part of the set of images that are at the core of our spectatorial identity, of our private visual archives. These early film experiences may live vividly in us or may have lost their contours; in the latter case we may wish to access, to revitalize the vanishing images just like some true-born archivists.

Cinematic experience is in close connection with the sense of disappearance. Cinema history is strongly related to the quick succession of disappearing images, media carriers, and media specificities in the process of discontinuous tastes, advancement in technology, shifts in spectatorial needs and habits as well as attitudes to what has passed, to what is past. The resulting melancholy state of past images is also discernible in everyday spectatorial experiences or in educational situations. As Laura U. Marks confesses in her volume entitled *Touch. Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*: "When I began to teach film studies, I realized that the students will never *really see* a film in class: it's always a film that's half-disappeared, or a projected video that just teases us, with its stripes of pastel color, that there might be an image in there somewhere, that there once was an indexical relationship to real things, real bodies" (Marks 2002, 92). On the occasion of such spectatorial experiences the distinct temporality, the transient character of the recorded image is revealed, and in strong correlation with this, the sense of our own transience will get to the fore. As Laura Marks further says in the chapter *Loving*

2 I use here Tom Gunning's (1992) term referring to early film's character of displaying a series of images rather than narrating stories, arousing the wonder and astonishment of the spectators through the power of representation.

3 It was the fascination of the unconditioned spectacle that determined the spectatorial experience of the legendary film entitled *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (*l'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*, Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière, 1895).

a Disappearing Image: "To have an aging body, as we all do, raises the question of why we are compelled to identify with images of wholeness, as psychoanalytic film theory would have it; the question of whether this still is, or indeed was ever, the case; and the question of what it would be like to identify with an image that is disintegrating. Following Vivian Sobchack, I suggest that identification is a bodily relationship with the screen, thus when we witness a disappearing image we may respond with a sense of our own disappearance" (Marks 2002, 92).

Along Laura Marks's line of thoughts, the disappearing image does not only trigger our mourning for it. Paradoxically, its transience reinserts its auratic quality – in Walter Benjamin's sense of the term – the very aura that is supposed to have been lost together with the act of technical reproduction: "as images decay they become unique again: every unhappy film is unhappy after its own fashion" (2002, 94). Due to their regained aura and uniqueness, they become affective images, simultaneously asserting and celebrating the passage of time, acknowledged as the ultimate truth of our vulnerable existence: "Loving a disappearing image means finding a way to allow the figure to pass while embracing the tracks of its presence, in the physical fragility of the medium" (2002, 96).

The considerations above can lead us to a plethora of ways in which cinema has attempted at facing – resisting or displaying – its transience. However, Laura Marks's chapter title, "Loving a Disappearing Image," evokes in my mind a determining film experience, related to a quaint poetic experiment marking the start of career of Hungarian experimentalist filmmaker Gábor Bódy.[4] The set of images I recall are damaged, deteriorated, grainy from the outset, situated on the boundary between assertion and erasure, transparence and opacity, representation and dissolution [Figs. 1–2]. It is these (*non*-)images, however, that redeem the auratic quality of cinema in the age of technical reproduction as carriers of embodied perception, of an intimate, private connection with cinematic image.

4 Gábor Bódy (1946–1985), charismatic figure of the Hungarian filmmaking of the 1970s and 1980s, created his first films in the BBS (*Balázs Béla Studio*), he was the first Hungarian film director to direct films in the BBS already before graduating the College of Theatre and Film Art, specialization film and television directing. There he founded the Film Language Series, the first experimental film project of the studio, then he created his diploma film, *American Torso*. He presented himself in front of the large public with his first feature film, expanded into a hypernarrative, entitled *Narcissus and Psyche* (*Nárcisz és Psyché*, 1980); on his initiative the first international video magazine was founded; he established the experimental section of the MAFILM. He held lectures on film theory; in his theoretical writings he elaborated his views on seriality and the attribution of meaning in motion picture. He himself acted the main role of his third – and last – feature film entitled *Dog's Night Song* (*Kutya éji dala*, 1983).

1. Past Images. The Use of Archival/Found Footage as Remediation and Figuration

In an essentialist approach, the film medium was born out of a desire of archiving, that is, the wish to preserve visual material on a long-term basis. As Thomas Ballhausen points out in his essay entitled *On the History and Function of Film Archives*, once this desire is fulfilled, the subsequent need to preserve films themselves was born, implying an ethical responsibility, that of saving the values of the past from cultural amnesia, of preventing them from becoming obsolete. As Ballhausen notes, the Avant-Garde discovered film history by following in the path of archives: it returned to the beginnings of film with the purpose of confronting the medium's origins and its tradition. Already in the early period of film history, in the period of Avant-Garde cinema, the utilization of found material, of prior images, goes beyond the mere effort of preservation: the found footage becomes "an interface which enables the avantgarde director to evoke the subversive potential and quality of early cinema" (Ballhausen).

The use of archival/found[5] footage has been a general practice of film throughout cinema history, present in the filmmaking practice of Esfir I. Shub (co-worker of Eisenstein and Kuleshov), Joseph Cornell, Bruce Conner, Ken Jacobs, Hollis Frampton, to mention but a few of the most outstanding examples (cf. Yeo 2004). Ever since the Avant-Garde endeavours of utilizing found material in the spirit of Marcel Duchamp's *objet trouvée*, the span of film history from the early Avant-Garde to the post-media age, with the significant contribution of the experimental filmmaking of the 1970s and 1980s, has assigned an emphasized role to the found/archival footage, implying – but going far beyond – the intent of preservation.

5 As for the difference between archival footage and found footage, I resort to Michael Zyrd's distinction: "The found footage film is a specific subgenre of experimental (or avant-garde) cinema that integrates previously shot film material into new productions. The etymology of the phrase suggests its devotion to uncovering 'hidden meanings' in film material. […] Found footage is different from archival footage: the archive is an official record from the outtake; much of the material used in experimental found footage films is not archived but from private collections, commercial stock shot agencies, junk stores and garbage bins, or has literally been found in the street. Found footage filmmakers play at the margins, whether with the obscurity of the ephemeral footage itself or with the countercultural meanings excavated from culturally iconic footage. Found footage filmmaking is a metahistorical form commenting on the cultural discourses and narrative patterns behind history. Whether picking through the detritus of the mass mediascape or redefining (through image processing and optical printing) the new in the familiar, the found footage artist critically investigates the history behind the image, discursively embedded within its history of production, circulation, and consumption" (Zyrd 2003, 41–42).

Archival/found footage knows a great variety of cultural uses, designated by a great number of terms such as recontextualization, recycling, reuse, repurpose, rewriting, and has become "a, if not the, dominant critical procedure in independent film and videomaking" (McDonald, qtd. in Yeo 2004). Steve F. Anderson highlights the significance of the use of archival/found footage in terms of representation criticism: "The appropriation and reuse of 'found footage' inaugurates multiple possibilities for reinscription and critique of previously articulated codes of representation, and invites us to question the manner and extent to which 'history' may be constituted through images at the most basic level" (Anderson 2011, 70).

In his volume *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* William C. Wees speaks about three modes of found footage use corresponding to three paradigms/political positions: using archival/found footage for the purpose of documentation (documentary realism), collage (along the aesthetic principles of modernism), and appropriation (in the context of postmodernism) (Wees 1993). These three modes rely on distinct perceptions of archival/found footage, from serving as the evidence of the past, in the case of documentation, to more subtle medial and representational games relying on the tension between authenticity and mediatedness of the embedded archival/found footage that can be encountered in modern and postmodern cinematic productions. As Steve F. Anderson puts it, "The appropriation and use of found footage may be understood as a tactical maneuver within which the simultaneous deployment and subversion of ontological certainty is a crucial factor. The discursive import of found footage thus relies upon its claim to a prior, indexical connection to the world, at the same time it is inscribed in a fully articulated and conventionalized system of filmic signification" (Anderson 2011, 70–71).

Along Steve F. Anderson's considerations, a shift can be detected in the theoretical discourses of the archival/found footage from recontextualization to rhetorical strategy (2011, 72). This shift provides a distinct standpoint, from where the archival/found footage can be viewed not as a set of images (simply) standing for "the real," rendering some kind of transparent representation within the body of cinematic discourse, but rather as *figuration* in itself, as an alternative modality of mediation and representation, creating productive tension and opening up the possibility of interaction between two distinct sets of moving images.

Thus, we arrive at the paradox of the archival/found footage: the "less" becomes "more," the apparently "transparent" turns into the "figural" and becomes the carrier of manifold – cultural, temporal, medial – significations. In

a phenomenological approach, it is this – ontological and temporal – disparity and tension of the distinct visual registers implied by the use of archival/found footage that becomes significant, together with the question what kind of cinematic experience this ontological and temporal rupture provides.

Indexical archival footage embedded into feature film, as an ontological *niché*, creates a dynamic structure, induces fluctuation, inscribes a sense of difference together with a displacement of spectatorial positions. Its presence as *figuration* may serve as the locus of meditation upon time and history, it may as well open up a more profound, existential dimension, as, for instance, in Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* (*Zerkalo*, 1975), in which the sequences taken over from a war documentary – exhausted soldiers are trailing a cannon in mud and water – deepen the discourse of film and endow it with an additional metaphysical dimension, activating in the spectator the documentary consciousness in the sense Vivian Sobchack discusses the term, that is, "a particular mode of embodied and ethical spectatorship that informs and transforms the space of the irreal into the space of the real" (Sobchack 2004, 261).[6]

The use of archival/found footage can also be discussed in terms of *remediation*, in the sense Jay Bolter and David Grusin rethink the term in their volume entitled *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (2000). Differently from former conceptions of the term (that is, the process by which new media technologies improve upon or remedy prior technologies), Bolter and Grusin suggest by remediation the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms. In the case of the use of archival/found footage the gesture of revitalizing earlier forms of moving images is present; this revitalization can take place in the gesture of offering the earlier images as they are, without manipulating them (but also in this case the reuse itself can be considered as a subtle form of touch

6 It has to be noted here that documentary consciousness, as Vivian Sobchack puts it, goes beyond the generic distinction between fiction and documentary; the terms fiction and documentary designate subjective relations rather than cinematic objects. In *Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience* she defines documentary as "less a *thing* than an *experience* – and the term names not only a cinematic object, but also the experienced 'difference' or 'sufficiency' of a specific mode of consciousness and identification with the cinematic image" (Sobchack 1999, 241, emphases in the original). In the chapter entitled *The Charge of the Real. Embodied Knowledge and Cinematic Consciousness* of her volume *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* she thinks further the phenomenological model of cinematic identification, stating that "fiction and documentary, as supposedly *different* logical types as *genres*, are reducible to the *same* logical types *as cinematic images*" (Sobchack 2004, 260, emphases in the original). Thus what Sobchack calls "the charge of the real" is not particularly related to documentary as a genre, but it is the specificity of the phenomenological experience of the cinema.

and selective/authoritative intervention, activating an altered spectatorial gaze, sensitive to cultural, temporal, and medial differences) or manipulating the archival/found material with various techniques and with various purposes, including the intent of creating a fruitful dialogue with the history and identity of the cinematic medium itself.

The use of archival footage in film art can also be approached by adapting the idea of the anachronism of images to cinema: Hans Belting borrows the term and its meaning from the art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman, who by the anachronism of the images refers to the fact that the set of inner images that we dispose of have been created in an earlier stage of our life (Belting 2004). Accordingly, the intent of establishing connection with earlier motion pictures betrays the wish to explore the images that form the identity of the medium.

2. Gábor Bódy: Archival Footage and the Authenticity of Cinematic Experience

Archival material has been widely used Hungarian film history ever since the 1960s, however, it becomes a peculiar means of expression in the Béla Balázs Studio by the end of the decade, under the influence of Dezső Magyar's two films, *Agitators* (*Agitátorok*, 1969) and *Punishment Expedition* (*Büntetőexpedíció*, 1970), inspiring Gábor Bódy, Péter Tímár, Miklós Erdély, and Péter Forgács (cf. Murai 2009).

In his study examining the stylistic figurations of archival footage András Murai points out three traditions as regards the use of archival material in Hungarian film history: one is the reflective representation of the relationship between film and reality as the feature of the European modernist cinema (e.g. in Bergman's, Antonioni's, and Godard's cinematic art); the second is the attraction of Hungarian films towards historical themes, which also provides a possibility for them to formulate their critical attitude towards contemporary society; and the third is the use of archival footage or filmmaking in the spirit of/imitating archival footage as film language experiment within the creative workshop of the BBS. As opposed to the practice of films dealing with history which resort to archival material in order to display the recorded reality and irrefutable evidence of the past, in experimental films, especially in Gábor Bódy's works, archival footage does not serve as the place of memory but rather as a means of analysing the signification structure of the moving image (cf. Murai 2009).

For Gábor Bódy's experimentation with archival footage the model was provided by Dezső Magyar's *Agitators*, in which Bódy himself acted the part of one of the

protagonists (László Földes acting the role of the other) and he was also the script-writer of the film. The young agitator whose role is acted by Bódy asks the question in the heat of the party debate: *What kind of reality?* [*Miféle valóság?*] – this question will echo for long in Hungarian film history, significantly determining, together with the double-coded reflections on the dialectics of theory and practice, politics and art, revolution and counter-revolution, the evolution of the trend of experimental documentarism as well as of Bódy's career as a filmmaker.

In the disguise of the historical film dealing with a controversial episode of Hungarian history, namely the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, the *Agitators* provides a profound analysis of the model of revolution at an abstract level, applicable to further examples of revolution in the twentieth century. In line with the historical theme, Dezső Magyar's film includes indexical archival material, but with a subversive stance: the ideological purport of the film is juxtaposed with figures of the "second publicity," artists and intellectuals of the end of the 1960s, and presented in such an excessive, exaggerated way that it becomes the target of its own criticism. The film material is elaborated in the style of the embedded archival material, revealing the intent of offering the film as if it had been recorded in 1919. Thus, a peculiar interaction is created between the actual film recordings and the inserted indexical archival material, undermining the grand narrative and ideological discourse of the historical past; recording the film in the style of the archival material releases a potential of creative freedom that will inseminate films to come, also including Gábor Bódy's experimenting with film language and attribution of meaning.

The remediation of found/archival footage will be central to Gábor Bódy's reflexive-analytical filmmaking and film-theoretical thinking. Moved also by the ethical responsibility of preservation, but more intensely by the film language researcher's curiosity, he turns towards the found footage as a suitable means with the help of which the very nature of the moving image can be analysed, and also as a peculiar material suitable to displace the passive, uneventful spectatorial gaze. In my paper I wish to argue that it is the very usage of found footage and fake found footage that brings Bódy's conceptualisation close to an inherent sensuous theory of the film experience.

On a careful re-reading of Bódy's theoretical writings on film, we can discover references to a hidden, underlying sensuous approach to the cinematic experience. Besides the linguistic and semiotic approaches to film in line with the leading theories of the age, there is a covert phenomenological investigation of the moving image present in Bódy's writings. In several writings of his Bódy reflects on the

return to the primeval, atavistic cinematic experience that is a complex of spectacle and sensuous experience, retaining a dose of intimacy and concrete mystery and providing the spectator with the enchantment of the unconditioned spectacle. In *Anthology and Aspects to a Film Programme* (1972, 1979) Bódy regards the emergence of sound film as directly leading to the cultural and cultic practice of the camera that hindered the self-reflective development of silent cinema and thus considerably obstacled the sensuous revelation that cinema can offer, namely "the mere joy that we feel in connection with the fact that something is simply *there*…" (Zalán 2006, 68).[7] According to Bódy, it is the return to the pre-cultic use of the cinema that could re-activate the "unconditioned reflex" of film watching. The urge to return to the beginnings of the moving image, to the roots of the medium arises from the fact that the ideological, cultic, and commercial appropriation of the film medium contributed to the loss of the capacity of "unconditioned seeing." The role of film art is to relieve the spectatorial gaze from the ideological layers, from the artificially created "conditioned reflexes" and to create the conditions for the viewer to perceive the moving image as "unconditioned spectacle." In the essay entitled *Cosmic Eye* (1975) Bódy writes: "Fiction is brutal enough to ironically put itself in quotation marks. At the same time, even if in a playful manner, it urges the spectator to get rid of the 'conditioned reflexes' of cultural interpretation and to enter the simultaneously awakening- and requiem-like state in which the unconditioned spectacle is rooted" (Zalán 2006, 204). In the same piece of writing we can read: "When someone watches the images of the first film reel, he is shaken by the perfect objectuality of the images. These images do not impose their signification upon us, their effect is rather magical. They are impersonal, but intimate. They are the memories of the rendezvous of open spectacle and open interest. They create the impression which is also expressed in the lines of the *Archaic Torso of Apollo* by Rilke. [...] The capacity of unconditioned viewing is no longer given. To achieve it, both the viewer and the director have to proceed a way of destruction, in the course of which he becomes aware of – the exclusion of – the forms of awareness. This is a process of countdown until we reach the boundaries of language and consciousness" (Zalán 2006, 205–206). Thus the film medium, distanced from cultic registers and directed back to a medial and linguistic interest in the spirit of Avant-Garde filmmaking, becomes capable of reviving the mysterious and disquieting images of memory and imagination and of providing the authentic, embodied experience of the cinema.

7 The translations from Bódy's texts and from Hungarian specialist literature are my own throughout the article.

Bódy's films can be regarded as alternative film-theoretical theses, formulations of film-theoretical issues in the language of film. In an inverted chronological order in the spirit of returning to the origins suggested by Bódy himself,[8] *Private History*, directed by Gábor Bódy and Péter Tímár in 1978, is a 25-minute sound-image collage, embracing private recordings on the basis that they are less determined by the cultural-ideological conventions of the age. The time span that passed between the archival recordings and the presence of filmmaking endows the embedded images with new signification; even the previously uninteresting motifs can acquire new dimensions. The juxtaposition of the social and the private consciousness results in a productive asynchronity leading to a distinct quality of reception. Private recordings are regarded by Bódy as being exposed to the passage of time more than any other previously recorded film material. Bódy said in his notes on the film that from the point of view of archiving it was the penultimate moment. Bódy's follower, Péter Forgács probably grabbed the ultimate moment in collecting private recordings for his *Private Hungary* series, the first piece of which, interestingly, uses the same private recordings, those of Zoltán Bartos, as Bódy and Tímár's *Private History*, but with different accents and with a different poetics.

The short film entitled *Four Bagatells* (*Négy bagatell*, 1975), created in the Béla Balázs Studio, experiments with the possibilities of reinterpreting the moving image by subsequent masking of the archival material. In the first part the archival ethnographic recording is restructured by motion of the cross-hairs, guiding the spectator's attention.

In his short film entitled *After Jappe and Do Escobar Fought How Did the World Come to Fight* (*Hogyan verekedett meg Jappe és Do Escobar után a világ*, 1974), an adaptation to screen of a short story by Thomas Mann, the text of the short story that is read is juxtaposed with old TV news, film sequences and own material recorded in an archaic style. Thus the film plays upon the relationship between sound and image while the spectator gets confused about which sequence actually constitutes the archival material.

Through the visual archaisms and the deliberate act of creating (the impression of) fake found footage in his first feature film, *American Torso*, Bódy reveals his intentions as an archaeologist of images, searching for the reality of the medium beyond the time frame of cinema history.

8 We can encounter an archaeological orientation and ardent interest in the origins in Bódy's theoretical writings; in his writing entitled *Infinite Image and Reflection* he writes: "It is evident that the farther we advance in time, the closer we get to the origins with our continuously changing intellect" (Zalán 2006, 120).

3. The Fiction of Found Footage in Gábor Bódy's *American Torso*

The damaged images of Gábor Bódy's first feature film, *American Torso*, created in 1975, have not undergone the process of deterioration but have been intentionally created in this manner. Daringly, as the accomplishment of a task demanding proof of the creator's directorial aptitudes, Gábor Bódy came up with a diploma work that might as well have been interpreted as a failure, Bódy offering a distorted image of what a successful cinematic production should be. His model and master, Miklós Erdély wrote about this diploma film entitled *American Torso*: "Under the ruffled surface the presence of a denied adventure film can be felt all through the film. Above the film, separated from it so to say, there floats its artistic essence, which manifests almost never during film watching, but rather in form of a painful memory full of anxiety" (Erdély 1995, 186–187). Erdély's appreciation of the graduate director's diploma work draws our attention to the fact that Bódy's film resists certain generic expectations and simultaneously redirects our gaze to the "ruffled surface" of film, to the texture and materiality of motion picture, which comes to the fore in the process of making the moving images seem "older" than what they actually are. For this is what is effected through "the second gaze," that is, in the phase of post-production: with the help of techniques of manipulating the – black-and-white – recordings such as light editing, scratching and deteriorating the images, manipulating the soundtrack, slowing down the image and the sound, masking, the use of filters, etc., the impression of erstwhile recordings is created. The method called by Bódy himself light editing or light cutting [*fényvágás*], that is, the change of sequences is carried out by burning the image instead of cutting, significantly contributes to the creation of visual archaisms, to the effect of "film find" [Figs. 3–4].

American Torso is conceived as if arising from a kind of collective subconscious or mythical pre-existence of cinema; the cinematic images it consists of assume the status of some kind of memories of the medium. Gábor Gelencsér highlights the term memory in Miklós Erdély's appreciation quoted above: "The term 'memory' is suitable also as regards the film's basic structure, as it refers to something that used to be but what no longer exists, what can only be recollected. In the context of cinematic expression this precisely outlines the specific character of the medium: on the screen we can see something past, which in its conreteness evokes exactly what no longer exists in the moment of viewing the film" (Gelencsér 2004). By connecting the acts of mediation present in memory

as well as in the film medium, the fictitious found footage, or in other words, the "fiction of documentary," gets closest to the spirit of the cinematic medium itself.

The film itself carries out the dating of the found footage back into the pre-cinematic times. The spectator is invited to sign a pact with the director referring to the *fiction of found footage*: accordingly, the film is supposed to have been created in 1865, offering itself as an overtly "impossible documentary," following the fate of Hungarian revolutionaries emigrating to America after the suppression of the 1848 revolution and taking part in the American Civil War. The film displays liminal situations in which human character and behaviour is tested. The protagonists, János Fiala and Ádám Vereczky embody two types of human conduct: János Fiala does service to the army as a land surveyor by making calculations of distance with the help of the theodolite, he is challenged to compromise by the American Railway Association; Ádám Vereczky becomes the legendary hero of the American Civil War due to his uncompromised behaviour, due to his *action-gratuite*, standing with legs spread and arms crossed in the heat of the battle or jumping off the huge swing. They are drawn into decisions that represent models of possible individual behaviour against the backdrop of history.

The Hungarian revolutionaries experience the drama of becoming futile; thus, Bódy chooses to represent a liminal state thematically (the drama of a historical role becoming anachronistic, in course of dissolution), culturally (Hungarians in American emigration, experiencing the loss of home and cause), linguistically (the mixed use of Hungarian and English in the course of the film), and also medially (through the inventive use of the "pre-cinematic documentary" as well as through the generic/ontological confrontation of fiction and documentary). *American Torso* allows the spectator to view it neither as documentary nor as fiction, since the conventions of feature film sporadically present in the alleged documentary undermine the above mentioned pact of found footage, in this way, both the sense of "the real" and the sense of "the cinematic" will be compromised. Thus the film extends the situation of liminality to the spectatorial position as well.

In *American Torso* Bódy works out the poetics of the non-perfect film, in line with the aesthetic principles of modernism, aiming at a distinct concept of the cinema, of arts in general. In search for the connections between literature and the fine arts in the Hungarian culture of the sixties, seventies, and eighties, Éva Forgács (1994) points at the non-normative, erroneous sign use as the common conceptual basis of these distinct fields of art. Péter Balassa writes about Péter Esterházy's *Production Novel* (*Termelési Regény*, 1980) that linguistic norm breaking, the stylized deterioration of language, the consciously erroneous

language use makes the literary work be conceived in terms of texture rather than as construct. Together with other functional linguistic-stylistic inventions, such as repetition, linguistic plurality, or diverse linguistic registers, the deterioration of language creates a sense of openness and incompleteness, leading to a distinct concept of textuality (cf. Balassa quoted in Forgács 1994).

Bódy is especially interested in the damaged, deteriorated image; he adjusts the toolkit of film language to the fiction of found footage. Every erroneous recording or composition, every deteriorated form, unset focus, accidental movement of the camera (the camera, imitating the viewpoint of the theodolite, comes across the figures and events accidentally, through panning the field, or it does not record what should be recorded, it is not where the events and happenings of "grand history" are taking place), together with the burning of the film reel creating the impression of an erroneous copy, derive from the fiction of the one-time amateur filmmaker (cf. Muhi 1999).

American Torso abounds in examples of deframing. Pascal Bonitzer states that the appearance and spreading of compositional and figurative mistakes and spoiled forms in twentieth-century painting, radically altering the experience of the image, took place in fact under the impact of film: "After all, was it not cinema that invented empty shots, strange angles, bodies alluringly fragmented or shot in close-up? The fragmentation of figures is a well-known cinematic device, and there has been much analysis of the monstrosity of the close-up. Deframing is a less widespread effect, in spite of movement of the camera. But if deframing is an exemplary cinematic effect, it is precisely because of movement and the diachronic progress of the film's images, which allow for its absorption into the film as much as for the deployment of its 'emptiness effect'" (Bonitzer 2000, 199). Eisenstein's, Bresson's, Antonioni's films prove that deframing [*décagrage*], the shifts of angles, the employment of bizarre viewpoints, the unusual settings and compositions, the mutilation of the bodies by framing are basic stylistic devices of modernist film art, which ironically overwrite the forms of expression of classical Hollywood cinema. Deframing is the deviance of framing, the revolt of form; it "is a perversion, one that adds an ironic touch to the function of cinema, painting, even photography, all of them forms of exercising the right to look" (Bonitzer 2000, 200). Bódy's film actually displays "torsos," mutilating the figures by "careless" framing [Figs. 5–6]. The camera use and figural (de-)composition in *American Torso* are aimed at conveying the way human sight actually works (being discontinuous, non-homogeneous, and of varied intensity), as opposed to the underlying concept of human sight (as being continuous, homogeneous, and uniform) in the traditional filmmaking practice.

The fictional found footage displaces the indexical quality of motion picture. The *that-has-been* that Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida* (1981 [1980]) calls the essence or *noème* of photography is profoundly challenged once the moving images *perform* the indexical role in form of *simulacra* of old images, imparting the experience of the cinema as a disquieting paradox.

Gábor Bódy's experiment sets up a paradox, not merely in the above mentioned sense that it carries out the impossible project of a film recorded in pre-cinematic times, but also in that, by creating the "unconditioned spectacle" in the course of post-production, it confronts – along Bolter and Grusin's terms – the *immediacy of experience* (the authenticity of representation) and the *hypermediacy of experience* (the mediated character of representation). The film is directly aimed at clashing the two kinds of experience (an expressive film moment in this respect is the non-identical superimposition of the cross-hairs of the theodolite and the image of the cross [Figs. 7–8]), constituting a special case of what Ágnes Pethő calls the paradox of the "hypermediated cinematic experiences of the real" (2009, 47).[9]

The apparently amateur film recording "the real" is in fact a collage of heterogeneous audio-visual material, relying on diverse literary sources such as the short story entitled *George Thurston* by Ambrose Bierce, nineteenth-century memoirs by János Fiala, László Árvay, and Gyula Kuné, a quote by Karl Marx, László Teleki's letters, Walt Whitman's and Sándor Csoóri's poems; the soundtrack also displays similar hybridity and heterogeneity, containing, besides the presence of acousmatic sounds (in its turn a collage of sounds of birds/nature and weapons/war), also a collage of distorted (slowed down) classical music (Franz Liszt) and folk music (Ferenc Sebő). The collage of sound and image as well as the mixed multilingual character of the film (the employment of both Hungarian and English native speaker actors, dialogues both in Hungarian and English) result in the uniquely multilayered, hybrid entity of Bódy's poetic experiment.

"*What do you see?*" – János Fiala's emphatic question, together with the presence of the observing theodolite throughout the film, points at the fact that seeing, observing, the incorporation of the observer into the cinematic medium become central issues of Bódy's work [Figs. 9–10].[10] However, there is a paradox

9 In her study *(Re)Mediating the Real. Paradoxes of an Intermedial Cinema of Immediacy* Ágnes Pethő discusses types and cases when the cinematic image simultaneously triggers both the immediacy and hypermediacy of experience and points at the ways "the most transparent techniques can also end up as remediations" (2009, 47).

10 In my view, the return to the pre-cinematic age through the fiction of found footage connects Bódy's interest in the gaze, in the relationship between the gaze and the medium, to the paradigm shift taking place in the nineteenth century from classical optics to the making of the observer: "The notion of a modernist visual revolution

lying at the heart of Bódy's cinema: his concept of the cinematic medium strongly relies, on the one hand, on the enchantment of the gaze, on "the pathos of the eye" that can be traced back to the Vertovian legacy; on the other hand, there is a covert metadiscursive thread present in his works aimed at deconstructing the supremacy of the visual, of the eye as the sensory organ privileged in the course of the separation of the senses and the industrial remapping of the body taking place in the nineteenth century (Crary 1992). This paradox manifests in *American Torso* in foregrounding the gaze and techniques of the observer appearing side by side with the display of decayed images, with the touch of the skin of film.

By allowing the perception of the image's texture and materiality through the (camera imitating the) lens of the theodolite, the spectatorial gaze is simultaneously invited into the depth of the moving image and stopped at its surface; thus, the film ingenuously unifies the domains of optical and haptic visuality. The film rearranges the conditions of spectatorial participation and identification by redirecting the gaze to the "ruffled surface" of the moving image, welcoming haptic visuality: "[…] an image that is grainy, indistinct, or dispersed over the surface of the skin invites a haptic look, or a look that uses the eye like an organ of touch. This is how *love* works into this sort of identification. A tactile look does not rely on a separation between looker and object as a more optical or cognitive look does. […] This sort of look, then, is not just about death, but about loving a living but noncoherent subject, an image that contains the memory of a more complete self" (Marks 2002, 105).

In the process of redirecting the gaze to the reality of the medium, the moving image becomes a writable surface, welcoming the film director as a land surveyor, a cartographer of the cinematic medium [Figs. 11–12]. Ultimately, Bódy's "torso" experiment, compromising the idea of the wholeness and integrity of the images, calls forth an embodied perception of the cinema.

Conclusions

By now, the experimental endeavours of the 1970s and 1980s have become themselves archival documents of the cinema preceding the digital era, transmitting a sense of mythical origins for today's altered media culture. Gábor Bódy's work, labelled as a "torso," has become the legendary non-perfect film of Hungarian cinema history. Interestingly, the experimentation with the

depends on the presence of a subject with a detached viewpoint from which modernism – whether as style, as cultural resistance, or as ideological practice – can be isolated against the background of a normative vision" (Crary 1992, 4–5).

cinematic imaginary, the exploration of the non-existent archives of Hungarian historical consciousness, manifests as the confrontation of the medium with its subconscious, while a decade later, overseas experimentations with actual found footages, as present in Ken Jacobs' experimental filmmaking practice, will be labelled as downright the *Perfect Film*, suggesting a distinct approach to the role found footage may fulfil in cinematic experience.[11]

Through the poetics of fake found footage formulated in *American Torso* Gábor Bódy challenges (film-)historical consciousness, pointing at the unreflected ways in which mainstream historical films create – under the slogan of authentic representations of reality/history – totally inauthentic fictitious narratives. As Klára Muhi writes about the film: "It is evident that behind all destructive gestures and generic denials of the *Torso* there is the fight for the authenticity of the image. This unique experiment in an otherwise not too fruitful moment of film history can be connected to Bódy's ambition to release film from under the rule of genres, of image recording confined into rigid clichés, as well as of the destructive daily practice of 'faceless, industrial' filmmaking" (Muhi 1999). Thus the archaeological intent present in Bódy's experiment resists the obligatory representational modes of "official history" and reveals a more intimate relationship with both historical past and the history of the cinematic medium itself. By evoking the virtual images of the past or time-images in the Deleuzian sense of the term, the film reorders our sense of the past by reconfiguring the sense of presence of the medium.

Besides the historical consciousness that *American Torso* appeals to, the film also urges us to rearrange our expectations and perceptual modes, to accept the invitation that Laura U. Marks formulates as "thinking like a carpet,"[12] that is, the activation of a kind of non-figurative consciousness that can be described by giving up searching for figures, narration, and the wholeness of the image and sensing the texture, the fabric of the film, surrendering to lack of perfection, incompletion, distortion, and disappearance. It is in this way, by activating non-figurative consciousness, that film becomes capable of telling our own story, our own disappearance.

11 See Ken Jacobs's *Perfect Film* (1985), a film actually composed of found film reels, about which Tom Gunning (2009) says: "In uncovering meanings that were never intended to be revealed, Jacobs enters an uncanny dimension of the cinema akin to psychoanalysis."

12 "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" (Marks 2013, 19).

References

Anderson, Steve F. 2011. *Technologies of History: Visual Media and the Eccentricity of the Past*. University Press of New England.

Ballhausen, Thomas. *On the History and Function of Film Archives*. *http://www.efgproject.eu/downloads/Ballhausen%20-%20On%20the%20History%20and%20Function%20of%20Film%20Archives.pdf* Last accessed at 11. 04. 2014.

Barthes, Roland. 1981 [1980]. *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.

Bolter, Jay David and Richard Grusin. 2000. *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA – London: The MIT Press.

Bonitzer, Pascal. 2000 [1978]. Deframings. Translated by Chris Darke. In *Cahiers du Cinema. Volume Four: 1973–1978: History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle*, ed. David Wilson, 196–203. London and New York: Routledge.

Crary, Jonathan. 1988. *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, Massachussets – London: MIT Press.

Forgács Éva. 1994. *Az ellopott pillanat* [*The Stolen Moment*]. Ars Longa series. Pécs: Jelenkor.

Gelencsér Gábor. 2004. Önagyonfilmezők [Directors Filming Themselves to Death]. In *Né/ma? Tanulmányok a magyar neoavantgárd köréből* [*Né/ma? Studies on the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde*], eds. Pál Deréky and András Müllner, 205–226. Budapest: Ráció.

Gunning, Tom. 1992. The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde. In *Early Cinema*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, 56–62. London: BFI.

Gunning, Tom. 2009. Films That Tell Time. The Paradoxes of the Cinema of Ken Jacobs. *http://www.movingimagesource.us/articles/films-that-tell-time-20090206* Last accessed at 11. 04. 2014.

Marks, Laura U. 2002. *Touch. Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press.

Marks, Laura U. 2013. Thinking Like a Carpet. Embodied Perception and Individuation in Algorithmic Media. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* Vol. 7: 7–20. *http://www.acta.sapientia.ro/acta-film/film-main.htm* Last accessed at 11. 04. 2014.

Muray András. 2009. Emlék-nyom-követés. Az archív felvételek stílusalakzatai [Following Memory Traces. The Stylistic Figures of Archival Footage]. In *BBS*

50. A Balázs Béla Stúdió 50 éve [*BBS 50. The 50 Years of the Béla Balázs Studio*], ed. Gelencsér Gábor, 115–127. Budapest: Műcsarnok, Balázs Béla Stúdió.

Muhi Klára. 1999. A talált képek vonzásában. Archívok a magyar filmben [The Attraction of Found Images. Archival Footage in the Hungarian Film]. *Metropolis* No. 2.
http://www.c3.hu/scripta/metropolis/9902/muhi.htm Last accessed at 11. 04. 2014.

Pethő Ágnes. 2009. (Re)Mediating the Real. Paradoxes of an Intermedial Cinema of Immediacy. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* vol. 1: 47–68.

Sobchack, Vivian. 1999. Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience. In *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed. Michael Renov and Jane Gaines, 241–254. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Sobchack, Vivian. 2004. The Charge of the Real: Embodied Knowledge and Cinematic Consciousness. In *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 258–285. Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press.

Wees, William C. 1993. *The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films*. New York: Anthology Film Archives.

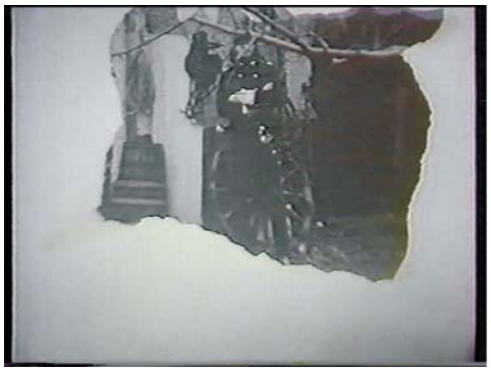
Yeo, Rob. 2004. Cutting through History. Found Footage in Avant-Garde Filmmaking. In *Cut: Film as Found Object in Contemporary Video*, ed. Stefano Basilico, 13–27. Milwaukee, MI: Milwaukee Art Museum.

Zalán Vince, ed. 2006. *Bódy Gábor. Egybegyűjtött filmművészeti írások* [*Gábor Bódy. Collected Film-Theoretical Writings*]. Budapest: Akadémiai.

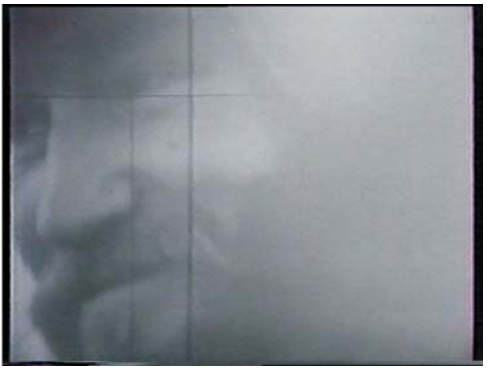
Zyrd, Michael. 2003. Found Footage Film as Discursive Metahistory: Craig Baldwin's Tribulation 99. *The Moving Image* vol. 3 no. 2 (Fall): 40–61.

List of Figures

Figures 1–2. Damaged, deteriorated, grainy images from *American Torso* (*Amerikai anzix*, Gábor Bódy, 1975).

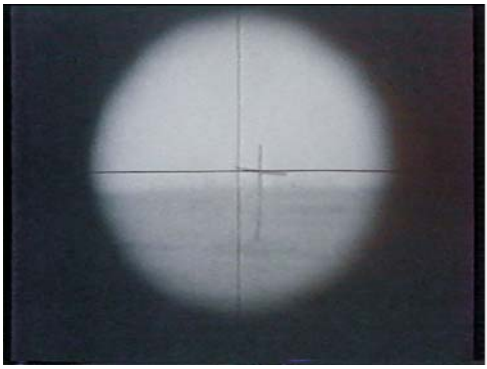
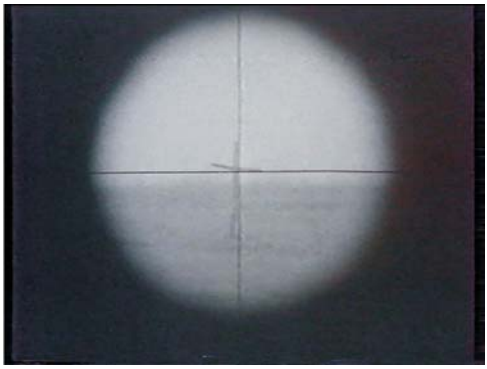



Figures 3–4. Light cutting – the auratic quality of the disappearing image.

Figures 5–6. Instances of deframing [*décadrage*] in *American Torso.*


Figures 7–8. The clash of immediacy and hypermediacy of experience in the non-identical superimposition of the cross-hairs of the theodolite and the image of the cross.

Figures 9–10. The *American Torso* as the film of the observer.


Figures 11–12. The image becomes a writable surface.


Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 79–96

‘Crows’ vs. ‘Avatar,’ or: 3D vs. Total-Dimension Immersion

José Manuel Martins
Department of Philosophy – Universidade de Évora, Centro de Filosofia de Lisboa
E-mail: jmbmarte@gmail.com

Abstract. 3D film’s explicit new space depth arguably provides both an enhanced realistic quality to the image and a wealth of more acute visual and haptic sensations (a ‘montage of attractions’) to the increasingly involved spectator. But David Cronenberg’s related ironic remark that “cinema as such *is* from the outset a ‘special effect’” should warn us against the geometrical naiveté of such assumptions, within a Cartesian ocularcentric tradition for long overcome by Merleau-Ponty’s embodiment of perception and Deleuze’s notion of the self-consistency of the artistic sensation and space. Indeed, ‘2D’ traditional cinema already provides the accomplished “fourth wall effect,” enclosing the beholder behind his back within a space that no longer belongs to the screen (nor to ‘reality’) as such, and therefore is no longer ‘illusorily’ two-dimensional. This kind of totally absorbing, ‘dream-like’ space, metaphorical for both painting and cinema, is illustrated by the episode *Crows* in Kurosawa’s *Dreams* (1990). Such a space requires the actual effacement of the empirical status of spectator, screen, and film as separate dimensions, and it is precisely the 3D characteristic unfolding of *merely frontal* space layers (and film events) *out* of the screen *towards* us (and sometimes *above* the heads of the spectators before us) that reinstalls at the core of the film-viewing phenomenon a regressive struggle with reality and with different degrees of realism, originally overcome by film since the Lumière’s *Arrival of a Train at Ciotat* (*L’Arrivée d’un train en gare de la Ciotat*, 1896) seminal demonstration. Through an analysis of crucial aspects in *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) and the recent *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (Werner Herzog, 2010), both dealing with historical and ontological *deepening* processes of ‘going inside,’ we shall try to show how the formal and technically advanced component of those 3D-depth films impairs, on the contrary, their apparent conceptual purpose on the level of contents, and we will assume, drawing on Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze, that this technological mistake is due to a lack of recognition of the nature of perception and sensation in relation to space and human experience.

Keywords: 3D film experience, Akira Kurosawa’s *Dreams*, James Cameron’s *Avatar*, realism.

1. Beyond the Ideological Content: On Form as Ideology

Concerning James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), the polemical reading of the title of this paper (indicated by the adverb "vs") is disputing and denying from the outset the 3D numerical pretention to graphically render the 'unaccountable' wholeness of 'real' space. In fact, Merleau-Ponty's *single* whole dimension he calls 'profondeur' (Merleau-Ponty 1960), corresponding not to a spectatorial subject/object external interface, but to the 'always-already' structure of being-*in*-the-world, is not gradually gathered together by adding yet another 'dimension' (or by explicitly featuring the visual effect of illusory depth created by an adequate 2D perspectivism), and 'three-dimensional' could be the kind of space cube displayed in front of me in the movie theatre, but not *the space where I am*. Indeed, '3D' is not just a somewhat misleading banner summarizing a complex cinematographical processing of digital HDI, motion & performance capture techniques (and stage – significantly called 'The Volume') and digital 3D Cameron/Pace Fusion Camera System, but actually a perfectly accurate fetish formula focusing on the central visual and symbolic issue of the film (3D space functioning as *our* avatar into Pandora's world with as much (fictional) success as Jake's into becoming a 'real' Na'vi) and marketing for a technical exploit meant to ideologically capture in advance also the audience's willingness 'to be a part of it' – namely, of a prodigious stereometric space both (contradictorily) exhibiting itself as such (as stereometric, not as real) before my eyes *and* 'involving' (yet without actually *embracing*) me in it when its irresistibly high 'reality rate' supposedly dissolves itself into 'reality' proper.

What I am implying here is that the acclaimed unprecedented 'realistic-immersive' qualities of '3D' are mostly a matter of enticing promotion discourse turning into a generalized public cliché only to be then naively reaffirmed by the single spectator *at speech level* without any real grounding in actual filmic experience; in fact, in overt contradiction with it, and utterly equivocated about the nature of filmic space and film experience.

'3D' is thus not the label for a more subtle set of phenomena, but an adequate description of the bulk of the commodity we're being (extra-)charged for. It works as an ideological device, summoning us up to identify and to partake in a glorious new age transcultural deep ecological neuro-spiritual posthuman journey of (and the unavoidable battle for) rebirth of ourselves as expanded 3D Na'vi-like spectators, while grossly omitting the (falsely) advertised means to accomplish the assigned mission; moreover, this very medium interposing itself self-obstructively as the main obstacle leading to failure. Its full ideological depth

reveals itself, however, in the fact that this failure remains unacknowledged and is even substituted by a *verbal* claim of success.

A similar (and parallel) disavowal takes place at the content's level: namely, the refuse to acknowledge the racist undercurrent of the "White Messiah fable" – pointed out both by David Brooks and Slavoj Žižek – at the heart of the apparently irreproachable eco-ethno-political agenda of Cameron's blockbuster, as well as its collusion with a general military-industrial-entertainment complex expressing the white/human supremacy status – equalling the military, the movie-making, the scientific, and the heroic-messianic vehicles and attitudes – according to the analyses of Žižek and Thomas Elsaesser, here broadly referred to without entering in further details. My thesis is that the unconscious semantic core of the film consists of the magical interconfirmation, taking place between the form and the content levels (and suggesting a magical equivalence between the fictional technology – the *avatar* device – and the technology of fiction – the *3D* device), of the same basic impulse of becoming the very substance of fantasy: *Jake Sully,* transporting himself into his vehicle, until ultimately becoming it, through the canonical phases of incarnation, death, and resurrection (post-technologically Christianizing its Hindu matrix, and thus indulging in a full New Age cinematic boasting); *us*, being transported by the corporification of space layers and boxes until ultimately vanishing into the fiction of a '3D' reality (which coincides with the far distant, yet so eminently reachable, world of Pandora – thus inverting the relation that for Benjamin defines the *aura*).

The self-denying character of these twin moves is already inscribed into their very constitution: because Jake 'becomes one of them,' his (human, all too human) role as the central hero and the destinal savior tends to go unnoticed (both to the average Western moviegoer and, according to Žižek and Elsaesser, to a wealth of anti-capitalist fighters spanning from President Evo Morales to the Dongria Kondh people in India or the Palestinians, in no way bothered to identify themselves with the sage primitivism of these much too Hollywoodesque constructed Na'vi: and if, according to Elsaesser, Cameron's and Hollywood's new film game does consist of allegorically self-reflecting its own several and contradictory conditions of possibility, using a shrewdly balanced double-bind control in order to surmount sheer contradiction, then, the result is not merely "[…] a reflexive doubled parable of the communication circuit that Hollywood seeks with its global audiences, where a studio's films are its avatars, 'leading' spectators while ideologically seeming to act on their behalf" (Elsaesser 2011). As Elsaesser himself recognizes, Hollywood does not try for a moment to conceal that it is making good use of its

most vernacular recipes to enlist worldwide potentially hostile audiences: but by honestly *staging* (in order to not having to *show*) this very circuit of idealized native people and ethnocentric/anthropocentric narrative leadership, 'the industry' manages to keep the whole operation unknown to its subjects, in a sort of magic circuit between film as myth and film as rite: we (mythically) identify with the Na'vi *in the film* because we have already accepted to be structurally identified *by* the film ritual *as* its Na'vi (by merely massively assembling to watch it), and we accept it *so that* we may go to Pandora (through the 3D amazing 'star' gate, in itself another Hero – a Hero of geometry) and identify with them – 'following the leader,' the white hero made blue and thus apparently redeeming himself from his intrusive redemptive quality in the very moment of its superhuman (or humanly transhuman) consummation. What is more human, nowadays, more Deleuzian and delightfully 'no-longer-merely-human,' than becoming the Other? Hollywood knows this better than its enemies do.

I am arguing here that the secret core that warrants the success of the double-bind operation Elsaesser is pointing out, lies in fact at a deeper formal level: if it is the blue tribe that captures the political identification drive of the colonized peoples on Earth watching this soft-toxic Hollywood product, their *empowerment* fantasy directly originates in the partaking on the thrilling '3D joint venture' (a simple 2D identification not being sufficient to ensure the very particular sort of *heightened cult* an Evo Morales or the Dongria Kondh were expressing, facing a *unique* object: something special must have been occurring at the same time, different from some sort of a newly enhanced and fully consequent *Dances With Wolves*: and that is not the simple Na'vi saga, but the immediately *materialized* saga of a *3D* Na'vi and a *3D* Pandora). But since McLuhan we are well aware of how much form and medium are the primary message and entail their own semantic content: namely, 3D as an escaping vehicle into the fantasy-world of a non-human tribe. Human tribes, as human, will feel attracted both by the non-human character of the Na'vi and by their humanizing and modelling role; at the same time, they will strongly surmise the central place they now find themselves occupying in the dialectical redefinition of humanness and humanity by its internal and external Others, whereby they both internally *redefine* the dominant white paradigm and expose themselves to the appeal of *being* externally *redefined* in their anthropocentrism by the archetypal fantasy of 'another Mankind' (to which the shared condition of banishment renders them all the more sensitive).

In other words, the Palestinians etc. can in the first place *afford* to identify themselves with the Na'vi thanks to the formal *3D empowerment*, but this will

in turn be the cause of an 'overidentification' with a cosmic fantasy which will again dissolve its critical function as a role model. Through the corruptive overempowerment contained within the empowerment, Hollywood ultimately wins back to the Western technological will to power the very populations it seemed to be instigating to rebel against it. Insidiously establishing the primary identification not with the *represented* Na'vi, but with the human and white *representation apparatus* ultimately mobilised to actually *produce* them, Cameron is urging his riotous tribes/target audiences to engage primarily with the cinematic machine that creates the spectacular simulacrum of reality (the 3D fake-hyperreal) and through it with what remains of the blue tribe as its by-product (the 'bon sauvage' Western fiction generating here a second degree *filmic avatar*), candidly advertising in the very title of the film that its deal is with *all sorts of* 'avatars' – i.e., with human-technologically *produced* 'legitimate Na'vi'… as well as with *humanly* produced dream-work sci-fi Na'vi fables, offered by Hollywood's agenda to its obedient consumers. The transference of the empowerment focus from content to form, from the blue tribe to the exhilarating 3D human power over reality ('technically reproducible' as it is the case with any simple Na'vi) entails the voiding of the Na'vi substance, in fact turning the film into a gigantic insufflation of the *avatar* device proper to a Western fabrication of dreams to be sold to the world, at a gambit's cost. The piece is exchanged for a better position on the world's chessboard: the Na'vi pawns are offered as allies to the world's 'tribes' in order to secure to the West the 'transcendental' domain over the territory, wherein the Pandora inmates have been constructed from the outset as the vanishing puppets they in fact turn out to be (self-reflectively, the in-universe mirrors the cinematic contrivance that produced the Na'vi entity as such out of a 'skinny' digitalization of optical effects, so that *all* the Na'vi are indeed genuine avatars and, their blue colour, a mere white projection. The cutting-edge technology actually used to produce the film parallels the one displayed in its fictional universe, and Sam Worthington animates from within his filmic avatar much in the same way Jake Sully dresses his, in either case feeling or acting through another body).

The fundamental mechanism of meaning developing in *Avatar* could be outlined as follows:

1. Form (the 3D displaying) deeply symbolizes and performs content, providing our real selves with a powerful avatar to enter the filmic realm; conversely, narrative meaning (Jake Sully's half and full avatar transferences) illuminates back the ultimate sense of its formal, meta-narrative framing;

2. The 'unobtainium' deadlock [the name of the material being mined in Pandora and a term designating a perfect theoretical solution impossible to apply] notoriously affecting the results at both the formal and the material levels of the film (which, like the military-industrial corporation mining in Pandora, is trying to obtain unobtainium to the industrial-entertainment corporation of movie-making in an era of audiences crisis) remains persistently denied in the ideological consciousness of the public: the obvious shortcomings and countereffects of the celebrated 3D upgrade in conveying the fusion of real and fictional spaces are replaced by the affirmativity of a self-fulfilling discourse about (hyper)reality-like immersive experience; and, on the other hand, the global Na'vi cult from the part of indistinctly Western and non-Western, American, non-American, and anti-American publics masks the obvious technological construction and digital forging, and the ethno-culturally and ideologically aberrant idealized projection of this recycled Pocahontas extra-planetarian tribe of most excellent deep-ecological postmodern tree-webbed savages. These are the product of a profoundly ethnocentric, patronizing (mis)representation of 'the Other' (hence, so utterly, and yet canonically Other; which also is, in patent cognitive dissonance, the strict opposite to the technological culture which thus invents its cinematic pre-industrial, untouched profile);

3. Far from being the effect of some misinterpretation from our part, this is a two-levelled delusion system originally embedded in the very structure of the film. Does it work similarly in the 2D and the 3D versions? Is the 3D actual perceptual effect and conceptual fetish responsible for a radical reinforcement of our ethno-political empathy with the 'Na'vi's way of life,' strong enough to make us disregard the ideological outrage encapsulated therein? In the face of the massive box office world record, the answer is *yes*, and the answer includes not only our sympathetic condescendence of Occidentals, but also the more odd manifestations of identification with the Alpha Centauri blue tribe on the part of other more earthly tribes in our planet, out of an acknowledged affinity, as described by Elsaesser. The first case could be explained in terms of an incomplete critical stand as regarding the unconscious pervasiveness of ideology, failing to recognize the traditional ethnocentric representation of the Other as a subsidiary partner of the white male protagonist; while embracing the right cause at a superficial political level, and thus failing to perceive that everybody and everything in the film behaves according to the same invasive, avataresque pattern adopted by the quintessential villain Colonel Quaritch, alias the Capitalist military-industrial complex in person – from the troops to the scientists (respectively strip-mining

and data-mining the planet [in Elsaesser's terms], not in opposition to each other but in a complementary, symbiotic relation), from the redemptive hero to Cameron's redemptive gesture towards the movie's historical crisis through the avatar/3D reciprocal devices. In this case, ideology comes out not diminished, but reinforced through this simulation of a progressive view, a mere gambit to keep its true basis intact.[1]

The second case is trickier: why the Heaven would "young Palestinians […] begin to dress up like the blue creatures, in order to protest?" (Elsaesser 2011). Certainly not because they are young, besides being Palestinians, nor while waiting for a (waited) Jewish Messiah who would convert to their cause and spirit, fight back his own evil government and marry their beauty queen (and without whom, according to the myth, the Palestinian tribe will be unable, by its own efforts alone, to overcome servitude – liberation thus amounting, symbolically, to an implicit confession and acceptance of minority status and ultimate mythical dependency), but due to a reason also operating in the previous case, a reason that appears here in reverse form: the 3D factor.

Our (and, for that matter, the Palestinian's, etc.) first allegiance is to the 3D myth (even before the identification with the blue tribe/white saviour one). The greedy dominance of this vantage point takes possession of filmic space like any other techno-industrial conqueror of foreign territory: it relays to us (the conquered conquerors) the secret pleasure felt in disposing of (and apparently magnifying, enhancing, and paying homage to) the space of Pandora's seven wonders. Ours

1 And, as inevitably as with any other big, big production… let's peep into this page of the director's signed confession: "Q. Have you gotten any criticism that the film might be perceived as anti-American?
A. It's something that I've anticipated the possibility of because people will misinterpret things in certain ways. You can almost count on people misinterpreting things. The film is definitely not anti-American. It's not anti-human either. My perception of the film is that the Na'vi represent that sort of aspirational part of ourselves that wants to be better, that wants to respect nature" (Murphy 2009). *Q.e.d. Of course* the film is not and could not be anti-American, *of course* it had to be interpreted as politically correct (that is, as anti-American), *of course* audiences are worldwide anti-American, *of course* the film subministers to them the American way of being so (the poison and the antidote): namely by *crossing* (literally: that's what the *avatar* fetiche is all about) the cult of *our* paraplegic (anti-)hero and the cult of the *Other* (as "a part of ourselves," *of course*). And, *of course*, who's against nature? Unfortunately, the film is not about respecting nature, but about the myth of respecting nature: it is about History. Nature is the bait. Anticipating and accomodating opposed views under one single perspective has been the politics of Western painting since the Renaissance. 3D geometry goes one step further in this direction: hypercubic space is keen on integrating overt contradiction. "Access for all" means that ideology no longer veils: it complexifies.

is Quaritch's and Cameron's will to power (and Sully's power to will). We are empowered, all right: in our case, through this empowerment we identify with ourselves; the Palestinians seemingly identify with the aggressor, whose power they (being only too human, not enlightened Na'vi) secretly admire and overtly envy: power over reality and power over nature, in the first place: human power.

This primordial identification, prior to any other, provides the regressive Procust's bed to any subsequent progressive identification: the identification with the power over space is the *a priori* to any identification with the space of things itself – with territories, habitats, places, planets; the identification with the power over nature ('it's not just the same old boring nature, now, it's a 3D brand new nature,' in fact a genuine hyperreal upgrade); the identification with the power over the Na'vi (exerted by us, empowered occidental Na'vi, or by them, empowered Indians, Chinese, or Aboriginal Na'vi) gives us (them) the confidence to identify with their/our plea for freedom and dignity, and with a common aspiration to sublime wisdom.

The question remains, though, whether there is a real power to rely upon, or merely the phantomatic will to do it, the self-delusional ideological concept of what 3D space is meant to be and would in fact consist of were it not the formula for a typical *nonobtainium* (the Cameron's cousin of Hitchcock's MacGuffin), something that would be perfect if only it would exist; or rather: if only it could be real, in the strong sense: if reality could really be like that. But real space is not '3D' – nor even 'three-dimensional.' Notwithstanding a choir of appraisals, where we can surprisingly meet the voice of an authority such as Thomas Elsaesser, what a rough phenomenological description of standard 3D space would point out is that such a forcible construct would hardly be able to involve me, to "invade my body" (Elsaesser 2011) and to provoke an exquisite immersive experience: in fact, it begins and ends quite graphically in front of me, keeping folding and unfolding its stereoscopic layers and boxes at variable telescopic distance rates and inscribing itself as an object (as a reified ostensive dimension) within my space, which it partially overlaps and with which it disputes and divides scope and range, the physical real space of the movie theatre where I am. Unlike the invisible, non-thematic pure dimension which space is, 3D displays itself as a limited frontal object-space I almost could touch as a soap bubble or a visual toy, but could certainly not merge with (if for no other reason, because of its telescopic instability, a sort of virtuoso peacock fan-tail – an instability not just due to the humorous choices of the Stereographer concerning the Convergence Control, "the amount of 3D in any given shot," but due to the objective "Depth Budget,"

the budgetary estimate established beforehand for the whole production). 3D delineates and draws itself as a self-represented space of strengthened iconic spatiality: a lethal overdose of artificialism (space, *plus* notorious spatiality indexes) that destroys any hope for 'reality.'

But the last thing the moviegoer longs for is precisely that some kind of technically improved cinema will come to match reality and the sense of reality. And here we come upon the crucial point at the opening of the whole discussion. The two related aspects generally stressed by 3D devotees are barely compatible: namely, 3D's ability to transpose the spectator inside the palpable film reality, the dream of entering and physically belonging to this new kind of proliferous onscreen/'around the screen' image; and the ability to convert that reality (specifically [the] filmic [sense of] reality/space/realm/world) into [a] real [sense of] reality – assuming 3D spatial architecture to qualitatively coincide with it, and expecting the Negative Parallax effect (the invasion of real space by a protruding fictional filmic 3D space) to ensure the connective overlap that will allow us to trespass the film's forbidden threshold while at the same time accessing a realm of fully established real, 'solid' 3D space; the proof of its genuineness consisting of its materializing all over the place alongside the very extension of perpendicular space available before me over the front rows of the movie theatre, where there is plenty of room just waiting to be filled by this sheer filmic flood, floating in a sort of ectoplasmic ecstasy up to my nose.

2. Van Gogh as a Chinese Painter, or Kurosawa as a Phenomenologist: the Meeting Point of East and West

The paradox of a geometrically constructed space of representation apparently aiming at the utmost realistic fidelity to the objective reality of the world, but in fact *overrepresenting* it by submitting the object to the constitutive powers of the subject and thus substituting a worldview for the world and the domain of the subject for the realm of the objects, is nothing new in History; in fact it corresponds ("as symbolical form," in Panofsky's sense) to the founding gesture of Modernity, the invention of perspective in Renaissance oil painting. To reproduce accurately the most perfect likeness to the visible and to its objects actually means, and implies, reconstructing them within the framework of a forged representational device – 'the visual pyramid,' – in whose dimensional terms they are then presented as stabilized projections, rather than as they manifest themselves in actual perception: the digitally generated world of

Pandora, projected onto the naked walls of the performance-capture stage, and the 'avatar of the avatar' provided by the 'e-motion capture' system, are but the last step in a long lineage of this re-foundation of (technologically controlled and dominated) reality by the modern Cartesian and Kantian Subject. The Dongria Kondh just fail to acknowledge the Copernican revolution taking place in (and as) *Avatar*, the transcendental determination of the Na'vi by Hollywood, of the thing represented by the pure (Western, American) conditions of the (budgetary, and techno geek) possibility of its (on-screen) representation. Indeed, in the digital era, representation is itself that which is represented, and Pandora's pure nature is pure technology.

Are we nevertheless allowed into such a paradise? Alas, no: contrarily to what might be expected from cinema as the contemporary antidote to the ancient expulsion, again we are expelled. Interposing between us and itself, we now find this sort of spacing design as the direct heir to the former visual pyramid, but somehow in reversed form (its depth-structure oriented not only 'from the screen onwards,' but also towards us) and conspicuously self-conscious as a solid block at whose outside gates we are left (and literally pointed out as if shown to our seats in the movie theatre by the fingers of the film itself), instead of simply becoming 'the world viewed.'

That seems to be the price to be paid for the powers of knowledge, not only mythically, but also technically, and Merleau-Ponty famously challenged the dominant Cartesian epistemology, which he critically depicted as a '*vision de survol*,' the kind of 'distinct and clear' view a Subject can take of the world from above it – indeed, totalizing it before him from the outside. But this was precisely already the case with the perspective system, positioning itself as a forerunner three centuries before Descartes: the eye draws back and retires from the place of the spectacle (moreover, it withdraws from its own bodily rooting) until it manages to unify under a single vantage point and according to a single dominant space axis the totality of the visible – that is, of its own perception and of the world. Proceeding in this manner, perspective doesn't do justice neither to the objects of perception nor to natural perception itself, because it separates what in reality remains originally deeply intertwined, to the point of their vanishing as such: 'subject' and 'object.' Perspective is not truer to the subject's actual mode of perception than it is to the object's mode of being: it does not amount to an imposition on the part of the subject's perception upon the natural world, but on the part of a self-constructed pure subject upon its own natural perception and upon the natural world *at once*. On the contrary, not only do we perceive the

world *in* the world – and not from the outside, – but in an originary condition of non-separateness: and that is what the 'in-the-world' existential structure means, in the particular 'bodily and perceptual turn' this Heideggerian notion acquires in its Merleau-Pontyan reception.

Classical Chinese landscape painting (conceived of as a spiritual method), which preceded western landscape genre by several centuries, offers a strong and most instructive contrast to this later. Its is not the kind of space that will be boasting its invasive and engulfing powers over the spectator, as in *Avatar*, where, incidentally, it establishes a sort of ideological visual rhyme and undoubtedly a common epistemological-political pattern with the para-avatar fighting robot that Colonel Quaritch dons in the battlefield, figuring the mechanical and electronic prosthetic expansion of his imperialist musculature and brain; nor will it be displaying its infinity (up to the meeting point of the converging parallel lines) for the monocular eye to behold and to master, as occurs with the laws of perspective in western painting. Rather, it aims at reinforcing the true state of a reciprocal inherence of the painter/beholder in the natural landscape and of the external world in the interior of man, mutually expressing the shared balance of the cosmic organizing principles of the polar interplay of oppositions, exchanges, and ultimate union, at its different levels: 'water and mountain,' earth and heaven/sky, emptiness and fullness, yin and yang. Strikingly at odds with the western way of taking preemptively possession of the territory (a priori space is also a welcomed condition of possibility of military strategy, and Cameron plays the transcendental ally to Quaritch – and to Sully, the redemptor – in the enterprise of conquering Pandora, of making it *our space*), Chinese painting achieves this through the importance given to *emptiness*, mostly (in)consisting of clouds and mists and the sky, beyond mere vacant spaces, and in fact pervading all the substantial elements of the world. In other words, it stresses the dimension that allows things to become and to be, and to dispose themselves throughout space – therefore inviting the painter to do the same, and (as in the paradigmatic Marguerite Yourcenar's tale of the painter Wang Fô) to enter the painting, to stroll around and eventually to abide in it. But the deep implicated meaning of the practice of the double perspective – the one prescribing that a natural being, or a house, should be rendered as if viewed at the same time from a distance, from close range and from within – is that the painter must have occupied the same double stance (in front/inside) he is now being invited to spouse in relation to the tableau, while primarily perceiving nature. Because in the same way as the double perspective is structuring both the aesthetic perception and

the artistic work itself (accounting for the 'awkward' aspect of objects, distance, and space in most oriental art), it also lends its structure to natural perception and to the ontophenomenological modality of the presence of nature, i.e., the world (Cheng 1991, 92–105). It should be noticed that Cheng is writing one year after Kurosawa's *Dreams*. Here is his final synthesis: "The movement of moving away in space is in fact a circular movement in space that returns and, through the reversal of perspective and look, eventually transforms the relation between subject and object. (The subject projecting itself gradually outwards; and the exterior becoming the internal landscape of the subject)" (Cheng 1991, 105).[2]

The one self-reflective work of art (i.e., self-theorizing both as film and in its intermedial relation to painting), offering an unparalleled illustration both of this Far Eastern tradition and of contemporary Continental phenomenological and postphenomenological theory (lets say, of Merleau-Ponty's interlace structure of the 'chair' and of Deleuze's plane of immanence) is the film episode *Crows*, the fifth in Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams*. At first, the Japanese visitor indulges in the trivial dual form of perception, having a glimpse of the several paintings hanging on the wall in front of him. How are we to interpret the metalepsis that follows, when the planes of the beholder and of the painting overcome their initial separateness ('transcendence') and he finds himself within the general plane of consistency of van Gogh's world (encompassing this latter's being-in the natural setting and his general plane of pictorial composition, as well as the complex process of reciprocal exchange between the two)? Certainly not in a literal sense (either magical or 'happening only in dreams'), and neither as a mere metaphor, since the point is not a fictional one, but the very transcending of the distinction between 'reality' and 'fiction' – such a transcending amounting precisely to pure immanence. What (Kurosawa's) 'van Gogh' says to his unexpected guest about the reciprocal bodily assimilation gradually taking place between the painter and the landscape[3] (different from a mere distantial visual operation) also gives a

2 "Le mouvement d'éloignement dans l'espace est en fait un mouvement circulaire qui revient et qui, par le renversement de la perspective et du regard, transforme finalement la relation du sujet et de l'object. (Le sujet se projetant, par degré, au dehors; et le dehors devenant le paysage intérieur du sujet.)" (My translation, J. M. M.)

3 The passage reads as follows: "[van Gogh] Why aren't you painting? To me this scene is beyond belief. A scene that looks like a painting does not make a painting. But [I] if you take the time and look closely, all the nature has its own beauty. And when that natural beauty is there, [II] I just loose myself in it. And then, as if it's in a dream, [III] the scene just paints itself for me. Yes, [IV] I consume this natural setting, I devour it completely and hold it. And when I'm through, [V] the painting paints itself for me completely. But it's so difficult to hold it inside!
[Japanese] – Then, what do you do?

good description of what is just happening to that latter as he 'enters the frame' and somehow turns his vision into the visibility of the things themselves – a visibility conveyed by, and as, the painting.

It also happens to correspond to the phenomenological description of the standard film-viewing experience, namely, the disappearance into the 'non-thematic' both of real space (the movie theatre, the world, our seat, ourselves) and of the fictional topos, the (on-)screen. A painting is not hanging on the wall, a film is not on, or 'in' the screen – for there are no longer such things as 'a screen,' 'a wall.' The painting, the film constitute their own self-consistent world (but non-thematic as such). Coleridge's suspension of disbelief is still a partial formula: what is really suspended is the very awareness of the difference between belief and disbelief, reality and fiction. What collapses, then, is the measurable spatial distance and distinction between the subject and the object. The moviegoer is no longer watching the film, nor is he co-present in it (the artifice Kurosawa was nonetheless constrained to use): he is rather 'in a state of film.' And he is *in* that space, rather than surrounded by it (which on the other hand fails to be the case with 3D, in spite of what the false advertising campaigns wilfully keep repeating). Precisely in the same way in which Heidegger explains the sense

---

[van Gogh] – [VI] I work, I slave, I drive myself like a locomotive!"
I numerate the successive stages in the process of painting; it will be noticed that the actual application of paint on the canvas only begins at stage VI, which by no means entails a separation between perception and action, rather, emphasizes the fact that aesthetical perception is already invested by the artistic operation. Kurosawa's scenery including natural landscape vividly 'retouched' in van Gogh's fashion, offers the visual equivalent to the concepts expressed. A whole gamut of reciprocal overlapping features of nature and culture, subject and object, and of Deleuzian processes of becoming is displayed all over this ten minutes long masterpiece of Modernist artwork about the artwork and offers a significant counterpart to the avataresque tour de force, rooting instead that phenomenon deeply in natural and aesthetical (and specifically cinematographical) perception rather than in VR-like technology (the avatar/3D/motion-capture complex) ideologically reverberated in Pandora's New Age 'spiritualized nature,' with all its neuro-connexions between the Na'vi and the ikran (flying dragons) ultimately regulated by the bio-neuro-cybernetics of the Tree of Souls. The Cartesian leitmotiv at stake in the 3D controversy reappears as the mind/body duality, presupposed in the cases of the (unequal) avatar transference and of the (unequal) ikran symbiosis (two double-bind features responsible for generously fuelling drama and intrigue), always doubled by its own characteristic hierarchical structure: and so, subduing the ikran culminates in becoming a toruk makto, the mighty [< 'makto,' its avatar-word] rider – that is, the master – of the toruk, much in the same way as playing the avatar game will culminate in becoming the Na'vi supreme hero, and once again the duality of a mind's eye outside a totalized and dominated world (the perspective/Cartesian paradigm) translates into the vertical axis of masterhood, fulfilling and profusely illustrating the double meaning of the expression '*vision de survol*.'

of the *pre*position 'in:' we are in the world, not because as a matter of fact we are evidently surrounded by it (as a separate entity objectively placed within a physical-geometrical extensive space, like inside a container), but we can be surrounded by the world only insofar as we are *in* (not *inside*) it, in an ontological kind of proximity previous to any sort of particular relationship, be it 'frontal,' or 'distant,' or 'practical,' or 'immersive,' or 'contemplative.'

3. The Cinema of *Sensing*

This paper comes to an end at the very point where it should start developing the fundamental phenomenological approach which constitutes the implied point of view in what precedes. Let me briefly indicate the core of the question and telegraphically add two final polemizing remarks.

Avoiding any falling back into a philosophy of the conscience, it was the major contribution of Merleau-Ponty since *Phénoménologie de la perception* to reformulate Heidegger's *Daseinsanalyse* in terms of the perceptive body (later, 'the flesh') in its phenomenological constitutive involvement with the world. In fact, in the case of cinema (and of painting, and of nature, according to Kurosawa) it is not visibility as such that catches and captures the spectator (not just her eye, but his whole being), but *vision*, *insofar* it carries the body – and is carried by it: "Before being an objective spectacle the quality is acknowledged by a type of behaviour that intentionally aims at its essence, and that is the reason why from the moment my body adopts the attitude of the blue I obtain a quasi-presence of the blue"[4] (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 245). Which was the whole point in *Avatar*, except that it is with my body that I perform such a Deleuzian 'inhuman' *devenir*, not as a god-like transmigratory *res cogitans*, as Cameron himself in a *Time Magazine* interview claims: "– What is an avatar, anyway? – It's an incarnation of one of the Hindu gods taking a flesh form. In this film what that means is that the *human* technology in the future is capable of *injecting a human's intelligence into a remotely located body*, a biological body" (Winters Keegan 2007) (my underscores). And it is such a body agency that also accounts for the similar experience of reading a book or listening to music: we become the symphony, or the world of the book, and if it is with our lungs that the fictional characters breath (when the typed page gives way to a world), as Sartre puts it in a very fine

4 "Ainsi avant d'être un spectacle objectif la qualité se laisse reconnaître par un type de comportement qui la vise dans son essence et c'est pourquoi dès que mon corps adopte l'attitude du bleu j'obtiens une quasi-présence du bleu" (My translation, J. M. M.).

analysis which emulates Kurosawa's silent philosophy (Sartre 1947), that just means we are already there, breathing with theirs.

In the abovementioned line, Merleau-Ponty is implying four crucial aspects: that the blue is not a mere visual quality objectively present at hand, but a dimension requiring a way of being and caught up in a dynamic relationship with it; that it is not primarily an ocular event, but a bodily one; and that the perceiving body implies a moving body, in fact, that body is fundamentally movement, before being cognition. The key-aspect is however the fourth: the non-thematic level corresponding to such an anticipative bodily behaviour towards (or 'fleshly' involvement with) the blue colour and according to it. These four aspects outline and condense some of the recurrent features in Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la perception*, where he is building an entire theory of phenomenological constitution around the notion of the virtual projection of a motor body unto the world at the infraconscious level of 'sensing'[5] (characteristically independent of the instance of the subject). In short, it is through the ecstatic nature of the virtual movement of the sensitive-kinesthetic body that the spatial horizon is secured and access to the things in the world is gained. This network of movements is not to be understood as a mimetic internal recapitulation taking place 'inside' the body, nor as its actual projection unto the exterior, rather as a virtual abiding of the perceptive body among the virtual givenness of the world, and of things; and it is only because the body sets itself in a disposition attuned to other beings and open to their ways of making themselves present there – it is only because the body so to say enacts the behaviour of the (pre-'objective') sensible, that it may encounter things at that radical level of originary givenness that converts perception into the primary ontological condition from whose irrecusable and saturated condition everything else and every theoretical consideration concerning reality stems. A legion of micro-avataresque embodiments take thus place at the most fundamental level, where the body will be sensing the bodily qualities of everything in an overlap of flesh(es) evolving in an overlap of 'body-space' and 'world-space' (as opposed as it could be to the 'partes extra partes' Cartesian 3D kind of space[6]).

5 The author uses the verbal infinitive ("le sentir") as corresponding to a motor-synesthetic gestalt whole, rather than the traditional concept of 'sensation' misleadingly pointing at an atomic and specific element in the composition of perception. Being itself a gestalt whole, though, perception is not partible (into sensations); yet, being an 'originary phenomenon,' it is notwithstanding an articulated (not mediated!) one (namely, by 'sensing'). Its explanation is the formidable task that is motivating the title.

6 Another worth-quoting dictum from the same interview: "– *Avatar* will be in 3-D. Why did you choose that format? – It's immersive. It wraps the movie around you.

We find, perhaps unsurprisingly, at the bottom of natural perception exactly the same specious structure that is generally assumed to be distinctive of the exquisitely elaborated aesthetic experience: an unfolded body situated 'between here and there,' simultaneously occupying its place and projecting itself unto the background of the visible, sensing itself and the other beings ("loosing itself in nature/devouring it," in a visceral reciprocal engulfment, so van Gogh utters), inescapably bound to its "*sentant senti*" condition. *Voilà* the 'double perspective' in Chinese painting, and also the ubiquity of the Japanese visitor (Kurosawa's avatar…), who has to remain standing in the museum room in order to be able to *project* himself *elsewhere*, that is, 'not *here*' (in a tension between the reciprocally defining 'here' and 'not' which restablishes the *aura* formula).

First remark: it is possible that Deleuze's (drawing on Vertov's and abundantly drawn upon by Shaviro's) distinction between technical, 'inhuman' perception and natural perception, essentially defining the technical cinematic image against Bazin's theory of the 'intensification' of natural perception, might be only partially true. The mechanical apparatus is perhaps producing a new kind of perception (and of worldhood), but that does not exclude that this brand new type is at the same time conveying and recasting, not certainly unqualified or trivial 'natural perception,' but the non-thematic, virtual aspect involved in it. The cinematic moving image does certainly reveal some of the symptoms of the perceptual level of 'sensing,' and it is only to blame the anti-phenomenological temper of Deleuze if he fails to acknowledge that beneath the borderline dividing natural and mechanical perception, there exists the borderline distinguishing natural perception and its own (rather unnatural…) non-thematic anticipative structure. And just as Deleuze's cinema offers through mechanical mediation to an unwilling Bergson the pure image that should be 'extracted' from its decay in the natural image, so too it could come to realize that the 'kino-eye' does not indeed 'intensify' an originary potency,[7] but that it does provide an actualization

It's not necessarily just for kids' films either. It works in a dramatic sense because it gives you a heightened sense of reality." (Winters Keegan 2007.) A brief commentary: indeed, it becomes 'immersive' in the exact proportion in which we (are allowed to) forget about the 3D effect. We are not *surrounded* by the film: this is plainly a false statement (already more than a pre-production 2007 wishfull thinking). As for the sense of reality, 3D and digital technology produce the same petitive kind of self-delusion as Renaissance perspective does: it 'gives the sense,' *and the pattern* of reality that we are supposed to sense. An image in the obscurity of the vanishing theatre compares magically with itself, not with reality; curiously enough, neither do colour movies give us a sense of heightened reality, nor do black and white films fail to. They *are* 'reality,' and so were even the silent movies.

7 As regards the Deleuzian pair virtual/actual, there is nothing to fear from Merleau-

of the virtual stratum of 'natural perception,' and that probably both phrases are saying the same.

Second remark: Vivian Sobchack's diagram combining all the possible functions of the viewer's and of the film's *explicit* perceptions does not seem to take in enough consideration the non-thematic quality of them both, beside the non-thematic (and decidedly non-intentional) matrix of typical Merleau-Pontyan perception in general.

The day in which an accomplished 3D film will consist of a 360º hologram, we'll finally have nowhere to go inside the Pandora box and nothing to do but to stay en garde… in the face of – as Cameron will undoubtedly put it – 'reality:' "ce mauvais film," in Deleuze's word.

References

Brooks, David. 2010. The Messiah Complex. *New York Times* 7. 1. 2010. *http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/08/opinion/08brooks.html* Last accessed at 12. 04. 2014.

Cheng, François. 1991. *Vide et plein: Le langage pictural chinois* [*Empty and Full: the Language of Chinese Painting*]. Paris: Seuil.

Elsaesser, Thomas. 2011. James Cameron's *Avatar*: access for all. *New Review of Film and Television Studies* vol. 9 issue 3, 247–264. *http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17400309.2011.585854* Last accessed at 12. 04. 2014.

Marks, Laura. 2000. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1960. *L'œil et l'esprit* [*The Eye and the Spirit*]. Paris: Gallimard.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1969. Le langage indirect [*Indirect Language*]. In *La prose du monde* [*The Prose of the World*]. Paris: Gallimard.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1945. *Phénoménologie de la perception* [*Phenomenology of Perception*]. Paris: Gallimard.

Murphy, Mekado. 2009. A Few Questions for James Cameron. *The New York Times* 21. 12. 2009. *http://carpetbagger.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/21/a-few-questions-for-james-cameron/* Last accessed at 02. 04. 2014.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1947. François Mauriac et la liberté [François Mauriac and the Liberty]. In *Situations I*. Paris: Gallimard.

Ponty's notion of the originary: 'l'être sauvage' does not pre-define anything, nor is it in itself defined. Perception is immediately a sort of open stylization, or boundless virtuality. That should easily meet Deleuze's requests.

Shaviro, Steven. 1993. *The Cinematic Body*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Sobchack, Vivian. 1992. *The Adress of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Winters Keegan, Rebecca. 2007. Q&A with James Cameron. *Time Magazine* 11. 01. 2007. *http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1576622,00.html#ixzz0a69HUhNB* Last accessed at 12. 04. 2014.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2010. Avatar: un exercice d'idéologie politiquement correcte [Avatar: a Politically Correct Exercise of Ideology]. *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 654 (March): 66–69.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2010. Return of the Natives. *New Statesman* 04. 03. 2010. *http://www.newstatesman.com/film/2010/03/avatar-reality-love-couple-sex* Last accessed at 12. 04. 2014.

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 97–111

Harmony of Senses – 3D Documentaries of Herzog and Wenders

Katalin Turnacker
University of Pécs (Hungary)
E-mail: turnacker@vipmail.hu

Abstract. The two still active great artists of the new German cinema, Werner Herzog and Wim Wenders, presented their 3D documentaries on the 2011 Berlinale. This coincidence, not to be neglected in itself, is more than a mere experimentation with the new technology. Indeed, it much rather reveals the complexity of perceptions coming into action during the film experience and their relationship with the onlooker. It highlights the process in which the viewer involuntarily, thoughtlessly relates to their own sensory experience. Following their feature films grounded on the visuality of the cinema experience indicative of the German New Wave, the two directors now created a documentary which draws on the synthesis of various senses and a viewer's position focusing on perception and interpretation. This paper proposes to analyze how the harmony of senses happens on various levels, from the application of visible, audible, tangible subject motifs and modes of expression asking for various forms of perception, and all the way to the directorial perspective focusing on the viewer's engagement.

Keywords: Wim Wenders, Werner Herzog, 3D documentary, perception in cinema.

Introduction

The 61st Berlinale (2011) celebrated with great interest the featuring of 3D technology into the festival program. On the "day of spectacle" the two world famous masters of the German new wave, Werner Herzog and Wim Wenders presented their most recent documentaries produced with 3D technology. The first projection was Wim Wender's dance film, a memorial documentary about the tragically deceased choreographer, Pina Bausch, followed at the end of the evening by Herzog's film on the ancient paintings of Chauvet Cave in southern France, as a cinematographic "State of the Art." Going beyond 3D mainstream-movies, the two films stood as evidence for the artistic employment of this new technology.

The innovative potential of new media lies in the fact that, by abandoning the analog perspectival image space, it brings about the transgression of the usual boundaries, the possibility of opening towards the audience, and the elimination of the viewer's distance or physical separation. This consensual statement is based on technological, as well as ensuing esthetic and historical antecedents. Let us know set aside the 3D-experiences of film historical periods and highlight the innovation of the 1990s, the wide use of the flat screen, which in fact affected the depth of the view. The glass which separated the real from the unreal limited the movement of the gaze, and made it only possible to work in one single direction, in accordance with an analog single-channel medium. This conspicuous shortage in space experience and the restriction of the gaze brought about the need of a radical change in function: the desideratum of medial feedback and implication. The focus was shifted from audiovisual information to perception, eminently touching: the level of previous separation has now become a surface of tactile interaction for this new medium. The viewer's distance has diminished, its material separation ceased, and the images began moving towards him in the whole depth of the space, encircled him, penetrated his instincts. Now nothing prevented the viewer from literally taking into his hands the setting of the order of images, their montage, and their manipulation in time, space, or subject matter (Freyermuth 2011).

From that time on one could witness a rapid dissemination of digital technology and new media visuality, which radically reshaped all three segments of film industry (production, distribution, and presentation). As a result of the rapid reaction of mainstream-cinema, the pre-eminent genres became fantasy, thriller, and mainly animation. However, one can also often find that directors who started their career in the time of European new wave cinemas, consider digital technologies as a new instrument for the innovation of the art of film. Wim Wenders thinks it works as insurance for the future of documentary filmmaking, as a re-discovery of early cinema.[1] This claim can be understood as a re-discovery of the classic experimental silent movie, but it can also refer to the esthetic quality of the new waves. Wender's recent documentary presenting the art of Pina Bausch contains references to both of these aspects, completed with focuses on the position and perception of the body and space on and in front of the canvas. In this sense Werner Herzog also chooses not to place the emphasis in his 3D film

1 See: Wim Wenders über seinen Film "Pina" *http://www.stern.de/kultur/film/wim-wenders-ueber-seinen-film-pina-ich-dachte-ich-kann-es-nicht-1657549.html* Last accessed at: 2012. 01. 14.

on the intense technical work, but on the reshaping experience and effect that strikes the person who steps into the cave: man's awaking to life, his most ancient environment as mediated by paintings.[2]

Preliminaries

The formation of sensorial cinema bearing archetypal features raises a series of cultural, artistic, and philosophical questions, for the discussion of which it is worthwhile to survey the theoretical and historical preliminaries present in the life-work of German directors. Béla Balázs was the first of the theoreticians of film language to raise the problem of immersion. It is due to the so-called creative camera that we see differently than in reality, as long as the emergence of close-ups and details helps us situate ourselves right in the midst of the events. As a result of its mobility we can experience over and over again the dynamic changes of perspective, as the recorder has done away with the distance of the viewer, "which has been the essence of visual arts before" (Balázs 1984, 131). The viewer does not feel excluded from the closed world of art, but becomes part of the relationships, feelings, or thoughts of the visible person. Of all arts, Béla Balázs attributes this singular ability to the film alone, an ability which is formed by the purposeful application of film language apparatus.

Continuing this direction, the ideas of classic realist theoretician Siegfried Kracauer (1964, 320–330) must be mentioned, who considers the mechanical seizure of real images, the representation of the changing world of physical existence the basis of filmic spectacle. The mode of expression based on the primacy of seeing becomes characteristic of cinematography if the ideology, the content of the inner world gets in the background. Reality is manifested by various elements and conglomerates, in hardly noticeable surface phenomena which play an essential role in a film-like plot. With the recording of the visible world (whether real or imaginary), films offer solutions for hidden intellectual processes, historical facts, the state of a society, or the characteristics and dreams of a nation; the decoding of this spectacle can be referred back to the field of social reality. Kracauer's theory presumes the primacy of the sense of seeing; still, the emphasis of factual, material features implies the necessity of the sense of touch. Of all German new wave directors, it is the life-work of Werner Herzog

2 See: Erholung ist, den Gegner von Tom Cruise spielen http://www.welt.de/kultur/kino/article13691405/Erholung-ist-den-Gegner-von-Tom-Cruise-spielen.html Last accessed at 2012. 01. 14.

that can best be connected to this concept, and this is also the starting point of his new documentary, whose title (*The Cave of Lost Dreams*) can as well be conceived as a reference to Kracauer's theory.

The cinema of the physically based realist theories is connected and completed with the emphasis of movement, which Erwin Panofsky calls "the dynamization of space" (quoted by Kracauer 1999, 12). The immobility of the viewer while he watches a film should only be understood physically, whereas in an esthetic sense he is in constant movement. Since the eye identifies itself with the lens of the camera, the direction of gaze and the distance are in constant change accordingly. The fictional space represented for the viewer is just as much in movement as the viewer himself. It is not only the body fixed to its place that moves in space, but the space itself changes, revolves, falls apart, and rebuilds again. By this recognition the researcher analyzes the position and nature of the viewer's implication also from the point of view of seeing; nevertheless, it can be regarded as an important milestone in the formation of the experience of cinema. The difference between perspective view and *trompe l'oeil* paintings had displayed the formation of spatial dynamics long before the birth of film. While in Alberti's system the viewer is disrupted from three-dimension reality and is fascinated by the two dimensions of the painting, the Baroque painting style based on the conscious hoax of seeing moves the view and its spectator in the space of image, stepping out of the plane. This latter style does not employ the instruments of pictorial illusion, but draws into an imaginary world with the help of senses.

The perception of seeing has long been considered most important in the formation process of immersive experiences, since it plays a dominant role in the recognition of objects and people. In contrast with this restrictive, hierarchical concept of perception, another view emerges, building on the complexity of seeing-hearing-touching, and not less that of body perception and its analysis, spectacularly demonstrated by the 3D works of the German directors. Visual perception therefore cannot be regarded as exclusive or exhaustive, since information gained by touch is also necessary for the differentiation or identification of things. It is also indisputable that touching plays a leading role in human development and interaction, while it is also a universal means of interpersonal communication. The tactile message is one of the general features of Homo sapiens, and is dependent on human culture. In Western Europe for example the unwritten rules of contact were transmitted to subsequent generations, and are mostly widely known. In some cases a perception gained by the sense of touch can be more reliable than seeing. The stimuli of the several thousand mechanoreceptors of the skin and

the fingers and the muscles which move the fingers have a role in the formation of tactile features. The insecurity of touch can even be a matter of life and death: blind and deaf people see with their hands, they sense the vibrations formed during speaking by touching the speaker's face.[3]

In connection with haptic perception, writers of ecological film theory pay special attention to the biological process of tactile perception or active touch. When fingers smoothly touch an object, certain tactile signals are formed which guide the further movements, then the new signals formed result again in further movements. According to James Gibson's (1966, cited by: Sekuler–Blake 2004, 437) remark the actions made with the movement of body parts and fingers can change the objects touched, and even the perception itself. The information coming from the nerve terminals of the skin is combined with different information, kinesthesia, the receptors of which, located in muscles and articulations, inform about the position and movement of the members. Tactile and kinetic information is inseparable; consequently any sensory signal which is equally dependant on tactile and kinesthetic perception is called haptic perception. Gibson claimed that haptic capacity has not been appropriately recognized due to the dominance of visuality and the motor dexterity of the hand. However, in cases when one cannot see, objects can still be well recognized only on the basis of haptic perception. Visual experience is not a necessity therefore in bringing together tactile and kinesthetic information, thus the exploration of spatial organization of people born blind is similar to those who can see.

In the case of film the creators employ the multiple images and orders of seeing, sight, or visibility, and the viewers, who are participants of the spectacle and at the same time viewers of their own participation, are subject to influences created by these (illusion, manipulation, deception, a sort of supervision, etc.). Cinema has multiple ways of reflecting the blockages and aporias of seeing, of the gaze, by, among others, not being satisfied merely with revealing visuality and its contradictions, but also employing other forms of perception in the process of film creation and reception. Synaesthesia, intermodality, and the theories of phenomenology are fields which deal with the interplay of senses, the complexity and physicality of perception (Elsaesser-Hagener 2007, 139). Going beyond the criticism of visual dominance, Vivian Sobchack (2004, 55–84) places the analysis of the complexity of skin and body perception as a uniform communication surface in the foreground of film theoretical thinking.

3 Herzog treated this issue in detail in his documentary entitled *Land of Silence and Darkness* (1971).

Looking at the life-work of the two German directors, it is conspicuous that ever since their earliest films the immersive feature was always present in addition to the complexity of perception and the uniqueness of audiovisuality. One reason of this similarity is that they both learnt the art of filmmaking in the cinema, from where they borrowed their subjects, sources, generic and stylistic characteristics. German film history in the late 1960s – early 1970s (1971/1972) witnessed the formation of a multitude of esthetical principles, visual forms and patterns, and last but not least the methods to be applied for the captivation of the audience. The films are mixed in style: they equally contain narrative patterns and instruments characteristic of European art film, the exemplary fables and positive heroes of popular films, as well as the extension of fiction film towards documentaries. This is the beginning of the careers of the three directors recognized both in professional and connoisseur circles: Herzog's *Signs of Life* in 1968, Fassbinder's *Love is Colder Than Death* and Wim Wenders's *Summer in the City* in 1970. Thomas Elsaesser (2004, 247) uses the concept of "experiential film" for narratives closer to film essays or documentaries, and this is also a matching expression for the most recent works of the German masters.

Paleolithic Environment and Perception

Werner Herzog's New Wave films can be classified, on the basis of the metaphors, symbolic forms, artistic tradition and mythology employed, with the trend of the so-called anti-film (Kovács 2005, 378; Elsaesser, 2004). These are characterized by the creation of a private mythology formed by the director's particular individualism, by parabolic form and a style built upon the means of expression of the senses of seeing, hearing, touching, and tasting. Herzog regards as the starting point of his films the physical presence of things, objects, or characters. The creative attitude by which he draws up a reality (for instance, by hauling a ship across a mountain in *Fitzcarraldo*) heralds in fact the reign of spirit as the manifestation of a constructive will. His artistic-existential conception is guided by the creation of original images and (dream)visions, in such a way that the basic questions of the art of film and his life conduct cannot be separated. This orientation leads him from the beginning to the recording of images of nature, to the representation of extraordinary optical phenomena or landscapes as filmic environment and the vehicle of mythical and symbolic content in a way unique in film production. Herzog's sensory experiences, his unique visionary imagery are a result of wandering and walking. The strange shooting locations, the variety

of regions of the documentaries, the metaphoric poetry of natural phenomena are all born from this rite.

His most recent documentary shot about the around 400 paintings of Chauvet Cave in Ardèche valley in the south of France, discovered in 1994, is entitled *The Cave of Lost Dreams*. The more than 30,000 year-old animal depictions and symbols in relief decorate the uneven walls of several rooms and passages, and relate about the worldview and life circumstances of people in Europe living in the Upper Paleolithic period. This is the time of the last ice age (Würm) of the geologic time of Pleistocene, when the continent was largely covered with ice (reaching its highest cca. 25,000 BC), and the Homo sapiens had to live through this environmental change in the company of large mammals (bears, lions, rhinoceroses, horses). To the best of our knowledge, the earliest cave paintings are those found in La grotte Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc, and interdisciplinary historical, archeological, and anthropological researches prove that the objects, animal and human representations, and burial rites of humans living in the Upper Paleolithic period are evidence for a significant cognitive development. The hominids of the Pleistocene, adapting to the conditions of their environment, appropriated a self-preserving and reproductive behavior conditioned by the awareness of the interconnectedness of mental processes and ecological particularities, as well as the knowledge of one's space, one's habitat. Their orientation was not only determined by perception and movement, but also by their forming ability to treat their environment efficiently, and in accordance with their aims and worldview.

The Chauvet Cave is a place where the archetypal relationship of art and science can be experienced: the representations as creations of a mythical-mystical thinking are intertwined with an interested observation of natural phenomena. This early self-expression of the Homo sapiens cannot be connected to the phenomena of summer and winter solstice or spring and fall equinox because these only began to play a significant role later, in the period of the Neolithic and the Bronz Age. This cave of a worldwide significance is the place of the origin of art, the manifestation of human spirit, the birth of culture, where questions of the philosophy of culture and human existence are unavoidably present, as also, understandably, in the documentary of the German director.

The condition that Herzog was the only director who received the French government's permission to make a film determined the technical means that could be applied, which, in turn, resulted in a cinematic method built on the presence of multiple perceptions and their immersive effect on the viewers. The small 3D-camera, the spot-like illumination, the flashing lights give life to the

contours, colors, movements of the animals, the appearance of relief-like shapes. This technique enhances the experience that the objects on the screen seem to dominantly move towards the spectator, and gain their optimal plasticity. This latter works as a duplicate, its intensity is due to the common sensory perception of the dimension of reliefs and the space of the prehistoric cave (for instance, the harmonic unity of the dynamics of the two fighting rhinoceroses and the unevenness of the cave wall). The environment becomes conspicuous because of the cave paintings which smoothly cover the stone shapes formed as the result of natural processes.

At the beginning of the film the camera focuses the spectator's attention to the natural formations of the location, the landscape – in accordance with the dominant motifs of Herzog's life-work and filmic narration – could even be the location of a Wagner opera or the subject of a German romantic painter. The surface of the dripstones and stones in the passages, the formal variety of solid and liquid matter and the painted or incised representation offers major stimulus for perception. The intensity of the spectacle, the cinematic illusion engages and at the same time blocks the sense of touch (the surfaces must not be touched). The complete silence required makes hearing "turn inwards:" to the sounds of bodily functions, the rhythm of heartbeat, the conscious perception of the body. This synchronized unity of perceptions is the foundation for the birth of this sublime moment of prehistoric art.

The methods used in the paintings reminiscent of phase diagrams recall the first experiments with moving images, eminently optical games and Eadweard J. Muybridge's motion series. It betrays Herzog's alienatingly ironic, cliché-less thinking that the image series as a cinematographic shadow-play does not draw on Plato's allegory of the cave, nor Vilém Flusser's analogy between Lascaux paintings and the beginnings of cinema; instead, he uses the playful humor of a fragment of an American musical to present them. Also, he renders relative the philosophical questions he necessarily poses by the following sequence or scene. His scenes presenting various extreme modes of perception justify this: the famous perfume maker tries to get information by his smell; the master of ancient musical instruments plays the never heard, only assumed prehistoric music; a researcher uses a spear to reconstruct a never seen, only imagined fighting technique.

The epilogue is an example of Herzog's most complex treatment of subtle, individual subtexts. Not far from the Chauvet cave there is a nuclear power plant which has its cooling water used for the heating of a tropical biosphere-reserve. Herzog and his team become aware of an extraordinary spectacle there: two

albino crocodiles swimming in the water as each others' mirror image. The daring comparison suggests that, inasmuch as the albinos are prehistoric mutations, it may not be too unreal and unscientific to suppose that the man could also be something similar. Could it be still that we are not the surviving individuals of the evolution of the Homo sapiens, capable of reproduction and life, only some (accidental) mutations? Natural scientific research does not support this view, but on a metaphoric level and beyond it urges for further insight. The denouement of the film inspires the spectators to compare the purpose of two, very ancient and very modern, neighboring establishment of humans, the changed ecological conditions and their consequences, or the current world state of the Homo sapiens.

Life-Dance against Death

Similarly to Herzog, the experience of traveling and the continuity of movement is a dominant feature of Wim Wenders's modernist period. Tottering character, tumbling feet (*Same Player Shoots Again*, 1968), or a gaze at the outside world through the windscreen of a car (*Summer in the City*, 1970) are familiar motifs of his early films. In Wenders's opinion (1999, 83) walking and driving can be associated with the slowly passing perception of the camera, the long fade out takes on the meaning of "real" death. The simple *factum brutum* of his films is the passing-away at the end of the journey, but death is but an incidental fact. Wenders recalls Plato's allegory of the cave as an observation of perception: the traveler sees colorful spots, contours of forms, shadows passing by, which are reality to him. Discussions, encounters, and incidental events occurring during the voyage outline the phenomenon of life, the center of which is the problem of time. Can it be grasped, and in what way, if only the journey is the important turn in a person's life, while death is but an episode? Ultimately, Wenders tries, in all his films, to grasp the so-called "pure perception," the relations and contact modalities of motion and time, transforming them into image and sound. This is no different either in his documentary about a unique figure and phenomenon of the German art of dance.

Pina Bausch invented a form of self-expression which is not dance, theater, pantomime, or ballet, but all of these together, simultaneously. Her biographer, Jochen Schmidt (2002, 14–40) emphasizes that Bausch's art is the dance theater of the liberated body and spirit, of humanity, of the shaping of love, tenderness, and confidence between individuals, and of a dance language which enables the expression of a kind of communication that the other existing dance languages

are no longer able to provide. Wenders's film betrays emotional involvement, sensitivity by dance, through which insignificant daily gestures, habitual forms of motion, or body postures become meaningful again. The motion picture and Bausch's wordless speech attracts attention to the values of our body, the natural dynamics of expression, the narration of inner stories.

The inspiration comes from the environment (Wuppertal), from the natural-artificial space of the individual, and the physical experience of the materials to be found there. The organic and inorganic matters of the landscape – earth, stone, water, air, vegetation – and the built environment of man – roads, stairs, geometric interiors – get in contact with human bodies. The enhanced physical-biological presence, the works born from the chains of motions and gestures guide the attention to the problem of intellect, spirit, and body. The dances are placed within particular physical circumstances (such as, for instance, the four seasons as the framework for dancing in the film, both on the stage and in the landscape), while the mental connections, the affective-intellectual level expressed by the bodies addresses the mind.

The choreographies of Pina Bausch formulate the questions of guidance of one's life, the possibilities of freedom, the feelings of despair, joy, desire, or love, the relationship between sexes, man's relationship to action and labor, and the destruction of nature. Her art brings together the unity of spectacle–sound–motion of the dance with the space–time–plot continuum of short theater scenes, and this system encompasses the course of tragic and at times comic situations and human life situations. Motion pictures also possess these particularities, with the specificity that the continuity of space-time and motion is created by montage. This is the structure that Wenders enhances by 3D technology when creating Bausch's portrait in his own interpretation. This new means of expression helps him to intertwine his own methodology of film making with the characteristics of the choreographer's art and the perceptional aspects of reception.

The approach determined by the moving point of view was already present in his early films: the viewing direction of the camera placed in the inner space follows the possibly objective external location definition of the long shot and the bird's view. It happens similarly in this film, with the difference however that space creation in 3D becomes even more intense (the external image of the Wuppertaler Tanztheater with the characteristic suspension railway in the background is followed by a classic theater close-up showing the entire stage on ground floor level and part of the audience.) With this initial setting, Wenders poses again the theoretical questions which always interest him: the problem of

perception by film and the role of stories (1999, 185–195). It is a necessary step for the expression of Bausch's art, characterized by ignoring the limits of theater, dance, and film, and insuring the free flow of their means and interpretations.

Besides the novelty of seeing and the enhancement of the spatial motion dimension of the spectacle, Wenders had to build upon the particularities of the other senses as well in order to be faithful to the world of the German choreographer and his own (theoretical) investigations: he also engaged hearing, haptic and bodily perception so as to make the viewer's implication more intense. This complex of perceptions works most convincingly if it is assisted and enforced by the compositional structure of the film. The audiovisual framework of the film is set by the metaphorical and semantic meanings of the four seasons: the dancers walking in a single line through the space of the stage, then over the ridge of a green hill among statues, communicate by signs the effect of periodic changes on the body. Since Bausch could no longer be there on the shooting, she dominates the film as a medial imprint, on photo and archival footage, as well as through a monologue in the background of the dancers' portraits. Wenders employs the form of film within film, to which he associates the structure of theater within theater and dance within dance. This complex structure functions on the one hand as auto-textual mirroring – let's think of the films *Lightning over Water* (1980) and *The State of Things* (1982) – and on the other hand it attempts at grasping the essence of creative process by the multiplication, with the fact of death in Bausch's "one-minute" sketches, and with the metaphor of passing away of the ending film. Péter Esterházy (2002, 9) has a pertinent formulation: "Art, poetry is itself something that is embodied in a man, the happy recognition that art, although having no purpose, is still good for something – it speaks, it speaks of our existence as nothing else can."

Wenders's return to a filmic vision of Vertov's influence lies on structural grounds, logically developing from the new technology of spectacle, while highlighting its hindrances and impossibilities emphasized precisely by this medial awareness. He continues not with the avoidance, but the acceptance of this paradox, and revives a film production practice, familiar ever since the avant-garde, that film is an art which addresses the individual as a whole, and requires a certain education of senses. The characters of his narrations experience extraordinary situations, the dissolution of which is related to seeing and observation, because they have to realize that "they suddenly have to see things differently" (Wenders 1999, 192). The dilemma is whether auteur film exists at all, devoid of technical means and influences, disrupted from, or perhaps going together with, the self-shaping contradictions of the narratives, exempt from

the constraint of meaning creation, based on pure perception. With his film on Bausch, Wenders attempts to reformulate his theoretical questions.

The Wuppertal Dance Theater has two choreographies as its trademarks: Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring*, and the piece entitled *Café Müller*, in which Bausch herself performed as a dancer. In the latter's case, the commentary attached to the archival footage presented in the film informs about a creative mode which mirrors the subtleties of perception: that is to say, whether the feeling and perception mediated by movement with eyes closed becomes complete if the dancer's eyes under the closed eyelids look ahead or down. This emphasis of Wenders, besides nuancing the extraordinary creativity and sensibility of the choreographer, drives the attention away from that what is visible and that what is seen precisely by the voluntary limitation of seeing, and directs it towards the sad-lyrical arias of Purcell and towards body touching. The mutually unifying presence of the spectacle, the music, and body perception was first achieved in 1975, in the choreography composed for Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Bausch employs the various matters or elements (fire, water, wind, stone, earth, landscape, vegetation) in a way different from the usual forms of dance: here, the whole stage is covered with brown turf poured out from waste bins, with which the dancers permanently interact. The body lying on the purple drapery in the film, the motion forms of men and women create the tension on the rectangular stage in a diagonal composition. The choreography expresses the ancient rite of sacrifice from the point of view of the chosen victim, with the emotional-sensual charge of fear, pity, sexuality, and corporeality. The 3D camera of the film is the other gaze which takes on the position of the viewer, who helplessly allows to be drawn into the plot, as if by a vacuum, by the dramatic expression of the woman's close-up and the diagonal movement of the dancers.

The centralization of the material reality, the perception and self-expression of the body is a permanent consistency in Wenders's creative method. It recalls certain film theory associations: particularly those which consider a film a kind of contact, an encounter with the other (such as, e.g. intercultural cinema), and also those which refer to the skin's role in perception, to the haptic experience (Casetti 1999; Elsaesser-Hagener 2007). Wenders's film does not commit itself to either of the two; however, nor does it go deeper into any one of these. Much rather, it looks for a common set of these: it enforces intercultural encounters and communication possibilities by a variety of languages and foreign speech, as well as profound inner connections deriving from a sense and perception of the external changes and vulnerability of the skin and the human body at large.

Conclusion

The documentaries under scrutiny here, created by the two renowned directors of the German new wave, are based on the mutual relationship of sensory experiences triggered by the sense of seeing–hearing–touching and by body perception. This goal was attained as a result of the subject matter and the means of expression applied, as well as the viewers' active participation, by their creation of sensorial cinema, which treats the relationship of the creator, the work of art, and the viewer as a unitary whole, in a complex and balanced manner. Ever since the time of avant-garde filmmaking building upon both the theoretical and practical side of the film, these types of moving images have really been employed in the field of feature- and documentary filmmaking.

Ultimately, Wenders's film called *Pina* tackles the changes that have occurred about the particularities in perception together with the application of technology and the most recent technical instruments. According to the evidence of mainstream films and expectations shaped by these, the 3D film primarily enhances optical features with the spatial composition and motion dimension of the spectacle, heralding thus the primacy of vision. This eye-centered conception, otherwise very efficient, proves to be overly one-sided for the German directors when they elaborate on the basic matters of art and culture, and the first known visual signs of the life of man. The creative method is shaped and altered, the creative means are being enriched in response to a necessity and constraint of some sort. Wenders's interpretation of Bausch's art and Herzog's prehistoric cave presentation primarily exploits the multiple interactions of perception, which may bring about the formation of a cinematography which disrupts itself from technology, frees itself from influences, and abandons the narration of stories.

This is how things may have been in the time of the earliest visual signs, the first images, and from which the power and cultic function of images may have emerged. We are not aware of the meanings and practical purposes that the prehistoric man may have given to the first visual signs, but for contemporary people these signs do have a historic meaning, intertwined with the concept of art. The history of art engages its beginnings as all historical knowledge, and declares its diachronic character by spatial and temporal references, and the prevalence of the old form and style by new experiments. The relationship of the prehistory of the moving image and digital image creation is an appropriate example for this process. Our previously shaped concepts of time and space, causality or narration are all doomed to failure, and we can hardly speak about evolution

in art when faced with the primordial visual expression seen in Herzog's film. The two documentaries reveal that sometimes it would make much more sense to think about art not as a linear, evolutionary process, but as a cyclical system.

References

Arnheim, Rudolf. 1985. *A film mint művészet* [*Film as Art*]. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó.

Balázs, Béla. 1984. *A látható ember* [*The Visible Man*]. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó.

Bíró, Yvette. 2003. *Nem tiltott határátlépések* [*Not Forbidden Trespassings*]. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.

Casetti, Francesco. 1999. *Theories of Cinema, 1945–1995*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Csabai, Márta and Erős Ferenc, eds. 2002. *Test-beszédek: köznapi és tudományos diskurzusok a testről* [*Body-speeches: Everyday and Scholarly Discourses on the Body*]. Budapest: Új Mandátum.

Dúll, Andrea. 2009. *A környezetpszichológia alapkérdései. Helyek, tárgyak, viselkedés* [*Basic Questions of Environmental Psychology. Places, Objects, Behavior*]. Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó.

Eisner, Lotte H. 1994. *A démoni filmvászon* [*The Demonic Filmscreen*]. Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet-Filmvilág-Szellemkép.

Elsaesser, Thomas. 2004. *A német újfilm* [*The German New Wave*]. Budapest: Palatinus Kiadó.

Elsaesser, Thomas and Malte Hagener. 2007. *Filmtheorie zur Einführung* [*Introduction to Film Theory*]. Hamburg: Junius Verlag GmbH.

Freyermuth, Gundolf S. 2011. *Der Big Bang digitaler Bildlichkeit. 3D im Kontext der neuzeitlichen Mediengeschichte* [*The Big Bang of Pictures. 3D in the Context of New Media History*]. *http://www.schnitt.de/211,0059,01* Last accessed at 2011. 12. 01.

Gibson, James J. 1966. *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems.* Boston: Houghton-Miffin.

Sekuler, Randolph and Robert Blake. 2004. *Észlelés* [*Perception*]. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.

Kovács, András Bálint. 2005. *A modern film irányzatai* [*Trends of the Modern Film*]. Budapest: Palatinus Kiadó.

Kracauer, Siegfried. 1964. Az érzékszervekre gyakorolt hatás [The Effect on the Senses of Perception]. In *A film elmélete I-II. A fizikai valóság feltárása* [*The*

Theory of Film I-II. Discovery of the Physical Reality]. Budapest: Filmtudományi Intézet.

Kracauer, Siegfried. 1999. *Von Caligari zu Hitler: Eine psychologische Geschichte des deutschen Films* [*From Caligari to Hitler: a Psychological History of German Cinema*]. Frankfurt am Main: Surkamp Verlag.

Moholy-Nagy, László. 1978. *Festészet, fényképészet, film* [*Painting, Photography, Film*]. Budapest: Corvina Kiadó.

Müller Péter, P. 2009. *Test és teatralitás* [*Body and Theatrality*]. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó.

Pethő, Ágnes. 2003. *Múzsák tükre* [*Mirror of the Muses*]. Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Kiadó.

Popper, Karl R. 1998. *Test és elme: Az interakció védelmében* [*Body and Mind. For the Defence of Interaction*]. Budapest: TypoTex Elektronikus Kiadó.

Schmidt, Jochen. 2002. *Pina Bausch – Tanzen gegen die Angst* [*Pina Bausch – Dancing versus Fear*]. München: Econ Ullstein List Verlag.

Sobchack, Vivian. 2004. What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh. In: *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Wenders, Wim. 1999. *Írások, beszélgetések* [*Writings, Discussions*], ed. Zalán Vince. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 113–127

An Olfactory Cinema: Smelling *Perfume*

Sim Jiaying
Nanyang Technological University (Singapore)
E-mail: jsim2@e.ntu.edu.sg

Abstract. While technological improvements from the era of silent movies to that of sound cinema have altered and continued to affect audience's cinematic experiences, the question is not so much how technology has increased possibility of a sensory response to cinema, rather, it is one that exposes how such technological changes only underscore the participation of our senses and the body in one's experience of watching film, highlighting the inherently sensorial nature of the cinematic experience. This paper aims to address the above question through an olfactory cinema, by close analysis of *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (2006) by Tom Tykwer. What is an olfactory cinema, and how can such an approach better our understanding of sensorial aspects found within a cinema that ostensibly favours audio-visual senses? What can we benefit from an olfactory cinema? Perhaps, it is through an olfactory cinema that one may begin to embrace the sensual quality of cinema that has been overshadowed by the naturalized ways of experiencing films solely with our eyes and ears, so much so that we desensitize ourselves to the role our senses play in cinematic experiences altogether.

Keywords: olfactory cinema, haptic images, sensorial experience in cinema, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer.*

What is an olfactory cinema? An olfactory cinema brings to mind a 4-Dimensional cinema, where 3-Dimensional films are accompanied by external technological enhancements that produce additional physical effects, such as gusts of wind, scents, and vibrations. To be clear, this is not the olfactory cinema I wish to consider. While it is true that cinema has yet to come to a point of technological advancement which facilitates an accurate reproduction of smell in cinema, the question is not so much the reasons why smells – as a communicative device – fail to make a physical impact in cinema the ways visual and audio media do. In fact, my contention lies within the apparent failures of technological attempts at recreating smells in cinema to suggest that smell is not, and never has been, lacking in cinema. Perhaps, it is best to redirect my question: how is olfaction possible within a cinema that remains ostensibly audio and visual? This demands

that we approach cinema not just as an exclusively visual and audio medium. Instead, to consider the possibility of cinema as multi-sensory, in spite of this, just like our lived experiences.

I demonstrate an olfactory cinema through *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (Tom Tywker, 2006), which narrates the tale of an orphan named Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, who has a super-heightened sense of smell yet no bodily scent of his own. He ends up murdering young women for their individual scents in order to create the world's best perfume. The establishing shots of Tom Tywker's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* sets up the premise for an olfactory cinema and its implications. We get a montage of quick flashing images that include maggots feasting on decomposing flesh, a wild dog chewing viciously on whatever scraps of meat it can find, rats crawling in and out of butchered meat, the process of gutting fishes and removing innards from pigs; a close up of what seems to be intestines; a man in soiled clothes vomiting by the alley, and a close up of the end-product [Fig. 1]. This quick montage is juxtaposed to an aerial shot of a bloodied new born baby lying in a pile of dead fish, coupled with amplified sounds of sloshing, butchering, scampering of rats, and vomiting [Fig. 2]. The sensorial and synaesthetic nature of the film images and audio-tracks invites one to experience the film with all our senses, emphasising cinema's olfactory qualities. Although one does not necessarily smell the environment and is unfamiliar with how such a scene should smell, the spectator already experiences the discomfort, senses the dampness of the environment and the stench of the city.

This entire sequence establishes the olfactory landscape of stench, which lasts less than 30 seconds. Although one does not necessarily smell the environment and is unfamiliar with how such a scene should smell, the audio and visual montage is enough for the spectator to feel the discomfort, sense the dampness of the environment and the stench of the city. Similarly, a spectator who has been exposed to an environment as shown in the opening sequence of *Perfume: The Story of A Murderer* is better able to experience and relate to the stench of the environment, hence enhancing his/her cinematic experience. The sounds of scattering rats, resounding audio track of vomiting, on top of the constant cries of the baby, highlight the ways in which an audio-visual montage may complement one another. Sound, being a more proximal sense as compared to sight, draws the spectator closer to the image presented, almost close enough for one to actually smell.

Disconnected from any character's point of view, the camera moves from different imagery of odours quickly and it is also through the juxtaposition and quick montage that the spectator is assaulted by layers of images and audio

tracks superimposing on one another, shifting from one to another. The effect of this scene on the spectator is a strong sense of claustrophobia. Such a sequence thus invites the synaesthetic experience of smell and at the same time induces nauseated reactions from this spectacle. While one may take the opportunity to jump in on the fact that this highlights and emphasises the imperatively audio and visual aspects of cinema, I contend that one should resist attributing the impact of this sequence solely to what we see and hear, because only when one makes a conscious effort to break down the sequence can one distinguish the exact visual and audio cues that are presented on screen. In doing so the cinematic spectacle of the sequence is also completely broken down. This synergy – synesthetic, synthesised energy – proposes a multi-sensorial cinematic experience where the senses skirt through their presumed boundaries and overflow into and out of one another, making it difficult to properly separate and identify the senses at work.

According to Carl Plantinga in *Moving spectators: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (2009), there are two types of synaesthesia – strong and weak. Only one out of every 2000 persons experiences strong synaesthesia, "a form of cross-modal fittingness," whereby "a subject, words or sounds are accompanied by vivid images of colors or shapes" in the mind of the subject (Plantinga 2009, 157). While the above definitions refer to synaesthesia as clinical condition which only affects a few people, most people experience weak synaesthesia where "the stimulation of one sense cause[s] a perception in another" (Beugnet 2007, 73). This opens up the realm of olfactory, thought to be out of reach in cinema. In this paper, I refer to the phenomenon of weak synaesthesia and suggest that through sounds and visual images in cinema, the sense perception of smell is evoked and one is reminded of how it might be like to smell something. In this way, synaesthesia opens up the realm of olfactory which was thought to be out of reach in cinema.

In fact, scholars Steven Connor and Brian Massumi write about synaesthesia not as "an artistic device, a metaphor, an historical trend, nor solely a rare clinical condition," but "as a way of being in space and time that is simultaneously abstract and very real" (Barker 2008, 237). Through synaesthesia, the boundaries between different senses are blurred since the visual image may evoke the sense of smell. In other words, synaesthesia allows the spectator to be in the particular moment of a cinematic spectacle without necessarily having to experience something physically. One might claim that literal synaesthesia is not possible since cinema is still ultimately audio-visual. However, as Jennifer Barker asserts in her article, *Out of Sync, Out of Sight: Synaesthesia and Film Spectacle*, it is arguable that the

opposite is true, that "*all* cinema is synaesthetic, because in lived experience the senses have a way of skirting the hierarchies and divisions we use to define and explain them" (2008, 237). Since the experience of any sensation is never done so in complete isolation and the boundaries separating different senses are never completely distinguishable, it allows the possibility of synaesthesia in cinema. While smell might have been our first distant sense experience, all the sense modalities have essentially overlapped and have created a commonness in the senses. This underscores the ways which senses are interconnected, facilitating a synaesthetic experience that activates the memory of all other senses, thus inviting the sense of smell even if cinema only engages two senses – sight and hearing.

Therefore, without extradiegetic elements such as actual smells, winds, or splashes of water, cinema is able to "evoke sense experience through intersensory links: sounds may evoke textures; sights may evoke smells (rising steam or smoke evokes smells of fire, incense, or cooking)" (Marks 2000, 213). Its meaning for cinema is straightforward: to pay attention to the sense of smells within a film, spectators can and should go beyond the gimmicks of Smell-O-Vision, or scratch-n-sniff cards. Just as the era of silent films led to a cinema which "endow[ed] human beings with a new synaesthetic awareness: spectators will hear with their eyes" (Stam 2000, 35). The very absence of smell should allow spectators to smell with their eyes and ears, as well. While it may be tempting to base the plausibility of an olfactory cinema solely on one's ability to accurately experience the physicality of smells, I argue on the contrary that it is this inability to physically smell in films which welcomes an effective olfactory response to cinema. With that in mind, detractors who are quick to point out the inability for one to 'smell' in a film should realize that it does not matter if one is able to smell physical and actual smells in a film to discourse the experience of olfaction.

In fact, Laura Marks highlights that the physicality of actual smells may not be as successful as an imaginary smell evoked through cinema's audio-visual medium. An actual smell invokes in the spectator separate mental narratives, this 'imaginary signifier' that is the audio-visual of a film enables the spectator to be drawn in as well as out of the spectacle, thus creating a much more profitable interaction between film and the spectator. Marks highlights the evocative nature of an actual smell may distract the spectator from the cinematic spectacle because it evokes another set of narrative within our minds. By experiencing a sense of smell synaesthetically, one is still able to call upon personal experiences through memory, allowing one to respond personally while still ensuring the ability to experience film in its particularity. In other words, the synaesthetic nature of audio-visual images

provides an opportunity for one to adequately engage with one's sense of smell and the film at the same time, acknowledging the multiplicity of responses to a film without being overtly distracted by one's individual mental narrative.

That said, a synaesthetic sensory experience that encourages olfaction may be called upon through audiovisual cinematic techniques – cuts and edits, use of sounds, mise-en-scène, camera movements. As Martine Beugnet explains in *Cinema and Sensation*, "very simple and elaborate operations" such as "framing, camera movement, light and contrast, the grain of the image and the mix of different film stocks, as well as the variations in sound and visual intensities" (2007, 74) may invite an olfactory response to cinema. Anna Powell further asserts in *Deleuze and Horror Film* that "mise-en-scène, cinematography, sound and movement act in the mind/body/body system to stimulate both sensory-motor responses and thought via affect" (2005, 210). As such, both Beugnet's and Powell's contentions suggest an implication that synaesthesia is essential to cinematic affect. Affect is one of the vital ways in which spectators experience cinema, and it is this unique cinematic quality that provides a place of departure to consider an olfactory cinema. Powell further explains the Deleuzian concept of affect as a "neuronal response to external stimulus. Qualitative, not quantitative, it involves the body's power to absorb an external action and react internally" (2005, 210). This suggests that while one is exposed to stimulants from the outside and is unable to objectify or quantify it, one still responds to it – be it through facial expressions, body language, or thought.

The aforementioned example demonstrates a few things about cinema: (1) The predominantly perceived audio-visual cinema has produced and conditioned a generation of critics who have become so focused on the importance of visual and audio nuances in cinema, assessing meanings only via one's sense of sight and hearing, that one discounts the potentiality and the participation of other senses. By recognizing cinema as multi-sensory, we acknowledge cinema's potential to activate the other senses – such as our sense of smell, touch, or taste. (2) There is more to a cinematic image than what meets the eye or ear. As Anna Powell asserts in *Deleuze and Horror Film*, "the image is not the empty illusion of 'lack,' but is potent with affect. The spectator responds with visceral immediacy to images rather than gazing at them from a subjective distance" (2005, 17). The potentiality of an image lies in its ability to call upon instinctive reactions and sensations which are so proximate that one does not merely examine an image with one's eye. As such, an interactive relationship between spectator and film is established – where the film informs the spectator as much as the spectator informs the film.

Instead of trying to master the cinematic spectacle from a purely cognitive point of view, the spectator is involved in an ambiguous relationship which blurs the line between subjective and objective experience.

In another scene, young Grenouille brings his head close to a dead rat on the ground in order to better sniff the rat [Fig. 3]. After which, he brings his nose close to a dead rat by its tail as he sniffs it thoroughly while picking up the dead rodent. The close-up of the rat is one which draws the spectator closer to the texture of the rat – the stiff fur of the rodent. Before the camera zooms in further and focuses on the stiff fur, the spectator is almost forced to come closer to the image onscreen, thus literally forcing the sense of sight to shift from a distant sense to that of a proximal sense [Fig. 4]. Eventually, through a series of unclear visuals, the spectator is finally shown a close up of the dead rodent's insides filled with squirming maggots. This draws the spectator closer to better appreciate the multi-sensory nature of this image, even if one ends up cringing in disgust at this moment of cinematic affect: coming as close as Grenouille did with a dead rodent. As Carl Plantinga highlights in his book *Moving Spectators: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*, such disgust is essentially "invoked through that of taste and smell" (2009, 210). Such is the visceral and direct response which invokes disgust in the spectator. The synaesthetic experience of smell acts as a sensory stimulus that affects the spectator. In this way, this stimulus evokes a form of disgust in the spectator by bringing to light the imaginations of smells and tastes through synaesthetic presentations of sights and sounds.

The spectator is affected by this moment when s/he may be seeing what Grenouille smells, or s/he is smelling what s/he is seeing. At this instant, not only are the sensory boundaries between that of sight and smell blurred further as we are pushed to such proximity through the cinematic affect of disgust, the boundaries between cinema and spectator cannot be properly defined. These affects posit moments of ambivalence where there is a constant negotiation between the tensions that come from all directions and encounters within and outside of cinema. As such, the spectator is within the film as much as s/he is outside of it. The body of the spectator and that of the filmic body touch at this moment of affect – but this very instant of contact is one which blurs the boundaries between both bodies, and we are engaged in an instant that permits us to belong/not belong in this cinematic experience simultaneously.

Laura Marks argues in her essay *Thinking Multisensory Culture* that some images appeal to the sense of touch as much as vision does. While it is true that only actual smells call up precious memories associated with them, a haptic

image requires memory to bring in other forms of association through the refusal to allow visual abundance of any optical image, making it possible for memories to be evoked. Laura Marks calls a haptic image one which encourages the spectator to move closer to it, allowing one to explore it with all of the senses, including touch, smell, and taste (see Marks 2002, 118). The spectator engages with the spectacle by comparing what he/she sees on screen while remembering the mental images that are called up in his/her mind. In the case of the rat, one need not have smelled a dead rat to know of the disgust that accompanies such. At the same time, haptic images "locate vision in the body," making sight behave more like a proximal sense, like that of touch and smell (Marks 2004, 133). Through this, haptic images enable the synaesthetic experience of smell by welcoming an intersensory and embodied perception.

However, what becomes of an olfactory experience when one is unable to identify the scent because of the ab-sense (absence) of any prior encounter or memory with the object of smell? How do we reconcile smell as an absent sense in cinema, yet acknowledge the fact that smell continues to haunt the spectator within the film despite this? There is a scene towards the end of *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* that allows me to address this issue. Jean-Baptiste Grenouille is sent for public physical torture, followed by execution in front of a cheering crowd, all in support of his impending death penalty. As he walks up to the stand, he waves a handkerchief in the air, which was previously doused with the perfume made from essences of the girls he murdered. The entire crowd bends forward, kneeling down with hands raised, as if worshipping him. Through the visual images of people and the soundtrack played in the background, one understands that the beauty of this perfume entrances the crowd. The slightly slow-motioned sequence of the entire mass orgy, and the close-ups of contorted facial expressions, attempt to draw spectators even closer to the awe of Jean-Baptiste Grenouille's godly scent. Yet at this very moment, even as the spectator searches within his or her memory to find the most fragrant smell which s/he may remember, s/he is left out from this moment of engagement on screen. His godly perfume remains unknowable to the spectator.

According to Deleuze, smell belongs to special category which he calls "the recollection-image, which is an image that encodes memory" (Marks 2002, 123). He suggests that if we are able to call upon the encoded memory within an image, the image no longer remains merely an image, but becomes a narrative. However, when there is a gap between image and memory and we are unable to connect the image to a memory, Deleuze maintains that an image will remain a fossil image.

This refers to a meaning that is lost in our own bodies and memories because of the inability to evoke it from the image. Due to the lack of ability to smell what we see onscreen and the failure of the image to call forth a memory that might generate a narrative, such desire invoked by the perfume is lost on us.

When one is unable to remember, "the image we perceive does not link up with other images and we perceive it for its own sake" (Trifonova 2010, 144). At this moment, while we are not able to identify with the appreciation or the signification of the scent, we understand the significance of it within the scene. The notion of smell as "significance" and not "signification" is emphasised as the spectator knows of the importance of smell and its effects, despite having its exact meaning escape us. One is able to understand and not understand Jean-Baptiste Grenouille at the same time. This is especially true in his case – as even if we could smell, we could never smell like he does, and so the significance of such a scent is always beyond us: his drives are exterior to our capabilities of knowing. For the very knowledge of that would reduce Grenouille's intentions to something that is knowable to us.

This is a very paradoxical situation. By paying attention to smells or the lack of it, we open up an understanding of the film through its own particularity. We withhold moral judgement on Grenouille, who has just murdered young women for the creation of this particular perfume, and attempt to respond to Grenouille as an individual, free from moral rights and law, and begin to empathise with him. This happens even if this means acknowledging our inability to know Grenouille and his motivations completely despite cinematic conventions where one is supposed to relate to and identify with Grenouille through a close-up of his face as he closes his eyes to the flashback of the very scene before murdering the young lady, before opening them to stare briefly and directly at the spectator). The spectator is placed in a precarious position, being affected by different cinematic spectacles of conflicting motives – the juxtaposition of scenes of animalistic desire and coitus to the very sensual and inexplicable desire for a lady or her scent. From this scene alone, I have demonstrated the very way in which an olfactory cinema may allow for the plurality of a film to be explored.

Despite the unknowability of the scent, the "significance" of the scent is understood by the spectator, and attention is still drawn to the ambiguity of this scene as the spectator contemplates their moral position within the film. Therefore, such ambiguity welcomes the film to be read in all its multiplicity, and leaves the narrative open to the spectator's subjective interpretations. As Hans J. Rindisbacher asserts in *The Smell of Books: A Cultural Historical Study*

of Olfactory Perception in Literature, bad smells have been noted to signify "repulsion, corruption, decay, and ultimately death," while good smells often suggest a link to attraction, creation of bonds, sexuality, birth and life (1995, 290). What I propose an olfactory cinema can do is to essentially question the very conception of such a binary – good/bad – in the first place. The ability for smell to be experienced within cinema works precisely because of the blurring of any boundaries that seem to keep each sense in their particular sensorial realm. Therefore, the boundaries distinguishing between disgust and desire are never drawn out as clearly as binary opposites make them out to be.

In the final scene of *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer,* we see a dejected Grenouille, led by the olfactory memories of his childhood, walking back to the very fish market where he was born and abandoned. He stops and stares at a group of homeless people sitting around a bonfire. They appear to be unkempt, dirty, and even primitive in their behaviour. Standing at a distance, Grenouille opens up his bottle of heavenly perfume and empties the entire bottle over his head, dousing himself with this godly-scent. This scene highlights the difficulties and tackiness encountered by cinema in trying to portray smell. Grenouille is lit up in a sort of glow through a spotlight that shines on him to demonstrate how he now glows with a certain godliness, which creates a visual cue to the fact that he has now become an "angel." At this point of time, the upward-tilt of the camera calls into question the spectator's participation and responsibility in this sensory affair. The director pulls the audience into Grenouille's position, and we are forced to question how many of us were also searching for this smell that was missing throughout the entire film. How much of us are the same as Grenouille, gruesomely seeking out this perfect scent, or a scent, regardless of all else?

What follows this close-up is a reverse shot – we see one of the women from the group in complete awe of Grenouille's angelic aura, and how her love for him is immediately aroused by this smell. She runs to him and feeds on his shoulder. A crowd grows around him, almost like the way the rats were portrayed to have fed on decomposing meat at the start of the film as Grenouille stands unmoved, allowing himself to be eaten alive by the raving men and women attracted by his godly-scent. The scene transits via an overlapping crossfade from the crowd feasting on Grenouille until all that remains of him is his clothes. A small boy is shown casually walking by at daybreak, stopping to pick the clothes up as a fortunate find to demonstrate the elapsed time.

This entire sequence leaves the spectator in complete shock because the entire process of Grenouille being eaten alive is presented to the spectator as the passing

of time, fashioned as a matter of fact with no dramatic effects like the director had used in his portrayal of the godly scent and its effects on the people. There is practically silence – with no words from Grenouille or any of the people in the crowd during the two minutes and four seconds, except for the exclamation of "An angel! Oh, I love you!" before Grenoille allows himself to be eaten alive. The words serve almost no function since one is already able to gather from the sound effects and Grenouille's "glow" that there seemed to be some mystical significance to his perfume creation. However, in such a poignant moment where a sense of Grenouille's grief and resignation is heightened, the synaesthetic nature of imagined smells (i.e. the very streets of Paris where Grenouille was born and his godly perfume) creates a level of emphasis that cannot be expressed otherwise verbally or visually.

This ending sequence also underscores the ways in which desire and disgust are so closely intertwined. The most perfect scent in the world could in fact induce such disgust – the things one would do to attain such a perfume, and what eventually happens when the scent is used. The line between disgust and desire is all the more blurred and such closeness of "life, with erotics and sexuality, as its climax, and death" is perhaps best expressed in the French expression, "la petite mort" of which literal translation means "little death" (Rindisbacher 1995, 290). Such an expression for orgasms suggests effectively the closeness between death and desire, or disgust and desire. Perhaps one of the greatest pitfalls of *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* is its emphasis on and portrayal of the sense of smell as something "dangerously savage," as suggested by Watson (2000, 112). Grenouille is characterised as a man whose obsession with trying to create the world's perfect scent leads him to stalk and murder women who were not in the know. This is as opposed to drawing on the extraordinary nature of Grenouille's sense of smell, making it to be a true talent or a potential that is rare and barely explored enough. His olfactory sense allows himself to learn quickly the art of perfumery, as he is able to create scents without having to abide by actual proportions.

As the film demonstrates, the sense of smell, like any other sense, is one which has to be cultivated as well. We see Grenouille growing up, curious about every single smell sensation around him as he walks around linking each scent to its object, building his own olfactory vocabulary and library. However, the film subverts the possible potentialities of such an olfactory talent in various ways. The narrator whose voice appears throughout the film recounts the growth of Grenouille as he discovers his hidden nose for beautiful scents, subverts the positivity of such a "talent" by having to spell out and articulate with words that it is in fact a talent,

as if one is unable to notice that for themselves. Also, a parallel is drawn between Grenouille's lack of personal odour and his apparent lack of a moral conscience which causes him to murder without guilt. However, through an olfactory cinema, one is able to subvert the superficial presentations of his suggested talent, built up through audiovisual images, to expose a deep-seated layer of distrust towards the film with regards to the idea of such a sensory prowess.

Simply by setting up the premise for an olfactory cinema, one finds that skepticism towards adopting such an approach encompasses something deeper and more complex than just debates about technological apparatus, or the incommunicable nature of olfaction. Since synaesthesia allows the sense of smell to be evoked, apparent concerns serve more as an excuse and an attempt to conceal what lies at the crux of such an apprehension towards an olfactory cinema – the general distrust towards our sense of smell. Such skepticism towards the sense of smell is unsurprising considering how smells have remained elusive to us. We often find it difficult to articulate smell experiences without utilizing another sensory medium, or comparing it to something else. Dan Spercer brings up this problem of smells in *Rethinking Symbolism*, highlighting how our knowledge of different smells is determined by all the "categories whose referents have olfactive qualities," instead of having an independent domain of its own (quoted in Rindisbacher 1995, 15). Language has yet to develop a set of vocabulary for smells as we find ourselves describing smell in relation to its origin, or something else because our inability to "name" a smell as it is.

While one is able to acknowledge such an olfactory experience, one is unable to effectively put a cognitive encoding to the exact smell that one is experiencing without a relation to another. For example, the "smell of roses," or "it smells like roses" highlight the very metaphorical nature of smells. Due to such difficulties in articulation, smells have become "factually eliminated, linguistically euphemised, [and] psychologically repressed" (Rindisbacher 1995, 8). However, to avoid the address of smell altogether simply because of an inability to properly communicate it would be to suggest that significance lies only in how much something may be translated into common language.

Furthermore, as Anna Powell rightly puts in her book *Deleuze, Altered States and Film* (2007), such "immediacy of direct apprehension bypasses the capacity of words to fix phenomenal meaning" (2007, 101). This suggests that smell avoids being reduced to a single phenomenon, which ignores the multiplicity of any encounter. The sense of smell thus effectively exemplifies how one is not always able to translate the world into a common language or experience which is relatable

to all. Hence, the inability of smells to be properly communicated linguistically does not equate to its insignificance. Similarly, a physical absence of smells in cinema does not mean that olfaction is unable to affect our cinematic experience.

However, as Laura Marks states in *The Skin of the Film,* the use of senses are "variable according to culture and local need" (2000, 202). As such, our usage of senses is akin to a skill which one has to pick up. We learn more about any sense through regular usage of it and the use of senses differs from one culture to another. Thus, this suggestion echoes Norbert Elias's take on the importance of sight only in today's society, "the eye takes on a very specific significance in civilized society" (1994, 203). Robert Mandrou also asserts that despite the relative unimportance of the sense of smell and taste as compared to the other three senses in modern day, "the men of the sixteenth century were extremely susceptible to scents and perfumes" (quoted in Jenner 2000, 130). This suggests that every culture differs in its use of the senses and exposes how our biases against the sense of smell may be a product of social construction, so much so that the disregard for smell has become accepted as a natural belief.

As society turns toward modernity, the sense of smell decreases in importance while the sense of sight gains significance. Under such conception, I reiterate my point that the sense of smell is as valuable as any of the other senses, but it has been eradicated as a sense that remains below the hierarchy of sight and hearing through unquestioned social construct. Thus, any hesitance towards the usefulness of an olfactory cinema implies a strong inclination to unthinkingly accept social norms that have been based on nothing more than biases that have gone unquestioned. By opening up the possibility of such an approach to cinema, one is already making an attempt to embrace smell in all its materiality and value in its own right – the ability for it to open up the plurality within a film. That in itself is an act to refute totalizing analysis made through primarily audio-visual responses.

At this point, I wish to assert that my examples are singular by nature and they are only a demonstration of how I may apply an olfactory approach to cinema. They are by no means a definitive response to the films. What one takes away from an olfactory approach to cinema may and would differ from person to person as one takes into account the many differences that would shape one's encounter with cinema. This is the reason why an olfactory cinema better facilitates the exploration of multiple potentialities within a film. One would suspect that even without the introduction of gimmicks and technological experiments, one would be wary of any attempts to portray the very elusive, and intangible sense of smell through audio-visual means. Thus, to open ourselves to the very idea that smell

has all along been inherent within films, regardless of its physicality in cinema, may prove disconcerting for some.

Given the ways smell has already been neglected as one of the least important senses as compared to our senses of sight and hearing, per se, one cannot help but wonder how much we actually do know about smells and how much one can draw from an olfactory approach to cinema. However, what we do know are the potentialities and the values that an olfactory cinema affords; the film posits a certain level of dynamism over the film because of the ways olfactory allows an interaction between film and spectator. In this way, this relationality creates meaning that is singular and unique to each individual's cinematic experience. Different approaches to cinema open up various frameworks of responses to cinema, each defending their own approaches as beneficial to the cinematic experiences. However, the concern is not so much which approach to cinema is most beneficial and effective. There is no ranking in the ways of experiencing the world, or cinema; only different ways of approaching and responding.

I am offering only a prolegomenon to a larger investigation – the possibility of exploring even more approaches that could shed light on our understanding and experience of cinema. By opening up this other paradigm in cinema, spectators are equipped with new ways of understanding what was previously left out through a solely audiovisual approach. The nature of spectatorship is one that shifts constantly with various factors – the text, apparatus, history, social contexts, where spectators are involved in an ever-changing conversation with the cinematic experience. One must take into consideration the possibility of a future that could welcome the accurate experience of smell in new technological innovations in apparatus, one which would alter once again our olfactory experience in cinema. Or perhaps an olfactory approach might influence shifts in filmmakers' intentions to deliberately call upon synaesthetic responses of smell in cinema. Hence, at the very least, an olfactory cinema reminds us of what cinema can do – its ability to open up unexplored areas of experiences and provide a plenitude of meanings.

References

Barker, Jennifer. 2008. Out of Sync, Out of Sight: Synaesthesia and Film Spectacle. *Paragraph* vol. 31 no. 2: 236–251.

Beugnet, Martine. 2007. *Cinema and Sensation.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Elias, Norbert. 1994. *The Civilizing Process.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Jenner, Mark. 2000. Civilization and Deodorization? Smell in Early Modern English Culture. In *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas*, eds. Peter Burke, Brian Harrison and Paul Slack, 127–145. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marks, Laura. 2000. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses.* North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Marks, Laura. 2002. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marks, Laura. 2004. Thinking Multisensory Culture. *Paragraph* vol. 31 no. 2: 123–137. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Plantinga, Carl. 2009. *Moving spectators: American Film and the Spectator's Experience.* London: California University Press.

Powell, Anna. 2005. *Deleuze and Horror Film.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Powell, Anna. 2007. *Deleuze, Altered states and Film.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Rindisbacher, Hans J. 1995. *The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature.* USA: Michigan University Press.

Stam, Robert. 2000. *Film Theory. An Introduction.* Malden MA, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Trifonova, Temenuga. 2010. A Nonhuman Eye: Deleuze on Cinema. *SubStance* vol. 33 no. 2 (2004): 134–152.

Watson, Lyall. 2000. *Jacobson's Organ and the remarkable nature of smell.* London: Penguin Press.

List of Figures

Figures 1–2. Maggots on a rotting pile of dead fish seen in the opening montage: *Perfume: The Story of A Murderer* (Tom Tykwer, 2006). Newborn Jean-Baptiste Grenouille crying after being assaulted by the smells at the fish market.

Figures 3–4. Young Grenouille smelling a dead rat. Close-up of the dead rat's stiff fur.

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 129–148

See, Seeing, Seen, Saw: A Phenomenology of Ultra-Violent Cinema

Sarah Downes
Loughborough University, Leicestershire (UK)
E-mail: s.s.downes@lboro.ac.uk

Abstract. Vivian Sobchack claims in *Carnal Thoughts* that human bodies are continually remade by the "technologies of photography, cinema, and the electronic media" (2004, 135). One such sphere of contemporary media that continuously redefines the notion of the human body is horror cinema. The recent advent of so-called 'gorenography,' spearheaded by James Wan and Leigh Whannel's *Saw* (2004), issues conceptual and philosophical challenges to the presentation and conceptualization of the phenomenal body. Following in the scope of frameworks advanced by both Sobchack and Jennifer Barker this paper aims to explore how the body of the *Saw* series is constructed and how it emulates both the conceptualized bodies of its viewers and the state of modern information flow in a technological age. It will be argued that the *Saw* series not only recognises viewers' enjoyment of its genre conventions but also acknowledges and manipulates their engagement with the film as a phenomenological object through which a sense of re-embodiment can be enacted.

Keywords: Leigh Whannel: *Saw* (2004), phenomenology, "gorenography," ultra-violent cinema.

Amanda Young (Shawnee Smith) is led into a police interview room. She sits at the table, her head and shoulders shaking, twitching, as her eyes flit restlessly. Despite the eye-line shot taken by the camera Amanda does not meet its gaze. A non-diegetic soundtrack looms in the background, quietly at first with a steady, monotone timbre. Chiaroscuro lighting emphasises the contours of Amanda's face as the camera slowly zooms to a close-up and stark cheekbones draw one's gaze to the angry bruising at the corners of her mouth. The shot cuts harshly, contrasting light and shade created by the chiaroscuro lighting is replaced by green-filtered harsh light reminiscent of flashbulb after-images. The camera performs a fast arc around a soft-focused scene punctuated by pools of green-tinted hard light. The disorientation created by this movement is halted starkly

as the camera rests upon a close-up of Amanda, her eyes double framed by the screen and the mechanical apparatus that obscures the bottom half of her face; clearly unconscious. The few seconds of stillness allow the prominent features of the scene to be assessed: the framed eyes and the hard, dark metal surrounding them. As she arouses to consciousness the camera once again arcs around the restrained figure but this time the arc is disrupted; dissected and reassembled out of order. Amanda rolls her burdened head counter to the camera movement as the velocity of the arc increases. The juxtaposition of the camera arc and Amanda's lolling head create the illusion of frenzied movement, a dizzying effect. And then it stops. The scene is perfectly still as something off-screen catches Amanda's attention. The shot/reverse-shot technique reveals a television set buzzing to life, the profile of a ventriloquist's dummy flickering silently. Amanda turns to face the television; the dummy turns to face Amanda and the viewer now turns to watch this exchange very closely indeed. As the dummy explains Amanda's predicament both scenes – Amanda on the cinema screen and the dummy on the television set – remain still and silent except for the movement of Amanda's twitching head, the dummy's mechanical chin and the ever-louder pulsing, non-diegetic soundtrack. The dummy finishes his monologue, the television screen gives way to green-tinted static and Amanda slowly turns her head. She looks first directly into camera, combining for a split second the inter- and extra-diegetic gaze, and then further to her right to present the viewer with a perfect profile of the apparatus she is wearing. Suddenly, and with much urgency, the low pulsing soundtrack makes way for industrial rock beats. The camera resumes its fast arc, the scene around which it revolves distorted by both soft focus and the digital simulation of under-cranking the camera, as Amanda struggles wildly. The disorderly movement of the camera and the speeding up of Amanda's movement, together with the heavy soundtrack recreate the discomfort of the cinematic viewer as they are forcibly drawn into reciprocating the sense of panic which emanates from the screen before them. The kinetic energy created is once again immediately dissipated as all motion, Amanda's, the camera's, and the soundtrack's, ceases. Amanda stands up, triggering the pin to the apparatus she wears and the sound of a ticking clock, echoed in the bright, wide eyes that are shown in extreme close up, fills the screen. A few seconds of ticking and then panic resumes: the camera returns to its fast, disjointed arc, Amanda's struggles are shown in double-time and the arc gets faster and faster. Finally, in a frenzy of circling the screen goes to whiteout and the shot cuts to the low-key lit police interview room as Amanda opens her eyes.

By Halloween 2004 this shot sequence had begun to amass some of the infamy that now renders it one of the most iconic scenes in contemporary American cinema. The combination of low key lighting, lingering close ups of injuries, disorientating movement from both the camera and on screen characters and a peculiar stop-start rhythm all contribute to what was to become a defining feature of James Wan and Leigh Whannel's (2004) franchise.[1] In this short sequence, with barely any physical movement or narrative development and counterpointed with a kinetic editing rhetoric, the film brings together elements of *mise-en-scène* and technical form in a way that encourages what Laura Marks refers to as 'a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image' (Marks 2002, 3) that brings the viewing body and phenomena viewed into direct contact. Rather than proposing identification with the contents of the film, through the traditional methods of identification with either camera or character, it is the form and presentation of the images themselves that takes precedence. At the heart of the *Saw* series lies a partial inversion of voyeuristic spectatorship that hinges upon the intensely sensory and embodied nature of contemporary cinematic techniques: viewers of these films do not just watch the destruction of human bodies but also the deconstruction of the traditional viewing position.

Marks defines haptic perception as a 'combination of tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive' stimuli that define our interaction with objects (Marks 2003, 2). Haptic images can, therefore, be considered as images that encourage multisensory

1 In this essay *Saw* (2004) and its six sequels, released at one yearly intervals to both the US and European markets the week before Halloween until *Saw VII: The Final Chapter* (2010), will be approached as a series rather than individual films. While *Saw* (2004) was the only release specifically under the direction of James Wan and Leigh Whannel, being developed from their 2003 short film of the same name, they retain executive directorship of the franchise throughout. Additionally, following the success of the initial release producers Gregg Hoffman, Mark Burg, and Oren Koules formed Twisted Pictures; the company was subsequently awarded a nine-film deal with Lionsgate, six of which were *Saw* sequels. Members of the production staff on the initial releases, including film editor Kevin Greutert and production designer David Hackl, would go on to direct the later installments of the series. As a result of the continuity in production and directorship, and the fact that *Saw* was the foundation for Twisted Pictures success, the aesthetic of the initial film adapts relatively little during the series. Arguably, elements of theatricality develop in the convolution of the some of the later plots but within each title there are numerous elements of content, theme, and appearance that tie them together as a series. One would find it difficult, for example, to watch *Saw IV* (2007) without knowledge of *Saw III* (2006) and much of the impact of the final twist in *Saw VII* (2010) would be dissipated without having first seen *Saw* (2004). In this manner the series condemns itself to formulaic circularity and excludes those viewers who missed the first few releases yet it also ensures that its explorations of morality and death cannot be summarized in any single *Saw* film.

engagement. Such images go beyond the realms of pure visibility to stimulate directly, or simulate indirectly, the experience of additional sense modalities. The combination of uninhibited motion and the cultural connotations of nauseating colour in Amanda's trap sequence, for example, creates disorientation as it emulates the effects of gravity and velocity upon the viewers' sense of balance. Such haptic images, via a combination of visual, aural, and proprioceptive stimuli, move the viewed body of Amanda Young and the often-overlooked bodily experience of the cinematic viewer into close proximity to one another. Amanda's panic is embodied in the sickening arcing of the camera coupled with green-filtered lighting and the oddly soft focused motion shots. The oddness of the focus is of course derived from the routine deployment of soft focus in romantic and nostalgic scenarios. Usually connoting a heightened positive emotional response the technique is used, in this example, to dull the dominant sense of sight thus encouraging viewers to engage through other sense modalities in order to gain a clearer picture of the onscreen events. Amanda's confusion is articulated by the stop-start rhythm as the shot transitions from hectic, disjointed spinning, to serene and silent stillness. The return to the double-framed image of Amanda's eyes reiterates the constructed nature of the image. Coupled with the continued use of steady camera shots this framing reflects the slickness and hyperreal nature of the image. The film's body effectively foregrounds its own status as image, a construct of an un-reality. Such foregrounding of the artifice of the cinematic image creates a tangible barrier between the viewer and the narrative: there is no disputing, even for a millisecond, that the meticulously compiled combination of light, sound, and movement is anything other than extreme fictional artifice. All that remains in this hyperreal cinematic experience is the 'close and bodily contact' between the viewing body and the film-object that is invited by such haptic imagery (Marks 2003, 13). With only the images for company the effect on the viewer is similar to that of a roller coaster: visceral yet ultimately controlled. This section of film stirs within the viewer a sense of motion that is imitative of the movement of the body on screen but which is manifest in physical sensation: confusion, dizziness, and anticipatory excitement. The film's body, the body on screen and the body of the viewer are drawn into an intimate embrace.

Marks suggests that the desire 'to make images that appeal explicitly to the viewer's body as a whole, seem[s] to express a cultural dissatisfaction with the limits of visuality' (Marks 2003, 4). Contemporary Western culture privileges sight; from advertising billboards, the spectacle of celebrity culture and YouTube's five minutes of fame design the desire to see and the need to be seen are paramount.

Within such a frame the senses of hearing, touch, taste, interoception, and proprioception, and the interaction between modalities of sense perception can often be marginalised.[2] Perhaps the design of haptic images in films such as the *Saw* series could be seen as an embodiment of a critique not necessarily of the limits of visuality but of the cultural reliance on a single un-isolable sense. The human senses are often conceived of as distinct operations with, for example, visual input appearing isolated from auditory or olfactory input. While each of the special senses – vision, hearing, taste, touch, and smell – along with non-specialized modalities such as temperature and pain perception, do make use of specialized receptor cells and afferent nerve fibres the sensory consolidation areas in the brain receive input from a variety of different sense modalities pertaining to a single perception. Within the human midbrain, for example, lies the tectum tegmentum whose "principle structures are the superior [and inferior] colliculi" that receive synaptic transmissions from incoming visual and auditory neurons respectively (Carlson 2011, 76). The superior and inferior colliculi also share numerous synaptic connections with one another suggesting that there is a strong link between the visual and auditory fields. Indeed, the closeness of the visual and auditory fields, and the potential for manipulation, is perhaps most explicitly realized in contemporary horror film. The soundscape of horror, once dominated by the cacophonous orchestral sounds of either borrowed classical pieces such as Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* in the 1931 production of *Dracula* (directed by Tod Browning), or specifically written musical pieces such as John Carpenter's iconic score for *Halloween* (1978), has more recently been overtaken by the invasive sounds of heavy metal. In Amanda's trap scene the metallic, industrial rock music appears in waves, building to crescendo to coincide with Amanda's panic and fading to silence as it imitates her stillness. The very nature of the hard, heavy, repetitive sounds and the increased volume in the cinematic environment renders the music, like Amanda's bear-trap device, impossible to ignore and escape from. Vision and sound here combine to produce a type of sensory overload in the viewer that mimics the uncontrollable fear manifest in Amanda's facial expressions and actions.

Indeed, such interconnectivity of sensations is demonstrable outside of the cinema auditorium by the McGurk illusion that manipulates vision and sound through the presentation of conflicting stimuli. When spoken aloud the English

2 Interoception refers to 'inward' looking sensory perception that transmits information regarding the internal state of the body to the central nervous system including, but not limited to, hunger, thirst, vestibular sensations of orientation and balance and, arguably, pain; proprioception refers to the sense of bodily positioning and movement.

phonemes 'ba' and 'da' are easily distinguishable; the phonemes are also distinct when the auditory input (the spoken sound) matches visual input (the mouth shape of the speaker). When auditory and visual input is incongruent, that is when the subject hears 'ba' but sees the mouth shape for 'da,' or vice versa, a third phoneme, 'ga,' is perceived as being spoken. The human brain senses the incongruent stimuli and in comparing the two produces a best-fit model of interpretation. Reputed to be a "consequence of the evolutionary imperative for quick decision making" amongst the slew of sensory input received by the brain the illusion demonstrates how sensory modalities combine and interact to produce sensations that are not physically present (Smith 2000, 402). It is in this manner that the visual and auditory aspects of Amanda's trap scene are able to communicate, through sensory overload, the fear, panic, and confusion that the character is subjected to. In manipulating the combination of sensory input the film's body entices the viewer's body into mimicking the state of heightened excitement portrayed onscreen. At the crescendo of sound and movement, as overstimulation borders on pain, the viewer's heart rate might increase, they may squint or look away in an effort to remove all or part of the stimulation and they may move uncomfortably in their seats. They will not be feeling, vicariously or otherwise, the precise emotions intimated to be felt by Amanda but the experience will be visceral, bodily and above all, insistent.

While the human senses are often conceptualized, outside of the life sciences, as serial processes of input-process-output, the neural connectivity between sensory modalities actually creates a 'tangled hierarchy' in the brain with sensory data travelling upwards from sense organs to the central nervous system (CNS), downwards from the CNS to sensory-motor organs and 'sideways' between sensory-motor organs, neural pathways, and brain areas (Smith 2000, 33). It is such interconnectivity between sensory modalities that creates the richness of phenomenological experience and renders it difficult to analyse, describe, and explain an experience in its totality without reducing it to a sequential progression of instantaneous perceptions. In its overt manipulation of multiple senses the *Saw* series highlights the intricate connections between these senses and questions the cinematic and cultural reliance upon the singular sense of sight. The critique of the cultural reliance upon vision that is embodied by the series is, however, only enabled by the utilization of digital imaging technologies that appeal directly and primarily to that sense: digital recording equipment; editing techniques that disconnect and splice sections of the camera arc out of sequence, and, perhaps most prominently, the ventriloquist puppet's screen-within-a-screen/recording-

within-a-recording shot [Fig. 1]. Without the progression in digital visual technologies, which inherently favour one sense modality over others, films such as *Saw* would not be so easily made or so readily distributed. The *Saw* franchise, along with many other contemporary horror franchises, exploits the cultural reliance upon, or at the very least the cultural comfort with, vision as the primary mode of gathering perceptual information by using technology descended from this rhetoric of reliance to subsume and deconstruct the cinematic image. While the combinations of sensory modality available to cinema may not have altered considerably – one is still only able to effectively and consistently combine visual and auditory modalities – the ways in which they are combined and manipulated has developed alongside technological advances. The effectiveness of Amanda's recollection in *Saw* is based almost entirely upon such combinations. A key aspect of this scene is the sense of motion communicated to the viewer achieved by three elements of the film's body: the cultural associations of the colour green, the digital editing techniques that allow camera speed to be exaggerated and camera direction to be reversed and inverted, and the hyper-rhythmic qualities of the industrial rock soundtrack. The speed of the camera movement invokes dizziness which, coupled with the green filter, in turn suggests nausea. The heavy beat of the music provides a rigid structure that not only echoes the frantic movement of the camera in its tempo but also serves as a mediator of time. Once the soundtrack has commenced it stops only once as Amanda first stands. The music is abruptly replaced by two similarly repetitive sounds: that of the pin triggering and the mechanical ticking of a timer. The sharp echo of the pin sounds on the final bass beat of the music, acting as an abrupt stop. Immediately following this, however, the ticking of the timer mimics the music in both its tempo and regularity. When the music begins again, starting as it ended by synchronising with the mechanical tick of the clock, and both it and the timer run at the same speed the imposing sound track becomes an elaborate clock. When the music then speeds up to match the fast-motion of the camera movement time itself appears to increase. The camera, Amanda and the perception of time all increase the velocity of movement within the scene and the viewer. The modalities through which this velocity makes itself apparent – vision, audition, vicarious proprioception, and time perception – surround the viewer and induce an illusory sense of unstable balance and movement within the viewing body.

The development of cinematic technologies has been accompanied in the last thirty years by the rapid and increasingly accessible proliferation of digital communications media: home computers, the Internet, wireless and Bluetooth

technology, RSS web feeds, social networking software, viral advertising, and mobile communications devices. Such technological innovation is, for a limited but growing demographic, creating what Manuel Castells calls "a new communication system" which creates and distributes "words, sounds and images of our culture." The novelty of this system does not lie in any one piece of technology but rather within the interaction between different forms – television and smartphone applications; computer networks and video technology – which increasingly signals the integration of "the written, oral, and audio-visual modalities of human communication" (Castells 2000, 2; 328). The integration of communications modalities intimates at the desire for the multi-sensory appeal of technology that is evidenced in the *Saw* franchise. While not necessarily expressing "dissatisfaction with the limits of visuality" such developments do seem to acknowledge the multisensory nature of human communication and bodily existence. Like the sensory manipulation of the McGurk illusion, and the appeal to balance found in Amanda's recollection, it is practically impossible to envisage a truly isolated sensory experience; even the act of looking at a glass "automatically activates the motor programs [in the brain] of a grasping movement toward" it thus integrating vision, proprioception and touch into a seemingly singular sensation (Jung and Sparenberg 2012, 141).

The *Saw* series pertinently overwhelms its viewers not only with visual, auditory, and interoceptive stimuli but also with images of human bodies in sensorial states, usually the state least conducive to communication: pain (Scarry 1985, 6). Pain is a state that is irreducible to a singularity. It combines elements of the physical, psychological, and social in a way that renders it virtually impossible to claim exclusively *pain is x*. Pain is physical, various neurological pain pathways have been identified and documented from the skin receptors to the brain centres that disseminate sensory input; pain is psychological, one could not claim that the pain of losing a loved one is any less valid than the pain of a broken leg simply because it lacks physical damage; pain is social, it can be elicited when no painful stimuli is directed at the individual through the stimulation of associative neuronal pathways and mirror neurones. In addition, pain – physical, psychological, or social – can be stimulated directly (for example, through the burning of the skin) or indirectly through any other sense modality such as the overstimulation of the eyes under intense light. The confused origins of the state of pain contribute to what Elaine Scarry theorises as the unsharability of pain, its resistance to "objectification in language" (Scarry 1985, 5). Pain, for Scarry, is a state that isolates the subject and removes them and their pain from language completely. And yet pain remains

the subject of visual art from the passion of Christ to Edvard Munch's *Der Schrel der Natur* (*The Scream of Nature*), from PainExhibit.org[3] to Rodleen Getsic's performance art piece *The Bunny Game* (dir. by Adam Rehmeier, 2010). As Susan Sontag notes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, when words fail to sufficiently communicate pain the image steps in as "a record of the real," a link between what is incommunicable in language but intensely and sensationally available through the image (Sontag 2003, 23). It is through a deluge of sensorial images, lacking in spatial and temporal linearity, that the *Saw* films refocus spectators' attention from content to the multi-sensory mode of transmission in an effort to communicate this most universal and ambivalent sense.

The seven films in the *Saw* series follow the career of serial killer John Kramer (Tobin Bell), better known as The Jigsaw killer, as he abducts and tests his human subjects' will to live. Each of the seven films reproduces a very similar central plot and structure: there is a primary game which develops over the course of the film, the player of which is given a little background and development; around this the police investigation hobbles along and vignettes of other, less elaborate but not less-visceral games punctuate the proceedings. Few subjects make it out of Jigsaw's games alive and the series has a preoccupation with using the plot twist that sees Jigsaw captured-but-not-really or one of his apprentices being ousted by a new one. Far from being screenplay or editorial sloppiness, however, the convoluted and repetitive storyline works to draw viewers away from the temptation to invest oneself exclusively in the narrative. The narrative is so tenuous, formulaic, and familiar that there is really very little to invest in. A poignant example of such narrative destabilisation can be seen in *Saw IV* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007).

The film opens with a short montage recap of the ending of *Saw III* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006) – these two films are the only two in the series to be explicitly temporally linked – followed by an extended sequence in which the body of John Kramer undergoes an autopsy. Shot in bleached colour, the almost-entirely grey scenes are eerie in nature: the diegetic sounds of sawing, cutting, and peeling dominate the auditory field whilst visually, the only colour not bleached is the deep scarlet of John Kramer's blood [Fig. 2]. As the autopsy progresses the doctors find a tape in his stomach, which analepsis reveals Kramer swallowed at the end of *Saw III*. Detective Hoffman (Costas Mandylor) is called to listen to the tape. On his way to the mortuary Hoffman is informed that "another doctor has gone

3 An online gallery of representations of the various facets of pain available via open access: *http://painexhibit.org*.

missing from the hospital," a reference which nods to *Saw* (2004) protagonist, Dr Lawrence Gordon (Cary Elwes), and refers specifically to *Saw III* protagonist, Dr Lynn Denlon (Bahar Soomekh). The tape is addressed to 'Detective' and assures him that he will not walk away untested. Following these scenes the film cuts and begins the narrative, the easily missed references to the previous films seemingly set aside. The remainder the *Saw IV* plays out until the final sequence of events casts doubt upon the linearity of both *Saw IV* and *Saw III*. This sequence sees the FBI's Agent Strahm (Scott Patterson) discovering Jigsaw's lair. He enters a familiar room filled with equipment and on progressing to the next chamber Strahm discovers the final scenes of *Saw III* apparently playing out simultaneously with the events of *Saw IV*. It is at this point that viewers are left wondering how the autopsy of John Kramer ever occurred as up until these final scenes the autopsy appeared to begin the narrative of *Saw IV*; it is only now that it is revealed as prolepsis. The narrative is deliberately inverted and fragmented in a covert manner to prevent traditional methods of narrative interpretation: it is difficult to identify with a character when you do not know who they are, what they are doing, when they are doing it or why. Denying the viewer traditional narrative authority entices them to experience the images before them as simply images of experience: the film's body and the viewer's body draw close together. Narrative structure is foregrounded and flaunted so that, rather than being an anti-narrative series, the films present bodily engagement with haptic images as a pleasing alternative to attempting to unravel the labyrinthine and unconvincing plot. The images in this film series are flattened, as signification does not occur within the images but within the viewer's interaction with them. It is within this remit that the use of ultra-violence becomes important.

Ultra-violent films are typified by extreme, visceral, apparently mindless violence against human bodies. It is the extremity of the scenes of violence that contribute, along with narrative destabilization, to the refocusing of viewer's attention from content to mode of transmission. Ultra-violence remains an emerging subgenre of contemporary horror cinema and the term ultra-violent is preferential to both 'torture porn' and 'gorenography,' terms alternately used to describe the *Saw* series, as it provides a more neutral foundation for ensuing criticism. Both torture porn and gorenography share connotations with pornography, voyeurism, and socially abject viewing positions that infuse any reading of films classified as such with psychoanalytic notions of identification. Whilst notions of character or camera identification are an important consideration in film studies the unsatisfactory character development, the lack of convincing

pre-narrative context and the continuous highlighting of the mechanical aspects of film enable the *Saw* series to shift the emphasis to the embodied relationship between viewer and film without presenting that relationship as either inherently positive or negative. At no point is the viewer encouraged, or indeed 'allowed' to conveniently forget that each and every element of the *mise-en-scène*, down to the colour of Amanda's clothes and the specifically metallic ping of the trigger, that mimics the harsh sounds of the heavy metal overture and allows rhythm and time to become one, is artificially selected for maximum signification and effect. Identification with characters and camera is refused with each inter-diegetic twist and turn until the viewer can relate only to the image and the image, in and of itself, is not subjected to as fervent ethical rhetoric as, for example, the representation of female victims in traditional horror cinema may be.

Ultra-violent films usually emphasise extreme, non-instrumentally motivated violence against predominantly human bodies; a flaunting or negation of traditional narrative structures; and, a certain degree of post-modern self-awareness.[4] Ultra-violent films typically, and crucially, reach beyond the boundaries of decorum and narrative function as demonstrated by a short scene in *Saw VII* (Kevin Greutert, 2010) during which John Kramer's widow, Jill Tuck (Betsy Russell), has her face decimated by the reverse bear trap device premiered by Amanda Young in *Saw*. The entire scene is shot in close up; in full colour; in 3D and with surround sound. The significance of this trap is not in the death of the character or in the aptness of her demise but solely in that fact that, since its debut, this trap had been the only Jigsaw creation that had never fulfilled its destructive potential.

4 In this vein the *Saw* series may be categorised together with Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005) and *Hostel II* (2007); Alexandre Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes* (remake; 2006) and Martin Weisz's *The Hills Have Eyes II* (2007); Greg McLean's *Wolf Creek* (2005); Neil Marshall's *The Descent* (2005); Jon Harris's *The Descent Part 2* (2009); Rob Zombie's *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003) and *The Devil's Rejects* (2005) and, arguably, his remake of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (2007) and its sequel *Halloween II* (2009); Jaume Collet-Sera's *House of Wax* (2005); Christophe Gans's *Silent Hill* (2006); Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (2007); Breck Eisner's *The Crazies* (2010); Darren Lynn Bousman's *Mother's Day* (2010) and *Repo: The Genetic Opera* (2008); Marcus Dunstan's *The Collector* (2009); Tom Six's *The Human Centipede* (2010); Srdjan Spasojevic's *A Serbian Film* (2010); Adam Rehmeier's *The Bunny Game* (2010); and, Robert Lieberman's *The Tortured* (2010) among others. With Tom Six's *The Human Centipede III* in pre-production, Rob Zombie's *The Lords of Salem* in post-production and anticipated film festival debuts of Elias's *Gut* (2012), Jen and Sylvia Soshka's *American Mary* (2012), and Jennifer Chambers Lynch's *Chained* (2012) the trend towards ultra-violence in horror films shows few signs of abating. Note that some titles considered ultra-violent under this remit, such as *House of 1000 Corpses*, *The Human Centipede*, *Silent Hill* and *Repo: The Genetic Opera* do not comfortably fit into the categories of torture porn or gorenography.

The combination of visual and auditory sensations, coupled with the viewer's own expectations and heightened by three-dimensional technologies, produces an intensified physical response: of tension, shock, satisfaction, or disgust. The visceral image divested of traditional narrative modes of interpretation "invite[s] the viewer to dissolve his or her subjectivity in […] close and bodily contact" with itself (Marks 2003, 13). That such a scene can elicit a sense of bizarre satisfaction is testament to the powerful influence that the *Saw* series, the most commercially successful horror franchise of all time, exerts over some viewers and, of course, the power that digital media has and continues to exert over how information is presented and disseminated.

In *Carnal Thoughts* Vivian Sobchack claims that "technology not only differently *mediates* our figurations of bodily existence but also *constitutes* them," implicating a reciprocal relationship between technology and our conceptualisation of our own body (Sobchack 2002, 136). Technologies continue to impact the way in which individuals in Western cultures communicate, learn, browse, and shop. Physical proximity to friends and family has been replaced by the virtual closeness of Skype. Not only does this alter the behaviour of individuals, who perhaps venture further abroad safe in the knowledge that loved ones are only a click away, but it also constitutes a different, virtual mode of existence. The human body, in certain cultures, is increasingly conceptualized as a paired device for some other technology, ready and waiting to be 'plugged in' and connected to the network. The body is now a conduit, a gateway to a world that is at once expansive and minimal, exploratory yet ultimately contained. As a result, cultural notions of the category 'body' are affected not only by mediatised representations of bodies, including those presented by the *Saw* films, but also by the ways in which, as embodied subjects, individuals can interact with such representational technologies; and how the technologies can interact with us. Communicating, learning, browsing, and shopping can all be undertaken not by physically meeting people, searching for resources or visiting a precinct but simply by connecting to a network. The notion of an active consumer becomes partially inverted; the digital consumer no longer searches for the products they seek, they simply wait until the product makes itself available to them.

Digital consumer culture differs in its practices from traditional notions of consumption in two key aspects. Firstly, the digital consumer operates, primarily although not exclusively, within a virtual world. Secondly, this virtual world is almost entirely mediated by the flow of information through digital communications technologies. The capabilities of the human body can be extended, and restricted,

through the technologies that construct the virtual consumer world: video calling renders spatial proximity irrelevant in order to initiate face-to-face, or screen-to-screen communication; forums and discussion groups similarly render temporal proximity redundant. This falsification of proximity and distance is manipulated throughout the *Saw* series – from John Kramer's uncanny proximity to his primary victims in *Saw* (2004) and his omniscient presence following his death in *Saw III* (2007) to the confused and negated distance between the narratives of *Saw III* and *Saw IV* (2008) – but it is perhaps most effectively realised in *Saw II* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005). A prime example of the narrative convolution of the series, *Saw II* begins by proposing one main game scenario, a group of convicted criminals must escape a trap-filled house or succumb to the effects of nerve gas toxins, and ends by revealing an entirely different one. One of the players of the fun house game, Daniel Matthews (Erik Knudsen) is revealed early in the narrative to be the son of Detective Eric Matthews (Donnie Wahlberg), the officer in charge of investigating the Jigsaw murders. Detective Matthews and his team discover the whereabouts of John Kramer and find him sat quietly at a desk while a bank of computers at the other end of the room display the events of the fun house game [Fig. 3]. In response to Detective Matthews's demands for his son's safe return Kramer declares: "I want to play a game. The rules are simple, all you have to do is talk to me; listen to me. If you do that long enough you will find your son in a safe and secure state." Spurred by the video feed that shows both the elaborate deaths of the other players and the mounting effects of the nerve gas Detective Matthews resorts to violence and demands to be taken to the house shown on the screens. Despite Kramer's insistence on the rules of his personal game, "talk to me, listen to me," he eventually takes the Detective to the house in question. As Detective Matthews enters the house, however, the viewers are transported back to Kramer's desk and the computer bank. The officers still viewing the video feeds on the computers become confused when Detective Matthews does not appear on their screens. The monochrome images had been assumed to be a live feed but the absence of Matthews contradicts this notion. As the officers realize that the video feed was in fact prerecorded a safe behind Kramer's desk suddenly clicks and creaks open revealing Daniel's unconscious body. As the viewer uncovers the literal nature of Kramer's guarantee – "you will find your son *in a safe* and secure state" – the status of the represented digital image as a purveyor of temporal simultaneity is shattered. Matthews's belief in the legitimacy of the image as a truthful recreation of the *current* experience of the body it represents leads directly to his own capture and torture. Had Matthews listened to Kramer's

warning and decided to disbelieve the digital image that holds such cultural capital in contemporary society, he and his son would have been reunited safely and Kramer would have remained in custody.

The human body, like the represented body of Daniel Matthews, is becoming metaphorically digitised and removed from the corporeal realm through both its projection as an image by the media and through the interaction between actual human bodies and the technologies of digital communication. It is within the material context of such dematerializing influences that the concept of the body is being abstracted away from the physical referent. The digital body of Daniel Matthews works to expose the cultural acceptance of the represented body as an alternative, spatially, temporally, and metaphorically, to the corporeal body it stands in for. Digital images of bodies no longer represent physical human bodies but streams of artificially generated 1s and 0s or a collection of coloured pixels: the phenomenological immediacy of the image, as a vector of the real, is reduced (Marks 2003, 149). The lack of a physical referent for digitally projected or produced human bodies has a curiously disembodying effect: the human body on screen becomes an image of an image rather than an image of a body. It is in this manner that the horrific scene of Jill Tuck's demise signifies not the death of a human being or the death of a fictional character, or indeed *death* in any sense, but the climax of visual breakdown. As the reverse bear-trap ticks away the seconds, accompanied by the now iconic thematic score, a montage sequence erratically and quickly unties the multitude of narrative threads that lead to this culmination. Scenes of Jill and John Kramer are spliced out of sequence with images of devious traps, Hoffman's injury, a baby's cot and graveyard headstone, and finally an ultrasound image. Having un-told the elaborate narrative and retuned to the origin of John Kramer's pathology, the death of his unborn child, the scene focuses on Jill, now completely still and staring into the mechanical eye of the camera. At this moment the inter- and extra-diegetic gazes meet as both viewer and character acknowledge, by their reciprocally widening eyes and glassy stare, what they know will happen momentarily. For the character this is the dawning of death, an undoing and refusal of the life they once had; for the viewer it is a complete reversal of narrative flow, a recreation of Amanda's traumatic and viscerally sensorial scene in *Saw* (2004) which finally and ultimately denies the potential of narrative, image, and digital body. A beat passes before the trap triggers and the camera stares, unblinkingly into the bloody hollow of the face in a moment that is entirely concerned not with death, or narrative, or finality, but with spectacle and satisfaction [Fig. 4].

Viewing on-screen bodies in this manner denotes a decrement in the corporeal nature of the viewer's conceptualization of their own body. If fictional bodies are able to signify beyond their physicality as bodies, then the flesh that animates the viewer is also open to incorporeal interpretations that separate the conscious mind from the physical body. In the same way that the body can be conceptualized as a conduit waiting to be connected to a network *my* body can also be conceptualized as *of* me but *not*-me. As such, violence against represented bodies, the fictional status of which is foregrounded in the *Saw* films by the manipulation of both narrative and film form, becomes in part justifiable as violence against an object rather than a person. The objectification of onscreen bodies leads, subtly and insidiously, to a reconsideration of the viewers' own physicality and bodily existence. Jean-Paul Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, contemplates the phenomenon of self consciousness and physical existence suggesting that it is the dialectical relationship between an embodied subject and the philosophical Other (in the case of film, the onscreen body becomes the Other) that enables an existent Being to become conscious of its own objective physicality. Rather than being a simple case of objectification – the Other is an object for the embodied subject's consciousness, much like a dining chair or a vase is – Sartre suggests that "my connection with the Other is inconceivable if it is not an internal negation" (Sartre 1957, 339). In Sartre's dialectic the Self (viewer) recognizes that the (onscreen) Other exists *for it* as an existent object and that they exist *for themselves* as a prescient subject. Other human bodies are, therefore, both objects and subjects in the consciousness of the embodied viewer. This dialectic is, however, endangered by the relationship between Self (viewer) and Other (onscreen body) found in the *Saw* films: as an image of an image, divested of selfhood through a lack of characterisation and an extension of formal manipulation, the onscreen Other now has no existence *for itself*, it is no longer a body but a mere image, thus jeopardising the for-itself existence of the embodied viewer. It is in this manner than ultra-violent films are able to display such visceral acts of violence and depravity whilst attracting disproportionally less moral outrage than previous horror titles such as William Freidkin's *The Exorcist* (1973): viewers of ultra-violent films do not watch the evisceration of human bodies but the deconstruction of non-representative images.

Because the immediacy of digital information is diminished, and its un-reality pushed to the fore, the representation itself takes secondary relevance to the embodied relationship between the information and the perceiving viewer. The act of violence depicted or the volume of entrails displayed becomes incidental to

the mode of transmission. The predominant mode of information transmission in digital Western culture is increasingly becoming multimodal and multisensory: as the image disembodies the viewer, the medium re-embodies through its multimodal nature. Ultra-violent film, and particularly the *Saw* series, embodies a cultural shift in focus from content to mode of delivery that both allows images to become more shocking and favours multisensory communication as it is the experience of viewing the information, not the information itself, that is the primary desire. By de-realizing images of bodies and embodying the sentiment that in place of being our bodies we are "metaphorically […] 'housed' in our bodies," contemporary culture exposes a desire for multisensory experience that the *Saw* series seeks to provide (Sobchack 2002, 183). In doing so, however, it contributes to the continued "commodification of the human subject" as bodies threaten to become mere images for consumption (Jones 2006, 37).

Saw VII (2010) begins with the staging of a public trap in which the participants in a love triangle must decide which one of them should die. As the Perspex box containing them is revealed to a city square a crowd can be seen to gather. Individuals in the crowd are witnessed phoning their friends, taking pictures, and even videoing the trap on their mobile phones [Fig. 5]. This short scene acknowledges the commodification of images of the human body that digital media enables as one participant in the trap looks out incredulously into the watching crowd. The crowd, like the cinema audience, blindly consume de-realized images of bodies even when those bodies are animated and corporeal only a few feet from them. The Perspex box in this scenario becomes the cinema screen and the trap participants become digital representations. The incorporation of three dimensional technologies in *Saw VII* is also a key factor to the film's self awareness as it manipulates and redefines conventional perceptions of cinematic limitations: the film's body is virtually extended as it reaches out from the cinema screen to drag the bodies of the cinematic viewers into the experiential realm. As products of digital communications technology, and as cultural artefacts, the films cannot avoid embodying the very aspects of culture that they serve to critique. Through both its form and its content the *Saw* series, along with its ultra-violent brethren, can be seen as perhaps the purest expression of the conditions of contemporary culture.

The *Saw* franchise spans seven years and seven films and has been criticised by Christopher Sharrett as demonstrating "intellectual bankruptcy" for its lack of narrative originality and endless emphasis upon entrails and gore (Sharrett 2009, 32). Ironically, it is these exact characteristics that enable the *Saw* series to succeed in presenting a critique of visual culture. The images of bodies, alive,

dying, and dead, are de-contextualized and stripped of traditional signification so that the embodied relationship between the film's body and the viewer's body becomes the experiential focus of spectatorship. When Jennifer Barker poses the rhetorical question "if a film is projected in an empty theatre, does it still make a sound and throw out an image" the automatic response of logic may be yes (Barker 2009, 34). But, as engagement with the *Saw* series has demonstrated, the existential potential of a film under the influence of the digital communications culture cannot be realized without the parallel constitutive relationship between the film's body and the viewer's body. In order to fully experience the *Saw* series one must first have experience of the mode of transmission and of the digital communications culture that contributed to the making of the most profitable horror film franchise of all time.

References

Barker, Jennifer. 2009. *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Carlson, Neil R. 2011. *Foundations of Behavioural Neuroscience*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Castells, Manuel. 2000. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Jones, Amelia. 2006. *Self/Image: Technology Representation and the Contemporary Subject*. London: Routledge.

Jung, Christina and Peggy Sparenberg. 2012. Cognitive Perspectives on Embodiment. In *Body Memory, Metaphor and Movement*, eds. Sabine C. Kach, Thomas Fuchs, Michela Summa and Cornelia Müller, 141–54. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Marks, Laura U. 2002. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1957. *Being and Nothingness.* London: Methuen.

Scarry, Elaine. 1985. *The Body In Pain.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sharrett, Christopher. 2009. The Problem of *Saw*: "Torture Porn" and the Conservatism of Contemporary Horror Films. *Cineaste* vol. 35 no. 1 (Winter): 32–39.

Smith, C. U. M. 2000. *Biology of Sensory Systems.* Chichester: Wiley.

Sobchack, Vivian. 2002. *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sontag, Susan. 2003. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Screens within screens foreground the artificial nature of both the cinematic and digitally represented image thus questioning the cultural reliance upon digitally mediated images of bodies.

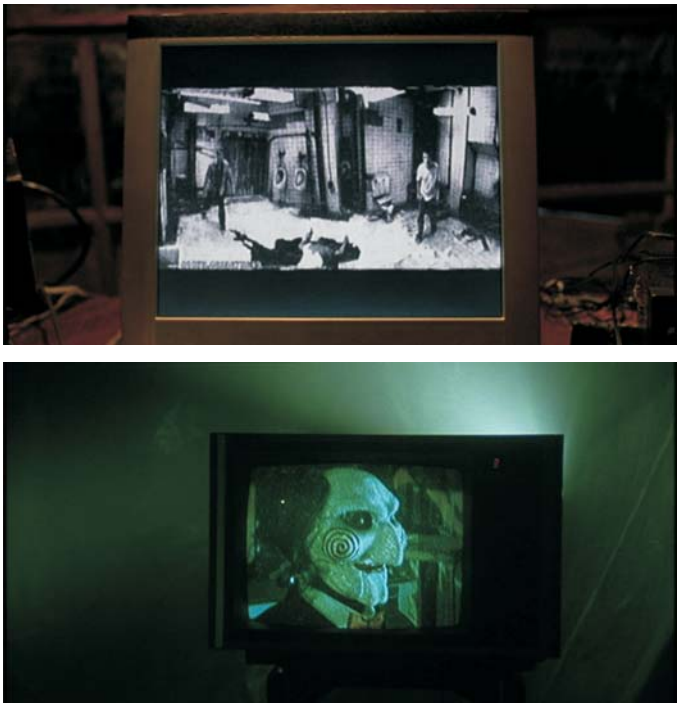


Figure 2. John Kramer's autopsy in *Saw IV* provided not only an opportunity for scenes of extreme, albeit sedate, violence against the human body, a literal destruction of human agency, but also functioned as an elaborate foil for narrative authority.

Figure 3. Detective Matthews uncovers the computer bank showing apparently live footage of his son, Daniel, participating in a Jigsaw game.

Figure 4. Jill Tuck's death provided a critical moment of visual breakdown and emotional satisfaction as *Saw VII* brought the franchise to a close.

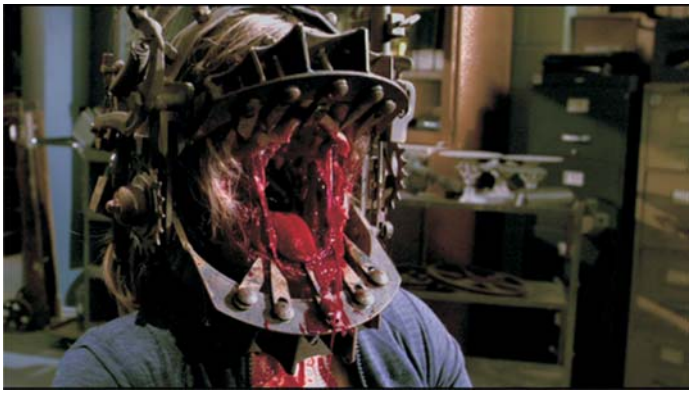


Figure 5. *Saw VII* questions its own viewers' motivations with a self-reflexive public trap; onlookers film the impending death in a demonstration of unethical spectatorship that illustrates the increasingly incorporeal conceptualisation of the human body.

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 149–166

Embodied Genetics in Science-Fiction, Big-Budget to Low-Budget: from Jeunet's *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) to Piccinini's *Workshop* (2011)

Andrea Virginás
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)
E-mail: avirginas@gmail.com

Abstract. The article uses and revises to some extent Vivian Sobchack's categorization of (basically) American science-fiction output as "optimistic big-budget," "wondrous middle-ground" and "pessimistic low-budget" seen as such in relation to what Sobchack calls the "double view" of alien beings in filmic diegesis (*Screening Space*, 2001). The argument is advanced that based on how diegetic encounters are constructed between "genetically classical" human agents and beings only partially "genetically classical" and/or human (due to genetic diseases, mutations, splicing, and cloning), we may differentiate between various methods of visualization (nicknamed "the museum," "the lookalike," and "incest") that are correlated to Sobchack's mentioned categories, while also displaying changes in tone. Possibilities of revision appear thanks to the later timeframe (the late 1990s/2000s) and the different national-canonical belongings (American, Icelandic-German-Danish, Hungarian-German, Canadian-French-American, and Australian) that characterize filmic and artistic examples chosen for analysis as compared to Sobchack's work in *Screening Space.*[1]

Keywords: science-fiction, genetic mutations, aliens, Vivian Sobchack.

Hero(ines) Facing Genetic Aliens

In her exceptional monograph about modern American science-fiction cinema, *Screening Space* (2001), Vivian Sobchack writes in detail about "the alien's perspective," the creature that not only is different from us, but, as a matter of fact, cannot be conceived of from the standpoint we, humans, occupy, neither

1 This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3 – 0199.

theoretically, nor visually, even if this is an urge at the core of the genre of science fiction.[2] The endless meaning and appearance possibilities of the "classical alien" have been undergoing a process of change due to biological and technological developments in the last several decades. These developments can be summarized under the keywords of the genetic and the digital, and may be exemplified with concepts and figures such as the DNA, the process of cloning, and the idea of genetic inheritance, the latter leading to the concept of networks, and copies that are hardly different from the original. When referred to the audiovisual filmic diegesis, one must highlight the fact that both the territories of the genetic and the digital are "closed" to the five basic human senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. This constellation leads to specific methods, solutions and outcomes concerning the genetic and the digital's introduction as well as representation within particular filmic diegeses.

Sobchack devotes particular attention to how what she calls "the reduction of humanistic perception" or "the expansion of perception beyond the human" is instrumentalized on the level of cinematic solutions. A propos the alien's "double view" – both their view on us, humans, but also our view of them – she differentiates between three types of science fiction films: "big-budget optimistic," "low-budget pessimistic," and "wondrous" middle-ground films. She writes the following, starting with the description of "an impassive third-person camera-eye" present in one of her examples: "the impassive third-person camera eye, in its flatness, its balanced and symmetrical attention to both the real and the imaginary, creates a wonder which is unique. It arises not from the visual transformation of the alien into something known as does the optimistic visual conquest of the big-budget science fiction film. Nor does it arise from the conversion of the ordinary into the alien as does the pessimistic visual subversiveness of low-budget science-fiction. Rather this third group of much-maligned SF film balances and equates the ordinary and the alien in a vision neither humanly optimistic nor pessimistic. […] What is unique about this last group of SF films is that its visual style demonstrates simultaneously both the unremitting banality and the inconceivable terror" (Sobchack 2001, 144–45).

2 In Sobchack's formulation "the major visual impulse of all SF films is to pictorialize the unfamiliar, the nonexistent, the strange and the totally alien – and to do so with a verisimilitude which is, at times, documentary in flavour and style. […] To make us believe in the possibility, if not probability, of the alien things we see, the visual surfaces of the films are intextricably linked to and dependent upon the familiar; from the wondrous, and strange and imagined, the cameras fall back on images either so familiar they are often downright dull, or neutralize the alien by treating it so reductively that it becomes ordinary and comprehensible" (Sobchack 2001, 87–88)

These two directions of thought presented by Sobchack – the alien's "double view," as well as the three types of science fiction films deduced from various cinematic depictions involving the alien – are fundamental for the present article. Its argumentation engages in analysing the "double view" of genetically defined and, in many cases, digitally created aliens in various contemporary (1990s/2000s) films and artworks, ranging from "big-budget optimism" (Jeunet's 1997 *Alien: Resurrection*) (on) to "wondrous middle-ground" (Natali's 2009 *Splice,* Kormákur's 2006 *Jar City*) and ending with the "low-budget pessimist" side of the continuum (Fliegauf's 2010 *Womb* or Piccinini's 2008 *Foundling* and *The Fitzroy*-series). The basic unity of analysis, engendered by the idea of a genetic and digital alien's "double view," are first encounters in diegetic (also, in most of the cases, closed) spaces, of such human heroes and genetically modified aliens who share some of their DNA (a science-fiction narrative), and if not, then intense (and positive) emotional investment on the part of the humans is present (a detection narrative).

The last part of the *Alien*-series to date,[3] the 1997 *Alien: Resurrection,* was directed by French filmmaker Jean-Pierre Jeunet. He has been manifesting a keen interest for fantastic environments and plots in his films: the movie preceding *Alien: Resurrection* was *The City of Lost Children* in 1995, and the one following it was *Le fabuleux destin d'Amelie Poulain* in 2001. However, the *Alien*-sequel is a singular foray on Jeunet's part – the popular French director more on the arthouse side – into big-budget, optimistic science-fiction.

In *Alien: Resurrection* Ellen Ripley is cloned to life in an outer space laboratory in order to offer an adequate linkage to well-known aliens, who subsequently are also cloned and bred in the hope of industrial-commercial exploitation. Ripley is as agile as ever, and several of her interactions with the environment around (throwing a basket-ball, thrusting a nail through her hand) early in the film suggest that she possesses capacities miraculous for a simple human being. The specific sequence I am quoting here follows the moment when she joins the band of illegal pirates and, being the last ones on the space station invaded by the ferocious aliens, they are trying to embark on the spaceship. A door and the numbers on them (1–7) attract Ripley's attention, since she has a number eight tattooed on her arm, and she enters through the door alone, while the others are proceeding.

This space could be called the museum gallery of further Ripley-clones on display [Fig. 1], clones which have gone wrong in the process of mixing human and alien DNA, actually the process of making the new type of Ripley while

3 Unless we consider Ridley Scott's 2012 *Prometheus* as a variation on the same theme.

cloning to life her DNA already "infected" with the alien DNA.[4] The different Ripley/alien versions are shown standing in cylindrical glass jars full of greenish transparent amniotic liquid, in which the various hybrid bodies float, seem to be sleeping, or secluded from onlookers and the outside world, and thus Ripley also, even though earlier versions of her body and herself. The climactic point of the scene is her coming face to face with the painfully living and suffering being no. 7 [Fig. 2], who has Ripley's face, but the alien's legs, and who, quite inadequately, is showing embarrassment because of two reasons: 1. she is uncovered, and she has to protect her modesty; 2. she is experiencing extreme pains, the pains of existing in-between bodies and species. Samuel A. Kimball comments on the scene thus: "An incoherent assemblage of parts that are not viable on their own, this corporeal frame nevertheless houses, imprisons rather, a self-reflexive consciousness. […] Approaching the suffering creature without a word, Ripley, fighting back tears, touches the sheet that partially covers her" (Kimball 2002, 97–98). According to the conventions of action science-fiction, after a moment of empathy, the sequence ends with Ripley shooting clone number 7, at her request.

Another important moment, in its construction similar to Ripley's entering the hall of her "abortive clones" (Kimball's expression), is to be found in Icelandic director Baltasar Kormákur's 2006 genetic detection movie, *Jar City* (*Mýrin*). Here, the morose, lonely detective, Erlendur, enters a medical laboratory where formerly ill body parts are being kept in formalin [Fig. 3]. He is guided by the genetic database researcher, Örn, whose daughter also died because of the secretly transmitted genetic disease (neurofibromatosis) that is the trace and key to the murders Erlendur, the detective is investigating. The mise-en-scène and choreography is similar to the one in *Alien*: the self-sufficient and confident human being enters a closed space of exhibition, where the differently shaped glass jars contain genetically wrong, non-perfect, problematic versions of former human beings and/or their earthly remains. I wish to direct our attention to the moment of encounter between the detective and the genetically problematic brain on display [Fig. 4]: touch and close observation are repeatedly in the choreography. Erlendur takes from the shelf the jar containing the child brain infected with neurofibromatosis, and the slowly constructed series of movements, the half-light glittering through and on the glasses around, as well as Erlendur's pensive mimics suggest a peaceful atmosphere adequate for contemplation rather than fright or disgust because of the genetically "other."

4 By which she was already inhabited at the time of her death in the previous part of the tetralogy.

Hungarian director Benedek Fliegauf's 2010 *Womb* places the narrative about genetic cloning (understood as "an anomaly in the genetic story") in an arthouse environment, from where only the "Venus-like figure"[5] of actress Eva Green stands out as a "suspect," transtextually and generically much too loaded body of/for signification. She plays the role of a single mother who gives birth to her dead lover through the technology of cloning, a lover who thus becomes her son. Here I wish to recall the scene when children smell out "the plastic smell" of one of their mates, who is also a clone, a fabricated child [Fig. 5]. Rebecca, the mother, Thomas, her (secretly cloned) son, his comrade and the utterly fabricated girl are the protagonists: they all meet on a clearing in the forest and a small discussion takes place, ending with the verdict that the skin of copied (aka: cloned) individuals "smells like window-cleaner." Here, the visualization of genetic anomaly is suppressed if compared to the previously summarized sequences: there is no bell jar full with experiments intended by researchers or accidental by nature. The alien and non-fitting nature of the clone is signalled through the mother's bewilderment as wonderfully played by Eva Green's gestures and mimics [Fig. 6], furthermore the paleness of the little girl's skin and hair, as opposed to her environment, and finally the long take of her vanishing figure, with all the other characters shown in medium shots [Fig. 7].

Moving on with the introduction of the examples, most of Australian artist Patricia Piccinini's works are exclusively dedicated to imagining and representing creatures of mixed ancestry and DNA,[6] although not within the discourse of science fiction cinema, but that of museum and gallery art. She uses techniques such as hyperrealist sculpture (the famous 2008 *Foundling* [Fig. 8]), classical drawings in pencil [Fig. 9], and digitally manipulated photographs [*The Fitzroy* series from 2011]). These certainly function much differently than the immersive feature film, the narrative recipe of which is well known, a recipe which in

5 These are the words of actor Johnny Depp, characterizing Eva Green in an interview published in the Hungarian national daily *Népszabadság* on May the 19th 2012.

6 This endeavour makes Piccinini's highly conceptual and perceptually rather stimulating artworks resemble, or indeed join such computer simulations that belong to the Artificial Life strand of theoretical biology: "Langton, in his explanation of what AL can contribute to theoretical biology, makes this difference explicit: Artificial Life is the study of man-made systems that exhibit behaviors characteristic of natural living systems. It complements the traditional biological sciences concerned with the *analysis* of living organisms by attempting to *synthesize* life-like behaviours within computers and other artificial media. By extending the empirical foundation upon which biology is based beyond the carbon-chain life that has evolved on Earth, Artificial Life can contribute to theoretical biology by locating *life-as-we-know-it* within the larger picture *of life-as-it-could-be*" (Hayles 1999, 232).

the case of Piccinini's works is replaced by still images showing contexts and situations. In these contexts and situations beings and objects visibly human are involved and interact with bodies and life-forms that are the visualizations of different types of DNA being mixed, cloned, and spliced together. The *Workshop* piece of the *Fitzroy* series [Fig. 10] is especially important in the light of my last example listed below, as an always already "double view" of the alien defined in the relationship to the human: here, in a barely lit, closed and messy place a nice young girl peacefully waits while a non-classifiable, alien body is searching or looking into a bin [Fig. 10].

The last example is Canadian director Vincenzo Natali's *Splice* (2009), in which the experimental genetic scientist, Elsa (played by Sarah Polley) makes the first encounter and as she calls it, imprinting (making friendship) with the being that is combining her own DNA with further animal DNA segments [Fig. 11]. The creature, later calling herself Dren, is simultaneously the experimenting woman scientist herself, also her daughter, but her radical, fundamental other too: the alien in this sequence allows for Elsa's being circumscribed as a potent and active woman scientist. The scene is the laboratory, again, and what we witness, on a conceptual level, is a moment of connection between genes as working in a standard manner, creating humans (in the form of Elsa), and genes as contributing to the creation of clones and hybrids (in the form of future Dren).

Sobchack mentions that subjective camera shots related to alien forms are relatively rare in sci-fi films, even if this technique would allow us, viewers to identify with perceptional modes different from the perceptional modes assigned to human subjective shots in sci-fi films (Sobchack 2001, 93). In my examples, such subjective shots that would de-familiarize one's routine modes of perception are not present either, and this may be motivated by the fact that the represented genetic variations (whether mutant, clone, or hybrid) may be considered only partially "classical aliens," since the films' narratives make it obvious that the human input or factor is always and already there. Thus the examples mentioned from *Alien: Resurrection, Jar City, Womb, Splice* and *Foundling/The Fitzroy Series* materialize and theorize upon border experiences, and I argue that their chief preoccupation is not defining (in a negative cutting manner) what it means to be a human, or how we can conceive, represent, and sense truly aliens life forms in environments of artificial representation, be that moving image or digital photography, sculpture or drawing, following in Sobchack's steps. Instead, these examples offer us the occasion to meet and meditate upon degrees of humanity and alienness involved. These films also create contexts and use conventions that guide us, as participants

in the spectacle, while reacting and adapting to beings that are not fully, but only partially different from what a human being is on the screen.

The examples included in the analysis dramatize encounters between the chief heroes, decipherable as the entities that gather our maximum interest, emotional and bodily investment as they exist and move through highly dangerous spaces and contexts, and the genetic variations. These variations are as diverse as a brain with the trace of genetic hereditary disease (long dead little Aude's brain and neurofibromatosis in *Jar City*), clone-variants of the hero's own body and identity (Ripley meeting clones numbered 1–7, each a stage closer and closer to her as an admired and perfect human-alien hybrid), the clone as the mirror-image of one's child (Rebecca and little Deema's forest meeting), or the hybrid clone who amalgamates one's very own biological and psychic/emotional characteristics, being at once the investigative heroine and the truly different (Elsa and Dren's first meeting), and finally the fully alien incorporated, included into the emotional and representational harmony in Piccinini's differently coded works.

Degrees of Visualization: Museums, Lookalikes, and Incests

As my examples have illustrated, a number of recurring methods of representation may be suggested: the museum of genetic aliens, encounters with genetic aliens, superficially similar genetic aliens, and finally interiorized genetic aliens.

The museum of genetic aliens offers us the genetically modified body on display in bell jars, recreating the context of museum visit, when the seeing and experiencing subject is moving and sensing artistic objects on display. Demands of interactivity are accomplished as the investigating heroes touch, caress, or take into their hands the clones and genetically ill body parts. This category reminds us of how Vivian Sobchack describes what she sees as a successful visualization of alien life forms, existing "most potently on the screen in a state of suspension, of pregnant possibility:" "If the totally imaginative visualizations of alien life forms in the sci-fi film strive to dislocate us from the narrow confines of human knowledge and human experience, they best do so when they are virtually silent and primarily inactive. […] To give such imaginative visual realizations voice and function is to make them comprehensible and reduce their awesome poetry to smaller human dimensions; they exist most potently on the screen in a state of suspension, of pregnant possibility, of potential rather than realized action" (Sobchack 2001, 92).

Another method is that of the genetically modified body shown as moving and counteracting with the hero(ine)s, as in the laboratory sequence of *Splice* or in Piccinini's *Workshop*, or indeed the end of the *Alien*-sequence. Here the same and familiar spatial arrangement is present, and the profoundly empathetic turn of the active, watching heroines to the genetically different bodies and life forms resumes to a degree (from) the foreign and monstrous nature of the genetic variants. However, one cannot help but notice the gradual assimilation of the self/the human identity by the alien form in movement. In the sequences from *Alien: Resurrection* and *Splice,* and also the photograph from *The Fitzroy series* the body postures, gestures, and approaches of bodies built from human DNA and bodies based on mixed/alien DNA mirror, reflect and copy each other, suggesting the gradual assimilation of genetically standard forms of being to genetically non-standard ones. Katherine N. Hayles's observation a propos genetic mutation is illuminating in this respect: "Mutation normally occurs when some random event (for example, a burst of radiation or a coding error) disrupts an existing pattern and something else is put in its place instead. Although mutation disrupts pattern, it also presupposes a morphological standard against which it can be measured and understood as a mutation. If there were only randomness, as with the random movements of gas molecules, it would make no sense to speak of mutation" (Hayles 1999, 32–33).

In the third case, the genetically modified body is not having striking outer differences as demonstrated by the sequence in Fliegauf's *Womb*, a feature that also originates from the film's arthouse discursive belonging and non-employment or tacit employment of digital special effects. Here, the alien tissue is materialized in conversations, aka linguistic signs and concepts, and also through perceptional experiences of the characters on screen (in this case, smelling), not easily transmittable to the audience unless a strong identification with the sensing hero is achieved. Furthermore, conventional and (film historically and poetically) realistic audiovisual modes of signalling unfamiliarity are employed: colour and object differences – little Deema, the clone's extreme fairness, highlighted by the symbolically overloaded white rabbit she has in her arms [Fig. 12] –, and also strongly resonating visual composition. One may cite further recent examples where alienness (partially motivated by genetically transmitted diseases or inexplicable, supposedly genetic mutations) is not allegorically represented by spectacular audiovisual symbols: the character of Justine in Lars von Trier's 2011 *Melancholia*, the representation of the gradual loss of sensual capacities in David MacKenzie's 2011 *Perfect Sense*, or the introduction of a

science fiction narrative in a filmic representation realistic in every sense in Mike Cahill's *Another Earth* (2011).[7]

Finally, *Womb* and *Splice*, which achieve the greatest outer similarity in the representation of clones and humans, also offer solutions that seem extreme at first sight since the otherness of the genetic anomalies is creeping in the bodies of the active observer heroes too. This is the case of the smell of plastic in *Womb,* furthermore a different version of this interiorizing happens when the genetic anomaly is not located in the form of an alien body and its differing modes of behaviour, but it "moves" inside the body – in the form of incestuous relationships represented in the narratives of the films. Both in *Womb* and *Splice*, the genetically aliens are at once clones and children of the main heroines, beings that mature (extremely rapidly) so that the viewers are offered the possibility to witness incestuous intercourses between mother Rebecca and son Thomas in *Womb*, or mother Elsa and daughter/son Dren in *Splice*.

However, on a closer look, this "interiorizing of alienness" ceases to be an extreme narrative and moral solution, and emerges as a logical outcome of the cloning procedure that gives birth to new beings without sexual-type reproduction involved, with the procedure of cloning (aliens) equalling the ignorance of sexuality as a human cultural invention. Since, as Petar Ramadanovic clearly demonstrates in his paper based on Claude Lévi-Strauss, "the incest prohibition is not only a cultural norm. As a prohibition, it is also a function that makes culture possible. The taboo is the invention upon which the notion of culture […] rests. […] the taboo is not only, or primarily, a particular rule banning sex with the nuclear family, it is a 'taboo,' a fundamental rule that makes sexuality" (Ramadanovic 2010, 13–14). As a matter of fact, Piccinini's cited works could be referred to as a context where the stigmas of disease and incest disappear, leaving room for visually interesting, enhanced bodily and instinctual capacities depicted. In this respect we may cite the artist's 2011 Statement referring to *The Fitzroy Series* as an argument. "My creatures," Piccinini declares, "while strange and unsettling, are not threatening. Instead, it is their vulnerability that often most comes to the fore. They plead with us to look beyond their unfamiliarity, and ask us to accept them. It is surprising how quickly we grow used to them, which reminds us that this sort of thing is not as far in the future as we might think."

7 These surface differences, if completed by rigorous textual, formalist, narrative, and iconographic analyses, would allow one to speak about a "mutation" in contemporary science-fiction, where arthouse, European-type, or American independent filmic characteristics are being mixed (hybridized?) with mainstream science-fiction features.

Conclusions: Bodies, DNA, and Canons

Visual genres in the science-fiction tradition are intensely engaged in conceptualizing "classical," genetically unproblematic human beings in the company of beings that are different because of genetic anomalies, changes, and hybrizations. Thus the nature and process of interaction(s) that happen(s) between human and alien, or standard "human" DNA and non-standard "alien" DNA is highlighted. This preoccupation does not belong exclusively to the big-budget spectacular blockbuster, where artificial CGI design does the work of imagining all kinds of beings and life-forms not seen up to now (and here we may think of the flora and fauna, or indeed the Na'avi population in James Cameron's 2010 *Avatar*). Lower-budget science fiction, also differentiated by Sobchack as more conceptually engaged than simply visually effective, post *Space Odyssey* and *Stalker*, is also involved in this project and one chief method in this respect is the one that the scenes chosen for examination represent. In these sequences the active protagonist – the figure of main spectatorial identification in the action-driven narratives – is put in a contemplative situation by entering a space of (laboratory) exhibition and forced, knowingly or unintentionally, to exist in the company of genetic anomalies, hybrids, and mutants. Furthermore, it is not only the reactions, or mode of play of the actors that guide our attitudes while living through these scenes, but the dynamics, choreography and spatial structuring of the scenes are also of a paramount importance. It is important to emphasize that these are diegetic encounters between the active heroes and the anomalous bodies, encounters that therefore might lay claim to such affects being played out and felt as empathy, understanding and even sympathy – thanks to the mutual mirroring poses, gestures, and mimics acted out and represented in the compositional structures of the images as scenes. In this manner, room is created for what Vivian Sobchack refers to as the sensation of "living a body," in this specific case living a body partially, but not fully alien to us, humans: "The focus here is on what it is *to live* one's body, not merely *to look* at bodies – although vision, visuality, and visibility are as central to the subjective dimension of embodied existence as they are to its objective dimension" (Sobchack 2004, 2).

As the title also shows, this article uses the notion of embodiment in the most literal sense of the word: having a body, and living through and thanks to that body, a body which may be shown, heard, smelt, or touched in the audiovisual environment surrounding figurative representation. Bodies in question, however, are not real bodies in the sense of having corresponding referents in a material reality

existing in the pre- or postproduction period of the creations they inhabit: they are not bodies of human or animal beings shot for the sake of films and photographs, or captured in drawings. These bodies are fully and totally fictional, so to say, existing only within the conventions of the respective figurative representations. However, the bodies I have made reference to are, at the same time, radically related to flesh-and-bone existence as we know it, being theoretical extensions of scientific possibilities constantly experimented and researched in connection to the human and animal body. In other words, these bodies (or body parts) are realisations of such biologically possible, yet currently either non-existent or hardly perceivable and/or sensible (i.e. non-embodied) concepts as hereditary genetic disease, offspring resulted from cloning rather than sexed reproduction, and finally hybrid beings that combine (splice) the genetic material of various biological entities (from humans on to animals). Certainly, by concentrating on the unique, these bodies that stand for hereditary genetic diseases, clones, and hybrid splices in the context of specific conventions of figurative representation – such as black-and white drawing in pencil, digital colour photography, science fiction movie, detection movie – may be called as looking for what is sensational, scary, not ordinary, or even disgusting to some extent.

Two opinions must be cited that have circumscribed and limited my ideas. In her 2007 book, *The Poetics of DNA,* Judith Roof is writing about all the burdens that have been put on the concept of DNA, and I quote her: "The three acronymic letters, then, like the chemical itself, have come to signify a vast number of processes, undifferentiated to the non-scientist and rendered intelligible by a series of metaphors or comparisons. These include such analogies as the 'secret of life,' the code, the book, the alphabet, sentences, words, chapters, histories, the Rosetta stone, the Holy Grail, the recipe, the blueprint, the text, the map, the homunculus, software, and others. None of these analogies is accurate in terms of how DNA works or even what it accomplishes. All of them import values, meanings, mechanisms, and possibilities that are not at all a part of DNA. The effect is that DNA has always stood for much more than what it is" (Roof 2007, 7). In this respect, my reasoning about genetics and genetic concepts on screen – basically reducible to how the DNA and the gene are conceptualized through involving such dramaturgical and narrative lines as inheritance, cloning, splicing, as well as their audiovisualizations – is perhaps falling in the same trap of creating further, not too useful or enlightening metaphors and comparisons.

In an article about "the contemporary persistence of genetic thinking," Vesta da Silva is even more explicit about how the DNA and the gene, as abstract and

non-sensible concepts, have nevertheless pervaded our realities full of sensations through the method of DNA fingerprinting.[8] Da Silva, quoting a number of experts, also summarizes the situation when we tend to link identity, soul, and moral standpoint, one's past and future to the DNA a human body carries and is built up from: "'In many cases,'" as Nelkin and Lindee (1995, 42) argued, 'DNA has taken on the social and cultural functions of the soul. It is the essential entity, the location of the true self, in the narratives of biological determinism.' As Gudding (1996, 545) explained, in the current deterministic paradigm, 'the *truth* of who someone is, forensically, medically, athletically, and otherwise, is to be found nearer to rather than farther from the genome' […] If the contemporary moment is marked by fluidity, change, and fragmentation (or at least the perception that such qualities have overtaken us), it is comforting to know that our selfhood can be 'scientifically' assured. Science has succeeded in making visible what was once hidden – fixing for all time our ability to know and guarantee who and what we are." (Silva 2005, 107.)

The second idea I have to foreground at this point of my argumentation and analysis belongs to Vivian Sobchack, who, in her book on American science fiction cinema, is extensively writing about how the invisible, unperceivable, or indeed alien life forms and their cinematic representation is at the heart of the genre. Quoting Sobchack: "On the most obvious level, the SF film attempts to meet our expectations by using the magic of design and special effects cinematography to show us things which do not exist, things which are highly speculative, which astonish us by the very fact of their visual realization on the screen since they have no counterparts in the world outside the theater. One can point to innumerable images in SF films which struggle – sometimes successfully, sometimes laughably–to exceed the anthropomorphic limits of the human imagination while still attempting to remain comprehensible" (Sobchack 2001, 91). Hopefully, the examples and the analysis have demonstrated that alienness and anthropomorphism are not opposed, but closely linked and interwoven, so this might generate a situation slightly different than the one described by Sobchack.

The motivations for such an endeavour have been manifold, also circumscribing the possible outcomes of the article. Besides proving the extreme viability of Sobchack's work written in the early 1980s (and first published in 1987), through a series of analyses performed on more recent examples and using her categories,

8 "Indeed, with the advent and acceptance of DNA fingerprinting, we set up a situation in which our genetic residue (left behind us wherever we go in the form of eyelashes, skin cells, etc.) has metonymically replaced our bodies as the ultimate seat of our identity" (Silva 2007, 106).

the need to add corrections to her observations is also present. Such a need primarily derives from the fact that ours is a new era, pervaded by the digital and the genetic – a difference utterly visible if compared to the atomic and the exotic (monstrous) in abundance in the 1950s–1980s examples analyzed by Sobchack in her monograph. Also, a change in tone is discernible if compared to Sobchack's categorization: low-budget has become more optimistic and big-budget more pessimistic as far as genetically modified and digitally formed alien bodies encountered by "digitally classical" humans are concerned. Finally, because of shared grounds emphasized – grounds ranging from common DNA on to positive feelings and existing in the same room – the idea of alienness emerging from my analyses could be called "partial" in comparison to a "more total" variant presented by Sobchack.

In conclusion, we may state that in the action science-fiction film discourse (*Alien 4* in my sample*,* but also *The Matrix*-trilogy), the "big-budget optimism" of Sobchack, the blending of human with alien (or human with machine) is not generated in the same manner and on the grounds of the same ideologies as in "more arthouse sci-fi" films such as *Jar City, Womb,* or *Melancholia*. In the latter "low-budget pessimistic" variant the incompatibility of different splices (or different-origin materials) is signalled through the methods (interpretable as metaphoric) of genetic bodily disease (*Jar City*), or (genetically transmitted) psychic instability disease (*Melancholia*), and incest (*Womb, Splice*). It is at this point that the discourses of genre and canon the movies in question rely on become important. These discourses either postulate the existence of a focalizer main hero(ine) who gathers the investment of the spectator, channelling the experience (feelings, thoughts) the viewer might have on human-alien-machine spliced organisms: this is what usually happens in the canon identified as the mainstream, classical-type storytelling of action science-fiction films. Or, on the contrary, these generic and canonical discourses may project a protagonist who divides, even to the point of senselessness, the psychic spectatorial investment, being founded on the more loose character-conventions of (European) arthouse films, with wandering, perhaps searching, aimless characters (of which Rebecca, Justine, and Piccinini's teenage girl may be examples). That, however, in most of the cases, it is female characters who need "the perform" on such dangerous terrains, evoking the script of un/successful maternal bonding with a newcomer offspring, attests to deep (perhaps even stereotypical) patterns at work, which may constitute the object of further investigation.

References

Eleftheriotis, Dimitris. 2002. Global Visions and European Perspectives. In *Aliens R Us. The Other in Science Fiction Cinema,* eds. Ziauddin Sardar and Sean Cubbitt, 164–180. London, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2002.

Katherine, N. Hayles. 1999. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Jameson, Fredric. 2005. The Alien Body. In *Archaeologies of the Future. The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, 119–141. London-New York: Verso.

Kimball, Samuel A. 2002. Conceptions and Contraceptions of the Future: *Terminator 2*, *The Matrix*, and *Alien Resurrection*. *Camera Obscura* vol. 17 no. 4 (50): 69–107.

Piccinini, Patricia webpage, *http://www.patriciapiccinini.net* , accessed on the 15th of August 2014.

Ramadanovic, Petar. 2010. The Non-Meaning of Incest, or How Natural Culture Is. *Postmodern Culture* vol. 20 no. 2 (January): *Project MUSE*. http://muse.jhu.edu/ Last accessed at 27. 07. 2013.

Roof, Judith. 2007. *The Poetics of DNA*. Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press.

Silva, Vesta T. 2005: In the Beginning Was the Gene: The Hegemony of Genetic Thinking in Contemporary Culture. *Communication Theory* vol. 15 no. 1 (February): 100–123.

Sobchack, Vivian. 2001 [1987]. *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. New York: Rutgers University Press.

Sobchack, Vivian. 2004. *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: California University Press.

Telotte, J. P. 2001. *Science Fiction Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

List of Figures

Figure 1. The hall of Ripley-clones (Jean-Pierre Jeunet: *Alien: Resurrection*, 1997).

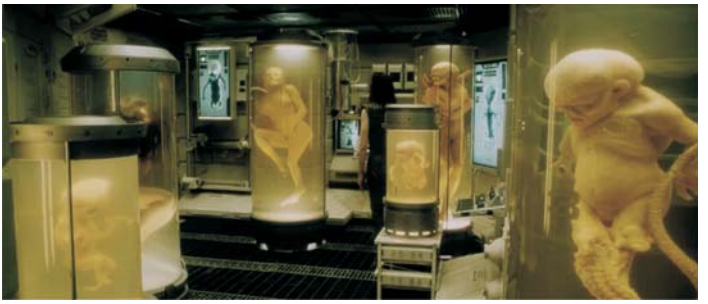


Figure 2. Ripley facing clone nr. 7 (Jean-Pierre Jeunet: *Alien: Resurrection*, 1997).

Figure 3. Genetic deviations on display (Balthasar Kormákur: *Jar City*, 2006).

Figure 4. Örlendur looks at Aude's brain (Balthasar Kormákur: *Jar City*, 2006).

Figure 5. Clone Tommy and his friend smell 'plastic' (Benedek Fliegauf: *Womb*, 2010).

Figure 6. Mother faces clones (Benedek Fliegauf: *Womb*, 2010).

Figure 7. Clone Deema walks away (Benedek Fliegauf: *Womb*, 2010).

Figure 8. *Foundling* by Patricia Piccinini (2008), silicon, human hair, polyester, wool, plastic, wire, 41 x 66 x 37cm (by courtesy of the artist).

Figure 9. Laura (with Surrogate) by Patricia Piccinini (2006), graphite on paper, 57 x 77 cm (by courtesy of the artist).

Figure 10. Workshop, 7.00 pm, by Patricia Piccinini (2011), C-Type Photograph, 160cm x 100cm (by courtesy of the artist).

Figure 11. Elsa and creature Dren meet for the first time (Vincenzo Natali: *Splice*, 2009).

Figure 12. The white rabbit in the clone's arms in Benedek Fliegauf's *Womb*.

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 167–181

Quasi-Bodies and Kafka's Castle in Sion Sono's Crime Noir *Guilty of Romance* (2011)

Chia-wen Kuo (Veronique Kwak)
National Chengchi University (Taiwan)
E-mail: gloomydaisy@hotmail.com

Abstract. Sion Sono's *Guilty of Romance* (*Koi no tsumi,* 2011) was adapted from an actual crime in Tokyo's love hotel: an educated woman (a prostitute at night) was found decapitated and her limbs were re-assembled with a sex-doll. Sono renders this through his cinematic narrative blurring the distinction between true crime and fictional sin like Rancière's idea that everything is a narrative dissipating the opposition between "fact and fiction," and "quasi-body" becomes a product of human literarity while an imaginary collective body is formed to fill the fracture in-between. In Sono's story, the victim is a literature professor tormented by an incestuous desire for her father, whose favorite book is Kafka's *Castle*. Thus she compares the love-hotel district where she turns loose at night as a castle of lusts. Here the narrative becomes a collective body that puppeteers human "quasi-bodies" in a Kafkaesque spatio-temporal aporia, and time's spatialized horizontally with the germs of desire spread like a contagion on a Deleuzian "plane of immanence."

Keywords: Sion Sono: *Guilty of Romance* (2011), Franz Kafka: *Castle*, "quasi-body," crime noir.

Introduction

Sono's *Guilty of Romance* revolves around two females: a housewife whose husband is a famous author of pot-boiler romance novels and a literature professor filled with an incestuous desire and longing for her absent father. Their excessive libidinal energies are intermingled with their obsession with words, and the professor convinces the housewife to explore along with her the unfathomable depths of her lust by methodically seducing her into a secret nocturnal life as street prostitute. The film is thus often seen as a Japanese version of *Belle de Jour* (1967), in which a straight-laced middle-class housewife plunges herself into a series of debaucheries in quest of her true self, a life of passion which mocks the hypocrisy

of French bourgeois society. In Sono's film the housewife comes to acknowledge that her body is given a new meaning as each act of sexual degeneracy leaves a mark upon her. "Welcome to love's inferno" – a variation on Dante's "Abandon all hope ye who enter here" – becomes a slogan in the movie. At the height of the two woman's sensual exhilaration, their flesh and by extension that of all such women becomes that of a "quasi-body" lacking "a legitimate father" – where now we will think of the "collective body" of patriarchal rationality since man here becomes both the object and catalyst of female "transgressions."

Finally the professor's husbandless mother, hating and also jealous of her daughter, convinces the housewife to kill the professor. The mother then performs the duty of "public sanitization" – here we are reminded of Malmgren's analysis (see section III. Crime Narratives, Rancière's Quasi-Bodies, and Deleuzian Cinema) – by dismembering her body, which she considers diseased, contagious; she replaces the polluted genitals with a sex-doll and isolates the former from any possible public exposure so the "disease" cannot spread. Then the mother commits suicide when the investigators arrive. In actuality (not the movie), the murderer is, like Jack the Ripper, never caught so the status quo is never restored. In Sono's fiction, those fictional female characters, who choose to unbridle their wild libido and expand the disorder within this society, are punished instead. Within the film, based as it is on an actual case, a true case history, the logics of facts and fiction are entwined.

Oedipal and Anti-Oedipal *Femme Fatales*

The title of the film, *Guilty of Romance*, leaves us with a sense of ambiguity, as we cannot help but wonder whether it is about psychology or religion, romance or sex. A guiding theme of this movie is that of one woman's desperate love for her father and another woman's smoldering desire for her seemingly chaste husband. As Jean-Luc Nancy says in *Shattered Love*, love here belongs to the domain of "the impossible," which means that it could make us aware of our own finitude, could be self-destructive. As Nietzsche's Zarathustra says, "Great loves do not *want* love – they want more" (Nancy 1991, 93–99). That is, love is always insatiable, a sort of void.

On the contrary, desire is the opposite of love, according to Nancy; it aims to be fulfilled precisely through "lacking its object" and "extending toward its end" (1991, 98). The professor tells the housewife that sex can never be experienced in vain: if you're having sex with someone whom you don't love, you must charge him money as a matter of principle. The women offer their flesh in exchange

of money as if performing an ancient ritual: love is in the realm of gift-giving while desire is merely a form of exchange. But love also contradicts the notion of gift-giving since wives, children, and perhaps husbands are held as property; it thus "frustrates the simple opposition between economy and non-economy" (property and gift). However, love terminates this opposition "without sublating or surmounting it" (96). Unable to obtain a complete and perfect love, women suffer from a severe feeling of self-negation, precipitated into love's inferno where bits of identities are eclipsed until they totally disappear because love can never "withhold its identity behind its shatters" (Nancy 1991, 99), and their chosen way to realize this impossibility of love's infinity is through death and decay.

Žižek dissects the idea of the *Femme Fatale* in *Two Ways to Avoid the Real of Desire*. In his Lacanian interpretation of Film Noir, the *Femme Fatale* is the woman who subjectifies her fate through brazenly "assuming the death drive." Žižek defines the position of the *Femme Fatale* as that of a "non-existence assumed through her hysterical breakdown." That means the woman becomes a menace to man by simply materializing her inherent masochistic desire for self-ruin; consequently she is no longer the object but the subject, even the *pure* subject who is totally able to govern her own fate. Žižek also supposes that the man who identifies with this woman is suicidal as he self-willingly submits himself to his "symptom." (Here we get the Lacanian notion that "Woman is the symptom of man") (Žižek 1998, 65–66).

But the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis of cinema does have its limitations inasmuch as it fails to transcend identity politics. For Deleuze and Guattari each of us is a "multiplicity," so in the first place there is no Daddy Mommy Me triangle, itself a construction of the desiring-machine of capitalism. In the Freudian-Lacanian view, which Žižek to a degree adopts, the protagonist is forced to undergo the process of "Oedipalization" because he/she is unable to break free of the family romance; "the desiring-production is displaced, 'travestied' into an 'Oedipal sub-aggregate'" (*Anti-Oedipus*). Here the schizo is unjustly "neurotized" into an impotent state, and a "neurotized" schizoid is restrained from exercising the power of affect. Therefore, Deleuze sees "schizophrenia as process" in the "affective dimension" (Pisters 2008, 105), and the neo-*Femme-Fatale* as a woman who attempts to break loose from the confinements of family romance, is also a woman who drives her desiring machine in full throttle.

Guilty of Romance shall be an affective dimension that emulates a schizophrenic automaton sufficed by multiple time-images, and the women in it are all triggered by "the relations to the affects" (Pisters 2008, 112). As for how the "guilty of

romance" women surpass the limits of "oedipalization," they metamorphose themselves into "the body without organs" as the professor turns her flesh into obsolescence: she yields her own body to the sexual dissipations to start her journey in "love's inferno," and at last she becomes "the body without organs" in the highlight of her orgiastic sensations in which she is emotionally devastated with self-loathing, she perishes into a decapitated corpse re-assembled with a plastic sex-doll (body without an image) (MacCormack 2001, 133). Tragically, self-obliteration becomes the only means to sabotage the pattern of her Electra complex as she abolishes the "power of speech" by re-incarnating herself into the Rancièrean quasi-body within the castle of lust.

Crime Narratives, Rancière's Quasi-Bodie, and Deleuzian Cinema

Carl Malmgren claims in *Anatomy of Murder* that criminal investigation in detective fictions serves to "formalize" or reduce the conflict between the rational and the irrational since the detective hero bravely "exorcises" the irrational, returning us to some semblance of a rational order (Malmgren 2001, 176). Similarly, Carla Freccero speaks of the "disavowal of institutionalized violence" in American serial killer fiction, since the acts of an individual, isolated serial killer contrast sharply with the concept of a "violence-situated [...] culture." Thus this perverse and abnormal violence is grounded in an individual's "psychosexual dysfunction" rather than in a larger societal malfunction, and the ultimate solution is always to eradicate the killer to restore your faith in the social norm, that is, in a projected illusion of status quo (Malmgren 2001, 177). However, in Tokyo's love-hotel murder the actual killer is, like Jack the Ripper, still at loose and so the force of rationality fails to fully exercise its proper function; *Guilty of Romance* reminds the Japanese readers of the irrational forces that still lurk within Japanese society.

In fact, the process by which police detectives (or private investigators, private *eyes*, as in *The Maltese Falcon* [John Huston, 1941] and other classic American versions of "film noir") attempt to solve murder cases is similar to the scientist's process of trying to prove a theory through the investigation of experimental hypotheses. And the hypotheses of crime investigators are not unlike scientific theories themselves, which try to explain the outcome of a series of events in time – "Drop something and then another thing and each case the object will fall," though of course we get more elaborate formulations such as "If X had been the cause of Y (If John Jones had killed her) then we would have expected outcome Z

(He would have already disappeared), but this is not the case," etc. History itself as well as scientific theory is of course a narrative, a story, an account of a series of events in time, and in any sort of narrative or "case history" we can freely move back and forth in time (into the past/future). History, scientific theory, the case history of a crime and the plot of a novel, drama, epic poem, or film all mix true and false, fact and fiction (myth, legend, hyperbole).

The above, perhaps too-obvious point is already presupposed by Rancière, who notes in *The Politics of Aesthetics* that the lack of a distinction between "the logic of facts" and "the logic of fictions" could lead to an "inter-dependentness" and a "a new mode of rationality, one that characterizes the science of history" (Rancière 2004, 36). Thus, by blurring the boundary between fiction and history, one could develop a new form of narrative conceived as a rational discourse of and on human society.[1] The manipulation of this narrative, Rancière says, would be a form of construction of "the real" since "the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought" (38). In the case of Sion Sono's crime noir, *Guilty of Romance*, Sono utilizes the *factual record* of the decapitation of a woman in Tokyo's love-hotel district to fabricate a gory urban tale. In fact the killer, who left the beheaded victim with her head and limbs displaced like those of a plastic sex-doll, was never found. We might say that Sono takes advantage of this sensational true story to confuse viewers' normal ability to distinguish the rational and irrational. Thinking of Malmgren's analysis, the question might even arise here as to which is more "real," the notion of a fundamentally rational society or that of a fundamentally irrational one.

Young children, Aristotle points out in the *Poetics*, love stories because *mythos* (narrative) "is life," that is, our life itself takes the form of a narrative, a series of events in time. If man is for Aristotle a political animal due to his innate narrativity, Rancière says that our "literarity" is expressed through many forms of locution, each of which becomes a "quasi-body" or "block of speech" (Deleuze's term in *A Thousand Plateaus*) that "circulates without a legitimate father" so that we ourselves really are or become a "heterotopia" (Foucault), a homogenizing "collective body" whose essence is "fractured and disincorporated" (Rancière 2004, 39). Here again we have the influence of Deleuze, in this case his "body without organs," which among other things can imply a purely "virtual" body.

In Deleuze's theory of cinema we have the power of the virtual, speech, and affect. According to Patricia Pisters (2008), "the virtual and the actual start

1 "The notion of 'narrative' locks us into positions between the real and artifice ... a matter of claiming that everything is fiction" (Rancière 2004, 38).

chasing each other to the point where they become indistinguishable," at which point we get the manifestation of "a mental reality:" this consists of time-images rendered through the power of the virtual as the symptom of "a schizophrenic delirium," where the latter is not "actual" but it is "very real." In other words, these quasi-bodies lacking a collective body are neutralizing each other in the virtual-actual or fiction-history aporia, while spatiality is temporalized as a series of time-images derived from the protagonist's desire. In the first half of the 20th century, cinema was "a machine of the visible" which represented "an illusion of reality" in order to restore the audience's perception of the material world.[2] But in Deleuzian schizoanalytic film theory cinema has now become "a machine of the invisible" that intercepts the time-images within our mind/brain to project a "reality of illusion" rather than to introject movement-images into our mind. Meanwhile, "the spectator" is turned into "a disembodied eye" (a surrogate organ of touch) – a disjointed quasi-body interwoven within the process of complicit voyeurism/exhibitionism (Pisters 2008, 112).

Thus in *Guilty of Romance*, one woman lures another woman to be a voyeur, watching from a distance the first woman's series of sexual encounters, and then forces her to join as a participant at wild orgies (Pisters 2008, 113). One pornographic scene after another is accompanied by Mahler's Symphony N. 5, creating a decadent and delirious mise-en-scène. Through this "intersubjective spectatorship" (Linda Williams), the story is told without linear narrations but in series of flowing images "ambiguously enfolded in each other," thus dissolving human desire into a fluid flux while the differentiation between the virtual and the actual (history and fiction) is dismissed. Deleuze indeed says we should not ask "Does cinema give us an illusion of the world?" but rather "How does cinema restore our belief in the world?" (Pisters 2008, 114). *Guilty of Romance* is Sion Sono's cinematic attempt to recuperate our faith in the world.

Film Noir, Malaise, and Kafka's *Castle*

In *A Panorama of American Film Noir: 1941–1953* we learn that film noir creates a "*state of tension created in the spectators by the disappearance of their psychological bearings*" (Borde and Chaumeton 2002, 13). That is, film noir exposes the inherent reality of irreconcilable human conflict; it gives us

2 In his essay *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Walter Benjamin argues that cinema could be an effective state-apparatus of the fascists or communists of the 1930's, if they exploited the mesmerizing power of the cinematic "aura."

"the moral ambivalence, criminal violence, and contradictory complexity of [...] situations and motives" in order to conjure up a collective consensus of "anguish or insecurity" (Giltre 2009, 21). The power of affect in Noir (literally "Black" in French) is that of "a specific sense of malaise" which envelopes everything, and may perhaps be best grounded in a painterly and cinematic technique, a "chiaroscuro space" [Figs. 1–2][3] where light and shadow (clear/obscure, light/dark, light/shadow) are sharply contrasted. This suggests various binarisms including that of good/evil and life/death, and contributes to the spectators' sense of tension, confusion, "loss of bearings."

In Noir, the demarcation between fiction and history is also erased due to the grim verisimilitude within the hard-boiled detective-narrative, reminding us that both are forms of narrative and perhaps suggesting something like a Nietzschean "eternal recurrence of the same" (in any-space-whatever) (Shaw 2008, 158). A flattened-out temporality such as Nietzsche sometimes suggests as one interpretation of the eternal return also can fit several of Kafka's works and major themes. That is, in Kafka we are often trapped in a sort of "progress of infinite delay" of infinitely-delayed journey, where the journey itself is often across a flat surface (*The Imperial Messenger* in *The Great Wall of China*), even where we might have expected it to be vertical.[4]

Indeed, "Kafkaesque" is phrase frequently applied to Noir, given the latter's constant sense of an impasse and of the dark side of human nature. In *Guilty of Romance*, the favorite book of the professor-protagonist's dead father was (is) Kafka's later novel *The Castle*.[5] In the film the professor delineates the clandestine side of her double-life via the enigmatic contours of *The Castle*. It becomes for her a spatial allegory of Tokyo's love-hotel district, above all because the novel and castle seem(s) to be a labyrinth with no exit, and to have again a sense of time so that flattened-out time so that there is in effect also "no beginning" and "no ending."

3 In Orson Wells's noir classic *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948) starring Rita Hayworth, the adulterers (the third party, the femme fatale, and her impotent husband) enter into "The Magic Mirror Maze" where they shoot each other into death when the husband utters "of course, killing you is killing myself. It's the same thing. But you know, I'm pretty tired of both of us!" The mirror-maze could be another metaphor of Kafkaesque castle where entraps the sinners in a snare of desires consummated by death, visible, intangible, and somehow concretized through chiaroscuro, in opposition to that in *Guilty of Romance* (2011). It could also be another form of Gaia which the men here aim to destroy in order to cut loose from the *Femme Fatale*.

4 "Before the Law" in *The Trial*, where the Law lies not "above" as we might have expected but in the innermost chamber of a labyrinth. We also get the horizontal labyrinthine structure in *The Imperial Messenger*.

5 In the wider domain of contemporary Japanese narrative, one of Murakami's best-known novels is *Kafka on the Shore.*

Herman Pongs (1960) notes that Kafka is the writer of the labyrinth which he sees as an effective image of a world out of joint. The design of the labyrinth – a place from which its own designer (Daedalus) could not escape until he resorted to the third dimension, the vertical, and flew upward— also suggests the paradoxical juxtaposition between light/dark, good/evil, life/death. Kafka's labyrinthine castle becomes what Pong calls "a shrunken form," and what Gustav Rene Hocke defines as "a metaphor unifying the calculable and the incalculable elements of the universe." Heinrich Politzer says that Kafka's *The Castle* is a clear embodiment of the labyrinth as cosmological dichotomy (Politzer 1962, 231), and that the telephone wire within the story demonstrates "the Castle's paradox in time," while the castle's "vibrating infinity" is also "a paradox in space" (Politzer 1962, 248). In *Guilty of Romance*, the housewife receives cell-phone calls from the seediest corners of the city, and she is compelled to leave her leisure life of plentitude and descend into a disoriented and disorienting space where time bears no consequence, an oblivion like that of "ever more deceiving spirals" as if "eternity prevails" (Politzer 1962, 252).

In the love-hotels of Tokyo, the interior design of the rooms includes mirrors which enable the couples to gaze upon themselves during their private activities. The mirrors can fulfill the obsessive narcissistic desires of adulterers: to watch yourself during sex means you are in effect making love to the reflected image(s) in the mirror(s) instead of to your partner, who is in a way "absent" from the love-scene. The mirrors of the love-hotels suggest the nothingness of "the castle" whose "inner chamber not only shelters nothingness, but, combined with it in absolute ambiguity, the promise of total existence" (Politzer 1962, 263), as if it were an all-encompassing *Gaia* (Earth-Mother as in Hesiod's *Theogony*) exercising its potency to punish the female sinners within "its majestic impassivity" (Politzer 1962, 267). Still, like the male protagonist of *The Castle*, the "guilty of romance" ladies are kept in a state of "incessant longing for a certainty." This brings us back to the nature of film noir and more generally to the nature of cinema in general. Spencer Shaw states that cinema is "a singular space" which ceases to be "determined" – for it has become an "any-space-whatever" consisting of numerous "linkages" as well as a series of "virtual conjunctions" (Shaw 2008, 157).

In the case of *Guilty of Romance*, it pays homage to Noir by de-constructing a page of murder history into a Deleuzian "plane of immanence" since the old aesthetic dimension of chiaroscuro is internalized as a mental picture (brain is the screen) projected through "a machine of the invisible." Here, Western binarism as well as the phallocentric world of hard-boiled criminality is disintegrated by the saturation of colors in which "femininity" and the "the exotic other" prevail.

The standardized noir is "internal anxieties bleed out, disrupting realism in favor of expressionist stylization" (Giltre 2009, 12), and the intervention of colors in neo-noir[6] is "a shattering of unity" according to Julia Kristeva, because colours "interrupt the process of self-formation" and the result shall be that colors manage to "de-differentiate the self and de-form the world" into a series of accelerated derangements, in which each noir individual fail to find an exit as he/she is "trapped in the patterns of behaviors beyond their control" (Giltre 2009, 21).

Furthermore, Jacques Rancière mentions in *The Aesthetic Unconscious* that the position of art in Freudian unconscious is situated between "knowing and not-knowing, sense and non-sense, *logos* and *pathos*, the real and the fantastic," (Rancière 2010, 53) but the aesthetic unconscious "radicalizes" one's identity into "contraries" (Baumgarten's "confused clarity") (2010, 24). The aesthetic unconscious aims to demolish this binarism in order to reach toward a "nihilist entropy" (Schopenhauerian will of nothingness) (2010, 88) in its confrontation "with the power of the Other" (2010, 85). Thus neo-noir attests to this Rancière-an embodiment of aesthetic unconscious through its saturation of contrastive colors, and there's no Oedipal denouement but an aesthetic sublime in which the Dionysian abandon triumphs.

Intertextuality: Words and Images

During the movie, the poetry of Tyuichi Tamura is introduced in a scene where the doomed professor is lecturing on Tamura's *On My Way Home* in her university:

I should never have learned words
How much better off I'd be
If I lived in a world
Where meanings didn't matter
The world with no words

If the beautiful words take revenge against you
It's none of my concern
If quiet meanings make you bleed
It also is none of my concern

6 Kathrina Giltre expounds, the use of colors in neo-noir could be just to "accentuate chiaroscuro lighting by using contrasting colors" (2009, 21). But in the case of *Guilty of Romance*, this "accentuation of chiaroscuro" is manifest in the poster as well as the criminal scene where the corpse is found through the use of crimson red (blood) and the ominous gleam of dark purple in the background [Fig. 3].

The tears in your gentle eyes
The pain that drips from your silent tongue –
I'd simply gaze at them and walk away
If our world had no words

I should never have learned words
Simply because I know Japanese and bits of a foreign tongue
I stand still inside your tears
I come back alone into your blood (Tamura).

While the professor is reciting this poem in front of her class, the housewife steps into the classroom. We cannot foresee the ensuing tragedy when we see the two women's faces glowing with a sense of excitement, a secretly shared intimacy. In the film's last frame the camera stays on the housewife's bruised face, a stream of blood flowing from one nostril [Fig. 2] while her eyes exude a strange delight in the reminiscence of her friend.

Thus the poem, which might have been "spoken" by either woman, makes us think about the two women's relationship and how it ended. It also summons the viewers' memory of these two women's first rendezvous [Figs. 5–7] in which words also seemed to cease to matter. The women along with those words they aspire to do away with now appear, in effect, as those "quasi-bodies" or "blocks of speech" that they have become within the collective body of Tokyo's "love-hotel."

Structurally Sono chooses to interpret the story of *Guilty of Romance* posthumously while he embeds many intervals to shatter off "images in a chain" in a Proustian manner, which could be "a force between the determining and the determined, within time" (Shaw 2008, 163). Events are dissolved into the remnant fragments of memories as we witness one random picture of a missing female on the wall of police bureau [Fig. 8] then we jump into her story narrated through "image-in-movement." By Laura Marks's appropriation of "transitional object" from D W Winnicott's object-relation theory, the picture of the missing woman is a transitional object as well as a "fossil" to serve a "radioactive" purpose to invite the audience into "decoding the past" of the actual event, but here transitional object becomes a "fetish" since "cinematic images obscure" the truth of the actual event (whose power is liquefied) by "connecting it to memory" and then fossils are now turned to "recollection-images" (Marks 2000, 124).

All of a sudden, the audience is forced to return to the crime scene where the horribly severed body on the morgue table turns the mellow memory into a grotesque ruin (Fundamental allegory of Noir). Everything "spreads out and

transmits" in a fluid mode without solid fixation just like the displaced body-parts of the victim – a "diffused" becoming, a body without organs within the "gaseous" plane of immanence (Shaw 2008, 163).

Merleau-Ponty notes that human relationship with the world is mimetic while Deleuze claims in his *Cinema 2* that cinema gives the spectators "the genesis of an unknown body" (Marks 2000, 147). Here, self and the world are "enfolded" in the film-viewing experience as cinema spectatorship becomes "the exchange between two bodies" – "the self-in-becoming" and "its embodied intercessor," and this mimetic bond between the spectator and cinema seems to simulate the Lacanian mirror-phase (Marks 2000, 151). But unlike the Lacanian mirror-phase, the distance between the beheld and the beholder is cancelled to reach an extent beyond voyeurism. By Laura Marks's definitions, "optical composition" annuls the "representational power of the image" through the lack between the gazer/gazed so the gazer could obtain an assured sense of self through constructing him/herself as "an all-perceiving subject." This lack-in-between is where voyeurism thrives. On the other hand, in the case of "haptic composition," the lack-in-between is nullified to transcend the optical voyeurism, and it is more concerned with the body as well as its "tactile materiality." In other words, haptic visuality sheds off the shackles between the self/other to attain a state where "the eyes themselves functions like organs of touch" (Marks 2000, 162). The stereotypical understanding of haptic by Riegl would be the visual provocation through "the blurring of chiaroscuro" – a disturbance to the abstractive function toward the "all-perceiving subject." But Marks has expanded this idea into another domain where the discussion of subject is made absent while the body reigns.

Let's associate Marks's categorization of optical/haptic composition in the transformations of Noir. Classic noir is constructed on the wrestle over the contrastive opposition between light and shadow [Fig. 1] through optical composition, where the language of noir becomes "standardized" and heavily reliant upon the narratives; the future of neo-noir exists in the place of Deleuzian time-image, where the viewer is "contemplating" the image itself (rather than get absorbed into the narrative) through haptic composition which focuses upon affects. That is, the language of classic noir is more about "narrative identification" while that of neo-noir is concerned more with "bodily identification" (Marks 2000, 170–71), just like Tyuichi Tamura's *On My Way Home*, in which words/narratives cease to matter while the bodily objects like tears and blood are channeling the might of affects in a more mimetic way that requires a more immediate "haptic composition" from the beholder.

Conclusion: Cinematic Body as the Prefigured Maternal Space

Throughout the film, man occupies in the position of the lack as well as the symptom of woman. One female intrigues another to voyeur her acts of fornications, and the voyeur is snatched into scene for actual participation as the spectator's "erogenous body is created through a pure dispersed and anarchic multiplicity." Hence, the discourse of spectatorship is also liquefied while the erogenous body (of the spectator) turns to be "a territory of becoming through relations of desire" (MacCormack 2008, 139). The females here engage themselves in a game of voyeur devoid of man, and they surrogately make love (a lovemaking without actual sex) through their voyeuristic gestures of each other until they disintegrate each other into "singularities."

Or, this seemingly voyeuristic game between the two females here could be a haptic erasure between self/other: in the beginning, the protagonist (the housewife) is cajoled in the underground pornography as the gravure girl; she is the beheld to be preyed with the eyes of the beholders. Later in her encounter with the professor who is a street-prostitute at night, she is the gazer who rejoices in others' affairs with detachment until she is forcefully snatched to join the scene as the distance between the beheld and the beholder no longer exists. Through this bodily involvement, she is no longer just a voyeur tickled in the delight of optical visuality but a participant overwhelmed in the thrill of haptic visuality till she totally loses herself in the haunted abyss of "death, degeneration and destruction" as one woman is literally transmuted into "body without organs" while the other takes over her place to continue the street-prostitutions, just like a ceremony performed in the manner of the Nietzschean "eternal recurrence of the same" in the inferno of love – a Kafkaesque spatio-temporal aporia.

Laura Marks elucidates, it is "the self-eclipsing desire" that "propels haptic visuality" as the eroticism in female spectatorship resembles more of the bond between mother and infant rather than "phallic economy" (2000, 188), and it borders upon the pre-lingual stage where language is not needed (Julia Kristeva's *Chora*[7]). In the end, even the sexes become joyless while love is turned to the eruption of their shattered multiplicities. The last bit of remaining

7 Anne-Marie Smith explains that Kristeva brings forth "a third dimension" where "the sensation, vocalics and images" prevail while "the semiotics" within „the Lacanian imaginary and symbolic" are expelled, and the state of "non-differentiation" is attained by the absence of father, just like a dark room that resembles a "prefigured maternal space" (Smith 1998, 60).

love becomes a fetish to evoke the recollection-image of the professor's reciting of *On My Way Home*:

I should never have learned words
Simply because I know Japanese and bits of a foreign tongue
I stand still inside your tears
I come back alone into your blood (Tamura).

The woman's eyes are blazed with an ecstatic joy over the dismantled, fetishised "body" of her late friend [Figs. 4–8].

References

Borde, Raymond and Etienne Chaumeton. 2002. Toward a Definition of Film Noir. In *A Panorama of American Film Noir: 1941–1953.* San Francisco: City Light Books.

Buchanan, Ian and Patricia MacCormack. 2008. *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema*. New York: Continuum.

Glitre, Kathrina. 2009. Under the Neon Rainbow: Colour and Neo-Noir. In *Neo-Noir*, eds. Mark Bould, Kathrina Glitre, and Greg Tuck. London & New York: Wallflower Press.

MacCormack, Patricia. 2008. An Ethics of Spectatorship: Love, Death and Cinema. In *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema*, ed. Ian Buchanan. New York: Continuum.

Malmgren, Carl D. 2001. The Police Procedural and Serial Killer Fiction. In *Anatomy of Murder.* Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Marks, Laura U. 2000. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1991. Shattered Love. In *The Inoperative Community*. Minnesota: the Regents of the University of Minnesota.

Pisters, Patricia. 2008. Delirium Cinema or Machines of the Invisible. In *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema* ed. Ian Buchanan. New York: Continuum.

Politzer, Heinrich. 1962. The Bitter Herb: The Castle. In *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Pongs, Hermann. 1960. *Franz Kafka: Dichter des Labyrinths* [*Franz Kafka: Poet of the Labyrinths*]. Heidelberg: Wolfgang Rothe Verlag.

Powell, Anna. 2008. Off Your Face: Schizoanalysis, Faciality and Film.In *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema* ed. Ian Buchanan. New York: Continuum.

Rancière, Jacques. 2004. Is History a Form of Fiction? In *The Politics of Aesthetics.* Britain: Gabriel Rockhill.

Rancière, Jacques. 2010. *The Aesthetic Unconscious*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Sono, Sino. 2011. *Guilty of Romance*. Japan: Eureka Entertainment.

Shaw, Spencer. 2008. *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze.* North Carolina: Shutterstock.

Smith, Anne-Marie. 1998. *Julia Kristeva: Speaking the Unconscious.* London: Pluto Press.

Tamura, Ryuichi. 2007. On My Way Home. In *Poetry International*, transl. Takako Lento. *http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poem/item/9470* Last accessed at 18. 04. 2014.

Žižek, Slavoj. 1998. Two Ways to Avoid the Real of Desire. In *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

List of Figures

Figures 1–2. "Chiaroscuro space" in Orson Welles's cinema (*The Lady from* Shanghai, 1948).

Figures 3–8. Sion Sono: *Guilty of Romance* (2011).

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 183–201

Sensations of the Past: Identity, Empowerment, and the British Monarchy Films

Zsolt Győri
Debrecen University (Hungary)
E-mail: gyorizs@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract. Royal bio-pics have always enjoyed a high priority among cinematic representations of British history and taken a lion's share in defining Britishness to audiences at home and abroad. These historical narratives never render national identity by capturing the past of historians, instead reconstruct the past as a mirror of contemporary reality and in a way as to satisfy their audience's demand for both romantic qualities and antiquarian nostalgia, for sensations they regard their own. The author's basic assumption is that such cinema does not represent history but exploits spectatorial desire for a mediated reality one inhabits through the experience of an empowered identity. The first part of the article examines how private-life films (a subgenre of royal bio-pics) mythologized and idealized Tudor monarchs in the 1930s, while in the second part, contemporary representatives of the subgenre are analysed as they portray the challenges of the Monarchy in its search for a place within modern British identity politics. Analysed films include *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Alexander Korda, 1933), *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (Michael Curtiz, 1939), *Mrs Brown* (John Madden, 1997), *The Queen* (Stephen Frears, 2006), and *The King's Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2010).[1]

Keywords: British royal bio-pics, the psychologization of history, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939), *Mrs Brown* (1997), *The Queen* (2006), and *The King's Speech* (2010).

Introduction

Although British screen culture is rich in historical depictions, rarely does it address topics generally considered by the academic historian as Britain's chief contribution to Western civilization. Apart from the zenith of the Empire and their heroic resistance of the nation during WWII, there is little attention paid

1 The publication is supported by the TÁMOP-4.2.2/B-10/1-2010-0024 project. The project is co-financed by the European Union and the European Social Fund.

to the development of the parliamentary system, Puritanism, the making of the Empire, the industrial revolution, or the trade unions. This should however not come as a surprise: the moving image has not gained worldwide popularity as a stimulant of the intellect; its sensations have always appeared closer to visceral emotionality and instant entertainment than the exercises of an analytical mind. Thus abstract socio-political, religio-political, and socio-cultural phenomena have been overshadowed by historical representations rooted in the concrete entities of historical figures, love affairs, the zeitgeist of an era, great conquests and defeats. Corresponding cinematic genres – respectively the bio-pic, the costume melodrama, the period film and the historical epic – render the past as an immersive field of genuine drama and attraction, and although they might be criticised for their poetic license, historical cinema, as Martha W. Driver notes, "provides immediacy and simultaneously appeals to the imagination, engaging the viewer in the past and involving him emotionally and imaginatively in the action on the screen" (2004, 19). It is this imagination I set out to discuss in this article.

In the introductory chapter of *Remaking the Middle Ages* Andrew B. R. Elliott describes three problem areas that need to be considered when examining (or for that matter criticizing) cinema's use of history. These are narrative, montage, and ideology. The first involves techniques of arranging and fitting events into a narrative scheme, giving them formal coherency. The second concerns the ordering of events, the way moments are pieced together in a historical narrative. Ideology, as the third factor shaping representations of the past – that "foreign country whose features are shaped by today's predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges" (Lowenthal 1985, xvii) – is of chief concern for me. In the wake of Lowenthal's and others illuminative arguments, there is now a definite agreement among film scholars that historical cinema should not be thought of as historiographic interpretation but epistemological mirror of the age (its national culture, social structure, system of filmmaking, identity crisis) that produces it. Kara McKechnie argues in similar vein when she suggests that "a history film tells us more about the time in which it was made than the time in which it is set" (2002, 218), and so does Andrew B. R. Elliot: "filmmakers trying to bring to life a historical past are frequently prone to reflect the cultural, political and social trends most prominent in the climate of the film's production" (2011, 22). The films I am about to analyse prove the above points and address issues lying outside the world of historians, simply because they themselves turn away from the knowable essences of the past. What makes these films widely popular is not a strict and original scientific methodology, but finely tuned techniques

of dramatization and schematization, the framework of a cinematic memory that needs to be readjusted from time to time. In a sense such memory knows little, or next to nothing about the past, yet possesses expert knowledge of the audience addressed, that is, knows how to shape and mould – above all – the materiality of the past so that viewers will want to identify with and remember it.

The representation of the past as something deeply embedded in materiality is a common feature of all the above mentioned historical genres. Stifling colours, voluptuous bodies, flamboyant draperies framed by a string of painterly *mise-en-scène*s, flaming passions heightened by music and additional effects populate the screen in order to indoctrinate the eyes and ears under "the religion of sensuous appetites" (Marx 2002, 33) – the very definition Marx used to describe commodity fetishism. The fetishization of hypersensual representations leads to the proliferation of such material images in historical cinema which offer points of pleasurable immersion for audiences. The research of Laura U. Marks made important advance in the field of material and haptic images/visuality which she differentiates from purely visual, dis-embodied perception. In both *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* she questions the supremacy of optical visuality and argues that meaning is not only generated at the level of conceptual seeing through idealization and symbolization but via "response in terms of touch, smell, rhythm, and other bodily perceptions" (Marks 2000, xvii). Marks argues that haptic visuality generates meaning in the "flow between sensuous closeness and symbolic distance" (2002, xiii), where the audiovisual properties of cinema are not maintained without sensation becoming non-hierarchical, folded, and multi-sensorial in nature. Within these shifting relations of distance and presence, the spectator's position is best understood as a "dynamic subjectivity" (Marks 2002, 3). The maker of haptic cinema destabilizes prescriptive categories and representational conventions that would determine how the material is to be read, instead invites the spectator to "[build] toward its object, brushing into its pores and touching its varied textures" (Marks 2002, xv), an act which can seriously undermine dominant notions of subjectivity. In view of linking haptic visuality to generic cinema Marks is more cautious, and so should we. The sensuous qualities of historical representations tend to be superficially woven into the image, they rarely undertake the hard task to go beyond commodity fetishism and uncover the hidden meanings of a historical age through its embodied sensation. Marks notes that commercial media has serious constraints in comprehending multisensory pleasures, "for most Western cinema, these sources are supplements to the many

other representational resources it has at its disposal" (Marks 2000, xii), resources – one might add – which inscribe ideology into the image.

Under the hegemony of commodity fetishism the materiality of the past is not only instrumentalized and subordinated to the logic of consumption but is also mummified. What permeates historicizing imagination is, first and foremost, an ideological materiality. No serious examination of cinematic memory can escape taking into consideration the extent to which films are themselves ideological effects of making history consumable in the very manner museums achieve this aim. In a sense the spectator of historical films is someone under the spell of, what Lowenthal has called the 'pastness of the past'[2] or, what Nietzsche has termed, the agent of an antiquarian historical sense: someone "who will greet the soul of his people as his own soul even across the wide, obscuring and confusing centuries; and power of empathy and divination, of scenting an almost cold trail, of instinctively reading aright the past however much it be written over […] knowing oneself not to be wholly arbitrary and accidental, but rather as growing out of the past as its heir, flower and fruit and so to be exculpated, even justified, in one's existence" (Nietzsche 1980, 19–20).

The films I propose for discussion wear the materiality of the past – something the eyes find pleasing to touch and feast on – as a mask; yet these masks (as Nietzsche suggests) also fulfil our desire to be protected from the loud roaming of contemporary history, and express one's reverence for old customs, well-tested values and beliefs. Such desire was never more apparent than in the British cultural policy of the 1980s, spearheaded by "heritage industry: a potent marketing of the past as part of the new enterprise culture, a commodification of museum culture" (Higson 2003, 1). Part of this industry was a culturally English but financially international cinema with preference towards "particular types of stories that narrate the nation imaginatively, narratives that are capable of generating a sense of national belonging in their audiences" (Higson 2011, 1). The fact that heritage cinema emerged in the decade when the public discourse on a deepening identity crisis became increasingly ideological ensure further legitimacy for the argument, in view of which cinema always pictures and narrates the past in order to offer ideologically-embedded empowerment for audiences. Understood in these terms, empowerment is always partial towards particular values and ideals, in the very manner Belén Vidal in her recent book on

2 Addressing the contemporary fixation of preservation, Lowenthal argues that "it is no longer the present of the past that speaks to us, but its pastness. Now a foreign country with a booming tourist trade, the past has undergone the usual consequences of popularity" (1985, xvii).

heritage cinema suggests: "architectural sites, interior design, furnishing and, in general, the mise-en-scène of objects, setting and period settings not just become a conduit for narrative and characterisation but carry an ideological effect: they help construct a sense of Englishness according to a certain bourgeois ideal of imperil tradition, stability and propriety" (Vidal 2012, 9).

Heritage films might have taken a lion's share in constructing Britain's modern national(ist) iconography, nevertheless the first homogenous group of films that both fetishized the materiality of the past and rendered it is a consumable image were the monarchy biopics, or so-called 'private-life films'[3] made in the 1930s. These films engendered prototypical empowerment narratives which made the past consumable in the form of ideological materiality. From the classical period I will examine two films by Hungarian émigrés, Alexander Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) and Micheal Curtiz's *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939) and show how they mythologized but also humanized the person of the monarch while reasserting and offering empowerment for traditional notions of gender. Philippa Lowthorpe's TV movie *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2003) will be analysed as the antithesis of mythical representations. Last I examine the recent renaissance of private-life films through the examples of John Madden's *Mrs Brown* (1997), Stephen Frears's *The Queen* (2006), and Tom Hopper's *The King's Speech* (2010) which portray royal characters while analysing their personalities. Royal characters within this latter representational paradigm are rendered as suffering in their respective ways from the conflict between the intimacy of private life and the remoteness of institutional identity. My focus is how identity crises are always resolved from within, that is, how these characters (re)gain the respect of the public after having understood their responsibility as role-models towards them.

The Mythologizing-Melodramatic Approach and its Recent Critique

Alexander Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* openly admits to being interested in the historical figure of the Tudor monarch as the masculine hero of popular memory – the mythical Henry. Already the entrée of Charles Laughton, as the exact replica of Hans Holbein the Younger's famous portrait of the king, puts things on the right track and introduces audiences to a culturally constructed quasi-mythological image of Henry as the mixture of a Renaissance prince and

3 For details on the historical inaccuracies of films made in line with the private film formula see Chapman (2005, 28–30).

a Rabelaisian figure: a narcissistic man of excess as far as courtly, culinary, and carnal pleasures are concerned. Henry's overstated self-assuredness and outspoken misogyny – apparent in statements like "My first wife was clever, my second was ambitious. Thomas, if you want to be happy, marry a girl like my sweet little Jane. Marry a stupid woman" – is balanced by his ever-present good spirits and cheerful vulgarity (in the vein of Shakespeare) which his court and all of Merrie England seem to share. For Korda Henry's "life story belongs to the people of later generations, not because it is in the history books, but because it is crude and generous and vulgar enough to establish an England about which history books could be made" (Lejeune quoted in Chapman 2005, 21–22), in other words, he is at the centre of a mythologized history which nonetheless serves as a point of empowerment. Such history would have a lot in common with storybooks and fairytales for children more the same as at the end of the film the aged, white-bearded and obese Henry seated by the fireplace and covered in blankets recalls popular images of Father Christmas. Chapman is right to suggest that "the film validates the institution of monarchy, a central plank of consensus politics" (2005, 31), nevertheless Henry's representation as a genuine national folk hero is constructed through xenophobia, insularity, sentimental nostalgia, and the romantic myth of egalitarianism. Yet most relevant is masculinity, not only evident in his bottomless sexual appetite, but also in his straightforward hot-headedness and the open mockery of (table) manners amongst others. Higson's argument about the attractions of recent medieval and early modern historical films seems to apply Korda's film too: "the unmodern setting thus legitimates what now seems socially or culturally transgressive, what might otherwise be considered censorable representations" (Higson 2011, 216). Henry's masculinity, even if for audiences it remained no more than a fantasy of masculinity, proved empowering and complemented with his above listed other attitudes and values was willingly embraced by economically hard-hit audiences beyond England, in Great Britain and the US alike. In a sense Kordaesque, populist-mythological or, for that matter, sentimentally nostalgic history for the working classes was a product of the post-Depression world of surging unemployment rates, of disillusioned people and the crisis of traditional gender hierarchies. For them the England of Henry VIII exemplified a reality more tolerable than their own, thus warmly welcomed a cinema which would serve as a corrective mirror and offer them projected illusion of the people they would have liked to be.

Michael Curtiz's *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* directly follows on Korda's path, not only because he uses the private life formula to depict the love-

hate relationship between Elizabeth I and the Earl of Essex but for portraying Tudor England as a Romantic realm fetishized in its material splendour. As a national heroine the character of Elizabeth is constructed through the virtues of self-restraint and sacrifice. Unlike Henry, her attractions and desires will remain unfulfilled, de-eroticized, and idealized, nonetheless empowering. Already in the very first scene Curtiz makes explicit the temptations awaiting the queen: the grand parade of the victorious Earl of Essex is portrayed through the voyeuristic gaze of the ladies-in-waiting, one of whom fascinatedly exclaims: "Oh, it must be wonderful to be a man." Be that the shiny armour, the tight trousers and the flawless makeup, the male body is offered for spectacle, yet its pleasures are never realized. For these lustful bodies belong to egoistic, power-hungry warmongers, who – as in the case of Essex – wish to take Elizabeth as "simply a woman" as the *king's* queen. Elizabeth's recognition, that there is an unresolvable conflict between her public and private identities, disallowing her to be both a queen and a woman, eventually leads to the suppression of her feminine love. Yet another, highly idealized love and a symbolic 'marriage' is realized: "There is another love greater than the one I have for you […] England. That is my greatest and most enduring love. And when I think what you would do to my country if you were king, I will see you dead, yes and your soul condemned to eternity forever." Arriving to cinemas in the autumn of 1939, the film resonated closely with the burning issues of its time while contrasting the monarchy as a self-restraining institution with individuals ready to abuse political power. Such a distinction would be even more crucial as Britain began its gruelling war with Nazi Germany, and so would the sacrifice of Elizabeth to abandon self-fulfilment be understood as a genuine act of patriotism – a moment of empowerment most The Britishs were ready to repeat in their own ways.

Both Korda and Curtiz exploited popular memory of the Tudor-era as an easily convertible 'historical' currency to forge out a hero/heroine who can serve a strong identification point for British national sentiments. More recently Shekar Kapur's *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* mythologized and glamourized the queen by updating the private life formula and re-semiotizing the image of the monarchy to fit both modern audience tastes and the contemporary cultural climate. Elizabeth's portrayal merges the qualities and attitudes of an ageless, voguish freethinker of a fearsome femininity – smoking, flirting, wearing tight body armor reminiscent of Arthurian court fashion, giving lessons in dance choreography – with that of the graceful grandmother figure sharing with the nation the more traditional values of solidarity, safety, home. In agreement with Maya Luckett, according to whom

"the film might be seen in the context of Tony Blair's attempts to update the monarchy by demonstrating how the image of a monarch might produce national renown" (2000, 91), I also believe that in this film the cultural markers and ideological discourses of 'Rule Britannia' and 'Cool Britannia' enter into a playful coexistence and render legible Elizabeth's character as a symbolic discursive site where previously antagonistic versions of Britishness are reconciled.

Changing sociocultural attitudes towards gender leave the strongest mark on cinema's historical imagination. Recent Tudor-films explicitly contest the mythologizing approach and phallocratic representations of their predecessors. In their resistance towards populist narratives of masculine empowerment, these films reject – first and foremost – former stereotypes, hierarchies, and discourses of male dominance and re-inscribe into the (cinematic) memory of Tudor England the contemporary crisis of masculinity. Pete Travis's 2003 television film *Henry VIII* offers little masculine empowerment and portrays the birth of each female baby as a challenge for the supremacy of male history. The instability and partial debasement of such history is also accentuated by the fact that the failure of wives to bear boys or satisfy Henry's other desires results not only in the elimination of women but leads to Henry's male companions falling from grace: Cardinal Thomas Wolsey and Thomas Moore (with Catherine of Aragon), George Boleyn (with Ann Boleyn), Thomas Cromwell (with Ann of Cleves), Thomas Culpeper and the Duke of Norfolk (with Catherine Howard).

Philippa Lowthorpe's TV movie *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2003, BBC) goes furthest in this regard and takes an unromantic and demythologizing look at the body politics of Tudor court in a cinematic narrative which itself resists glamourizing representation and in its stylistic solutions follows on the path of DOGME 95 aesthetics. The film – underlined by its strong home video-like cinematography (handheld camera, oblique angels, arbitrary *mise-en-scènes*, on-location sound, and little musical score) – offers a sensitive reading of how the Boleyn girls' bodies are owned by their family and turned into assets traded for the loyalty of the monarch. The older of the girls, the already wedded Mary, gains independence by becoming Henry's lover and the mother of one of his illegitimate children, and it is exactly this illegitimacy that liberates her body from public constrains, those her sister will fall a victim of. Anne uses her body in an openly ambitious way; she preserves her virginity in order to be eligible for the position of the Queen. She plays by the rules of official body politics the chief trope of which is the synecdoche. No other time in the history of the British Isles would it be more of a central issue whether a marriage is consummated, never was the

hymen so precious a piece of flesh than under Henry's reign.[4] The hymen served as an invisible skin safeguarding and also defining pre-marriage femininity, a taboo that made the female body untouchable but for the king, a skin that allowed royal history to be inscribed onto the female body. However Anne's body not only undergoes a synecdochic reduction and will be identified as 'the skin of history (as possession),' since after her marriage to Henry it is further transformed into a royal womb, something no longer intimate and private but a public asset out of which the future is supposed to take shape. She will soon discover that the royal womb is no ordinary womb, and unless it nurtures a male heir to life and serves as a seed of historical continuity, it is doomed to be identified as waste. As Anne Boleyn's historical case suggests, royal femininity is made meaningful through the very framework of functionality which ensures the genesis and establishes the superiority of male history, in other words, the body of the queen is conceptually constructed in a manner that it is always already subordinated to (the logic) of a masculine order. The depiction of the private sphere ceases to be humanizing, in fact, it renders visible the most dehumanizing aspect of one's identity: the loss of corporeal intimacy. The very functionality of the public/institutional roles degrades the female body to the synecdochic-symbolic relationship of *the hymen as the skin of history* and *womb as the seed of history*, only to be further reduced to *the waste of history*. As such Lowthorpe challenges the popular image of Tudor Henry, calls attention to ways in which corporeal femininity is silenced and suppressed within monumental representations of the past, and – contextualized within my present inquiry – suggests that mythologizing/glamourizing empowerment narratives rigidify rather than modify values, hinder and not promote change. Does this mean that such revisionist films lack to offer empowerment of any kind? Not at all, in fact they urge us to break away from the spell of romantic-nostalgic representations of the past, to examine the masculine logic underlying history, and to revisit those traumatic sites of history where the materiality of the female body was appropriated by history. Empowerment germinates as soon as we understand how history itself is brought into being by this very appropriation.

4 To annul his marriage with Catherine of Aragon, Henry argued that her marriage with his older brother, Arthur, has been consummated. According to Catholic Canon Law this would have annulled his marriage with Catherine. Later, his fourth marriage to Anne of Cleves was annulled after both sides confirmed that the marriage was never consummated.

The Psychologizing Approach

Monarchy films about more recent British rulers expand on the dichotomy of the private and the public less critically, yet show full awareness towards the dramatic changes in values, beliefs, lifestyles and consumption patterns that have occurred since the 1930s. These films are mirrors of an era when the public demand for self-conscious images grew, just as the popularity of royal family members – similar to politicians and celebrities – was frequently measured by opinion polls. This was also a period when increasing numbers began to regard the monarchy as part of the heritage industry, or thought that its primary contribution to British society should be the safeguarding of traditional values, like the family: even if this concept was going through a decisive change.

Classical depictions of Queen Victoria – namely *Victoria the Great* (Herbert Wilcox, 1937) and *Sixty Glorious Years* (Herbert Wilcox, 1938) – were narratives of empowerment "foregrounding the successful combination of royal duty and married life" (McKechnie 2002, 226). More recent films detach themselves from such idealizing representations and no longer speak of the peaceful coexistence of the public and the private identity, thus "the simple, mythologized image of *Victoria the Great* is replaced by a more complex representation which includes psychological insights and the element of romance" (McKechnie 2002, 227). A common feature of psychological representation in films like *Mrs Brown*, *The Queen*, and *The King's Speech* is the focus on the monarchs' temporary loss of faith in their institutional persona. Their psychic frailty (either prompted by the death of a family member or speech defunct) is best grasped as the condition of being torn between their self-image and their public image. Such a crisis psychologizes rather than mythologizes human characteristics, which is a way of arguing that these characters are humanized in their identity crises and confrontation with their image.

Empowerment through psychologization clearly signifies a paradigmatic shift within the genre but also gives recognition to (and as such is a side-effect of) the changing view of the monarchy, itself a consequence of Princess Diana's highly publicised and scandal-ridden break with The Windsors. In those days history was written and consumed through tabloids, news coverage, and interviews, it was something immediate, touchable, demanding response. And never evident, in fact, the key to Diana's image is its openness to "multiple and often contradictory investments, calling up notions of royal and non-royal, ordinary and extraordinary, Englishness, Britishness, nationality and the international, of feminist icon and

patriarchal phantasm, femininity as lived experience and Woman as abstract symbol" (Davies 2001, 135), that is, it occupied a semiotic field open to a multiplicity of meanings: the site of ambiguity. This ambiguity – no longer seen as a frailty – led many to praise Diana for bringing to surface the everywoman within the princess, and to compliment her for being someone who could (both literally and figuratively) touch and be touched by people. As such her desire to "rescue femininity-as-personal-feeling from its imprisonment in the Palace" (Davies, 106) was recognized as the central element of her feminist empowerment. Diana's legacy remains ambiguous partially because it has inspired and keeps inspiring historical narratives in which the status of the monarchy and the position of the monarch are both unstable. In Jean-Marc Vallée's *The Young Victoria* (2009) the adolescent queen – reminiscent of Diana's later years – expresses herself through compassion, style, and charisma, behaves through instinct rather than rationality and adopts a spontaneous and fluid identity which defies the tightly controlled functions she is supposed to act out as future monarch. Cinema constructs and mediates a Diana-esque Victoria capable of touching people in profound and humane ways, an energetic and forceful personality beneath the traditional image of Victoria as the grandmother-figure of the nation.

Ambiguities surrounding the character of Queen Victoria in *Mrs Brown* arise from her being torn between the desire for privacy and institutional responsibilities made evident by her preference for Balmoral over Buckingham Palace, the vast spaces of the masculine Scottish Highland over the claustrophobic study, writing her diary over dealing with public affairs, and a cottage dinner over a high profile banquet. Victoria, in her plight to embrace 'femininity-as-personal-feeling,' braves a hypocrite court constantly reminding her of public expectations and allows herself to be immersed by romantic Scotland, this pastoral and pre-modern Britain where she develops a close – and in the eyes of many, scandalous – friendship and admiration for John Brown, an ingenuous yet faithful male servant. The romantic portrayal of their friendship renders the notions of master and servant, affection and pragmatism, alienation and self-exploration ambiguous, and also serves as a narrative tool to dramatize and psychologize the queen's crisis. Such a representation – I believe – is a direct product of the 1990s when the idealized (and official) image of the monarchy came tumbling down and people discovered a human reality behind the fences of Palace, a familiar reality they could identify with. The British discovered the Windsors to be their contemporaries, flesh and blood people who were immune neither to the crisis of values and ideals nor the changing life-styles and the ambiguities it brought about. *Mrs Brown* revisits

an episode of Queen Victoria's rule marred by the scandal of her ambiguous relationship with Brown, nevertheless it portrays this crisis from inside, revealing the psychological mechanisms of a mind, first traumatized by loss and alienation, but later rejuvenated by emotional bonding and self-discovery. The psychologizing formula develops into an empowerment narrative as the queen understand that it is her human qualities and not historical necessity, her natural devotion as opposed to public expectations that makes one a monarch.

Psychologizing, Empowerment, and Self-Reflexivity in *The Queen*

Stephen Frears's *The Queen* addresses Diana's heritage ever more directly, retelling the week's incidents following her death on 31 August, 1997. Almost a decade after the actual events took place the film revisits this traumatic site of memory, a threshold between historical and living memory, "an instance of history in the making" (Vidal 2012, 38). Frears understands all too well that most of us remember the newspaper headlines, television broadcasts, and speeches as if they happened yesterday, that this mediated event and its iconic images cannot be fully historicised.[5] The film blends the immediacy and 'on-the-spot'-ness of original footage with aestheticized and dramatized representations in a sensitive manner and makes in them reflected the conflict of private life and public duties: the dichotomy lying at the heart of the queen's identity crisis. Already in the first scene two types of visual frames – the news footage on TV and the half-finished portrait of the queen on the canvas – emphasize two regimes of images, one bringing the world into one's living room, forcing sensationalist, low-resolution, yet collective and energetic images onto the viewer, the other offering a flawless, painterly vision of a privacy which nevertheless seems distant, cold, dead. The first reaches out towards the viewer as a haptic presence waiting to be

5 While 'historical distance' is somewhat lacking, the film's portrayal of the royal family as a historical institution is fully justified. Vidal's analysis calls attention to ways Frears adopts a nostalgic mode of address in his presentation of the heydays of Tony Blair's (and his party's) political intelligence. Bearing in mind that nostalgia is a memory-technique grounded on the clear distinction between past and present (a yearning for a past based on something missing from the present), we can see how the Queen's cautioning the PM about the changefulness of popularity (as a sign of her own 'historical intelligence') finds expression in the film. As Vidal argues: "Ultimately, the sharp sense of irony in *The Queen* arises, not just from the spectacle of the past that fails to fall into step with the present, but also from the present (the period of New Labour government reframed as the past) to live up to its promise" (Vidal 2012, 47).

absorbed, the second favours disembodied vision, prefers only to be observed and functions as a "fetish tableau" (Vidal 2012, 42). Distinct as they are, these iconic regimes come into contact and overcode each other in the film that can be considered a narrative of an iconic transfiguration: whereas at the beginning she is identified in the context of the portrait, the film practically ends with her broadcasted image. I regard the queen's transformation as the mirror of more extensive transformations the monarchy – as a historical institution, but also as political, legal, and symbolic body – underwent in the aftermath of Diana's death as it encountered a crisis of making itself meaningful, as its semiotic field, believed to be stable, was directly contested.

Frears uses the original news footage of the mourning crowd and their raw emotionality to monumentalize and inscribe the loss of Diana into the physical and symbolic spatiality of Buckingham Palace, whereas the composure and decorum of picturesque Balmoral Palace and its empty spaces signal the identity crisis of the queen. Shots of her in the company of hunting dogs, her figure dwarfed in the enormous kitchen or the palace garden do not work as realist depictions of an average person in everyday situations; her physical isolation is always already linked to the presumed emptiness of the Establishment, the weakening moral support of the people and her failing popularity as a reassuring symbol of Britishness. In fact these images semiotize and spatialize her presence as something rather belonging to the fine elegance of the painterly compositions than to a lived reality: she is depicted as a left-over of antiquarian history, someone alienated and untouchable. Furthermore, reappearing shots of the queen among dogs locates her presence closer to the tender-minded, sentimental, and Romantic 19th century world of Sir Edwin Landseer than the late 20th. Fixed within these art-historicizing 'canvases' the queen seems more lifeless than Diana, who, although physically absent, is the very force animating the present.

To this point my analysis offered similar insights into the film as Belén Vidal's own reading of *The Queen*, I will now turn my attention to the psychologizing strategies of the narrative. I believe that visual markers of the queen's spatial alienation are used by Frears in their capacity to make legible her inner turmoil. Psychologizing or humanizing the character involves, one the one hand, linking the queen's identity crisis to the antagonism of the private and the institutional personae, and on the other hand, making audiences aware of those principles and values – a respect for intimacy and tradition, an adherence for protocols and ceremoniality, emotional restraint and discreet mourning – that shape the royal family's pragmatic attitudes in the aftermath of the tragedy. The queen's

identity crisis will be resolved as she understands that the unpopularity and media-induced vilification of these principles is less a challenge on her moral integrity than the institution of the monarchy. In other words: the queen might be right to regard herself morally superior to the manipulative and hysterical modernity of celebrity culture propagated by the media and embraced by the majority of the population, yet she is responsible for the Crown, its symbolic powers and historical continuity. Discovering that her conflict with false ideals is really a conflict between her private and institutional identity, the queen also realizes that part of her identity falls outside her personal control.

The central role of Prime Minister Tony Blair (Queen Elizabeth's own rather sentimental John Brown) and his mediatory activities to evade a full-blown constitutional crisis might suggest that her identity crisis is resolved from the outside, as an involuntary submission to realpolitik. Yet Frears refuses to offer such a functionalist, defeatist, and unromantic notion of the monarchy; on the contrary, the film's most intimate and sentimental scene, the queen's encounter with a majestic royal stag in the Scottish Highlands, serves as a catalyst of her climactic transformation. More than a sequence with unmistakable painterly qualities, the encounter takes place 'within' Landseer's *Monarch of the Glen* (1851)[6] [Fig. 1], the portrait of an anthropomorphized, 'monarchified' deer. The filmmaker reproduces the painting as a cinematic composition [Fig. 2] and extends the sequence towards a shot which simultaneously uses hard-focus and soft-focus photography [Fig. 3], making distinguishable a dominant (optical, remote) and a secondary (haptic, imminent) figure but also introducing into the composition a doubling and othering effect. In the last composition our eyes trace the painterly space along the diagonal axis, hence signification is realized through the perspective of the queen, occupying the blurred space of 'the other.' Her spatial position serves as a point of identification, evolving involvement and responsibility for the stag. One literally sees two monarchs in this frame and the intensity of their co-presence is not only spatial but symbolical. Their identicalness, on the one hand, alludes to the shared fate of the two entities but, on the other hand, points to the psychological moment of identifying oneself with one's 'other,' or for that matter, honouring subliminal otherness as one's own. In my understanding it is through the imposing and empowering image of

6 *Mrs Brown* also makes extensive use of Landseer's painterly universe and that of his disciple Charles Burton Barber. Nevertheless his *Queen Victoria at Osborne House* (1965) and Barber's *Queen Victoria with John Brown* are used as mere illustrative resources and are not 'woven into' the cinematic images in such a self-reflexive manner as with Frears.

the stag (as a symbol of dignity) does she discover and embrace her own symbolic other, the institutional identity she has been trying to repress. In a sense she realizes that the monarchy is just as much an integral part of Britishness as the stag belongs to the landscape, without which it would be incomplete, pathetic, unaccomplished. If Frears depicts the encounter as a kind of 'magic moment,' he only does so to accentuate the queen's inner transformation of becoming sensitive to her 'other,' the part of her personality that must touch people the same way she was touched by the radiant presence of the stag.

Frears portrays the newly found equilibrium between the monarch and the people – as the royal party joins the commemorating crowd outside Buckingham Palace – in a sequence with optical and haptic images entering into a new relationship. The first shot is taken from original news footage followed by images photographed on low-res film stock (with a video-image-like feel to it), and the sequence is concluded by frames of standard quality. Frears's conceptual use of different resolutions and textures accentuates the tension as the queen gradually enters the consensual space of the commemorators, slowly walks towards the crowd and comes within touching distance (both spatially and symbolically). She crosses the threshold beyond which communal/excessive remembering and individual/subdued mourning fade into each other, where the living drama of the moment is not yet historicised and the week-long crisis of confidence evolves into an empowerment narrative. Crossing this threshold, Frears might conclude, cherishing Diana's memory becomes a shared responsibility and her legacy – in the wish of a more accessible and spontaneous monarchy – inscribed into British identity.

Conclusions: *The King's Speech*

I regard *The King's Speech*, my last example, the most mature and acknowledged[7] of recent monarchy films dramatizing the identity crisis of the monarch and addressing the antagonism between private and institutional personae through an empowerment narrative. By mature I simply mean the clarity with which thematic issues are drawn up and narrative-aesthetic effects are employed in order to make British history accessible for global audiences. The best elements of the cinematic profession come together in the final scene of the film as George VI addresses citizens in Britain and the colonies through a radio message after the country

7 With a win-nomination ratio of 4/12 (4 Academy Awards won out of 12 nominations) *The King's Speech* is ahead of other films in the genre. Similar figures for other films are as follows: *The Queen* (1/6), *The Young Victoria* (1/3) *Elizabeth* (1/7), *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (1/3), and *Mrs Brown* (0/2).

declares war on Germany. Relying on a historical document (the recording of the king's actual broadcast), this sequence is a vivid example how fine moments of the past are dramatized, how empowerment is extended towards the future – in this case – within a triple framework: as (1) self-transcendence for a person suffering from speech disorder, (2) the advent of unity for the nation which stands supportive of its institutions, and (3) a second of clarity for liberal democracy as far as its core values and principles are concerned. *The King's Speech* historicizes the empowerment of private and national identity and capitalizes on the elemental forces working within nostalgia and the sentimental yearning for the generation of Britons who have taken an active part in WWII, yet it does not remediate this monumental past as something shaped by impersonal historical forces, instead concentrates on the personal and quotidian aspects of history.

The film makes numerous references to the British political and sociocultural context in order to *situate* its hero, yet George VI is *individuated* through his traumatised identity. Stammering is the most evident symptom of his injured self-image, a direct consequence of having been brought up at the royal court where his body was made painfully aware of its institutional role and image as an adult. Being forced to wear painful corrective splints for his knock knees and required to write with a right hand (although born left-handed) gave an early lesson to George in how the normativizing forces of history are inscribed onto one's body, how bodies are prepared for history. As a result of these traumatic interventions his speech organs literally revolt against the public voice he is expected to act out. His voice is the wound, the pre-linguistic orality, the noisy babbling, the fractured verbality as opposed to the flawless musicality of eloquent oratory. How does one arrive from the former to the latter and play along norms and rules that make him ill? Well exactly in this manner, by *playing along*, by liberating the child that has been supressed and silenced, by returning part of the self to the pre-traumatic, pre-Oedipal, 'other' existence, where Oedipus is not just the authoritative father (persistently haunting the adult George) but History itself. If Lionel Logue's speech therapy is unorthodox, it is for no other reason, but for being a unique psychotherapy; a technique that teaches the king how to play along institutional obligations as part a game, for fun. All this finds expression in the rehearsal for the all-important radio broadcast when we see and hear George the clown, the 'other' of History: an ignorant kid swearing, dancing, singing, and playfully debasing the moral message of his words. In the minutes to follow he will transform from prankster into king, swearing will be censored, singing eliminated, dancing reduced to a static posture, nevertheless his 'other' will only be overlaid and not altogether eliminated and overcoded.

I have argued above that self-transcending is achieved in a triple framework of the individual, the nation, and the ideology. Cinematic imagination captures this moment by way of orchestrating three axes of dramatic-narrative functions – the Hero, the Act, and the Morality – in the final, glamourizing-lyrical montage sequence of the film depicting a cross-section of British society as it attentively receives George's (Hero) broadcast (Act) of the causes why England declares war on Germany (Moral). These snapshots, reminiscent of genre paintings, reveal faces from various classes and ranks of society, faces that will enter the pages of history as saviours of the nation (Hero) having protected (Act) British lifestyles, values, principles, and belief systems (Moral). But beyond the home and the factory, the barracks and the gentleman's clubs there is yet another location and a community listening to George's word: the cinema Audience. It is here (in the present) that the narrative fully unfolds its empowering effects as spectators become contemporaries of those faces. Historical cinema needs this fourth axis that receives the joint efforts of the other three and raises them to the level of individual, social, political, and ideological empowerment. *The King's Speech* achieves empowerment by foregrounding a strong psychological narrative, that of self-transcendence. One of its main achievements is the elegance with which it allows us to identify with the character-centred human drama, the other is the powerful manner we are made recipients of heritage as part of a community. It certainly is good to be British! Or is it? At the time of its making, Britain – as all other developed nations – were in the midst of one of their most serious financial crisis, a crisis of confidence regarding the very foundations of our global consumer societies. Fighting the bloodiest war of history certainly requires very different resources and strategies than finding remedies for financial woes, nevertheless both demands social consensus, joint efforts and most of all placing community interests above individual concerns. While working towards these aims history might be the best, if not our only teacher.

I would conclude by saying that what binds the past to the present is the vulnerability and ambiguity of our identities. Each of the analysed films aim for empowerment: as historical narratives they perform, stage, dramatize the past in order to discover through them the values, points of identification and systems of orientation contemporary identities rely on. The past is resemiotized – given a material and abstract existence – along two, often intertwined paradigms, both of which undermine the strict methodological rigour of historiography. Mythologizing the past, rendering historical figures as heroes/heroines of a glamourizing popular memory offers rather didactic and superfluous forms of

empowerment, similar to the ones consumer culture provides. Psychologizing history, in my understanding, is a more dynamic and complex strategy of empowerment, one in which the antagonism of the intimate and the institutional is resolved through involving and immersive narratives. Either way, for long decades, cinema has drawn inspiration from history and this fascination is unlikely to end any time soon. Forcing our way into the 21st century we cross consecutive thresholds within hypermediality and globalisation, and whereas our identities are likely to become ever more fluid, it might offer reassurance that there will always be a past, a foreign country, waiting patiently to be occupied and serve us with the kind of empowerment we are willing to take.

References

Chapman, James. 2005. *Past and Present: National Identity and the British Historical Film*. London: IB Tauris.

Davies, Jude. 2001. *Diana, A Cultural History. Gender, Race, Nation and the People's Princess.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Driver, Martha W. 2004. What's Accuracy Got to Do with It? Historicity and Authenticity in Historical Film. In *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy*, eds. Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray, 19–22. Jefferson: McFarland.

Elliot, Andrew B. R. 2011. *Remaking the Middle Ages: Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World*. Jefferson: McFarland.

Higson, Andrew. 2003. *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980*. Oxford-New York: University Press.

Higson, Andrew. 2011. *Film England: Culturally English Filmmaking Since the 1990s*. London/New York: I.B.Tauris.

Lowenthal, David. 1985. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Luckett, Moya. 2000. Image and nation in 1990s British cinema. In *British Cinema of the 1990s*, ed. Robert Murphy, 88–99. London: BFI.

Marks, Laura U. 2000. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Marks, Laura U. 2002. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minneapolis: Michigan University Press.

Marx, Karl. 2002. The Leading Article of No. 179 of *Kölnische Zeitung*. In *Marx on Religion*, ed. John Raines, 28–44. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

McKechnie, Kara. 2002. Taking Liberties with the Monarch: the Royal Bio-Pic in the 1990s. In *British Historical Cinema*, eds. Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant, 217–236. London: Routledge.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1980. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.

Vidal, Belén. 2012. *Heritage Film: Nation, Genre and Representation*. New York/Chichester: Wallflower Press/Columbia University Press.

List of Figures

Figures 1–2. Edwin Landseer's painting, *Monarch of the Glen* (1851) reproduced in Stephen Frears's *The Queen*.

Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, 8 (2014) 203–214

Local Sensorium, Local Cinema: György Pálfi's Sensuous Body Politics

György Kalmár
University of Debrecen (Hungary)
E-mail: gykalmar@yahoo.com

Abstract: György Pálfi's *Hukkle* (2002) and *Taxidermia* (2006) establish markedly unique cinematic styles and richly sensorial life-worlds, which function in both films as counter-discourses opposing official history, hegemonic ideologies, and conventional patterns of (cinematic) understanding. In the present study I analyse the ways Pálfi's films communicate through non-symbolic meaning, bodily discourses, and a heavy reliance on the multisensory evocation of the local *sensorium* (Marks) and the local *habitus* (Bourdieu) so as to create significance on the margins of established, hegemonic systems of meaning, cinema, ideology and identity.

Keywords: György Pálfi, *Hukkle*, *Taxidermia*, local sensorium, local habitus.

The present paper originates in a personal experience that is as intercultural as multisensory. Two years ago I had the good fortune to spend a six months' research trip in Andalucia. When I came back after half a year's absence and my plane landed in the late summer of the Eastern-European temperate zone, I went through an experience that I can only compare to that of the narrator of Proust's *A la reserche de temps perdu* upon tasting the Madeleine reminding him of the days he spent in Combray as a child. I was picked up by a friend at the airport and went to a summer cottage. When I got out of the car, I suddenly realised that I had been really *away*: these particular smells of the forests, *this* chill of the evening, *these* sounds of nature, *this kind of* blueness of the sky were *home,* sensory experiences completely missing from the hot, sunny Mediterranean coasts of Andalucia. The concept of home appeared through an invasion of the senses (so as to use Proust's expression): it was first my body that knew that I was home.

It was this experience that first 'brought home' to me the idea that ways of being-in-the-world and ways of seeing the world, that is, sensuous impressions and key metaphors, bodily reactions, and historical experiences may be intimately interlaced. The initial hypothesis of the present paper is that these interactions

may be perceivable in cinema as well: Hungarian cinema may have a different sensuousness than Spanish cinema, for example. They may mobilize different senses, rely on different sensoriums, and evoke these for different (ideological, political, aesthetic) purposes. In this paper my intention is to show how certain pieces of contemporary Hungarian cinema – specifically the films of György Pálfi – rely on physically stored collective memories and evoke a culturally specific, local sensorium in order to undermine the ideologically laden grand narratives of a homogenized, official History.

The Local Sensorium

In his seminal work, *The Logic of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu emphasises the bodily embedded nature of one's relation to the world. Following Durkheim, who called attention to the way past experiences of a community may be stored unconsciously and may influence future social and individual behaviour, Bourdieu introduces the concept of *habitus*: "The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (1990, 54). Bourdieu's *habitus* is a sort of imprint of historical experience of a certain group, a cluster of unconscious knowledge that is "constituted in practice" (1990, 52) and stored in the body: "Practical belief is not a 'state of mind,' still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines ('beliefs'), but rather a state of the body. Doxa is the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between a *habitus* and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense. Enacted belief, instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory-pad, […] a repository for the most precious values, is the form *par excellence* of the 'blind or symbolic thought' […] which is the product of quasi-bodily dispositions" (Bourdieu 1990, 68). In other words, people with the same *habitus* (which, in Bourdieu's thought, is equal to one "group" of people) share more or less similarly conditioned "schemes of perception, thought and action" (1990, 54): they do not only *think* similarly, but also *sense* similarly.

It is not only Bourdieu, however, who points out the possibility of cultural or geographical specifications of the senses, and the interconnection of cognitive and

sensory schemas. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors actively shape the ways we live or experience. In their seminal work, *Metaphors We Live By*, they argue that: "It is as though the ability to comprehend experience through metaphor were a sense, like seeing or touching or hearing, with metaphors providing the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world. Metaphor is as much a part of our functioning as our sense of touch, and as precious" (1980, 239).

In this sense, I would argue, one can distinguish between the cinemas of different cultures not only on basis of the filmed material (the actors, dresses, locations, etc.), or cinematic techniques (like certain narrative techniques characteristic or French cinema, or the way the long take is used by Tarr or Jancsó), but also on basis of "the feel" of these films: the way the camera looks may be as significant as the look of the actors and actresses, the way sound is used may be as significant as the particular language spoken.[1] This "feel," these patterns of perception and view learned from *both* life and films – if one is to believe Bourdieu, Lakoff, and Johnson – may be stored so deeply in one's cognitive and sensory patterns, mind *and* body, that it seems completely natural, it is (in Bourdieu's often used expression) history turned into nature.

Due to the recent academic interest in sensory experience in different cultures in such diverse fields as sensorial anthropology, cultural psychology, and cultural phenomenology, it can be safely assumed today that "larger abstract cultural ideas can affect the structure of the sensorium" (Geurts 2002, 6), therefore we can talk about „the culturally specific construction of our own sensorium" (Geurts 2002, 6) on strictly scientific grounds, without any kind of essentialist conceptualization of "Westernness" or nationhood. Without attempting to outline this wide and colourful academic field, let me simply quote one fairly recent study, the insights of which strongly influence my own focus on the sensorial and bodily aspects of contemporary Hungarian cinema, Kathryn Linn Geurts's *Culture and the Senses*: "I believe that in a cultural community's sensorium we find refracted some of the values that they hold so dear that they literally make these themes or these motifs into 'body.' In other words, a cultural community's sensory order reflects aspects of the world that are so precious to the members of that community that (although they remain largely unconscious and habitual) they are the things that children

1 For a recent take on the old question of national cinemas, see Gábor Gulyás's interview with András Bálint Kovács made for and displayed at the *What is Hungarian? Contemporary answers* exhibition in Kunsthalle, Budapest (2 August – 14 October, 2012). Kovács here affirsms the possibility of distinguishing between different national cinemas, but he is sceptical about the existence of a unique Hungarian cinematic tradition.

growing up in this culture developmentally come to carry in their very bodies. So the senses, I believe, are ways of embodying cultural categories, or making into body certain cultural values or aspects of *being* that the particular cultural community has historically deemed precious and dear" (Geurts 2002, 10).

I propose to take Geurts's ideas one step further and extend her concept of the body (in which a given cultural community's values are carried) to the cinematic body as well: I argue that a cultural community's cinema may carry patterns of perception, schemas of sensation, and ways of being-in-the-world very similarly as living bodies do. As Laura U. Marks's sensitive analyses of intercultural cinema in *The Skin of the Film* clearly show, when one watches films made by people belonging to other cultural communities (with different *habitus*), one has a chance to encounter a different sensorium, a life-world where the senses operate and are systemized in different ways.

Pálfi's Sensuous Counter-Histories

I consider the theoretical possibilities of such different sensorial systems significant for the present study because in my opinion György Pálfi's two award-winning films that I wish to analyse here establish markedly unique cinematic styles and sensorial life-worlds, which function in both films as counter-discourses opposing official history, hegemonic ideologies, and conventional patterns of (cinematic) understanding. Pálfi, in other words, tends to communicate in these films through sensory impressions, non-symbolic meaning and bodies, so as to create significance on the margins of established, hegemonic systems of meaning, ideology, and identity.

As I have elaborated in more detail in *What the Body Remembers*, the importance of counter-memory, and such destabilization or bypassing of official History (understood as an idealized and homogenized narrative that excludes marginal voices) is particularly significant in case of such smaller nations as Hungary. These strategies of counter-memory and the reliance on the local sensorium may be crucial in the identity-politics of losers of historical conflicts, peoples occupied, colonised, exploited by larger forces (as it happened with Hungary with respect to the Ottoman-Turkish, the Habsburg, and the Soviet Empires), as in such situations "official" History was often a means of oppression and ideological brain-washing. Hungary's traumatic past, and centuries of occupation by foreign forces definitely seem to be connected with such characteristics of its *habitus* as the incredulity towards grand historical narratives, the way most

historical events and figures are subject to dispute and controversy, the way typical historical roles (such as hero, victim, or traitor) are often mixed, and the sceptical approach to idealized images and narratives.

The strategies of *Hukkle* and *Taxidermia* share some common characteristics in this respect, but they are not identical. *Hukkle* is set in a nameless Hungarian village, a sort of heterotopias (in the Foucauldian sense), on the margins of history and civilization. Verging on the experimental, and combining "Nat-Geo" style documentary (of people, plants, animals, and sensuously rich inanimate phenomena) with the crime genre, *Hukkle* creates a film text in which conceptual, symbolic, and narrative meanings are pushed to the background for the sake of sensuous overabundance. There is no audible dialogue in the film, which clearly limits the symbolic register, and the elements of the narrative are scattered among multisensory images of nature. *Hukkle* operates a complex, slightly experimental strategy that dislocates the humanist tradition of representation. The human figure is no longer the most important element of the frame, it is often too close or too far, medium shots are tellingly rare [Figs. 1–2]. This strategy undermines the hegemony of the human being (understood also as a culturally and historically specific figuration): the human figure is turned into a part of nature (when shown from the distance) or a phenomenal object (old hand, wrinkles on the face, young fingers). Following a Copernican or Darwinian approach that removes the human being from the centre of the story and the picture, and makes it an accidental detail or a marginal figure, the film also challenges traditional European iconography (together with its ideological apparatus). *Hukkle* often evokes inhuman perspectives: the subject of the gaze is often an animal [Fig. 3], or simply the curious, contemplative inhuman camera that operates without moral or value judgements, thirst for drama, or need of psychological motivation. The narrative of *Hukkle* (if there is one) involves the wives of the village systematically poisoning their husbands. Yet, their motivations for this is never clearly explained, the human characters do not show any sign of "human" sentiment, they do not cry when someone dies, do not show fear when poisoned. They simply go by their routines (like the animals represented), do their duties, live, work, cook, eat, and die in a most casual manner. Thus, the film "silences" what one could conventionally call the "human" aspect. This void, the lack of controlled narrative and symbolic meaning, however, is filled by a richness of phenomenologically sensitive multisensory images. *Hukkle* seems to deliberately avoid the controlled mastery of cinematic meaning practiced in what Laura U. Marks calls optical visuality, and favours haptic images instead. According to

Marks, "The ideal relationship between viewer and image in optical visuality tends to be one of mastery, in which the viewer isolates and comprehends the objects of vision. The ideal relationship between viewer and image in haptic visuality is one of mutuality, in which the viewer is more likely to lose herself in the image, to lose her sense of proportion" (2000, 184).

In my opinion, the strongly phenomenological, sensuous film-text of *Hukkle* does indeed manage to make the spectator "lose herself in the image," moreover, with this loss (of oneself and one's sense of proportion) a whole tradition of cinematic meaning and interpretation may be lost as well (a question I will shortly come back to). What seems most crucial at this point is that these sensuous, haptic images [Fig. 4] supply rich multisensory impressions without turning the signified into represented objects: it often takes a considerable time for the spectator to realise what it is that one sees. The time gap between the sensorial impression and the realization of what "thing" exactly is shown, between an image and the concept, impression and idea, opens a space for a non-controlled, non-human(istic), non-optical, non-narrative, and non-conceptual cinematic meaning, which is also affective and bodily. Marks's description of haptic, intercultural cinema suits very well this cinematic *modus operandi*: "By appealing to one sense in order to represent the experience of another, cinema appeals to the integration and commutation of sensory experience within the body. Each audiovisual image meets a rush of other sensory associations. Audiovisual images call up conscious, unconscious, and nonsymbolic associations with touch, taste, and smell, which themselves are not experienced as separate. Each image is synthesized by a body that does not necessarily divide perceptions into different sense modalities" (2000, 222).

Though Pálfi's later film *Taxidermia* seems to share the intention to side-track established, hegemonic narratives, and conventional ways of interpretation with the use of the body and sensuousness, its cinematic strategies are somewhat different. *Taxidermia* clearly tells stories: its three parts tell the stories of three generations of Hungarian men. The story of the grandfather is a story of a sex-obsessed, half-wit Marosgovány, a soldier at an army outpost (in the middle of nowhere) in the Second World-War; that of the father is about the life of the fast-eating (almost) champion Balatony Kálmán, set in the post-1945 Soviet-occupied Hungary; and the last part is about the son, Balatony Lajos(ka), the skinny, pale taxidermist son of the huge fast-eater, living in the bleak world of contemporary consumer society, the son who finally stuffs both his father and himself, turning their bodies into works of art, bodily monuments of a traumatic past.

Whereas *Hukkle* was set in the heterotopic, liminal space of a nameless Hungarian village where narratives break up and human beings disappear, *Taxidermia* does not get rid of either storytelling or recognizable historical times, we may know (more or less) which era is revisited. The film also involves dialogue, and relies strongly on symbolic and narrative elements. On the other hand, *Taxidermia* sidetracks the grand narratives of official history by the inclusion of personal fantasies, communicative memories, oral storytelling, sensuous memories, and family anecdotes. It is therefore set in a hyper-real space, where cinematic meaning is shaped by such counter-discourses as alternative histories, bodily memories, and bodily practices.

As László Strausz has apply demonstrated, *Taxidermia* does not only stage the body "as a memory site" (1), but also "each of the episodes selects a recurring, performative corporeal practice" (1) that becomes principal carriers of cinematic meaning, creating sensuous, corporeal, non-hegemonic counter-narratives. In case of the grandfather this practice is sexuality (reproduction), in case of the father it is eating, whereas in case of the son it is defecation (dealing with excrement and dead bodies) [Figs. 5–6]. From the point of view of the film's strategies of distancing from official ideologies and historical narratives it may be important to note that all three characters are overpowered by other people or by larger historical forces, all three are losers in different ways, and their outsider-existence is further emphasised by the questionable nature of the filial relationships, as the spectator may have serious doubts about the real fathers of both the fast-eating and the taxidermist Balatonys. In other words, *Taxidermia* undermines the idealized figure of the human being (inherited from humanism) and the narratives of official, "falsely redemptive" history (Lowenstein 2005, 146) by relying on bastard-narratives and the material practices of the human body. Similarly to *Hukkle*, *Taxidermia* also often applies haptic images. Its goal seem to be less radical perhaps: it does not dissolve human beings and human stories in a phenomenal world of sensory experiences, but "only" undermines hegemonic discourses about humans (and especially masculinities) by its haptic images and unusual perspectives.

By basing the characters on corporeal discourses, calling attention to the haptic, phenomenal characteristics of the characters' life-worlds, using non-idealizable bodies, and relying on non-melodramatic acting, *Taxidermia*, similarly to *Hukkle*, also effectively distances itself from that sort of idealizing representation that (from as early as the Greeks) regards the bodily, the physical, the material, and the visible as secondary to the spiritual, non-material, and non-visible.

The Senses against Sense: The Hermeneutics of the Surface

In his already quoted article Strausz argues that *Taxidermia* "addresses the issue of historical (dis)continuity" (1), without doubt a key element of Eastern-European historicity. This discontinuity (well signified by the brokenness of the patriarchal family lineage and the circling camera-work) obviously marks a distance from the grand narratives of an idealized, redemptive History. However, as I have already suggested, this is not the only means of the two films that serves the purpose of creating narratives and cinematic worlds more or less detached from hegemonic historical narratives. The little village of *Hukkle*, out of time, history and symbolic meaning, and the heterogeneous, hybrid, hyper-realistic worlds of *Taxidermia*, where fantasy and history, sensuous memory and corporeality interact in rich, but unreliable narratives are both distanced from (logocentric, idealized) Meaning as a result of their haptic visuality and sensuousness.

Though in the above quoted article Strausz performs a fairly successful "symptomatic-thematic reading" (2) of *Taxidermia*, interpreting the sexualized body as a symptom of social subjugation, and (following a similar hermeneutic tradition) Teréz Vincze in her review assumes that the point of *Hukkle* is to "tell a crime story with the help of its slowly flowing images" (2002, 113), I would argue that both films play tricky games with interpretation: with the help of the above mentioned cinematic strategies they create a distance from symptomatic readings and story-based understanding. In my opinion, one of the most exciting cinematic characteristics of Pálfi's films is the way they play off the images' haptic sensuousness against symbolic, conceptual, and narrative understanding, that is, how they use the senses to undermine sense, the Logos and control over cinematic meaning.

Vincze's above mentioned review apply shows the situation's ambiguities. On the one hand, she highlights the visual-sensuous strength of *Hukkle*, and – in order to contextualise it – distinguishes films that rely on the power of images from others that focus on narrative. However, on the other hand, she supposes that the aim of these powerful images, at the end of the day, is to tell a story. According to her, in *Hukkle* "imagery transubstantiates into narrative" (2002, 115), which statement, from the point of view of (post-)deconstructive picture theory, is equal to subjugating the sensuous power of images to the reign of the sublime Logos, privileging sense over the sensuous. The expression *transubstantiate* [*átlényegül*] clearly expresses this metaphysical heritage in which aesthetic phenomena must make *sense*, must

take up its place within the supreme Logos so as to be acknowledged. Vincze, of course, follows a long tradition of European modernist aesthetics when she holds those films in the highest esteem that simultaneously take images seriously and tell stories, films that "fill up images with thoughts" (2002, 115).

Though my personal tastes may very well coincide with those of Vincze, I would argue that *Hukkle* (and partly *Taxidermia* as well) share some experimental qualities and open a more or less new chapter in contemporary Hungarian filmmaking precisely because they wish to break loose from the Logos: the sensual impressions they make often deliberately exceed the realm of sense, they create a surplus of multisensory affect that cannot be contained in the realm of conceptual or narrative meaning. I agree with such film theoreticians as Steven Shaviro, who argue (throughout *The Cinematic Body*, 1993, for example) that cinema always produces such an affective surplus; yet, I think in Pálfi's films this also becomes a strategy to avoid, bypass, or radically destabilize logocentric meaning. Pálfi's films play complex, ambiguous games with meaning and interpretation: they are simultaneously seductive film-texts, calling on interpretation in order to find meaning where meaning is clearly endangered (as Vincze has rightly observed), yet through the above listed formal qualities they also make sure that such attempts can never reach totalizing conclusions.

Interestingly, Vincze also quotes a sentence from Béla Balázs that points out precisely this anti-metaphysical "flatness" of the film (so as to use Laurent Berlant's term), its difference from the hermeneutic tradition that cannot help seeking for a secret, underlying, logocentric, "deep" meaning: "Film is the art of the surface… the psychology and the significance of film are not based on the 'deeper content' of thoughts: they are always visible to the eye and completely perceivable on the surface" (Vincze 2002, 114). In my opinion, *Taxidermia* and *Hukkle* are par excellence examples of this sort of "flat" signification that avoids the hermeneutic of depth through the overabundance of non-narrative sensuous impressions.

From a historical perspective, one could argue that film's surface-based signification took time to be recognized. In a two thousand years old hermeneutical tradition that has been obsessed with "the beyond" from Plato and Aristotle on, the "art of surface" is definitely something new. Plato's cave may take on new significance from this point of view: Plato's "prisoners," tied down in the cave, watching the mime show (staged by Plato as deceived fools for not understanding the origin of the shadows on the cave's wall) may be the only ones in this setting who actually take sensuous impressions (images) seriously: the wise "philosopher" (the prototype of the Western intellectual), who wishes to lead these people from

sensuous illusion to the invisible truth of the Logos, is someone who has never given oneself over to the lure of the moving images. The philosopher looks at these fleeting, material, sensory impressions only in order to find something *behind* them, use them as symptoms of an underlying *other* meaning, some sort of immaterial, invisible, "deep," and usually universal meaning.

The influence of this kind of symptomatic interpretation or hermeneutics of depth in cinema studies has not vanished in the 20th century with the birth of such anti-metaphysical intellectual trends as postmodernism, poststructuralism, or deconstruction. Psychoanalytic film theory and criticism – maybe often in spite of its intentions – have further prolonged its influence. The concept of the unconscious, the distinction between latent and manifest meaning, and the practice of symptomatic reading (that leads from manifest to latent, surface to depth, sensorial to sense) have effectively extended the life of this old hermeneutical model that has always been sceptical and even hostile towards the sensual, the material, and the affective. Jonathan Culler's words about "symptomatic interpretation" summarize well one's possible theoretical reservations about the above mentioned hermeneutics of depth: "'symptomatic' interpretation […] treats the text as the symptom of something non-textual, something supposedly 'deeper,' which is the real source of interest […]. Symptomatic interpretation neglects the specificity of the object – it is a sign of something else – and so is not very satisfying as a mode of interpretation" (1997, 69).

Pálfi's body cinema (and Gergely Pohárnok's camera-work) produce such richly sensuous surfaces, abound in such strongly affective, yet non-narrative elements, that undermine the legitimacy of symptomatic interpretation. These images may or may not play roles in story-telling, may or may not be filled up with thoughts, but they constantly call attention to the affective-sensuous dimension of cinema, to that realm of meaning that lies beyond the reach of the Logos, that is, to the visible realm lying naked, unconcealed, on the surface, here right in front of our eyes. This visible, non-logocentric, non-metaphysical surface takes the viewer to a hyper-realistic jungle of multisensory impressions that evoke corporeal memories from the Eastern-European spectator. They evoke the local sensorium, together with its bodily-based, non-controllable *habitus*, a whole way of being in the world, a complex, yet unreflected approach that makes the cinematic experience for most Eastern-European viewers an especially unique, strongly affective experience.

References

Berlant, Laurent. 2012. Structures of Unfeeling: *Mysterious Skin.* Keynote lecture at the 3rd International RHSS Conference in Zadar, Croatia, on 6th Spetember, 2012.

Bourdieu, Pierre.1990. *The Logic of Practice.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Culler, Jonathan. 1997. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Geurts, Kathryn Linn. 2002. *Culture and the Senses. Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kalmár György. What the body remembers. The Memories of Eastern-European Body Cinema: Pálfi György's Taxidermia. *Loci Memoriae Hungaricae – The Theoretical Foundations of Hungarian "lieux de mémoire" Studies.* To be published, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó.

Lakoff, George, Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By.* Chicago: U of Chicago P.

Lowenstein, Adam. 2005. *Shocking Representations: Historical Trauma, National Cinema and the Modern Horror Film.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Marks, Laura U. 2000. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Strausz László. 2011. Archaeology of Flesh: History and Body-Memory. *Taxidermia. Jump Cut* no. 53 (Summer)

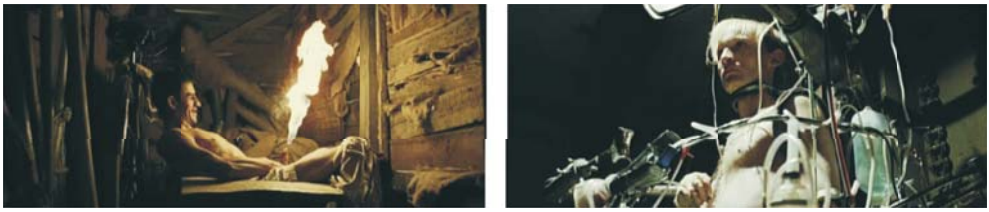
http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc53.2011/strauszTaxidermia/. Last accessed at 12. 03. 2014.

Vincze Teréz. 2002. Gondolkodó képek. Pálfi György Hukkle című filmjéről. *Dunánál* no. 10: 113–115.

List of Figures:

Figures 1–4. György Pálfi: *Hukkle* (2002).

Figures 5–6. György Pálfi: *Taxidermia* (2006).



Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

The scientifc journal of Sapientia University publishes original papers and deep surveys in several areas of sciences written in English.
Information about the appropriate series can be found at the Internet address http://www.acta.sapientia.ro.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae
Film and Media Studies

Sapientia University

Scientia Publishing House

ISSN 2065-5924
http://www.acta.sapientia.ro

Information for authors

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies publishes only original, previously unpublished articles in English in all fields of film and media studies. All papers are peer reviewed. The series is published in 1-2 volumes annually. Papers published in current and previous volumes can be found in Portable Document Format (pdf) form at the address: http://www.acta.sapientia.ro.

Articles should be submitted via e-mail to the following address: acta-film@acta.sapientia.ro

Please submit your article together with the following information about yourself: a) academic affiliation (i.e. official name of the university or research institute where you work, together with its location: city and country); b) your contact e-mail address.

Submit a short abstract of your article (approx. 150-250 words).

Please send your article as an A4 Word document (.doc or .docx).

In case you want to submit pictures together with your article (preferably screenshots from the films referred to in the text): a) please send the pictures separately in jpg format; b) insert the pictures in the order you want to use them into the Word document at the end of the article in a List of Figures, add captions. If you want to use copyrighted pictures or extensive quotations, you need to submit to the publisher letters granting permission for extensive quotation and the use of illustrations.

Articles should generally be between 4000 and 6000 words long.

Detailed information regarding the general style and referencing format can be found at the address: http://www.acta.sapientia.ro/acta-film/film-main.htm.

The submitted papers should not be considered for publication by other journals. The corresponding author is responsible for obtaining the permission of coauthors and of the authorities of institutes, if needed, for publication, the Editorial Board disclaiming any responsibility.

Each author is entitled to an issue containing his paper free of charge. No reprints will be available.

Contact address and subscription:
Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies
RO 400112 Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Str. Matei Corvin nr. 4.
Email: acta-film@acta.sapientia.ro

Printed by Gloria Printing House
Director: Péter NAGY