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Film Journal8

Crossing over Genres and Forms

Julia Echeverria and Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot

Guest Editors

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Helen E. Mundler is Associate Professor in English Studies *(maître de conférences HDR, 11e section)*. She obtained a first class degree from Durham in 1992, an M Phil from Strathclyde in 1994, a PhD in Strasbourg in 1998, and an *Habilitation* (higher doctorate) in Nanterre in 2014. She works on a range of contemporary fiction. In 2016, she published a book entitled *The Otherworlds of Liz Jensen: A Critical Reading* (Rochester NY, Boydell and Brewer), and this led her to study the first film adaptation of Jensen's work. Her other areas of specialisation include the work of A.S. Byatt, on which she published a book in 2003 *(Intertextualité dans l'Oeuvre d'A.S. Byatt*, Paris, Harmattan), climate-change fiction, on which she will be publishing a book in 2022 (*Rewritings of the Noah Myth in the 21St Century: New Readings from a Drowning World,* Rochester NY, Boydell and Brewer), and creative writing. She has published two novels *(Homesickness*, Stockport, Dewi Lewis, 2003, and *L'Anglaise*, Newbury, Holland House, 2018). A third novel *Three Days by the Sea*, will be published in May 2022 (Newbury, Holland House). She has also published several short stories.

Introduction

Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot and Julia Echeverria

Many borders to cross … some have already been outlined in issue 7 of the journal, actual geographical borders as well as historical, political, social and gender ones, and now time has come to examine virtual and metafictional ones. One could contend that, on film, all frontiers are virtual, as they and their possible (or impossible) crossings are but represented and abstracted from reality. Yet the objects of study here make a self-conscious attempt to depict the border-crossing dynamics existing between reality and its multiple representations.

The crossings of the frontiers between, on the one hand, the filmic space, the film narrative and the visual and aural pageant the spectator is supposed to get immersed in and, on the other, the latter's awareness of its fictionality generally involve a rupture of the realistic illusion, and a disruption of the "willing suspension of disbelief" Coleridge described as the novel reader's essential position. However, the crossings go both ways since, when the spectator forgets about their surroundings and gets immersed in the world of fiction, he or she steps beyond the divide between their reality and the filmic one, only to step back into the "real" world moments later. Depending on various factors, either material ones, like different cases of interruptions, or cognitive ones, as when the spectator starts analysing the film or becomes aware of the production process, the crisscrossing activity can be constant and intense. This intensified crisscrossing may occur, for example, in the case of academics "reading" a film text for their research, even if it (ideally in the classic Hollywood model) may be reduced to one incursion into the filmic realm, the length of which would coincide with that of the film. Hence, a definition of the spectator's involvement in a film that can be but fluid and infinitely varied, as the "spectator in fabula," to paraphrase Eco,[1] crosses the symbolic divide between film and watcher times and times again.

Tex Avery's incredibly inventive 1946 cartoon, *Northwest Hounded Police*,[2] offers a striking illustration of our concerns when the runaway wolf Droopy is chasing actually jumps over the film border and back again to take shelter in a movie theatre showing an MGM cartoon that opens on

[1] Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula ou la coopération interprétative dans les textes narratifs*, traduction française, Paris: Grasset, 1985 (1979).

[2] US animated short film directed by Tex Avery, produced by Fred Quimby, MGM, August 1946, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6e5qoy

Droopy greeting the wolf thus: "Boo you!" (05:06-05:28) – a perfect *mise en abyme* of possible crossings of the "fourth wall" or interface between films and their audiences. Another perfect and similarly enjoyable representation of such a crossing can be seen in the *Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, 1985), in which the protagonist attends so many screenings of the eponymous film that she attracts a character's attention, lures him into the theatre and then is drawn into the film within the film.

Woody Allen's film is quoted by Céline Murillo as she introduces her study of the "risky game" Jim Jarmusch plays with his spectators, who are successively, indeed almost simultaneously, drawn into the fiction *and* reminded they are watching a film. As her survey offers many precise analyses of the different degrees and modes of spectatorial involvement and is extensively grounded in theory, we have chosen it as an inaugural essay in this selection of contributions dealing with intergeneric and intermedial issues. The articles derive from the superb SERCIA Conference Wendy Everett hosted in Bath in 2011. However, while this foreword means to be brief and subservient to the authors whose texts we are happy and proud to present, we would like to evoke a few mechanisms of self-reflexivity that are explored by the authors in the following individual essays.

First, as films are watched, moments of intimacy may occur between their "text" and the spectator's consciousness, especially when the latter's senses are awakened by different signs working in a way not very different from the famous Proustian "madeleine" or Venetian pavement in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. During SERCIA's 2012 Conference on Intimacy, Dominique Sipière showed how the spectators of *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) could realize, thanks to a shot of Judy Barton/Kim Novak in a robe and walking bare-footed on Scottie's/James Stewart's wool carpet, that the latter had indeed undressed her, as the image on screen conjures up memories of the sensation of wool on bare skin and sensual connotations translating the character's desire for Judy.[3] Far from being purely visual, film can relate to all our senses, indirectly in the case of touch, taste and smell,[4] and directly in the case of hearing.[5] The infinitely varied degrees and modes of involvement act along paradoxical lines as the spectator's consciousness wavers on the razor's edge between immersion and reflexivity: an actor's voice, a tune,[6] a few notes from a song you recognize, the spectacle of rain trickling down leaves or a mouth-watering shot of a bubbling casserole are enough to trigger sensory memory together with cognitive activity. This sensory input draws you into the fiction while activating subjective thoughts, thus reinforcing both the realistic illusion and your awareness of being a spectator.

Other instances of paradoxical crossings would be those moments when an actor or actress/character seems to address the onlooker beyond the screen, as Céline Murillo writes in her analysis of Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive*. When a film like *Annie Hall* (Woody Allen, 1977) begins with a medium shot of a man who is known as the film's director and an ex-stand-up comedian standing against a white backdrop and telling jokes to the invisible audience he faces, that first contact establishes a special relationship in which the spectator hardly forgets he or she is watching Woody Allen introducing his new film. Moments later, the second scene shows the actor/director as character

[3] Dominique Sipière, « Petite grammaire de l'intime : l'hélicoptère, le microscope, la voiture qui fume et les pieds de Judy Barton », in Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot, David Roche, *De l'intime dans le cinéma anglophone*, Condé sur Noirot: CinémAction, 2015.

[4] Thomas Elsaesser, Malte Hagener, *Film Theory, An Introduction through the Senses*, New York and London: Routledge, 2015 (2010).

[5] Michel Chion, *Un art sonore, le cinéma. Histoire, esthétique, politique*, Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2003.

[6] Céline Murillo, David Roche, "Unheard Possibilities: Reappraising Classical Film Music Scoring and Analysis. An Introduction," *Miranda*, 22, 2021.

Alvy Singer auditioning a bad comedian. The inaugural address fittingly introduces Allen's special brand of fiction and the illusion of entering the film space is then potentially established thanks to the spectator's capacity at understanding, or better, comprehending such ironies as the basis of their enjoying the film.

In a different way, camera looks,[7] which also address the viewer, will create an illusion of proximity and yet deepen the mystery of what happens on the interface between a film and its spectator. The smile and camera look of Noodles/Robert de Niro at the end of *Once Upon a Time in America* (Sergio Leone, 1984)[8] have been extensively commented upon, yet if the address actually draws the viewer into the filmic space, it is only to trigger their thoughts by challenging him or her into solving the enigma of that smile and of the disappearance of Noodles' alter ego and nemesis. The final address of the film shows Noodles withdrawn into an opium dream the spectator cannot share in despite their illusion that the character is summoning them into the fiction.

To sum up those few remarks on the blurring of the frontier between the spectator and the film, the ultimate representation of the former's paradoxical modes of involvement can be found in the *mises en abyme* of the cinematic spectacle that mimic the crossing of the divide between the diegetic space and the theatre. Years after the already quoted *Purple Rose of Cairo*, the *finale* of Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) illustrates the ambiguities and riches of such meta-filmic strategies. Here, the diegetic spectators are Hitler/Martin Wuttke and his clique. They are thoroughly enjoying the spectacle of one of their heroes shooting down dozens of enemies when, suddenly, the theatre's owner Shosanna Dreyfus/Mélanie Laurent avenges her family's massacre at the hands of Nazi colonel Hans Landa/Christoph Waltz by using highly inflammable film as ideal kindle and fuel on the Nazi theatre audience. As Tarantino's spectators enjoy the massacre in their turn, the *mise en abyme* complexifies and possibly mitigates their pleasure. Shosanna's story, and history itself, indeed justify the glee one can feel at getting rid thus of the utterly evil (if only!), yet the fact that the spectators find themselves in the same position as the villains turned victims denounces their satisfaction while making them aware, on the one hand, of the totally illusionary nature of their experience and, on the other hand, of the darker side of the pleasure induced by the spectacle of violence.

In other words, the moments when the spectator witnesses or experiences such blurring or crossing of the frontier between their spheres and the worlds and stories films build can be seen as manifestations of the oscillation between belief and disbelief Octave Mannoni summed up in his famous "I know, of course, and yet…"[9]

This meta-filmic invitation to cross the screen frontier was already explored by early cinema. Long before the spectacular, self-reflexive theatre scene of *Inglorious Basterds*, and before the diegetic screen jumps of the already mentioned characters in Tex Avery's MGM cartoon and Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, Buster Keaton had toyed with the idea of screen crossings with his character of the projectionist in *Sherlock Junior* (1924). In it, Keaton falls asleep while projecting a film in a movie theatre and, in his dream, he walks up to the stage, goes through the screen and enters the film realm. As in dreams, the film-within-the-film's settings and the characters' faces change and overlap, perplexing a disoriented Keaton and underscoring the dreamy quality of cinema. Keaton's film incursion blurs the physical border that separates the movie stage from the audience, granting depth to the

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[7] Marc Vernet, "The Look at the Camera," *Cinema Journal* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 1989), 48–63, published by University of Texas Press, https://doi.org/10.2307/122511.
[8] Adrian Martin, *Once Upon a Time in America*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019 (1998).
[9] « Je sais bien, mais quand même », Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou L'autre scène*, Paris: Seuil, 1985 (1969), 21. (Our translation).

screen and bringing cinema closer to live theatre. Keaton's ability to jump in and out of the film turns the screen not into a border but into a threshold that connects the audience to the story in a self-conscious way.

In the second article of this issue, Fabrice Lyczba uses Keaton's memorable scene to introduce his discussion on fade-in prologues. This 1920s practice consisted in short theatrical pieces that were performed before and sometimes during the intermissions of film projections and that were usually thematically related to the films they accompanied. Not unlike Keaton's play with the screen-turned-stage, as Lyczba argues, fade-in prologues reflect the proximity of theatre and cinema in its early stages and the easy fluctuations spectators could experience between one and the other. The blurring of frontiers between the two artforms encourages a more active mode of spectatorship, one in which the audiences are invited to reflect on the multilayered reach of stories and their expansion beyond the limits set by the screen and the stage.

The scene with Keaton's projectionist epitomizes the crossing, at the same time, of the frontier that separates dreams from reality, underscoring thus the oneiric quality of cinema. This type of crossing is explored in detail by some of the articles featured in this issue. Pierre Floquet's essay on *Alice in Wonderland* (Tim Burton, 2010) relates Alice's fluctuation between reality and fantasy to the film's use of CGI, as is further explained below. For her part, Nicole Cloarec analyses the British miniseries *The Singing Detective* (Jon Amiel, 1986), in which the protagonist, a writer suffering from a skin disease and stuck in a hospital bed, mixes dreams, memories and the fictional universe of his new detective novel. The series blends different diegeses together and, in it, as in Keaton's dream sequence, space, time and characters crisscross and intermingle. Cloarec applies Gérard Genette's notion of metalepsis – the transgression of narrative levels – [10] to explain this breaching of narrative frontiers in what she refers to as a "mindscape" where passageways and transitional spaces are, in the end, more relevant than boundaries. As Cloarec argues, metaleptic devices call attention to the artificiality of the process of representation and encourage spectators to adopt, once again, an active cognitive position.

Apart from these narrative and diegetic crossings of frontiers, this special issue includes essays that focus on the blending of cinematic genres in specific case studies. In these instances, the crossings occur at an extradiegetic level, as they depend on critical considerations based on pre-existing labels which, as film genre theorists have consistently established,[11] are but conventions that often result in hybrid crossovers. Since genres provide frames of reference that shape spectators' expectations about a film, their mixture and hybridity may call attention to the artificiality of the film and the medium itself, thus resulting in self-conscious exercises. In her article on Vincente Minnelli's *Some Came Running* (1958), Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard uses the concept of "cross-fertilization" to examine the intergeneric combination of the melodrama with elements taken from the musical. Through an analysis of the use of bright colours, typical of the musical, and of moral family and class issues characteristic of the melodrama, Costa de Beauregard outlines Minnelli's filmmaking evolution and contends that this generic crossover ultimately typifies the characters' diegetic crossing of social class barriers. The melodrama, mostly a black-and-white genre so far, benefits from the spectacular elements of the musical and vice versa, a generic miscegenation that underscores the rich possibilities of hybridity.

In another instance of generic crossing, Julie Assouly analyses the Coen brothers' neo-noir *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001) by focusing on the figure of its protagonist, a barber. Assouly traces the

[10] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.
[11] See Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, London: Macmillan, 1999 and Steve Neale, Genre and Hollywood, London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

origins and evolution of this emblematic, usually benevolent, figure in US popular culture. The article describes the mythical meanings attached to the barber as depicted by painters of the American way of life like Norman Rockwell and Edward Hopper and film genres like the Western and *film noir*, where the barber was typically represented as a meek secondary character. Assouly argues that the Coen's film transgresses these connotations of subservience by placing the barber as the protagonist and, at the same time, by gathering the sometimes-conflicting meanings attached to it in a blending that is also reflected in the film's hybrid tone, dark humour and intertextual combination of low and high cultural references. Assouly claims that the Coen's barber exemplifies the way this figure cuts across artistic and generic borders while, at the same time, it is closely associated with the Frontier and the first US settlers, that is, with an ingrained sense of nation and nationality.

These generic and artistic crossings are further explored by Christophe Gelly through another figure, in this case a literary one, that transcends borders: Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote. Standing at the intersection between reality and fiction, Christophe Gelly looks into the special case of *Lost in La Mancha* (Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe, 2002), the "making of" Terry Gilliam's never-finished project *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*. Even though a different version of the project was eventually filmed and released by Gilliam under the same title in 2018, Gelly examines the reflexive and postmodern potential of Fulton and Pepe's work about the 2000 failed production. As Gelly contends, the work stands at the crossroads between two genres: the "making (or *unmaking*) of" a film and a documentary about the failure to make it. Gelly claims that fiction, in the shape of the never-released film, progressively takes over the documentary, since, in it, Gilliam the creator is subtly compared to Don Quixote, as if he were possessed by the character's idealistic spirit in his "fight against the windmills of reality." Thus, reality and fiction intertwine, with the actors and crew becoming fictional characters in a story about failure and then even spectators of such failure. In the end, as Gelly states, the work becomes an entity on its own, a postmodern comment on a film that was never fully completed and, therefore, does not even exist as such.

Just like the US barber and Don Quixote, who travel across borders, genres, and time, Dominique Sipière's article delves into another literary figure that crosses a wide variety of media and dichotomies: Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. As Sipière states, the renowned fictional detective has jumped out of the literary pages to become almost a "real" person, a "fixed label" with his own devoted museum in London's Baker Street, thus defying the limits of fiction. Ironically, Holmes performs the opposite crossing from that of Buster Keaton described above in *Sherlock Junior*: he jumps out of fiction and into reality, becoming a familiar signifier with its very idiosyncratic features. Sipière uses Linda Hutcheon's cultural concept of the "meme" (which, in turn, she takes from Richard Dawkins's theory of cultural transmission)[12] to outline the many different adaptations and takes on the detective. Sipière explores the extent to which this figure has been, and continues to be, reimagined and reinvented in each new version, claiming that it pushes the borders of its own literary constraints.

Finally, in the last essay of the present collection, Pierre Floquet moves forward his questioning of the technical and artistic merging of live actors and computer-generated imagery in a study of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*. Where Walt Disney had transformed a book into an animation film, thus crossing the line between literature and cinema, the page and the screen, Tim Burton brings the venture one step further and uses Computer Graphics (CG) to picture shifts between realistic and fantastic episodes, blurring the transitions to mirror Alice's and, possibly, the spectator's wonderings at

[12] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, London: Routledge, 2006; Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016 (1976).

the degree of reality of what they experience. His study of the CG Red Queen combining digital and natural components leads to a reflection on the evolution of acting, with the technique reinforcing the essential hybridity of actors and actresses merging the personal and the acting in their personas, with Jean-Baptiste Massuet's research[13] as a theoretical frame.

The latter's studies on the encounter between animation and live movie seems to point at a progressive abolition of the frontier between photography and animation thanks to digital technology. In the last decade, this has raised concerns about a loss of the specificity of cinema as an art devoted to the recording of live pictures.[14] Animation creatures, even – or maybe especially – hybrid ones like Tim Burton's Red Queen, consciously emphasize the digital manipulation of images. And yet, as seen with the example of Buster Keaton's dreamy projectionist, early twentieth-century audiences were no strangers to this reflexive presentation of cinema as a construct, and this would not prevent them from enjoying the original "flicks" as hybrid sources of pleasure, especially when associated with a piano player in the theatre. The different essays of this volume all tend to show how films are built through constant crossings, between their audience and themselves, between genres, media and mediums, enabling forms and ideas to circulate and expectations to evolve. At a time when politics, climate change, and now pandemics seem to make the circulation of human beings more and more dangerous and difficult, these cinematic frontiers remain open in a positive form of cultural globalization.

[13] Jean-Baptiste Massuet, *Le dessin animé au pays du film: Quand l'animation graphique rencontre le film en prises de vues réelles*, Rennes : PUR, 2017.
[14] Shane Denson and Julia Leyda, *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, Reframe, 2016.

No Suture: Screen Borders in Jim Jarmusch's Films

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Introduction

When we watch a film, do we mentally cross the screen border, like the heroine in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, 1985), and then remain in a closed fictional space until the end titles tell us to leave our seats, or remain conscious of the film being projected on the screen as a flat surface, with no other world beyond? For many of us the first case would prove we are watching a good film, while the second would mean we are watching a bad one.

However, there are films whose narration and fictional worlds hint both at their own presence and at the physical presence of the screen as a flat, impenetrable surface, at times pulling us inside the fiction and at others excluding us. This is the risky game Jim Jarmusch has been playing with his spectators ever since *Stranger than Paradise* (1984). In his films, we are both drawn into the fictional world of the film (thanks to the emotional content, the identification with the characters, and the power of the music) and reminded that we are watching a film; at times we are told so in so many words, at times we are trapped outside the fictional space by certain filmic devices. His works exemplify this tension for a variety of reasons. First, because they represent what Pascale Ferran[1] calls "film du milieu": independently produced, stylistically innovative, and yet narrative, fictional and shown in cinemas and, in most cases, attracting enough spectators who remain seated to the end of the film, and might even come back to see Jarmusch's next work, and in doing so, make his filmmaking modestly profitable. Secondly, these films dwell on the question of the subject: the I. The cinema viewer's I and the Eye of the camera or of the character (depending on the identification process) may indeed coincide, especially when we analyse filmic reception with semiological and

[1] Pascale Ferran, "Violence économique et cinéma français," *Le Monde.fr*, 26 février 2007, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2007/02/26/violence-economique-et-cinema-francais-par-pascale-ferran_876347_3232.html.

psychoanalytical tools.

If we define a border with the tools of topology, it is seen as the limit of a closed space. In the physical world, the screen is the border of a two-dimensional space in which the film is projected. On the other side of the border, there is a three-dimensional world that we usually call "reality." Such a view goes against the cinemagoer's experience, as is clearly shown in Woody Allen's film, where the screen is the border between two three-dimensional spaces. In André Gardies's work on cinematic space,[2] the screen is, clearly, if not a border, an interface separating two half spheres, one belonging to the non-filmic reality, the other, mentally rebuilt and depending on the spectator's presence and gaze. This puts two seemingly heterogeneous spaces on the same level. Whether the hemispheres are connected, separated, or united depends on the way our eye works: but what do they tell us about the I, about us as a cinematic subject?

Our topic connects the physical situation of the cinemagoer with the topology of psychological entities as defined by Jacques Lacan, in which the orders of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic are thought of as places in our psyche that define our mental structures. He develops these ideas in the *R.S.I.* seminar (1974–1975),[3] and in the *L'Insu*[4] seminar. When applying Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller to filmic analysis through the notion of suture in *Les Cahiers du cinéma,*[5] theoretician and film critic Jean-Pierre Oudart was already linking psychoanalytical theory and film viewing. Slavoj Žižek bases much of his thought on this principle. French psychoanalyst Serge Tisseron[6] moves very smoothly from the creation of mental images to the reception of cinematic image, as does Madelon Sprengnether in *Crying at the Movies*.[7] Using all this background as our underpinning, our topology will show how the screen can work actively as a border that is felt and can at times be crossed.

The basic observation of our complete involvement in a movie corresponds to the filmic interpretation of the system of suture as defined by Jean-Pierre Oudart, where the cinematographic subject's place depends on the cinematographic discourse and the Eye/I is at the centre of the perceived world, thanks to the use of the shot-reverse shot pattern as explained by Slavoj Žižek in *The Fright of Real Tears*:

> Firstly, the spectator is confronted with a shot, finds pleasure in it; in an immediate, imaginary way, and is absorbed by it. Then this full immersion is undermined by the awareness of the frame as such: what I see is only a part and I do not master what I see. I am in a passive position, the show is run by the Absent One (or rather, Other) who manipulates images behind my back.
>
> What then follows is a complementary shot which renders the place from which the Absent One is looking, allocating this place to its fictional owner, one of the protagonists. (In short, one passes thereby from imaginary to symbolic, to a sign, the

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[2] André Gardies, *L'Espace au cinéma*, Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1993, 81.
[3] *Jacques Lacan, RSI : séminaire, 1974-1975, Séminaire 1974–1975*, Paris: Association freudienne internationale, 2002.
[4] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, 1, Points 5, Paris: Seuil, 1992, 177.
[5] Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Suture I & II," *Les Cahiers Du Cinéma*, May 1969.
[6] Serge Tisseron, *Comment Hitchcock m'a guéri : que cherchons-nous dans les images ?* Paris: Albin Michel, 2003.
[7] Madelon Sprengnether, *Crying at the Movies: A Film Memoir*, vol. 1, Saint Paul (Minn.): Graywolf Press, 2002.

> second shot does not simply follow the first one, it is signified by it.) When the second shot replaces the first one, the "Absent One" is transferred from the level of the enunciation to the level of diegetic fiction.[8]

In a classical movie, you see a speaker from a given point of view, while the addressee is not visible in the frame, and the effect which is produced is called "the Absent One." We ask: "Who is this person talking to?" and start wondering about form, that is to say, cinematic enunciation rather than content. However, when in the reverse shot we are confronted with a character standing where "the Absent One" was supposedly standing, what was perceived as a problem of enunciation is now transferred to the level of fiction and dialogue. The enunciative system, the apparatus, becomes invisible, as is normal in classical Hollywood cinema[9] for instance. The onscreen space is continuous: there is no "gap," no hole, no visible manipulation of images; we, the spectators, are at the centre of a fictional world that unfolds by itself. The borders mentioned in the introduction are now far away from us, they are not relevant to our understanding of the film. Hence, one hypothesis of this paper is that in mainstream cinema the screen is not really a border as it is not relevant to the spectators' reception.[10] In the same way, this corresponds to a psychological situation where the subject is complete and centred on her or himself. The system of suture accounts for our pleasurable involvement in many films, that we probably compare (but neither Žižek nor Oudart go as far as this) with a total self-centredness, the absence of a "hole" in our psyche, the complete mastery of language – in other words to the delicious wishful thinking of a comfortable position from which nothing escapes. In the words of Roland Barthes, sutured filmic texts are "*textes de plaisir*"[11] and not "*textes de jouissance*."[12]

No Suture: Cinematic Device(s) to Decentre the Cinematographic Subject

Jarmusch's motto could instead be "No Suture," and "Let's Cross the Border." The first cinematic borders to be clearly experienced in his films are in *Stranger than Paradise* (1984), his first film to be distributed (even if earlier, he had made *Permanent Vacation* (1980), which was only exhibited in cinemas after he had been awarded a Golden Bear in Berlin for *Stranger than Paradise*). The film deconstructs the system of suture by renouncing the shot-reverse-shot pattern while making sure that we expect it; it also refuses editing, since every shot is a long take separated from the next by a black screen. In several sequences, it stages two characters and a dialogue to ensure we expect to see the speakers exchange positions on the screen and the reaction on their faces. But none of this

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[8] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory*, London: British Film Institute, 2001, 32.
[9] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1988, 50.
[10] According to Louis Seguin, the cinema is an ontological machine that allows us "to cross the mirror," while the price to pay is a form of closure: "But there a price to reproduction, the price is confinement: it is the limits imposed by making use of the ontological machine, of the mechanics of transcendence that bring spectators though the looking glass": our translation from *Louis Seguin, L'espace du cinéma: hors-champ, hors-d'oeuvre, hors-jeu*, Ombres-cinéma, Toulouse: Ombres, 1999, 44.
[11] Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte*, Points, Paris: Seuil, 1982, 25.
[12] Ibid., 22.

happens.

In *Stranger than Paradise*, Eva, a Hungarian girl, flies from Budapest to New York in order to visit her aunt who lives in Cleveland, yet before she can travel there, she has to stay for a while at her cousin's apartment in Manhattan. In the sequences that take place inside the apartment, the short camera movements are limited to panning and reframing, accompanied by zooms. Even if we are used to rebuilding mentally the continuity of the fictional space, it takes us four or five sequences to be able to map the apartment (00:17).

We then realize that the world unfolding on the screen contains a kind of hole, since part of its space is only a construct of our minds: this becomes clear when Eva is looking towards the camera inquiringly as if to try and take in the smallness and shabbiness of the rooms she has to occupy for ten days. This hole is the place where "I," the cinematographic subject, am standing, on my side of the "fourth wall," outside the fictional world and in front of the screen as a border, a limit I am not invited to cross, since there are no reverse shots. In this instance, the hole in the fictional space (first due to the lack of reverse shot and second to the black screens that isolate each sequence), means that the off-screen space will never find its way back onto the screen: the world cannot be grasped totally, some of it will escape. This hole corresponds to the Lacanian Real, which, by definition, is what cannot be imagined or understood. According to Jacques Lacan, "The Real is what resists symbolisation absolutely."[13] As Susan Hayward explains:

> The Real order refers to what is outside the subject, what is "out there," what the subject bumps up against but does not make sense of immediately – because it cannot or it will not. The Real Order is what subsists outside symbolisation, what has been expelled or foreclosed by the subject. If something gets excluded from the Symbolic, it appears in the Real. It is what the subject is unable to speak, so it is like a hole in the Symbolic order. Only through reconstruction can the Real be understood.[14]

Indeed, experiencing such a gap may result in either a form of "angst" or, even worse, the impossibility of locating the Ego/self/I at the centre of one's world (with the impossibility of using language as an extreme consequence). The subject cannot be built:[15] a question that has fascinated Jim Jarmusch from the very beginning of his career when he shot with fellow screenwriter Sarah Driver a film about schizophrenia called *You are not I* (1981).

Letting in Non-Dualism

In *Stranger than Paradise,* Jarmusch decentres us and makes us aware of the gaps. We can relate this to our own, and very limited experience of sensing the Real, to the cracks in our awareness.

[13] Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique*, 1953–1954, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester, 1st American ed., vol. 1, Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. English, New York: W. W. Norton, 1988, 66.

[14] Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, Second ed., Routledge Key Guides, London New York: Routledge, 2000, 282.

[15] In Lacanian theory, the subject, I, is not a given but a construct, as explained by the "mirror stage" (1949) and depends on images.

Decentring the self goes hand-in-hand with portraying characters that are foreigners who do not master language completely, such as Eva, or the main character in Jarmusch's first film *Permanent Vacation*, or even his apparently schizophrenic mother.

In *Stranger than Paradise*, the hole of the Real is hinted at through the lack of suture. The result is that we are aware we are watching a movie: the screen is a border, a barrier for us. For example, later in the film, the three characters are facing Lake Erie, turning their back on us and leaning against a black railing: the lake is a hard, white surface, on which our gaze bounces, with no counter shot to allow us to cross the border underlined by the railing (52:08-53:47).

Paradoxically, this dual opposition between the spectators' world and the fiction lets us see something rather amorphous, such as the void of the lake or, earlier in the film, the wasteland in front of the airport. These are "non-spaces" or "non-places,"[16] for example, during her trip to Florida, Eva comments: "I thought we were going to Miami, this is nowhere." In other words, the fixed screen border in *Stranger than Paradise* makes a certain number of things feasible, such as facing the void.

If we relate all this cinematic and psychoanalytical interpretation of thematic and optical specificities to the cultural context in which the movie was shot, we may contend that for Jim Jarmusch, at a relatively young age, the fascination with emptiness, lack of signification, and a world escaping one's perception and comprehension is linked to the creative freedom of the late seventies and the punk movement.

Divorce From the World

Even if in later films Jim Jarmusch goes back to the use of the reverse shot, he still does not immerse the spectator in fiction. He uses a certain number of devices that make the screen into a border for the spectator. The lateral tracking shot creates a surface that is parallel to, and a metaphor for the screen: in *Stranger than Paradise* it is the iron shutters of shops, in *Down by Law,* the facades of wooden houses. This irreducible distance breaks the vision-action links or sensory-motor links, as described by Gilles Deleuze in the *Movement Image*.[17] We may either see this as a crisis in an idealistic cinema where action and vision go hand in hand, as Gilles Deleuze does, or, like Stanley Cavell, as the accurate reproduction of our condition within the world – we cannot act on it, and images reveal all that can be seen.[18]

With the lateral tracking shot, we are again located outside the screen as a border, which becomes a surface (analogous to the one of the houses or the iron shutters) that glides, at a distance, out of our reach (and most of the time, out of the characters' reach.) This time, Jarmusch offers a form of counter-shot, but it is not aimed at filling the gaps or at hiding the apparatus: he shoots the scene with a 180° turn. This camera movement is normally prohibited as it creates a strong sense of disorientation for the viewers. Normally, for example when you shoot a football match, if the red

[16] Marc Augé*, Non-lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, La librairie du XXe siècle, Paris: Seuil, 1992.

[17] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, London: A&C Black, 2001, 208.

[18] A "film takes our very distance and powerlessness over the world as the condition of the world's natural appearance. It promises the exhibition of the world in itself. This is its promise of candor: that what it reveals is entirely what is revealed to it, that nothing revealed by the world in its presence is lost." Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1979, 119.

team is on the left, and the blue one on the right, you should not edit shots from the other side of the pitch, otherwise the spectators will not understand the game. However, in *Mystery Train* (1989), for example, we see Luisa walking beside a fence (another metaphor for the screen border), from the right to the left. After a cut and a 180° reverse shot, we see her walking in the other direction, as the camera and our Eyes are situated on the other side of the fence/border (43:23-44:33).

In a way, Jarmusch's breach of the 180° rule is a means to represent the aimlessness of his characters: to that extent (and to that extent only), it resembles the ending sequence from *Tout va bien* (Godard, 1972), in which the camera laterally tracks a row of tills in a supermarket (1:22:00-1:30:00). What customers are doing at the tills is always exactly the same. At some point, left-wing activists run towards the camera but stop short just before the tills: as if this border were impossible to cross. The camera just goes back, with the same lateral tracking shot, only in the other direction. In Godard's film, the closure in a space where an infinite and repetitive drudgery occurs is a satire of mass consumption and the capitalist system. In Jarmusch, the criticism is far from being that clear: as in Godard's film there is no direction, nowhere to go but instead of simply going back and forth, the camera turns around the characters and shoots them from the opposite side, in a subtler comment.

This technique distances us from the fictional world, allowing us to cross it (for a perplexing moment we entertain the idea that we could be immersed in the fiction) only to recreate the same fixed distance between the Eye and the world. It works as a kind of joke made at the expense of the spectators and the characters: even those who believe they are walking straight on (literally or metaphorically) are not: as it turns around them, the camera derides this idea. The same irony occurs when the purposeful Japanese tourists reach one attraction in Memphis (the Sun Studio) while they are actually aiming for another (Graceland) (10:19).

Art: From Absorption to Watchfulness

With the tracking shots, a misshaped suture becomes less disturbing (even if we feel the screen's border); the perturbation returns with the 180° editing that turns the world around on itself. Even if the world is complete, in films such as *Mystery Train*, mapping it becomes complex, and when one place appears where another should, we get the impression that no understanding can rightly account for our experience, which is a typical resistance to symbolisation or, in other words, an emergence of the Real into one's life.

Lateral tracking shots and perpendicular streets leading our Eye to the depth of the other side of the screen remain a relatively stable solution to negotiating the dialectics of immersing the spectators or excluding them, holding the fictional world at arm's length. The spectators are sheltered in what Edward Hall calls the far phase of the personal distance.[19] In this solution, the perpendicular streets are there, but no character or camera-Eye could see them. This also occurs in later films such as *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2011) where the two heroes cruise around a distant Detroit. This could have been an immersive and self-sufficient fiction, but contemplating it sufficed for the participation of Jarmusch's spectators.

In a rather little-known film, *The Limits of Control* (2009), Jarmusch daringly reconfigures the

[19] Edward Twitchell Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, New York: Anchor Books, 1990, 120.

surface *vs* depth or border *vs* immersion dialectics. The fictional world is no longer quietly held at arm's length, but at once all around and entirely impossible to understand. The spectator never really knows what the hero's aims are. Lone Man (Isaac de Bankolé) seems to be a secret agent hired by people whose goals are either abstruse or coded; even if the mission he is given is progressively revealed, it keeps some opacity to the very end. We can neither know how Lone Man feels nor work out how the mission is progressing on a daily basis: why is he given keys? Or match boxes? How does a postcard of a minor tourist attraction appear on his path while a small-scale model of the same attraction decorates his room? If Lone Man unflinchingly performs a series of actions that remain obscure for us, he still needs a mediation to transform what he sees; this mediation occurs through art.

As a hired gun, his "gaze" is linked to action: when watching, he is looking for clues or else trying to recognize the people who can give him information. Watching is a constant activity: he gazes through the window of a taxi, observes the Madrid streets from a café (where we get the impression that the waiter is interrupting him). All this time, the apprehension of the outside world is kept at a distance by the Eye. There is little interaction or significant action or conversation. The main character is aloof from the spectator in the same way as the walking characters in *Permanent Vacation*, *Stranger than Paradise* or *Mystery Train*. Sometimes the screen surface is foregrounded by high-angle frames in which the character's skin is a dusky surface and the entire image feels painterly.

The scenes in which he visits the Reina Sofia art museum offer very striking editing, and completely upset our perception of the screen border. On each of his three visits to the museum, Lone Man stops in front of one painting that catches his attention. Thematically speaking, these paintings are related to his own life: they provoke intense contemplation. When he stops in front of Juan Gris's *Violin* (1916) (18:28-19:01), first we see painting and viewer in profile view: it thus defines "the axis of action,"[20], on one side of which a conversation is normally shot. The *mise-en-scène* turns what happens between Lone Man and the Work of Art into a form of communication (one of the very rare ones that occur in the film). In the following shot, the angle on the painting remains oblique as advised by editing manuals. But the reverse shot on Lone Man becomes completely frontal: it coincides with the "axis of action," and so do all the other shots of the painting and its viewer. As a result, everything happens along the same axis; the rest of the space (the museum surroundings) is irrelevant. Furthermore, the character is completely static, which reinforces the symmetry between him and the painting. The camera zooms both on *The Violin* and on its viewer as if they were being hurled at each other.

According to Jacques Lacan, and as extensively explained by Slavoj Žižek, the Eye is on the side of the subject, whereas the object "returns the Gaze"[21]: here the "f" holes of the violin are the counterpart to the dark eyes of the character. The escalating visual tension shows that something makes sense for Lone Man. The distance will eventually cease to exist, the surface of the painting and the face of the viewer being one and the same. At this point, the gaze (that requires a minimal distance) is impossible: the sequence is over. This moment of sudden truth also relies on the

[20] Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th edition, New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2008 (1979), 231.
[21] Slavoj Žižek, "I Hear You with My Eyes," in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, by Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1996, 90.

protracted shots of the character's face. According to Gilles Deleuze's theory of faciality,[22] his face is like a wall with holes (the eyes) that swallow up signifiers, here, the painting.

Narratively speaking, the contemplation sequence at Reina Sofia has its realization in the prediction by a minor character, that "the violin [would] find [him]" and announces the moment when Lone Man is met by a man carrying a violin. For the spectator it is impossible to understand how Lone Man and this character meet: they do not use mail or phone. Their encounter depends on codes, on idiosyncratic habits, such as eating pieces of paper. Should the filmic grammar be respected in relation to the painting, this would add an extra layer of strangeness to the unfolding of the movie. But here we are pulled into the screen and, at the reverse shot, hurled back into our seats, all the more so since the music intensifies as the scene progresses. In the frontal reverse shots, the system of suture does not apply: the world escapes in the direct contact between the gaze and the object that becomes all important, a "*point de capiton*"[23] that sucks in everything we thought we understood and expands into an illumination that mobilizes the fictional world, leaving us bewildered or in awe.

On his second visit to the museum (24:00-24:40), Lone Man sees a nude reclining woman by Roberto Fernandez Balbuena, *Nude* (1922). It creates a very complex relationship with the rest of the fictional world. First it echoes overhead shots of himself with his arms folded under his head, second it announces magically the presence of a naked woman in Lone Man's apartment. Here the intensity of viewing reaches the point where the image is blurred: there is no distance left at all. Later on in the film (27:18-28:17), the same device is reversed as his vision of Madrid from the top of Torres Blancas takes on the same intensity and the same grammar of shots (frontal shots with zoom and blurring) and is continued by the vision of a painting in nearly the same place by Antonio Lopez, *Madrid desde Capitan Haya* (1987–1994).

Jarmusch multiplies variations that reveal intricate links between understanding/seeing the world and intensely contemplating works of art. Every time the directly frontal gaze of the character towards the painting destroys any perspectival notions, we are, through the eyes of the main character, attracted to the screen, stuck to its surface and maybe even allowed to pierce it, in an intensity where the work and the world coincide. We are transfixed by the inexplicable truth of the gaze and the work of art; we have no place to stand, no place to hide. With hindsight, this is the most daring game that Jarmusch's cinema has played with the spectators' apprehension or perception of the screen border. Subsequent films provide a more immersive fictional world or a more complete filmic world. *Paterson* (2016) continues the theme of understanding or relating to the world through art.

The Inclusive Space of Poetic Inspiration

[22] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi Continuum, 2003, 199. See also; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Mille plateaux, Capitalisme et schizophrénie, 2; Collection Critique, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980.

[23] Lacan uses the metaphor of a quilting point or more literally of an upholstery button; the "*point de capiton*" is an anchoring point that fixes together the signifier and the signified. "It's the point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively." Lacan, *RSI*, 267–68.

Here the outside world is not opaque as in *Stranger than Paradise* nor needs to be mediated through an external work of art as in *The Limits of Control*, but it is accessible: the character himself produces art since he is a poet. The world around him, that he looks at and listens to enquiringly, is a source of inspiration. An insert on a small box of matches at breakfast is the beginning of a slightly cheesy love poem including the sentence "I the cigarette, you the match." The poet works as a bus driver, which implies long hours, represented by jump cuts. His thinking about his poems leads to mental images, which are so inserted in the poetic activity that they no longer break the flow of the film: for example, we accept the recurring independent shots of the bridge over the iconic Passaic waterfalls.

As in *The Limits of Control,* the world the hero evolves in is littered with significant micro-events. However, it was a paranoid world full of clues and "suspicion" for the hired gun, as Blonde (Tilda Swinton) said, but for the poet here, the world acquires meaning through watchfulness, heightened sensitivity and awareness of one's surroundings. Poetic observation leading to writing is, at first, shown thanks to closeups both on the attentive and contemplative poet and amply justified reverse shots on his surroundings. Then, progressively, independent shots crop up, that are unmatched but a continuation of the poet/bus driver's gaze. The polished windscreen of the bus reflects the city sky and the neoclassical building as the bus slides by in a slow lateral tracking shot. The beauty of the image is startling, but in keeping with the poetic concentration of the driver moments earlier. The slight breach in suture is also a cutaway shot, creating a sort of relief from the confined space of the bus. However, the ending and its exaggerated sense of fate tends to lay bare the apparatus. Up to that point the saturation of the place with both poetry and signs had been building up. The film slowly transforms into a fable where everything is significant. It is a world where there is no randomness, a world riddled with coincidence. The film loses its claims to verisimilitude; for example, when Laura mentions "twins," they start to appear everywhere in the film. This way, the film verges on surrealism as Objective Chance Encounters (the co-presence of things that defies or ignores causality) reign supreme. The question is when do we, spectators, start quivering in our seats? When do we cringe? Is it when the little girl who sits writing is a poet, with a "secret notebook" like Paterson, and has a twin? The double image brings us on the verge of the uncanny. Except that the conspiratorial wink from the girl, and the close up on the "secret notebook" turn our unease into a private joke between Paterson and the viewer, since logically the little girl cannot be aware of it. It feels like a direct address that may shout "this is a film" for some spectators and pull them out of the fictional world. So does the appearance, out of the blue, of a laconic fellow poet (1:41:08-1:46:27) just after the "secret notebook," the unique copy of Paterson's poems has been shredded to bits by his wife's dog (1:33:00). At the moment when the way the hero relates to the world (his way of understanding it) has been shattered, his gaze made blank, his gait lifeless, another poet – somebody with the same take on life – gives him a blank notebook and restores his relation with the world.

Justified by Genre

Two other films also step away from the demands of realism: one deals with vampires, the other with zombies.

In *Only Lovers Left Alive*, generic conventions naturalize the absence of consistency of the

space. To begin with, music takes the lead in the opening credits and this sequence, like others in the film, borrows the aesthetics of a video clip. Editing and camera movement are synchronized with the steady beat of a version of Wanda Jackson's song "The Funnel of Love," originally released in 1961, which has been "remixed, slowed-down, and feedback-dosed to give it a seductive drugginess as the two [heroes] awaken in spacey unison."[24] There is no pretence that this will open for us a unique and unified fictional world whose space would have physical properties similar to the ones we live in. The sensations attached to the timbre of the music, the fuzzy chords and the screeching voice envelop the listener in a mantle of sound, together with the lyrics which tell us that we are indeed "in the funnel of love," where we are "spinning around and around," and the camera follows suit. From an overhead angle on a spinning turntable, it smoothly cuts with the same overhead angle and starts spinning quietly to reveal a female figure lying supine in an oriental décor, then smoothly cuts with the same spinning movement on a male figure also lying supine in more occidental settings. There is no way that we may place the turntable anywhere in the world of fiction, but all this is made acceptable by the fact that we are still in the opening part of the film and that the music has more narrative power than the rest at that point. The improperly sutured space finds a generic and narrative justification. We fluidly suspend any disbelief and prepare to go into, if not the funnel of love, at least into the groove of the film's style and atmosphere.

In the following sequences, parallel editing shows the two characters in different places, an American city (Detroit) and a Maghreb one (Tangier): the spatial logic is now established and for a while there are no disruptions in the consistency of the space nor in our immersion in the fictional world that now feels complete. We also learn that the characters are vampires, meaning that non-realistic features are allowed. For example, Eve's speed-reading books translate into numerous jump-cuts that are fully justified by her supernatural powers.

In the same way, when the vampires feed, drinking a very precious glass full of human blood, the ceremony ends in an ecstatic direct address (23:25-24:00). Looking directly into the camera is a sign of their losing control. This is a description of their mental states: we are focalized through them. Jarmusch uses an irregularity in the apparatus to create a special meaning that does not aim at unsettling the viewer, yet the screen borders flutter for a second before the film goes back to normal. As opposed to *The Limits of Control*, here, for the vampires, understanding the world is unproblematic, as they are more or less all-knowing. They may take planes across the world and read whatever book they want, use modern or old-fashioned equipment. But there are two parallel worlds, theirs and that of the normal humans they see as "zombies." Their world is quietly present yet as aloof as the Detroit city lights floating in the distance. [25]

A Meaningless, Forsaken World: Fictional Fracking

In stark contrast with *Only Lovers Left Alive*, making meaning of the world in *The Dead Don't Die* (2019) is no picnic, neither for the spectator, nor for the actors, especially as apparatus and generic conventions are laid bare in various places, cracking the fictional world in a number of places.

The Dead Don't Die is a tongue-in-cheek, highly referential and reflexive zombie film with a heavy

[24] Howard Hampton, "Spooky Action at a Distance," *Film Comment* 51, no. 1 (February 2015): 47.
[25] Céline Murillo, *Le cinéma de Jim Jarmusch: Un monde plus loin*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016, 38.

political undercurrent. Zombie films may be considered as a subgenre of horror movies, characterized by cannibalistic reanimated corpses. Jarmusch's movie harks back to the traditional George Romero *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) which uses very slow zombies with a consumerist drive[26]: these "shopping-mall-bound corpses ride escalators in an endless loop and wobble listlessly to Muzak."[27] The only serious element is the consistent anti-capitalist satire eloquently expressed by Hermit Bob (Tom Waits), who remarks that the undead are "still hungry for more stuff" in accordance with Robin Wood's analysis of *Dawn of the Dead:* "The zombies instead are a given from the outset; they represent, on the metaphorical level, the whole dead weight of patriarchal consumer capitalism."[28] Here, Jarmusch goes back to reflecting on absence of, or resistance to, signification. The zombie disorder is not the result of a zombie master with a consistent plot, but "simply caused by (dis) order,"[29] here taking the form of "polar fracking," that upsets the circadian rhythm.

Going back to psychoanalytical theory, the horror connects the I, the subject, with the Thing, that is unknowable, and part of the subject's inner realm. In Žižek, who reworks at the same time Kant and Heidegger, "the 'Thing-in-itself" is therefore strictly *ontic,* it is the part of the ontic (of "innerworldly" entities) that must fail to appear"[30] within physical reality. However, gruesome horror extensively "appears" in the film and makes the film reflexive and unstable. The horror starts with murders first attributed by the general public to "a wild animal or several wild animals." These characters see the murders as abject in the sense given by Julia Kristeva: "by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder." [31] As such, these murders are put away beyond the pale of humanity.

One police officer is the first character to give another explanation, one that uses the knowledge of horror fiction: Ronnie Peterson (Adam Driver) declares calmly: "I am thinking zombies." Zombies, being located at the frontier between human and non-human, are a way of renegotiating our rejection of the horror, be it the Real or the Thing when it appears[32] in the realm of (diegetic) reality. For some characters, like Mindy, the female police officer, Zombies break the power of speech[33] and action: she, as she should in a classic horror film, is transfixed, vomits, cries and screams, and is generally unable to act rationally.

[26] Richard Brody, "The Dead Don't Die," Reviewed: Jim Jarmusch's Fiercely Political Zombie Comedy," *The New Yorker,* 17 June 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row.
[27] Josh Levin, "How Did Movie Zombies Get so Fast?," *Slate Magazine*, 19 December 2007, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2007/12/how-did-movie-zombies-get-so-fast.html.
[28] Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan . . . and Beyond*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, 105.
[29] David Roche, "Resisting Bodies: Power Crisis / Meaning Crisis in the Zombie Film from 1932 to Today," *Textes et contextes*, no. 6 (1 December 2011): 10, http://preo.u-bourgogne.fr/textesetcontextes/index.php?id=327.
[30] Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, Radical Thinkers 36, London & New York: Verso, 2008, 219.
[31] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Léon Roudiez, European Perspectives, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, 12–13.
[32] Stefan Gullatz, ''En-Gendering' Philosophies of Horror: A Zizekian Perpsective," *Offscreen* 19, no. 5 (May 2015), https://offscreen.com/view/en-gendering-philosophies-of-horror-a-zizekian-perpsective.
[33] Benjamin Noys, "The Horror of the Real: Žižek's Modern Gothic," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 4, no. 4 (2010), http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/issue/view/19.

If, as Lacan says, truth is structured like fiction,[34] it is quite logical that Ronnie (Driver) should search solutions in imaginary creatures and fictional works. This naturalizes the existence of Zombies in the diegetic reality. For some characters, they are no longer unknowable, unthinkable, unpresentable. They are threatening but not horrifying to people like Ronnie or the attendant of the gas station who sells and collects horror films and books and memorabilia. Horror fiction is part of these characters' horizon of expectation.[35]

In the same way, the characters are deemed competent to deal with zombies and the spectators no longer need the pretense of suspense nor of the closed space of fiction nor the stability of the character to remain interested. Jarmusch rejects the traditional Aristotelian conception of drama that relies on the illusion that we are watching an action that is taking place.[36] First the fiction slightly cracks as Ronnie declares in a Pirandellian manner that he knows the film's theme song and the ending. If characters believe that they are in a film, it becomes (rather) logical to use film for their own knowledge, but also, it all becomes extremely unstable: if actors know they are in a film, how do they continue acting? When one mentions later that he knows the theme song, who is talking? Is it the actor or the character or a superimposed persona, "Driver playing Ronnie"? This instability points to the fact that we, spectators, are watching a film.

The first instances of reflexivity and reference to Zombie film as a means to deal with the problem crack the fiction. In addition, the exaggeration of gore, namely close-ups on eating intestines and organs (30:15), prevents us from getting used to what is going on. But this gradually creates a new norm, a generic shift. We accept the conventions that the film has set for itself. The crack is patched up as the film continues on this premise. Yet stability is lost the moment when the Scottish accented undertaker (Tilda Swinton) takes off in a spaceship, radically breaking genre convention. The fiction is eventually completely cracked or even "fracked" when the two main characters bicker because one had less access to the scenario than the other.

This may remind us of Brechtian distancing, which demands that the spectators reconsider what they have taken for granted and look at the world enquiringly. But here, as opposed to what Paterson does in *Paterson,* it is not to make meaning, but to reveal the lack of. The "fracked" fiction reveals, as in Jarmusch's first films, absence of meaning and emptiness. Richard Brody from the *New Yorker* notes: "Jarmusch transmutes the long-term fantasy of environmental horror into the real-life and immediate horror just below the surface of daily life – and the inescapable doom that it entails into a vision of the emotional and spiritual void at hand."[37]

Conclusion

Until the aptly named *The Limits of Control,* Jarmusch never completely allowed his spectators to enter the realm of fiction and definitively cross the screen border. Not giving in to what Daniel Dayan

[34] Ibid.
[35] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, Theory and History of Literature* ; v. 2, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, 22.
[36] Alain Chevalier, "Pour le regard inconfortable et productif de Galilée. Distanciation et critique de la représentation chez Brecht et chez Bourdieu," *MethIS*, 1 January 2008, 131, https://popups.uliege.be:443/2030-1456/index.php?id=248.
[37] Brody, "The Dead Don't Die."

calls the Tutor Code of mainstream cinema, Jarmusch, instead, wished to exhibit the voids, the decentred subject and the apparatus. Initially, he allowed himself to do so first by cornering the spectator and second by abandoning the shot reverse shot system, and thus the system of suture. At that point, the spectator was more often than not locked outside the fiction on their side of the screen border. Then Jarmusch proceeded to establish the two parallel lines of the screen and of the surfaces of the fictional world through an extensive use of lateral tracking shots. This way, spectators cannot act on the world and may even be "divorced from the world." Still, without giving up the decentred subject and the spectator left on the other side of the screen, Jarmusch shows us how images can be a way of apprehending the world. Viewing becomes acting and understanding. He leads us and his character to gaze at paintings that return our gaze and pierce the screen. Understanding the world does not cancel the screen border: on the contrary, it allows us to feel it more directly by creating dramatic inroads through it. In *The Limit,* Jarmusch stages a character who understands the world through art. In his later film *Paterson*, he thematises this grasping at the world by having a poet for the main character, making the film flow far more fluid than previous ones. Later, as if playing a subtle trick on us, he uses, in two films, genre conventions that give him a lot of freedom and enable him to have jump cuts, illogical matches without the spectator batting an eyelash. Both films are in the realm of horror: they deal with death and the undead, the unknowable, the thing. But far from maintaining a mystique of invisible horror *à la* H.P. Lovecraft, they bring bare the very notion of horror, deconstructing genre and narrative, leaving us with only a derisive void.

This survey, from Jarmusch's early ultra-low-budget debut films to his latest, shows that the question of the screen border transforms itself until it becomes nearly completely included into the narrative and generic levels. It reveals how enmeshed this topic is with the question of making meaning of the world. And it brings us full circle, from void to void, with fleeting moments of marvellous insights passing by, through creation and contemplation.

"Putting the Show Over": Fade-In Prologues as Border Crossing in the Reception Space of 1920s American Film Exhibition

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Keaton's Projectionist over the Border

This article will focus on a peculiar practice of US film theatrical exhibition, particularly active in the years 1919–1926, the so-called "fade-in prologue." It will argue that such theatrical presentations of films, aiming to seamlessly, but theatrically, guide the audience into Hollywood film worlds, present evidence of a non-illusionistic, active mode of spectatorship well into the early years of Hollywood's classicism[1] – a mode of spectacular address to the audience that plays upon dramatically materializing on stage the diegetic border between films and spectators to better cross it, revealing film as an illusion both flimsily distant and theatrically present. As in one of the most quoted and analysed sequences in film history, the projectionist's dream in Buster Keaton's 1924 *Sherlock Junior*,[2] a sequence where the theatrical logic of vaudeville interruptions comes to clash with the classical film's aesthetic of narrative integration,[3] fade-in prologues in the 1920s dramatize the tension between illusionistic, classical filmmaking and the demands for a more vaudeville, theatre-based and self-reflexive spectatorship that aims to take its audience in on the joke played.

Keaton's film, and the projectionist's sequence in particular, remains an active reference for film history, often analysed as part of a double tradition: part "behind-the-screen" movie, and part "rube" film. As a "movie about a movie,"[4] it demystifies filmmaking, by showing Keaton's character caught in a

[1] D. Bordwell, J. Staiger and K. Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Production to 1960*, London: Routledge, 1995.

[2] See A. Horton, ed. *Buster Keaton's Sherlock Jr.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, for a range of critical approaches to the film.

[3] H. Jenkins, "'This Fellow Keaton Seems to Be the Whole Show': Buster Keaton, Interrupted Performance, and the Vaudeville Aesthetic," in A. Horton, (ed.), *Buster Keaton's Sherlock Jr*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 29–66.

[4] C. Ames, *Movies About the Movies: Hollywood Reflected*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

frenzy of editing that has him "jump" from one space to another without warning – a tongue-in-cheek play on the operations of editing that classical filmmaking had sought to render all but invisible. Yet typically for a "metafilm"[5] Keaton's film does not just debunk Hollywood illusion-making by laying bare its mechanics, but it also, and conversely, stays within the conventions of Hollywood "bunk" by having the hero, in the end, win the girl–with help, it should be noted, of the very hokum love-scene, complete with happy family life, being played out on the screen under his perplexed eyes as part of the *Hearts and Pearls* serial. Is the film world, the sequence suggests, real or fake? Life-lesson or mirage? The answer suggested here, paradoxically (but in line with other "behind the screen" movies), is *neither*, precisely because it is *both*: caught in the artifice, the audience can have its cake (the illusion) and eat it too (the self-reflexivity).

Keaton's film is also, as Thomas Elsaesser has shown, part of the "rube" film tradition – films from the early years of cinema where typically unsophisticated characters, falling prey, as Keaton's character does in his dreams, to the realistic illusion of cinema, seek then to intervene in the film fiction, often to comical effect.[6] As he argues, these films represent a disciplining of audiences that happens in the transition years 1900–1910: the "primitives" that have not yet learnt the correct code of distanciation from the narration effect are duly chastised by being mocked by those (us?) who have mastered the new code. "Rube" films, indeed, may have become far less frequent in subsequent decades, suggesting that such disciplining of audiences is an accomplished fact by the establishment of classical modes of storytelling in Hollywood in 1917. Yet, as a trope of reception discourse, the image of the "rube" remains, at least throughout the 1920s, a classic of *publicity* texts, and, beyond, a constant of *fan* discourses, marking the difference between "naïve" spectators and those "in the know" – those who can navigate the specific kind of distanced fascination that Hollywood films demand for maximum engagement, and the simpler ones, whether too old or too young, too emotional or too "primitive," who will be "taken in" by the increasing illusionism of film fictions. The "rube" trope, thus, marks a continuously evolving frontier straddling spell-binding fascination and sophisticated incredulity, with modern audiences continuously defining themselves in opposition to fictional "other" more "naïve" ones, whether past audiences – as in the myth of the "train-effect" decisively debunked by Stephen Bottomore[7] (1999) – or more contemporary but exotic film-goers in distant lands and cultures (as in numerous tales brought back by travelogue filmmakers). Keaton's crossing into the diegetic world, thus, exhibits this perilous balancing act common in classical Hollywood spectatorship: the projectionist is a "rube," mistaking the film-fancy for reality– but in the film, this is couched in the more sophisticated, 1924 language of irony, where the "mistake" is relegated to a dream sequence.

There is, I would like to suggest in this essay, a third tradition in this American silent film culture that plays so openly and dexterously with the fiction/reality border and that is referenced by this sequence: the theatrical practice of the fade-in prologue. In *Sherlock Junior* this is revealed by the very wilfulness apparent in the staging of Keaton crossing the diegetic frontier as a series of *deliberate* steps, from the projection booth, down the centre aisle, to the front seat, then over the head of the pianist, and finally across the proscenium stage. The sequence, in other words, shows the boundary between film and fiction as more than just a limit (a flimsy screen), as a *space* that extends from the diegetic film world to at least the projection booth (and indeed beyond, into the character's most intimate dreams).

[5] M. Cerisuelo, *Hollywood à l'écran: essai de poétique historique des films: l'exemple des métafilms américains*, Paris: Presse de la Sorbonne-Nouvelle, 2000.
[6] T. Elsaesser, "Discipline through Diegesis: The Rube Film between 'Attractions' and 'Narrative Integration,'" in W. Strauven (ed.), *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006, 205–225.
[7] S. Bottomore, "The Panicking Audience? Early Cinema and the 'Train Effect,'" *Historical Journal of Film*, *Radio and Television* 19 (2), 1999, 177–216.

The deliberate staging thus points to the *physical* nature of film's reception space – the space that needs to be crossed if the audience, dreaming or not, is to engage with the film fiction. What this suggests is that illusion-making takes place not just in the Hollywood studio, but also at the point of reception, during the exhibition of the film, in the *material* organization of a theatre space that operates as a *continuum* between film and audience. The space the Keaton character crosses, in other words, is more than the mere physical space of the theatre, although it is also that. It is already a space inhabited by fiction generated from both sides, from the film world and from his own fancy. And it is this inscription of film fictional space within theatre space in the culture of 1920s reception that I would like to analyse here, as an example of the "diegetic space" that Thomas Elsaesser has proposed as the key concept of cinema studies (2006).[8]

Perverse Engagements with Classical Fictions

Such inscription of film space within theatre space has been analysed before in the exhibition of early silent films, remarkably in relation to the years of the first cinema of attractions, a cinema where film text meant little without its *experience* in a theatre, as Miriam Hansen has demonstrated,[9] and where film and theatre spaces were not "segregated." The models developed in much recent work on film spectatorship that has focused upon early cinema have been put to exciting use in the analysis of film spectatorship in our own age of the spectacle-driven, attraction-loaded blockbuster and remote-(computer-) controlled DVD (streaming) navigation of films, what Richard Grusin calls a "cinema of interactions" that would "return" us to the pre-classical cinema of attractions.[10] Yet this renewal of the discourses of spectatorship has been kept at arm's length from classical cinema. Worse, it is often constructed, and explicitly so, as *anti*-classical Hollywood, with Hollywood spectatorship being equated with a "discipline of silence, spellbound passivity, and perceptual isolation."[11] In this way, classical Hollywood spectatorship has become, in recent scholarship, a parenthesis, an unwelcome, and increasingly unknowable, 80-year hiatus. *Before* 1917 and *after* 1970, audiences are modelled as active and participatory, the cinema of attraction is analysed as *also* a cinema of interactions, screen space and theatre space are *not* segregated. *During* the Hollywood classical period, audiences are invariably prisoners of the gaze apparatus: they are inscribed in narration, ideologically sutured into the film, isolated in the dark of the auditorium, spellbound–with the negative, passive connotation of the term being emphasized. Attempting to strike the right balance between the requirements of classical narrative integration and the remnants of vaudeville in the programme of many movie houses in the 1920s, Rick Altman describes the effort to provide standardized music for silent films in the 1920s as "the silencing of audiences"[12] – especially when compared with the rich intermediality of early cinema practices in the 1900s. Yet he must also note that many practices such as the use of popular songs or audience participation did not disappear during the 1920s, but were "shunt[ed] to specific genres and

[8] Elsaesser, "Discipline through Diegesis."
[9] M. Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1991.
[10] R. Grusin, "DVDs, Video Games and the Cinema of Interactions," in J. Lyons and J. Plunkett (eds), *Multimedia Histories: From the Magic Lantern to the Internet*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007, 209–221.
[11] M. Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere," in L. Williams (ed.), *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995, 134–154: 139.
[12] R. Altman, *Silent Film Sound*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 280.

to designated portions of the new program that was developing as a compromise strategy."[13]

In 1999, however, Janet Staiger argued for a bolder direction in reception studies, one based on "the proposition that the entire history of cinema in every period (and likely every place) witnesses several modes of cinematic address, several modes of exhibition, and several modes of reception."[14] Such studies, she claims, would start by recognizing that "it is not at all clear […] that the conditions of exhibition for the classical narrative cinema are uniformly environments to promote a voyeurist cinema, an absorption into an illusion, and a 'static,' passive spectator."[15] In line with other historical case-studies of reception that support Staiger's hypothesis of "perverse" modes of spectatorship[16] (notably Carbine 1990[17] or Debauche 1999[18]), and in the search for what Ian Breakwell, introducing a collection of testimonies of 1940s-1960s cinemagoers, calls the "uncanny interplay between screen image and real-time events in the auditorium and in the world beyond the muffled doors,"[19] this essay would like to offer one limited example of what a configuration of a *non*-voyeuristic, *non*-passive reception might look like in the middle of 1920s theatre exhibition in the US – a practice that, as Staiger suggests, offers a more active possibility of audience engagement with film fictions – a self-reflexive mode of spectatorship very much active even in the first decade of Hollywood classicism in which audiences, like Keaton's projectionist character, are invited to experience reception space as a *continuum* between theatre and film space: the practice of on-stage, "fade-in" prologues.[20]

Border-crossing at the Theatre, a Key to a Coherent Theory of Silent Film Pleasures

The rich and colourful history of theatrical practices in US movie houses of the 1920s has, of course, been recognized before, most notably in Ben Hall's study of motion picture palaces and their exhibition practices.[21] Stage presentation acts, their grandiose excesses and their integration within exotic big palace architecture, along with the commercial infrastructures that are developed in the late 1920s to allow more theatres to offer on-stage entertainment of a diverse nature before, or after the film, are profusely studied and illustrated in his seminal study of 1920s big palace exhibition practices. Richard Koszarski, in his authoritative and wide-ranging introduction to 1920s Hollywood cinema and film

[13] Ibid., 388.

[14] J. Staiger, "Modes of Reception," in Gaudreault, A., G. Lacasse and I. Raynauld (eds), *Le cinéma en histoire: Institutions cinématographiques, réception filmique et reconstitution historique*, Paris: Méridien-Klincksieck, 1999, 306-324: 315.

[15] Ibid.

[16] J. Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, New York and London: New York University Press, 2000.

[17] M. Carbine (1990), "The Finest Outside the Loop: Motion Picture Exhibition in Chicago's Black Metropolis, 1905–1928," *Camera Obscura*, 23, reprinted in Abel, R. (ed.), Silent Film, London: Athlone Press, 1996, 234–262.

[18] L. M. Debauche, "Reminiscences of the Past, Conditions of the Present: At the Movies in Milwaukee in 1918," in M. Stokes and R. Maltby (eds), *American Movie Audiences: from the turn of the century to the early sound era*, London: British Film Institute, 1999, 129–143.

[19] I. Breakwell and P. Hammond (eds), *Seeing in the Dark: A Compendium of Cinemagoing*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1990, 8.

[20] To be clear, Keaton's film does not offer an example of an on-stage prologue (and no film, to my knowledge, offers such an example, though on-stage entertainment before the film of the Fanchon and Marco "variety" type is profusely illustrated in *Footlight Parade* (Lloyd Bacon 1933). Keaton's film, however, suggests that the perception of reception space as a continuum between fiction and reality is an active possibility in the 1920s. In this activation, fade-in prologues are obvious historical participants.

[21] B. M. Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace*, New York: Bramhall House, 1961.

culture, notes the disruptive potential of such stage presentations, with famous examples of film premières where the film is shown almost as an afterthought, after several hours of rich, multi-sensory, and not necessarily coherent on-stage shows.[22] Indeed, even when recognizing the grandiose specificity of US film reception in the 1920s, film history has, by and large, struggled to reconstruct some sort of coherence in the 1920s context. Koszarski, for instance, devotes an entire chapter to colourful exhibition techniques in the 1920s, a sign of their importance in understanding the pleasures of classical cinema. Yet he also reacts to the mutilations of films at the hands of enterprising showmen (from accelerated projection speeds to unwarranted cuts to fit into the evening programme) by wondering if "even the most nostalgic viewer [would] wish to exchange current viewing conditions for those of the silent era."[23] At best, as is shown in the detailed work of Phil Wagner on the presentation acts of Fanchon and Marco,[24] the theatrical component of the show is analysed in its relationship to the larger 1920s culture but, as far as film is concerned, as a *separate* discourse, essentially unrelated to the films shown. The question of the understanding of 1920s cinema pleasures, thus, remains largely unanswered, and the impact of exhibitors' *theatrical* efforts on the reception of films largely untested, leaving historians who rely on film texts only with a meagre understanding of what pleasures audiences could take from silent film shows in which film was but one component of the whole programme. And yet this is precisely the issue that Keaton's film suggests should be raised: the tantalizing possibility that film reception, well into the classical period of the 1920s, happens in a space in which audiences should be understood not just as (passive) viewers of film, but as active users playfully engaged with fiction film *as fiction and as visual artefact* through the self-reflexive co-construction of the theatre space as diegetic space – a space where any fictional border comes to be dissolved, crossed, and crisscrossed.

Fade-in Prologues: Leading the Audience into Fictional Worlds

Though possibly limited (a 1922 poll by the exhibitors' magazine *Motion Picture News* estimates that a mere 3% of movie houses in the US staged prologues – and not just fade-in ones – on a regular basis),[25] the practice of prologues remains important as it opens the door to an understanding of the *culture* behind film presentations that, in exhibition discourses at least, were popular until the late 1920s when Vitaphone and other synchronized sound shorts replaced most stage presentations.[26] In their columns advising exhibitors, trade magazines such as *Motion Picture News*, *The Exhibitors' Herald* and *Film Daily,* offer regular examples of the practice, emulations of the larger New York or Los Angeles shows (staged by showmen Sid Grauman or Roxy Rothapfel), often in much smaller movie houses, with all the problems inherent in adapting expensive, big-house prologue ideas to small, budget-tight movie houses, far away from Los Angeles or New York.[27] Clearly, and in spite of the costs involved and the frequent criticisms directed against them, stage prologues to films remain a "best practice" of theatre management, a horizon to be emulated by enterprising showmen around the country, and an integral

[22] R. Koszarski, *History of The American Cinema: T. 3, An Evening's Entertainment, the Age of the Silent Feature Picture*, New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1990, 56–65.
[23] Ibid., 61.
[24] P. Wagner, "'An America Not Quite Mechanized': Fanchon and Marco, Inc. Perform Modernity," *Film History* 23 (3), 2011, 251-67.
[25] Poll published in *Motion Picture News*, November-December 1922, 26 (21–25). The poll was jointly conducted with the magazine, Columbia University, and the Babson Statistical Organization, on a generous sample of 10,000 (out of an estimated total of 16,000) theatre managers, representing large and small cinemas around the country.
[26] R. Koszarski, "Laughter, Music and Tragedy at the New York Pathé Studio," *Film History* 14 (1), 2002, 32-9.
[27] See, for instance J. Harrower, "Small Town Houses," *The Film Daily* 38 (55), 1926, 26.

part of the 1920s understanding of film reception. As such, fade-in prologues, a sub-category of prologues staged in the 1920s (although the difference between the two is not always clear in 1920s exhibition discourse),[28] are useful less as a historically unconvincing attempt to "pin the viewer down"[29] or reconstruct concrete contexts of film shows, than as an example of discursive practice that provides "a sense of what the historical prospects were for viewing at a given time by illuminating the meanings made available within that moment."[30]

The importance of fade-in prologues to our reconstruction of the pleasures of cinema lies, therefore, in the fact that, as in Keaton's dreaming navigation of the fiction-reality border, they are instigated first in order to "ease" the theatre audience into the diegetic world of the film. A positive review, in the *Exhibitors' Herald* (April 1921), makes this precise point when describing the prologue staged for *Bob Hampton of Placer* (Marshall Neilan 1921):

> The setting would consist chiefly of a backdrop painted to represent the Bad Lands in the style of the famous Frederick Remington backgrounds. A band of Indians, in war paint, occupy the stage. The band indulges in various Indian sports, an Indian wrestling match, or a war dance could be utilized. Throughout the action, however, one of the band stands statuesque in the pose of a sentinel, eyes shaded and his gaze directed steadily at a promontory in the background. […] At a grunted command from the leader, the Indians hastily gather up their gear that is lying on the ground and exit in single file on a dog trot with a break into the picture before the stage is emptied.[31]

Colourful and picturesque, this prologue may also be diegetically motivated. The novel which the film adapted, Randall Parrish's 1907 *Bob Hampton of Placer*, does indeed open with a battle between Sioux Indians and sixteen US Army soldiers. The transition, "before the stage is emptied," is a smooth journey through fictional spaces, with characters actually managing the process Keaton's character could only dream of. Surprisingly but possibly thrillingly for a film about Custer's "Last Stand," the audience is here positioned on the Indian side, the representation of which borrows its imagery from the most legitimate visual tradition.

The positioning of the audience as fiction-ready is more explicitly what the manager of the Beldorf Theater in Independence (Kansas) has in mind for this prologue to D. W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920):

> [Manager Wagoner] used a house, painted a canvas with a window cut in, showing a drawn shade. This occupied the side of the stage, while a big back drop represented a rural setting, with a bunch of real corn shocks arranged at the left. In the forefront, an old well and wooden bucket completed the set. Seated near the well a man in overalls shucked

[28] For the sake of clarity, I have restricted myself to sources that explicitly deal with the fade-in prologue. By 1927 four groups of pre-show entertainment could be distinguished: short silent films preceding the feature, an atmospheric prologue, a variety prologue, and short films with synchronized sound, such as Vitaphone shorts. See P. J. Scheuer, "Prologue Rivalry is Keen," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 November 1927. This essay is concerned with the second type, which, as Scheuer indicates, was pioneered by Sid Grauman in 1918 in his Million Dollar theatre in Los Angeles.
[29] B. Klinger, "Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies," *Screen* 38 (2), 1997, 107–128: 114.
[30] Ibid.
[31] *Exhibitors' Herald*, April 1921.

> corn, while a girl in country attire stood at the churn. Another girl entered from the house and rang a big farm bell, then two more farmers came from out of the cornfield. All "washed up" at the bowl beside the house, when one girl entered the house and lighted an oil lamp on the kitchen table, so that its rays shone through. Then all went inside and sat down to supper. At this point other lights were dimmed and not a word spoken, the picture cut in at the dimming, creating a pleasant atmosphere.[32]

Reminiscent of the tradition of "tableaux vivants" active in nineteenth century museology[33] and evocative of both the rural atmosphere of the then well-known melodrama and its stage version, this prologue also shows a remarkable effort to provide a seamless transition into the film: both a sensory transition ("the picture cut in at the dimming"), and a diegetic one, as its representation of the winding-down of the day points to the first shots of the film where Anna and her mother are shown sitting in the evening light. It could also echo a later scene in the film and function as a delicate and distanced preview of the first dinner scene at Bartlett Farm, where the bucolic atmosphere is thrown in jeopardy as Anna meets the Squire again. Beyond these references to the film, the echo further points to a more general positioning of the audience as fiction-ready, offering, as it does, a representation of the "story-telling" moment: just like the farming family "washed up" at the end of their day, ready to share anecdotes around the dinner table. In all of these senses, such prologues bridge the gap between film and audience, with a suggestion of further potential. Modern copies of the film open with a flurry of moralistic intertitles in which Griffith situates his story within what he presents as a millennial, moral fight to make men practise monogamy – a moral position clearly seeking to establish some sort of common ground with the audience. With its emphasis on dimming the lights and transitioning into the picture, this description of prologue further suggests that Manager Wagoner of the Beldorf may have done away with such intertitles and "cut in" the film to transition with his stage view of rural domestic peace – thus establishing a common, fictive ground with the film's audience through an appealing dramatic evocation, rather than a moralising discourse.

Spoilers and Classical Narration

To lead the audience into the film, prologues point out plot elements that will be relevant to the film experience, in effect, offering a pre-mediation of the narrative, in ways more directly relevant to the film experience than the "atmospheric" example used for *Way Down East*. In a prologue described as being used at three key theatres in Washington, DC, in 1919, for the Emile Chautard film, *The Mystery of the Yellow Room*, the audience is treated to a didactic prologue that tells it in no uncertain terms where to look in the film for narrative clues, and what to watch for in this upcoming mystery: light, cat, old lady, long hand.

> Before the picture is flashed on the screen, the rising curtains reveal, in the centre of the

[32] "Prologue in Pantomime on Way Down East," *Motion Picture News*, 29 July 1922. According to the AFI Catalog this is not the prologue that was staged as part of the road show release of the movie and in some performances of which Lilian Gish appeared. "Way Down East," AFI Catalog, https://catalog.afi.com/Film/18291-WAY-DOWNEAST?sid=e6a32f51-5efc-4e79-93ac-dcd69e69a713&sr=12.113546&cp=1&pos=0, accessed 29 November 2020.

[33] A. Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

> stage, the mysterious "Yellow Room" with the barred window at one side. The lights are subdued, an air of mystery pervades the entire scene. A green hued spot light discloses, in an aperture at one side, the cat, whose lingering 'm-e-o-w" precedes important action in the film story. The green light fades, to show at the other side, in an aperture, the mysterious old woman who hovers near the castle containing the "Yellow Room," always near when trouble occurs. She predicts evil in her muttering voice. […] In the dim light a skulking figure is seen. As the dim light sweeps back and forth across the stage, the figure each time seen is nearer the "Yellow Room." A long hand reaches for the door knob. Then flashes on the screen the scene from the film of the long hand and the clutching hand of the mysterious assailant. He seizes the girl; she screams, draws back, secures a revolver and fires. The "kick" comes from a real scream and a revolver shot behind the screen, timed with the film. The picture follows in its entirety.[34]

The suspenseful scene will thus be seen twice in the same evening: once on stage, with added sound effect, once in the film, in a logic that harks back to *The Great Train Robbery* of 1903 and the shot of bandit Barnes shooting at the audience– the logic of an attraction that can be displayed for its own power. An added kick to this prologue, it should be noted, may also come from the fact that the audience will recognize a recent winner of a local beauty contest as the actress playing "the girl.'[35]

Do such prologues enhance the narrative experience of the film, or do they give too much away? In 1921, the *Exhibitors' Herald*, a magazine catering for theatre managers around the country, offers its professional advice by suggesting four different types of prologues that can be used in all movie houses, with the Marshall Neilan movie about General Custer, *Bob Hampton of Placer*, as their example. The fourth type is the most spectacular, and, to us, the most un-classical:

> For the spectacular prologue the closing scenes of the production provide the basis for one which should bring audiences out of their seats. The setting of General Custer's headquarters should be used with the bookshelves and entire back wall painted on a transparency. The dialogue should be based upon Bob Hampton's discovery of the real perpetrators of the murder which has resulted in his dismissal from the army and his plea to be permitted to ride with his old company in the campaign which is just about to start against Sitting Bull. General Custer gives his consent and the entire party exits to endorse for the last campaign, as the lights in back of the transparency disclose a tableau based upon the famous painting of "Custer's Last Stand." […] As [Custer] falls, the entire stage should be darkened and a spotlight play on the flag waving in the breeze of an electric fan.[36]

While the entire plot of the film revolves in fact around *not* knowing who killed the hero's father (for most of the film, the hero believes that the father of the girl he loves killed his own father, thus prohibiting their love), the magazine suggests basing "the dialogue … upon Bob Hampton's discovery of the real perpetrators of the murder"–a spoiler that does not seem to bother the editors in their belief that the staged scene "should bring audiences out of their seats." In bringing the film world down to

[34] "Unique Lobby Display Advertises Latest Kerrigan Film," *Motion Picture News*, 20 (22), 22 November 1919, 3743.
[35] Ibid.
[36] *Exhibitors' Herald*, April 1921.

the theatre audience, prologues thus suggest a distanced and self-reflexive mode of spectatorship that may run counter to the classical demands of the audience's integration into the narrative by foregrounding, as seems to be the case here, the *theatrical spectacular* in the film and making it more important than traditional narrative demands.

Materializing Film Worlds, Materializing Audiences

In this borderland between the film and the audience, prologues are intermedial affairs, whether they reference a spectacular scene of the film by quoting a film image as a background to the staged scene (as in a prologue used at the Strand theatre in Seattle, Washington, for the 1921 Cecil B. DeMille film, *Fool's Paradise*, where the key fantasy attraction in the film, the ice-ballet sequence, is re-enacted on stage "with a large drop painted especially to represent the scene in the photoplay" with "snow [falling] on the dancers during their entire performance"[37]), or whether they literally interrupt the film, transposing whatever scene was taking place on the stage, adding a moment of theatrical display, then allowing the film to resume. In the pursuit of this attraction-based and theatrical logic, narrative interruptions are indeed frequent, and come under the heading of the fade-in prologue not so much as "prologues" (since they may take place before the film but also, intriguingly, during the projection) but rather as "fade-in" transitions from the film and back into it with little, if any, visual break. Some of the examples that one may find in the trade press and its best-practice examples suggest that the requirement of having prologues precede the film is not as stringent as the name would seem to imply. Thus, at the Strand in Brooklyn (New York), Edward L. Hyman, the manager, offers a fade-in prologue that interrupts the film projection, even though the scene referenced in the staged event is merely the fourth shot of the film – so that a more general prologue could safely have been staged *before* the start of the film without losing its relevance, but without the fade-in and fade-out effect that seems to have been very much the key to the success of this particular presentation. The film in question is Maurice Tourneur and Clarence Brown's *Last of the Mohicans* (1920):

> When a colonial interior was reached in *The Last of the Mohicans*, (…) Edward L. Hyman caused the projection to cease while a stage setting fashioned after the scene was revealed and a colonial madame with her harp gave a solo. This was followed by a tenor selection given by a bestockinged gentleman of the period, after which two dancers properly costumed danced "The Pavlowa Gavotte." The picture was interrupted for only a few minutes and at a period in the continuity which was opportune.[38]

The film scene here, interrupted and reproduced on stage, is indeed a long shot crowded with people dancing, but the film, in full classical narrative mode, quickly moves from the establishing "master" long shot to a series of close-ups of the main characters who are all present in the scene. It thus eschews a more attraction-based exploitation of its staging by refusing to linger on less diegetically motivated elements (such as, for instance, the dancing, the costumes, the historical authenticity of the sets and costumes– all elements that the prologue does develop). The on-stage spectacle provides this attraction, at a potential cost of breaking the illusionistic spell of the film, thus requiring a dual and *competing* gaze from the audience as both engrossed in the diegesis and self-reflexively aware of its

[37] *Motion Picture News*, 29 April 1922.
[38] *Exhibitors' Herald*, 22 January 1921.

material, staged origin.

Another example of this practice (this time in 1919, at the Rialto theatre, Dayton, Ohio) shows that such materialization of the film medium on stage does matter as it allows a parallel materialization of audiences whom the theory of the Hollywood classical cinema has variously portrayed as "silenced" or "distanced":

> During the showing Mr Seifert furnished a surprise by having the curtain raised where the star as a pseudo-Spanish nobleman is entertaining the heroine with his mandolin. The Seifert Symphony Orchestra struck up a Spanish number and on the stage came a quartet of Spanish dancers and singers. After a ten-minute exhibition, the curtain was lowered and the picture resumed amid applause at every performance.[39]

Clearly, such practices are non-illusionistic, yet provide added pleasures for 1920s audiences who invariably manifest themselves with "applause at every performance." This pleasure comes *despite* the fact that such practices reveal film not as an immaterial diegetic shadow world, a transparent "window on the world," but as a concrete photographic medium, a form of photography that can be animated or not, stopped, doubled with sounds, and so on. Watching film, such prologues suggest, is a total theatrical experience; there is more to cinematic pleasure than mere immersion in the film plot, there is also recognition that the diegetic border exists as a border to be toyed with and experienced through the senses. Foregrounding sensory pleasures, even to the point of narrative incoherence, is what such fade-in prologues are about, as is shown, for example, by the prologue staged for the Olive Thomas film *Out Yonder*. In the film, Thomas plays the part of a daughter of a light watchman. The prologue uses this general maritime background to reinforce the sensual appeal of the film by staging a Botticelli moment:

> Accordingly, an elaborate special setting was constructed, the screen was "flied," the lights were tested with the picture in operation, so that just the right degree of illumination would be assured, and [the theatre manager's] stage feature planted at that point in the story. At the proper moment the screen was raised, leaving the picture upon the setting. It quickly disappeared as a sunrise effect was put over, and, as day dawned, a young woman, apparently nude, rose out of the sea, climbed over a set rock and donned the overalls and shirt that Olive Thomas wears in the ensuing scene. Again the picture was flashed upon the setting, the screen was lowered into place, and the girl in the setting became Olive Thomas in the picture.[40]

Here, considerable effort is made to minimize visual or narrative discontinuity by offering a scene that will reinforce the film in multiple ways: aesthetic (the painting connection), symbolic (Thomas as Venus), sensory (light, colours), sensational ("Thomas" naked), and as an intermedial reinforcement, by merging the film space and the theatre space into one continuum. Much of the pleasure thus derives from a crossing and merging of film space with that of the theatre; an invitation to audiences to dream the film beyond the screen.

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[39] "Unique Lobby Display Advertises Latest Kerrigan Film," *Motion Picture News*, 20 (22), 22 November 1919, 3743. In this case, the film shown is *A White Man's Chance* (Ernest C. Warde 1919), with a Mexican background theme that is enough to justify this ten-minute "Spanish" dancing during the film.

[40] "'Fade-In' Replaces Prologue in Cameraphone Presentation," *Exhibitors' Herald*, 24 April 1920.

That such prologues question some of the basic tenets of classical spectatorship can be further seen in the debates that exist around them in the 1920s. An exchange of views between director Sydney Olcott and showman Sid Grauman, published in *The Motion Picture Director*, sums up the main lines of debate between film production and exhibition in 1926.[41] Olcott, one of the important commercial directors of the 1920s, makes three main points against the practice: prologues are bound to be inferior to Hollywood films as they cannot compete with the skills or finance of Hollywood products; prologues (and all presentation acts in general) will further ruin the film by imposing cuts so that it fits into the programme schedule; and, most importantly, prologues are basically redundant:

> The average motion picture feature is built for an evening's entertainment. Its length and structure is such that it constitutes a complete show in itself. It is balanced with comedy, pathos, humor, tragedy, adventure, pictorial beauty and a hundred other properties not available on the stage. Therefore it follows quite naturally that anything which precedes such entertainment is either superfluous, repetitious, or irrelevant.[42]

Classical film studies, by and large, have long sided with such pleas from industry insiders that film texts be treated with absolute respect, and dismissed disruptive exhibition practices as so much noisy and incoherent "ballyhoo." Yet prologues do have a logic which, beyond narrative integration, understands film less as a text than a *sensual experience.* Grauman's 1926 answer to Olcott specifically points to the need to "appeal to all the senses" of the audience in order "to create in the spectator a responsiveness to the dramatic qualities of the photoplay" that will "sweep the spectator from the prologue to the opening of the screen drama," *à la* Keaton. Yet, paradoxically, sensual involvement here is created through processes that simultaneously reinforce the theatrical self-reflexivity, by positioning film *as* film, and the projection screen as a border to cross. Furthermore, here one is aware of a subtextual drama between the production and exhibition branches of the motion-picture business, a fight for control over the film's meaning, and a resistance, in the theatres, to the producers having complete control of meaning – a fight, that is, to assert a role for the audience that goes beyond that of passive consumers.

Presence, the Illusion

Prologues, thus, give away the plot and decrease the suspense of films, interrupt the narrative flow, embody it in concrete live bodies and objects on stage, force cuts in the film unwarranted by the narration, and, in general, make short shrift of the intention and auteur debates in filmmaking. But in their insistence that film be an experience, and a full sensory one at that, they point to a remarkably coherent theatre culture which strives to have films meet their audience, to put, in the parlance of the day, "the film over" the stage barrier[43]. The questioning and foregrounding of the border between the real and the fictive, a border that Hollywood classical filmmaking had learnt to subdue and render transparent, is thus a central activity of spectatorship that such theatre culture proposes.

[41] S. Olcott and S. Grauman, "Do Prologues Make or Mar a Picture," *Motion Picture Director* 2 (10), July 1926.
[42] Ibid.
[43] The expression "putting it [the film] over" is frequently found in 1920s theatrical exhibition literature to denote successful exhibition strategies and a film that has "gone over well." It is also the title of a regular column published by *Film Daily* containing exhibition advice for all film exhibitors.

In this active and creative reception, audiences are invited to negotiate meaning actively with the film. Fiction characters routinely step out of the picture, or jog into it from the theatre space of the proscenium at the foot of the screen. Film experience, in this reception culture, is thus positioned as one of self-conscious theatrical illusion, rather than one that would propose diegetic illusion as its central, or unique, goal – an alternative mode of address that coexists with the illusionistic gaze celebrated by theatre managers throughout the 1920s. When putting the show over, 1920s showmen break down the screen border and replace it with a fluid combination of spaces that interact together in pleasurable ways–an interaction that is best defined as an enjoyment, conscious or not, of film illusion as illusion of presence: as a bit of magic.

Metaleptic Vertigo: Temporal and Generic Crossovers in *The Singing Detective*

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The scene seems familiar: the opening credits are composed of a series of drawings that unashamedly depict all the clichés of *film noir* – the profile of a man in a beige overcoat and trilby, a high-angle shot of a semi-naked woman's body lying under a streetlamp, a man's shadow cast onto a wall. The opening scene similarly shows an urban setting at night in the 1940s, with dark alleyways and wet pavements. An elderly busker playing "Peg O' My Heart" on his mouth-organ inserts bars of the German National Anthem at the approach of a man who silently exchanges a message with him. As the man steps down into an underground nightclub, the voice-over comments: "And so the man went down the hole, like Alice. But there were no bunny rabbits down there. It wasn't that sort of hole. It was a rat hole." The camera then tilts down to a flickering neon sign that reveals the name of the club: "Skinskape," while, on the soundtrack, the music of "I've Got you under my Skin" appropriately starts. However, while the tune continues, a cut to the next shot reveals a white sheet on an empty bed in a present-day hospital. Notwithstanding Marlow's (played by Michael Gambon) comment in voice-over, the viewer, like Alice, has been cast through the looking glass, crossing the frontier between two worlds.

Ever since its release in 1986, *The Singing Detective* (Dennis Potter/Jon Amiel, 1986), a BBC production,[1] has been praised as one of the greatest achievements of British television and the masterpiece of Dennis Potter,[2] one of the most creative and controversial playwrights for British television. However, as both Glen Creeber and Joost Hunningher have pointed out,[3] one must not overlook the significant contribution of the director Jon Amiel, who used all the expressive resources of 35 mm film, as well as the unique qualities of the TV serial, exploiting repetitions with variations as its

[1] *The Singing Detective* was made in association with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. It was first broadcast in Britain in 1986 over a period of six weeks, starting 17 November. See Glen Creeber, Dennis Potter. *Between Two Worlds. A Critical Reassessment*, Basingstoke: Macmillan / New York: St Martin's Press, 1998, 167.

[2] Dennis Potter himself declared in an interview to *The Times* even before the serial was broadcast: "This is the piece of work I'd like to be remembered for" (quoted in Creeber, Dennis Potter, 166).

[3] G Creeber, *The Singing Detective*, London: British Film Institute, 2007; Joost Hunningher, "The Singing Detective. Who done it?," in *British Television Drama in the 1980s*, George W. Brandt (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 234-57.

foundation.[4] *The Singing Detective* is certainly a masterpiece in metalepsis as defined by Gérard Genette: a "deliberate transgression of the threshold of embedding," a process through which the boundary between different narrative levels is breached or blurred.[5]

More specifically, as a crossing over the ontological frontiers between diegetic universes and a violation of thresholds of representation undermining mimetic illusion, metalepsis foregrounds the very process of creation. It thus highlights both the intrusion of a narrative instance and the role of the viewer, who has to break from a referential reading of film in favour of "a shared knowledge of illusion."[6] *The Singing Detective* shows how effective metalepsis can be in film: it paradoxically highlights cinema's powerful capacity for hypotyposis (namely the iconic power to present what is depicted as though it were before one's very eyes), while, at the same time, calling attention to the gaps and seams within the narrative. "Discontinuity becomes programmatic."[7] Not only does metalepsis appear as a heuristic tool both within the diegesis and for the viewer, but it also becomes the source and essence of narrative and spectacular pleasure.

As in Alain Resnais's *Providence* (1977),[8] the main protagonist is a writer. Philip Marlow (without the e) is a writer of pulp detective fiction who suffers from an acute case of psoriatic arthropathy, affecting both his skin and his joints, and who is, therefore, confined to his hospital bed, where he mentally rewrites his first, out-of-print, novel entitled *The Singing Detective*. But in addition to this self-reflexive *mise-en-abyme*, other narrative strands are juxtaposed, eventually merging and cross-pollinating: memories from Marlow's childhood at the end of the Second World War; paranoid speculations about his wife, Nicola, conspiring with her lover to steal his former screenplay, adapted from the eponymous book; and hallucinations brought about by his feverish condition.

The serial thus borrows from different generic codes including film noir, detective fiction, period drama, situation comedy, the musical and the form of autobiographical narrative,[9] to name the most obvious. This playful foregrounding of generic conventions establishes "epistemological boundaries" of knowledge (to adopt Branigan's terminology[10]), and horizons of expectation, only to transgress them.

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[4] Both recall that Jon Amiel suggested many changes from the first screenplay that served to develop the detective story and the role of Marlow's wife, and to increase the number of cross-cuts between the different narrative strands; in particular, he and his film crew conceived the famous "Dry Bones" scene which Potter had planned on a dark background. See Creeber, *The Singing Detective*, 13 and Hunningher, *The Singing Detective*, 242.

[5] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, 88.

[6] Christine Baron, "Effet métaleptique et statut des discours fictionnels," in John Pier & Jean-Marie Schaeffer (eds), *Métalepses. Entorses au pacte de la représentation*, Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2005, 295–310, 298, our translation.

[7] Samuel G. Marinov, "*Pennies from Heaven*, *The Singing Detective* and *Lipstick on Your Collar*. Redefining the Genre of Musical Film" in *The Passion of Dennis Potter. International Collected Essays*, Vernon W. Gras & John R. Cook (eds), New York: St Martin's Press, 2000, 195–204, 201. Marinov's wording echoes Robert Stam's description of modernism: "discontinuity becomes programmatic and rather aggressive. Interruption pre-empts spectacle; in fact, it becomes the spectacle." Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature. From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992 [1st edition 1985], 7.

[8] It is worth noting that the screenplay was written by David Mercer. Mercer and Potter are seen by John Caughie as "the two writers who can most closely be identified with modernism in television drama." John Caughie, *Television Drama. Realism, Modernism and British Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 167.

[9] Potter insisted he was playing with the "form of autobiography," quoted in Graham Fuller (ed.) Potter on Potter, London: Faber & Faber, 1993, 95. Or again, in an interview given in 1990: "The Singing Detective played with the autobiographical genre. It pretended to be autobiographical because that's a very powerful way of writing." Vernon W. Gras & John R. Cook (eds), *The Passion of Dennis Potter. International Collected Essays*, New York: St Martin's Press, 2000, 241.

[10] Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, London & New York: Routledge, 1992, 85.

Not only do the different narrative layers display a kaleidoscopic array of echoes that bind them together thematically and formally, but they constantly intermingle with each other. The *noir* atmosphere, with its tilted angles, its distorted focal lengths, its deep shadows, and its drained colours, invades the hospital ward as well as the childhood memories of the London underground. The same gestures and dialogue lines are repeated from one diegetic universe to another, often providing match cuts.[11] As in a dream, characters are regularly displaced: in the second episode, Marlow's wife (Janet Suzman) has replaced his mother (Alison Steadman) in the forest. The obsessively recurrent image of a drowned, naked woman being pulled out of the Thames sometimes shows the same woman, sometimes the Russian prostitute Sonia (Kate McKenzie), from the fictional novel, other times Marlow's present-day wife, and even his dead mother, all framed identically. Identity is all the more unstable as some different roles are played by the same actors: Michael Gambon is, of course, Marlow, the Singing Detective, as well as his creator. The characters of Raymond Binney (the mother's lover), Marc Binney (Detective Marlow's client), and Marc Finney (Nicola's imaginary lover) are all played by the same actor, Patrick Malahide. The young Philip's mother (Alison Steadman) also appears as Lili the German spy; Nurse Mills mutates into the nightclub singer Carlotta (Joanne Whalley); Sonia (Kate McKenzie) is a Russian prostitute both in Marlow's novel and in the writer's recent past.

What's more, characters and events from the different narrative frames at some time cross the walls of the different narrative spaces or address each other from discourses that are supposed to be separate.[12] At the end of Episode 1, patients and staff from the present-day hospital are standing on the 1945 bridge, blurring the two periods of time. Likewise, young Philip darts across the hospital ward after running away from his mother in the underground (Episode 5), or the two patients, Mr. Hall (David Ryall) and Reginald (Gerard Horan), are seen among the soldiers on the train that takes young Philip and his mother away from home (Episode 3), as well as in the orchestra of Marlow's nightclub (Episode 6). In an emblematic way, the two Mysterious Men, Stoppardian Laurel-and-Hardy lookalikes, appear in the hospital ward from which they run away, to find themselves lost in the Forest of Dean, before returning to the ward to confront their creator. Like Pirandello's characters, they then provide some metafictional comment as they complain about being mere "padding," deprived of any consistence or even a name.[13] Metalepsis is even more flagrant when it involves the figure of the author: in Episode 4, Marlow literally dictates his wife's lines. Filmed in close-up, his voice-over is first heard: "No luck full stop No good full stop Talk about difficult exclamation mark" before the next shot shows Nicola repeating the same words without the references to punctuation. Conversely, Finney starts inserting punctuation and stage directions in his speech: "I have this awful dash he stops himself comma and all but shudders full stop." And similar disruptions occur even within embedded narratives: the scene where Mark Binney meets Sonia in the second episode is thus suddenly interrupted to reveal it is Binney's embedded narrative to Marlow.

[11] To give but a few examples, in Episode 3, the father waving good-bye on the station platform is echoed by the singing detective in a song, then by the scarecrow which becomes alive. In episode 5, Dr Gibbon's word association game which Marlow has to play is echoed by Nicola with Finney in the next scene. In the same episode, Marlow, lying in bed with the present-day prostitute, repeats the lines that Binney was telling Sonia the prostitute in episode 2: "The river looks as though it's made of tar, sludging along. Full of filth." Most specifically, the same question "who did it?" is used as a leitmotif that finds relevance in all the narrative strands.

[12] In Episode 2, for instance, the writer, Marlow, thus answers his novel's detective when the latter asks Binney "Are you as nervous as you seem?" – "Yeah, I'm as nervous as I seem."

[13] To Nurse Mills's question, "Who are you? What do you want here?" one answers, "Those are exactly the right questions;" to Marlow telling them, "I have no idea who you are or what you want," they respond, "Disowning us now, are you? Bloody orphans, are we? We're never told! Our roles are unclear! No names, even. No bloody handles!"

Throughout the film, self-reflexive devices highlight the artificiality of representation: young Marlow sitting atop his tree repeatedly addresses the camera to express his thoughts and, more specifically, all the characters are prone suddenly to dance and sing in lip-synch, a device which has somehow become a trademark of Potter's work,[14] and which provides a Brechtian distancing effect, while simultaneously commenting upon the action, in allowing the characters to articulate suppressed dreams and feelings.

Nonetheless, for all the elaborate disjunctive montage of this multi-layered, convoluted narrative, many film scholars have stressed the presence of a unifying entity since, ultimately, the various narrative strands are all linked through Marlow's consciousness. They have noted how the detective story–with its misogynist portrayal of double-crossing women–echoes the traumatic memory of Marlow witnessing his mother's adultery, as well as his paranoid suspicions about his wife, and works as an allegory for his psychoanalytical cure, the investigation of which leads to his redemption from the sense of guilt that, quite literally, cripples him.[15]

However, the psychoanalytical narrative remains a narrative convention just like the other *genres* used in the film, a useful weapon in the author's hands with which to play with the audience's expectations.[16] I would argue that if *The Singing Detective*'s achievement is, without any doubt, the creation of a mindscape, its significance is not so much its psychological meaning as its figurative possibilities. Indeed, the film builds up an inherently intertextual world where the boundaries between past and present, between the "real" and fantasy have collapsed,[17] but what matters are the passageways, the in-betweens, that allow for potential reconfigurations and re-figurations. As if to answer Troy Kennedy Martin's statement for a new television drama, *The Singing Detective* creates "a world where total meaning is not within the objects pictured but in the space between them."[18]

Significantly, some of the most frequently recurring images are of bridges, tunnels, and corridors. The very first shot frames an empty covered alleyway into which the camera tracks, with the shot dissolving into a deserted street with a lit streetlamp. Then another dissolve opens with a track along a wall to reveal the very same alleyway of the opening scene, this time with a busker in the background. From the onset, passageways are foregrounded as transitional spaces, full of potentialities, as if waiting to be peopled. Furthermore, the repetition of the first shot in the third – but with an additional prelude and a different content – suggests the possibility of rewriting, opening up the film to constant alterations and revisions. I will describe this figure as an open loop, perhaps best illustrated at the end of Episode 2. The scene takes place in the local pub where Marlow's father performs in front of the other villagers. The camera starts by framing young Philip, who listens, engrossed in his father's singing, and it slowly dollies round the room to complete a full circle, but instead of young Philip, it now shows

[14] As Glen Creeber explains, the lip-synch technique was first used by Potter briefly in *Moonlight on the Highway* (1969) and plays a major part in *Pennies from Heaven* (1978), *The Singing Detective* (1986), and *Lipstick on your Collar* (1993) (Creeber, Dennis Potter). For a more comprehensive analysis see Samuel G. Marinov, "*Pennies from Heaven*, *The Singing Detective* and *Lipstick on Your Collar*. Redefining the Genre of Musical Film."

[15] In particular, the extensive biblical subtext has been thoroughly studied. See Creeber, *The Singing Detective*.

[16] Significantly, in Episode 3, Marlow's voice-over is heard composing his autobiography in the same way as he composes his detective novel, inserting punctuation marks: "The rooks gather in the lost trees comma like premonitions of the night full stop."

[17] In the last episode, Marlow acknowledges that his memory is as vague as a dream: "I cannot now distinguish between the train that brought my mother and me to London and the one which took us back. Which took me back, I mean. But I tell you – there was something odd about that journey – something not right – something I still dream about."

[18] Caughie, *Television Drama*, 156.

the adult Marlow, in his hospital pyjamas and bandages. Contrary to a conventional shot counter shot,[19] the transition is not carried out through editing but through camera movement within a single shot, undermining the principle of continuity itself as it conflates two incompatible chronotopes. Likewise, the continuity of tracking movements is used to cross over different temporal frameworks. In particular, the rotating track onto Marlow's face in a high-angle shot, while classically suggesting the entrance into the character's consciousness, typifies the vertigo-like disorientation of spatiotemporal landmarks within its continuous movement.

However, the most frequent transitional device throughout the series is the use of the sound bridge.[20] Jon Amiel himself compared the music to an elevator: "My image for *The Singing Detective* was that of […] a four-storey building […]. And the elevator that shuttled you up between the different floors was the music."[21] Because it is one of its most original features, many relevant analyses have been made of the use of songs that unite the different narrative strands, as they are thematically connected to Marlow's childhood memories and to his fictional protagonist, who sings in a nightclub. For example, at the beginning of Episode 3, the Mills Brothers' song "Paper Doll" continues uninterruptedly from the father waving good-bye on the station platform, to the detective singing the song in his nightclub, to close-ups of Marlow on his bed, then back to the father, still waving, who starts lip-synching, followed by the scarecrow that young Philip sees from the train, and, finally, by a group of soldiers on the train, amused at the song's allusions to "flirty guys," and thus hinting back to the mother's adultery. But the use of the sound bridge is not limited to musical numbers: bird song, the clackety-clack of the train and of the underground train, and the mother's shout as she calls "Philip" constantly echo, from one narrative strand to another.

The Singing Detective certainly makes the most of the multi-tracked nature of film. Not only does it fully exploit the conjunctive and disjunctive interplay between sound and images, but both the aural and visual tracks have recourse to multiple superimpositions: sounds, music and voice-overs from different diegetic universes repeatedly intermingle. Sometimes, as at the end of Episode 3, the voice-over of the young Philip and the adult Marlow are joined together, significantly evoking the endless loop of repetitions: "round and round and bloody round. The same bits all the time." On a visual level, multiple dissolves and superimpositions abound: in many of them, surfaces function as interfaces. It is no coincidence that Marlow's disease affects his skin, his most intimate frontier, as the exterior world flakes off. The surface of the water, the curtain of the hospital bed, the pearl curtains of the Skinskape, the portrait hanging on the wall of Binney's staircase, the canopy of the Forest of Dean, all are used as transitional spaces and, ultimately, as surfaces of projection. Significantly, the first shot that conveys the first shift from the universe of 1945 London to the present-day hospital shows a white bedsheet even before the main character, supposedly responsible for the different narratives, is introduced. What is clearly at stake is the possibility of projection. While plotting with her lover, Marlow's wife, Nicola, makes shadows shaped like parrots on the wall, an obvious comment on what the characters really are as they repeat the lines Marlow has uttered. And, of course, the *noir* aesthetics highlight shadows over the actual physical bodies. Just as the voice-over, at the same time, conjures a body and subtracts it from the image, so too bodies are treated first and foremost as projections, as Marlow's voice-over wisely comments: "You can throw a long shadow. You can throw a short one. And you know

[19] The scene of the adult being an actual witness of a scene set in his past recalls Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957).
[20] Genette specifically defines sound bridges as metaleptic devices (Gérard Genette, *Métalepse*, Paris: Seuil, 2004, 74).
[21] Quoted in Creeber, *The Singing Detective*, 22.

the mistake people make? They think the size has something to do with what's inside them. Am I right or am I right?"

Ultimately, the figure of the author as the origin of the narrative process collides with that of the spectator, reduced to immobility and projecting her/himself on the screen. At the end of the final episode, as the two Mysterious Men in search of a role confront their creator, Marlow-the-detective bursts into the hospital ward, starts shooting, and eventually shoots Marlow-the-author in the head. It is tempting to see in this murder a literal translation of the "death of the author" famously theorised by Roland Barthes, suggesting that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination."[22] It is true that the penultimate words are left to the fictional reader, Reginald, the patient who had been reading Marlow's eponymous novel throughout the film. But rather than a Barthesian interpretation, I would see this climactic conflation as the ultimate short-circuit that breaks the projection mechanism: after his symbolic death, Marlow is free to move out of his hospital cubicle, drawing its curtain open. Significantly, the last shot shows a long, empty corridor, as we hear Vera Lynn's song "We'll Meet Again." The circular time evoked in the song seems to be contradicted by the linearity of the corridor, yet the image does come full circle, as it echoes the very first image of the film. Again, this is a perfect illustration of the open loop structure that governs *The Singing Detective*.

What is remarkable in *The Singing Detective* is that, while pre-empting any narrative closure and mimetic illusion, it never precludes the possibility of narrative motivation or emotional involvement. The great variety and creativity displayed in the transitional devices allow for surprise effects, and doubt is maintained in ambiguous passages. Because the voice – overs of Marlow the writer and Marlow the detective obviously sound the same, their cynical remarks can often apply equally to their respective universes. But even when characters seem to follow Marlow's stage directions, as with Nicola and her lover, it is still possible to interpret this as a game of their own, when they are shown working on the screenplay. In Episode 4, a transitional shot between a scene with Binney in the London of 1945, and another with Nicola's lover, Finney, in the same flat, shows an external shot of a man looking out from the window while it is raining, and no clues indicate to which narrative strand the shot belongs. Or again, in Episode 2, when Marlow's father is filmed singing in the local pub, using the lip synch device, the distancing effect is shaken back into referential adhesion when, at the end, the audience sing in chorus.

Despite his avowed lack of sympathy for Dennis Potter, John Caughie has perceptively summed up the playwright's greatest achievement: "What is most striking and valuable about him […] is that he remained with television, expanding the boundaries of the possible in television drama."[23] Through its elaborate montage, its open loop structure, its use of superimpositions and its playful metalepses, *The Singing Detective* could be an illustration of Thomas Hardy's statement that "man, even to himself, is a palimpsest."[24] It certainly opens up the screen to "the landscape of the mind,"[25] and demonstrates how film can cross over genres and referential codes to create a multi-layered conflation of spatial and temporal strata, be it within a single shot, a scene, or a whole series.

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[22] "A text is made up of multiple meanings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The Reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music Text*, London: Fontana, 1977, 148.
[23] Caughie, *Television Drama*, 176.
[24] Thomas, Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* [1874], New York & London: Norton & Company, 1986, 189.
[25] Gras, *The Passion of Dennis Potter*, 3.

Vincente Minnelli's Melodrama *Some Came Running* and the Crossing of Borders

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This paper argues that in his first melodrama on screen, *Some Came Running* (1958), [1] the filmmaker Vincente Minnelli[2] tried to establish clear differences with his earlier musicals, such as *An American in Paris* (1951) or *Brigadoon* (1954), by exploring the possibilities of narrative in his films. Film critics generally agree that in his melodramas, the crossing of generic borders between the musical and the melodrama is a key to his aesthetic achievement.[3] A study of the plot and characters will show the influence of the literary model[4] in the film's narrative structure. Conversely, the cinematographic model allows much of the aesthetics of the stage musical to exert on the screen their fascination on the audience. Points of interest in the film will be discussed, such as social borders and characterization, as well as the erasure of the borders of the stage, which benefits from the CinemaScope format, the rhythm of the musical which is transposed into screen movement by fast editing, and the innovative use of colour in the film melodrama, which is a key element of the musical. Examining this film from the point of view of a crossing of generic borders will show that much of its great success is due to the cross-fertilization of both genres, the musical (stage or film) and the onscreen melodrama.

The Crossing of Generic Borders: A Significant Feature of Minnelli's Film Melodrama

A number of leading critics refer to Minnelli's films in terms of their generic awareness. Jean-Loup

[1] See synopsis in end notes.
[2] Vincente Minnelli (1903–1986). After graduating in arts, including music, painting, and costume and set design, he worked on shows and directed musical revues in New York such as Ziegfeld Follies of 1936. He was offered a job at MGM in 1940 by producer Arthur Freed. As a film director, his first films were musicals such as *Cabin in the Sky* (1943), and he directed musicals such as *An American in Paris* (1951) and *Brigadoon* (1954). Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincente_Minnelli, accessed 15 December 2020. The musical is about performed songs and this is particularly true of Minnelli's film musicals such as *An American in Paris* (1951) or *The Band Wagon* (1953). There exists an extensive bibliography on the filmmaker's work, among which only the relevant ones will be quoted, given the general availability of this documentation.
[3] "The Aesthete in the Factory," James Naremore, *The Films of Vincente Minnelli*, Cambridge (U.K.): Cambridge University Press, 1993, 7–50.
[4] Melodrama is found in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature as opposed to classical tragedy and comedy genres. It is a popular drama characterised by pathetic figures, sentimental situations which can be complicated enough to appear unrealistic. For the OED, it is a sensational piece with violent appeals to emotions and a happy ending; in the theatre the plays included songs and orchestral music accompanying the action.

Bourget, for instance, writes of *Some Came Running* that it includes all the dominant motifs of melodrama in film.[5] By this he means the themes of family life, as exemplified by the quarrelling brothers, Frank Hirsh (Arthur Kennedy) and Dave Hirsh (Frank Sinatra); of social life, as expressed by the dichotomy of high culture competing with low culture, represented through the opposition between Gwen French (Martha Hyer) and Ginny Moorhead (Shirley MacLaine); as well as by the popular theme of the young girl, Ginny, harassed by a villain, Raymond Lanchak (Steven Peck).

David Grimsted also discusses the literary model of the melodrama transposed in Minnelli's film. The characters either ignore the codes of social order, which characterizes Dave's attitude, or pay due attention to them: in the eyes of Dave's elder brother and his wife, who condemn Dave's misconduct, social order means morality. In the original model, the young heroine embodies virtue, the young man (or the old father) is opposed to the villain attempting to seduce her.[6] But David Grimsted shows that the main characters of Minnelli's melodrama are more complex than their literary sources. Ginny is rather the "lively girl" model found in secondary characters of melodramas, but gradually evolves into the innocent heroine, and Dave's rejection of the established rules of the bourgeois world gathers a strong moral value when we understand that he is aware of their hypocrisy. As a result, the film gives a satirical picture of the bourgeois morality extolled in the literary model.[7] Moreover, in Dave's neglect of conventions, and, in parallel, Ginny's ignorance of them, one sees the emergence of the modernist anti-hero type of post WWI literature. It can be argued that the moral dichotomies of romantic melodrama are rewritten by the film into a modern model relying on values of individualism and freedom of manners. By the end of the film, Dave and Ginny reverse the moral order of the establishment.

For his part, Thomas Elsaesser argues that, historically, melodrama was born with the rise of middle-class concerns. In his opinion, *Some Came Running* is a melodrama in that it exemplifies the entropy of the established middle-classes and their reticence in the face of impulse and energy. In that respect, it will be appropriate to examine the use of colour in *Some Came Running* as an onscreen vehicle to visualize the conflicting forces of society, conservative versus dynamic ones. Regarding our subject which is the transformation of the musical genre into the melodramatic one by Minnelli, we shall bear in mind Elsaesser's additional argument that melodrama is a genre which does not contradict the concerns of the musical in that it relies on a "dynamic use of spatial and musical categories, as opposed to intellectual or literary ones."[8]

Among film critics interested in melodrama in cinema, Rick Altman devoted a whole study to the notion of film genre. He argues that genre itself is a "border" in the sense that authors use established, pre-existing works as a model (for example imitation, pastiche or parody).[9] In so doing, they cater to the audiences' expectations defined by the implicit commonplace habits fostered by cultural backgrounds, customs, and ideologies. However, if the crossing of generic borders is to be meaningful for the more sophisticated audiences, it is because genre identification, which is inherently self-reflexive, is sufficiently underscored to be noticeable. In classical Hollywood cinema, this self-conscious mode of

[5] Jean-Loup Bourget, *Le mélodrame hollywoodien*, Paris: Stock, 1985, 111.
[6] David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled – American Theatre & Culture, 1800–1850*, Berkeley: University of California Press, (1968) 1987, 171–176.
[7] Ibid.,181–182.
[8] Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," (1972) reprint in B. Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods* vol. 2, Berkeley: University of California Press, 165–189, 173. For Peter Brooks, the crossing of genres in melodrama is part of a more general aesthetics of astonishment. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination-Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, New York: Columbia University Press (1976) 1985, 24–56.
[9] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, London: Macmillan, 1999, 14.

address is, of course, carefully ruled out as an obstacle to the illusion of reality created by screening fiction. Even when backstage drama comes to the fore in films about stars such as *A Star is Born* (George Cukor, 1954) or stage rehearsals and productions like *The Band Wagon* (Vincente Minnelli 1953), the camera simply frames the stage and the backstage indifferently. There is little reflexivity about the stage show as a genre distinct from cinema, unless for dramatic purposes: for instance, Cyd Charisse, as a ballet dancer in *The Band Wagon*, discovers the value of the musical as a performance, a scene which reflects upon the embedding film being itself a musical.

Crossing of Borders in the Plot

The script of *Some Came Running* [10] emphasizes the crossing of borders on the diegetic level, through scenes in which the trope of social and cultural barriers so characteristic of melodrama is screened at length. The film has two significant scenes in which both Ginny and Dave cross social borders by trespassing upon the doorstep of rooms where they do not belong.

Suspecting Dave's attachment to Gwen, Ginny decides to meet her and uses her classroom after the students have left to introduce herself (1:36:5 – 1:40:52). She asks Gwen whether she is going to marry Dave and is in love with him. But Gwen turns very stiff and cold at Ginny's shocking entrance in her tight pink dress, bright red flower stuck above the ear, heavy make-up and red hair, a style which is rather unsuitable for an academic student. As Ginny makes her rudely intrusive enquiry, she does not stand motionless as a student is expected to but keeps shifting her steps as if on hot irons and waving her hands to convey her meaning better than with her words. To emphasize her superior social rank, Gwen's indignation swells under the insulting questions and attempts to make her leave as soon as she can without transgressing the codes of politeness and self-control expected from a teacher.

Ironically, Gwen herself has intruded earlier into Dave's life with a phone call at Bama's place, unwittingly crossing social borders. Just as Dave is securing good earnings at a game table in the company of his associate gambler Bama (Dean Martin), he hears Gwen inviting him to pay her a call (1:27:33 – 1:28:45). This interruption initiates a typically burlesque scene of chaos: while the phone call upsets Dave, it also arouses another gambler's suspicion of cheating. The loser requests that Bama take his hat off, which he never does, and a fight ensues in which Bama is wounded. When Dave eventually visits Gwen, he is told by her father that she is not at home and is given a check for the publication of his novella in a newspaper. Collecting the check, he rushes upstairs and enters her bedroom unannounced (1:47:02 – 1:48:36). As–expected by the audience having witnessed Ginny's initiative, Gwen turns him down indignantly. She addresses him with rigid coldness, declaring she has come back to her senses, and realizes she does not like the way he lives, concluding with the injunction: "Keep away from me!"

Dave feels desperate and, typically, as a lover on the rebound, he falls for Ginny's love declaration: she has bought copies of his story and believes he is unattached. Again, the crossing of a social border is embedded in the diegesis. After asking Ginny to clean the place, using her as a maid and not acknowledging her words "I love you so much" as she embraces him (1:52:40), Dave complains that she does not understand the meaning of his story, and she confesses that she loves him but does not

[10] See film synopsis below. The movie was adapted by John Patrick and Arthur Sheekman from James Jones's eponymous novel. The town of Parkman was loosely based on author Jones's hometown Robinson, Illinois. The novel was Jones's second work, after his successful *From Here to Eternity*, adapted by MGM in 1953, starring Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr, Montgomery Clift, as well as Frank Sinatra.

understand him (1:55:16). It is this border between understanding, supposedly Gwen's competence as a teacher, and Ginny's true love, which Dave suddenly crosses under an impulse by proposing to her. The crossing of social barriers is completed when he decides to marry Ginny (1:55:40). The script is then devoted to the *mise-en-scène* of the wedding ceremony, which is a deconstruction (or "crossing" as has been suggested) of the expectations of the audience as far as the marriage ritual is concerned. Its representation, in the climactic sequence of the Centennial Revival Fair which will be discussed further on in this paper, emphasizes the dispersed form of the marriage ritual itself, as if this essential form of the melodramatic genre supposedly leading to a climactic happy end[11] had been disrupted.

Generic Cross-Fertilization in *Some Came Running*

Before launching into a career as a filmmaker, Minnelli had in fact been an innovator of the "integrated book musical,"[12] and his success in the theatre had almost entirely been related to a new form of revue which rejected the traditional staging of the various numbers as entirely distinct from each other. The sequence of numbers was usually determined based on contrasts in tempo, mood, or theatrical effects, so that lyrical moments alternated with comedy, star turns alternated with chorus numbers, and spectacular routines were placed at climactic moments. Although these traditional rules of composition were applied by Minnelli in his film musicals, his shows were characterised by a proto-narrative transitivity – what he himself described as an "idea of production."[13] And indeed, in this film, the "idea of production" is explicitly foregrounded in the diegetic trope of class barriers being crossed, as if it were essential to the crossing of generic borders.

The "Integrated Book Musical"

Minnelli's own comments on his film musicals highlight his interest in a narrative structure. His understanding of cinema as an art necessitating both narrative coherence and the attraction of stage numbers lead to the creation of a new genre: the "integrated book musical" using the strategies of "cross-fertilization." [14] In *An American in Paris* for example, he attempted to use both spectacular numbers and melodramatic situations.[15] The film gathered narrative coherence by telling a story about common people, while the verisimilitude of the fiction was emphasized by details and needed to be given unity by chromatic composition, relying on contrasts between different colours to "showcase" the star, Leslie Caron. The different costumes[16] were chosen for their eye-catching use of primary colours to

[11] Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 171–203.
[12] Since the 20th century, the "book musical" has been defined as a musical play where songs and dances are fully integrated into a well-made story with serious dramatic goals able to provoke genuine emotions rather than laughter. The three main components of a book musical are its music, lyrics, and book. https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=integrated+book+musical, accessed 15 December 2020.
[13] J.A.D. Casper, *Vincente Minnelli and the Film Musical*, New York: Barnes,1977, 19–20.
[14] While "hybridization" refers to animals or plants breeding with an individual belonging to another species, "cross-fertilization" does not appear in use (O.E.D). But according to Webster's American Dictionary, the two are synonyms, but the second one is also used metaphorically to mean "interchange" or "interaction" (as between different ideas, cultures, or categories), especially of a broadening or productive nature.
[15] Vincente Minnelli, *I remember It Well*, New York: Doubleday, 1974, 236.
[16] "[M]ost of his films contain scenes that take place at parties or festive celebrations." Naremore, *The Films of Vincente Minnelli*, 36.

obtain chromatic intensity. Jean-Loup Bourget argues that the transition between musical and melodrama which appears to characterize Minnelli's career as a film director, entails a shift of colour from the stage musical– of which it had become an essential ingredient– to its introduction into the melodrama, a genre which had previously flourished in black and white.[17]

Generic cross-fertilization also characterizes Leslie Caron's own art, as she was able to both dance in spectacular routines and act a part as a character. Because its script does not include social conflicts, this musical is not considered as a melodrama, but interestingly, Minnelli's comment in his autobiography shows that he sees no incompatibility between onscreen story-telling and the musical since they share an aesthetics of the senses in which colour and sound predominate.[18] In *Some Came Running*, though the melodrama relies on dialogue to develop emotional scenes of confrontation between characters attempting to manipulate each other, speech actually gives way as Gwen French's literary views about writing are actually questioned by her students. But in terms of the expressivity of contrast, she certainly provides a foil to the nearly inarticulate but keenly spontaneous and younger Ginny Moorhead.

The Show Within

Interestingly, the film script of *Some Came Running* gives us a *mise-en-abyme* of the musical in a climactic scene which sums up the essence of the genre, as it gives the characters, Ginny and Dave, a part which allows the stars, MacLaine and Sinatra, to don their Hollywood *persona*. At the Terre-Haute night-club, Ginny, who is now wearing a red dress and has been drinking heavily, upon suddenly hearing a melody which she loves is roused by an impulse to sing and join the orchestra.[19] Although, ironically enough, it was to become a well-known Sinatra song, she performs poorly with a raucous voice as she attempts to sing the melody, while her performance is, nevertheless, arresting.[20] The moment belongs to vaudeville numbers performance which addressed the audience directly, but owing to Ginny's intoxication it verges on the burlesque, through its melodramatic excess of gesture and its aural intensity, though her sudden arousal also conveys a sense of authenticity. When Dave manages to lead Ginny away from the small stage where the musicians are playing, she asks Dave to buy her a small yellow cushion inscribed with the word "Sweetheart'" and she suddenly relaxes, her whole body expressing innocent surrender as she slips it on his shoulder before resting her head. The excess of feeling which the scene expresses is more than appropriate to the melodramatic genre, as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith observes:

> [M] usic and mise-en-scène do not just heighten the emotionality of an element of the action: to some extent they substitute for it. […] This is particularly the case with Minnelli […]. Often the "hysterical" moment of the text can be identified as the point at which the

[17] Jean Loup Bourget, *Le mélodrame hollywoodien*, 205-14.
[18] Thomas Elsaesser, *Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama*, 173.
[19] The song is "To Love and Be Loved," recorded several times by Frank Sinatra. The music was composed by Jimmy Van Heusen (1913–1990) and the lyrics by Sammy Cahn (1913–1993). It won an Academy Award as Best Original Song. See end note.
[20] We could speak here of the "text of muteness" which Peter Brooks sees as characteristic of the genre.
Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 56–80. Gesture and its silent efficiency replace language.

realist representational convention breaks down.[21]

However, rather than a "hysterical moment," I believe such emotional intensity ultimately avoids the burlesque excess. Instead, its authenticity is achieved because, contrary to stage shows, we are empathizing with a film character, while the scene screens the generic crossing from realism into the marvellous.[22] Interestingly, it is the aesthetic empowerment of her small yellow cushion and its "Sweetheart" inscription which carries us into an imaginary world of dreams by the sheer force of its poetry. The stage prop is also used to conclude the melodrama, as an aura to her sweet peaceful face when Dave delicately tucks it underneath her head once she has died saving his life, true to her words: "I'm going to make you a good wife" (2:01:58).

Such a crossing from the realistic into the marvellous is but one instance of the ease with which melodrama crosses generic barriers.

The Deconstruction of the Marriage Ritual: Another Kind of "Crossing"?

Unlike the melodramatic tradition of the abandoned mother (as in Griffith's *Way Down East*, 1920), in *Some Came Running*, the girl marries, although she is not pregnant. But the wedding ceremony only amounts to signatures on a certificate, and banknotes to witnesses; and although the bride is wearing white, she is not carrying flowers; instead, we see her bunny-rabbit handbag which connotes her extreme youth and innocence. Later, she collects her fetish yellow silk cushion and its "sweetheart" inscription for the sweet promises of love that are part of the marriage ritual.

The order in which the various stages of the bride's marriage unravel is disrupted: she first receives the contract which ties her to her husband, and only later are the vows taken; the symbolic significance of her white dress is seen only later, as she moves into the crowd, rather than earlier, before the ceremony. We see her mothering a child without bearing it and the happy pair are framed in a composition which highlights Dave's lack of response instead of the traditional photograph on the steps of a church or other official building.

Part of this deconstruction of the ritual is due to Dave's attitude, since he is never heard to utter the husband's promise in his share of the vows. When Ginny moves towards him, expecting a kiss, he does not respond. In fact the marriage vows are delayed until the couple are at the fair ground, and she pronounces them alone, failing to get her husband to join her. As for the throwing of the rice, usually occurring as the couple leaves the church, it is to be delayed until Smitty's, the place where the couple are expected, but which they never reach. These moments of deconstruction of the social rites are suspended by the attempted murder of Dave and Ginny's sacrifice. The modality of such crossing is sublimated, as the ultimate crossing from life into death takes place.

And yet, there is a specifically American dimension to this emphasis on marriage details, even though they appear in a disorderly and incomplete manner. Rick Altman reminds us that marriage represents a very special phenomenon in American life. More than the dynastic, economic, and social event that marriage constitutes in Europe, the American marriage is a mystic occasion. "It is that moment when […] the couple is […] transfigured, drawing to itself the force and radiance of the sun.

[21] G. Nowell-Smith, "Minnelli and Melodrama" (1977) reprinted in M. Landy (ed.), *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television*, Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1991, 268–274, 272.

[22] "The fairy-tale quality of the melodrama tended to blur the image of the social world." Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 196.

Love it is that accomplishes this miracle – self-sacrificing, transfiguring love."[23] Minnelli's film devotes the last part of the narrative to such a moment, concluding it by the literal self-sacrificing of Ginny for the man she loves. It might therefore be because marriage in America is not an institution but a celebration which serves to project a momentary triumph of romantic love into eternity, that the final scene is so successful in winning our empathy.

The Colours of Melodrama in *Some Came Running:* Characterization

In the film's use of Metrocolor, as in classical Technicolor films,[24] colour is used to characterize the types which the protagonists embody, the impossible crossing of social barriers, and eventually, when such crossing is attempted, the ultimate tragedy it causes. In the following scenes, we understand how colour makes meaning come across as it addresses the audience's perception directly and emotionally. During the family reunion of enemy brothers with which the film opens, we discover the two protagonists' relationship not only by their gestures and postures, but also by chromatic signifiers: the two men, Frank Hirsh (Arthur Kennedy) and his younger brother Dave, are wearing beige, almost monochrome clothes. However, this similarity serves to highlight the individualism of the younger man: Dave is wearing a tight-fitting military uniform which shows his lean, muscular body to advantage, as opposed to the baggy though well ironed beige trousers which his elder brother – a jeweller and bank trustee – is seen wearing throughout the film, often with a navy-blue jacket. After a night scene during which Dave fights Raymond for harassing Ginny, he is put in jail and his brother has to pay the fine to bail him out. When they meet for the second time, Dave has moved to Bama's flat, and is recovering from his drinking bout. If Frank's beige trousers are well-ironed, Dave's tightly fitting beige uniform is now badly crumpled, which is a clue to his final rejection of middle-class conventions. And yet the colour pattern of Dave's clothes remains toned down throughout the film: he later appears in grey flannels, white shirt, and black jersey, and, in the final scene, is dressed in a grey suit, white shirt, and dark red, grey and white "club tie." The character is depicted thus as ambiguous, hesitating between conventional values when he visits the already quoted Gwen French with a mind to become a successful writer, and freedom, a value symbolized by Ginny. Dave's facial expressions are always uncertain, troubled, or perplexed, as opposed to Frank's rigid demeanour. Contrary to appearances, if for Frank and Agnes who are always careful about their appearance, Dave's often neglected clothes mean he is ignoring the rules of social order. It is with him that the audience is made to empathize. The chromatic composition in the film also depicts other characters' psychology, as for example when colours serve to define the women's differing attitudes to sensuality and sexuality. Frank's wife Agnes is unable to show affection either to her husband or her daughter, and her preference for blue dresses constitutes an objective correlative of her emotional coldness; however, she wears a pink robe when she is seen waiting anxiously at night for her daughter to return from an "outing," but this colour connoting well-to-do comfort clashes with her pallid face. Similarly, Gwen appears in a dress matching her golden hair to meet Dave the writer at dinner. The inner division of the character, between an intellectual superiority complex and a psycho-rigid psychology, is suggested by this first appearance. While a close-up of Dave's face shows that he finds her very attractive, she pretends to be only a

[23] Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, 261-62.
[24] The founding text on Technicolor and color in films is Natalie Kalmus's "Colour consciousness," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, August 1935, 139–147. See Scott Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow – Color Design in the 1930s*, Austin (Texas): The University of Texas Press, 2007, 41–46.

teacher, and after escaping Dave's warm embrace as they dance, she leaves "to mark papers": the humorous innuendo of Dave's ceaseless attempts to seduce her (00:35:12) as she is seen sitting very prim at her car's steering-wheel, justifying her hairstyle by her job as a teacher, ends with his decision to step down at Smitty's bar and join Bama (00:35:57). Less ambiguous colours are used for her subsequent scenes: as a schoolteacher, she wears a white shirt and a blue skirt (1:35:30), and as a hostess greeting Dave who brings her his manuscript (00:52:49), she wears soft beige colours, which does not deter Dave since in this scene he manages to kiss her and undo her hair, and deeply, though briefly, arouse her passion (1:01:42).

Colour is used to convey the dichotomy between this conventional chromatic world and Ginny's, which is symbolized by its many colours. Colour shots of Shirley MacLaine in pre-production are commented upon by Minnelli:

> It was very critical that she be overly made up, that she look vulgar […] her make-up test arrived from Hollywood. It was dreadful. Her face was a child's, made up as a woman. I made her up myself on Sunday. Rouge was put where the shadows would be. I requested a photographer make colour shots of her; […] it turned out to be a vulgar look, but one that didn't destroy her face […]; she was now ready to deliver her pathetic performance. Her part represented the failure of sex rather than the triumph that would be implied if a sex bomb had been cast in the role.[25]

Within the palette of colours Minnelli uses, Ginny's dresses provide visual metaphors of her inner tensions. With the exception of the white dress in which she marries and is killed (1:59:49), her clothes are generally red or orange, matching her red hair and florid complexion. She is sometimes seen wearing the same low-cut, short-sleeved flowery pink blouse either with a skirt in the same fabric and a tight-fitting sash, a blue-grey skirt, or red pants. She usually wears a bright red artificial flower over her right ear which matches her bright lipstick and adds intensity to her expressive eyes. Thus, her clothes reveal her ambiguity and inner conflict: on the one hand, the primary colours echo the fact that she is very much aware of the social prejudice of upper-class characters for whom they advertise promiscuity and sex (she is a "hostess") but knows no other way of dressing given her low-class background, and, on the other hand, such primary colours are a vindication of the sincerity of her feelings for Dave. As she gives her body and life to protect the man she loves, her ultimate dress is made of two symbolic colours, white and red.[26]

Hollywood Stars

The casting of Shirley MacLaine[27] allows the star to perform a role in which spontaneity as well as grace and even elegance paradoxically fit the usual characteristics of her acting; though she plays the part of a character who is the butt of all the other characters' cruel scorn, including the not so respectable Bama

[25] Minnelli, *I Remember It Well*, 328.

[26] Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard, *Silent Elizabethans. The Language of Colour in the Miniatures of Nicholas Hilliard and Isaac Oliver*, *Astrea* n° 7, Montpellier: CERRA, 2000, 123–193. White and red became the colours of Queen Elizabeth's dresses instead of black, when brown replaced violet/blue. There is an English tradition for this symbolic pair disseminated in novels, in *Jane Eyre* for instance.

[27] American actress and singer Shirley MacLaine (1934-) is famous for her portrayals of headstrong, quirky, eccentric women.

despite his dignified posture and large gentlemanly hat, she never seems to deserve such contempt. As said above, she is given the highly significant line "I love you even if I don't understand you" (1:55:16) with which she proves that she is quite clever. At that moment the orchestra is heard playing a soft lyrical melody which matches Dave's sudden inspiration as he kneels near Ginny and says: "Will you marry me?" (1:55:40). The chromatic intensity chosen to characterize her by a highly emotional nature conveys her sincerity with great visual power, the Hollywood star being made literally to shine.

The casting of Dean Martin[28] for the comic role of Bama Dillert, a part which allows him to play his public *persona*, also uses his way of dressing to characterize him. He is always represented as very much aware of his appearance, in impeccably white underwear at home while carefully adding a few drops of whisky in his morning coffee, hesitating which tie to wear to match his jacket, while, as an emblem of his role as the clown,[29] he never takes off his hat, even in bed, but symbolically takes it off in a homage to Ginny's courage at her burial. He is never seen to wear other colours than light grey and sticks to his gentlemanly appearance even though he makes a profitable living by spoils from poker games.

As to the casting of Sinatra,[30] it contributes to the characterisation of Dave Hirsh as a modern anti-hero, owing to his reputation as a crooner, both violent and tender. Regardless of the stereotyped social grouping of melodrama, and despite his ability to sing and perform–which is not exploited in the film, but which might constitute one of its explicit references to the musical–he plays a character who does not belong to any definite social group. Indeed, Dave is capable of fitting into diverse social categories: he is welcomed by a former shopkeeper and smiles graciously; he has a relationship with a sophisticated educated woman, Gwen, and with a "hostess," Ginny. He can also behave as a decent, protective uncle to his disturbed and adolescent niece, Dawn, when he sees her entering the nightclub where he is with Bama. While his brother sees himself as a member of the wealthy, respectable middle class, Dave is torn between two extremes: he defines himself as both a failed writer, with ideals and aspirations (as shown by his love for the beautiful, but frigid, Gwen), and as an alcoholic. If, in Frank's case, monochrome images signify respectability, in Dave's case, they imply absence of social identity, and deep ambiguity and uncertainty. During the scene of his marriage to Ginny, the camera frames his mobile features in close-up, and, in an address to the audience, a sudden flare of his blue eyes reads as an eloquent metaphor of doubt, the typical philosophical stance of the modern anti-hero.

Modernist Colour Patterns: Crossing by Dissemination and Projection

As Ginny's first appearance on screen shows, her figure introduces a subversive force into Parkman's conventional world, dramatically expressed by the colour red. She is carrying a red jacket on her arm, and wearing red lipstick, which has stained Dave's cheek and that she carefully wipes off. Red is thus referenced through clothing and make-up but, ultimately, the proleptic symbolism of this plurality of meanings becomes clear as we reach the end of the film and the emblem of the red spot on her immaculate white dress. Dave sees the blood stain projected by the last beats of her wounded heart which is as it were literally printed on the palm of his hand: one might say that the dissemination of red

[28] Famous American comedian Dean Martin (1917–1995) was nicknamed "the King of Cool" for his seemingly effortless charisma and self-assurance.
[29] On the figure of the clown see Philippe Goudard et Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (eds.), *Figures du clown, sur scène, en piste et à l'écran*, Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2020.
[30] American singer of traditional pop music and jazz Frank Sinatra (1915–1998) became a successful film actor after his career as a singer and starred in a great many Hollywood films.

here symbolizes the ultimate crossing into eternity.

The Centennial World Fair

The use of the fairground to underscore the main action, that is, the wedding, suggests that "in melodrama the rhythm of experience often establishes itself against its value (moral, intellectual.)"[31] In addition, the film is among the first to use CinemaScope, a format which enlarged the breadth of movement on the screen in a manner which suited the musical numbers and the exterior action scenes.[32] The broadening of space thanks to CinemaScope is exploited in the shooting of the Centennial Revival Fair with a boom-mounted camera.[33] Crowds and lights are seen in constant movement, a flow or "rhythm of experience" which the characters clearly share.

The chaotic freedom of the fairground was already a favourite location for cinema in black-and-white melodramas such as King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1927), or Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951), and the transposition from black-and-white to colour films is referenced in the shadow cast by Raymond, the killer, reminiscent of Napoleon's cast shadow in *Becky Sharp* (Reuben Mamoulian, 1935).[34] Shadows also appear earlier in Minnelli's film, for example, combined with back-lighting and silhouettes in Raymond's first attack on Dave, signalling the arrival of the "Chicago hoodlum." The choice of green for this first street fight and red for the final one is also reminiscent of tinted horror scenes in silent films. The effect is to create a subterranean, demonic, parallel world, as in *The Phantom of the Opera* (Rupert Julian, 1925).

The numerous, flickering lights take on a mysterious power, as if they were ominous signs, addressing us without the characters being aware of their significance. In Smitty's bar, a green light is seen flickering above the exit at the back, as if beckoning to us: it is obliterated by a young man's body as he rushes to the table where Bama is dining alone, to warn him about Raymond's intention to shoot Dave. In a similar way, the lights on the gigantic Ferris wheel soar into the night like an ominous Wheel of Fortune. Here, the composer Elmer Bernstein uses harsh string chords which underscore the threat of Raymond's manhunt, in contrast to the music of the merry-go-round that accompanies the couple. Moreover, Minnelli seems to have been fully aware that the rhythm of editing allows for the compression of events, leading to a psychological pressure that threatens Ginny and Dave.[35] He uses cinematographic devices such as parallel editing to create simultaneous plots, and in its climactic sequence of pursuit, the rapid juxtaposition of quick shots to screen the manhunt. In the final sequence of *Some Came Running*, what the flickering green light seems to have been conveying at that moment in the film is a warning about the imminent crime, as Ginny and Dave are being chased by Raymond. As if he had seen the signal along with hearing the young man's warning, Bama immediately leaves the

[31] Thomas Elsaesser, *Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama*, 173.

[32] Colour in *Brigadoon* is enhanced by the use of the new format: CinemaScope, as in the views of the hills covered with purple heather. But Minnelli recalls that, "On *The Band Wagon*, some theatres used the Cinemascope mat and cut off Fred's feet in his dancing scenes," and complains that it changed the pictorial quotes by altering the proportions of screen space. However, the advent of CinemaScope cannot be separated from Bourget's (aforementioned) shift of melodrama from black and white to Technicolor. Bourget argues that both changes contributed to a remarkable revival of melodrama in the 1950s (Bourget, *Le mélodrame hollywoodien*, 208) and the new format was important in the production and successful reception of *Some Came Running*.

[33] Naremore, *The Films of Vincente Minnelli*, 37. Here, Naremore quotes film historian Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, London: Starwood, 1993, 29.

[34] Scott Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*, 67.

[35] Thomas Elsaesser, *Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama*, 174.

place and drives his car in the middle of the crowd, looking for Dave and Ginny to protect them. The parallel editing of his car trying to move fast but delayed by the thick crowd of people enjoying the fair (2:03:38) and quick shots of Raymond racing on foot in the crowd is typical of the suspense of action cinema. But the actor's performance is carefully choreographed: we see him jumping speedily upon tables with ape-like agility, scrutinizing the crowd with baleful eyes, and finally spotting the happy pair. This manhunt amid the crowd is punctuated by shots of the first floor of a hotel where he appears to get a better view of the crowd and spot Dave and Ginny. The hotel sign stands out in scarlet letters in the darkness, and when Raymond suddenly appears at the balcony, he stands out in back lighting as a mysterious black figure, while the whole screen is literally painted red by the neon sign's beam (2:03:08). The shot is repeated (2:04:30, 2:04:47), intercutting with subjective shots of the crowd below him (2:03:57, 2:05:29). Dave and Ginny's peaceful progress slows down when Ginny spontaneously bends over a small child and kisses him (2:04:30), a moment of suspense which shows the warm and tender person she truly is, while unaware of the villain's presence. The parallel choreography is a reference to the musical genre, as if we were now crossing the border from the marriage and the city to the world of the stage. But what is taking place in the crowd suddenly changes into an empty backstage (2:06:31).

The Colours and Rhythm of the Musical

This sequence uses rhythm – through editing – for its dramatic progression, and the cinematography expresses chaos in parallel to the diegetic disruption of the marriage ritual. In the same way, careful narrative motivation for colour, a characteristic of the musical as well as melodrama, is disrupted by the apparently arbitrary presence of the primary colours of the neon signs, seen as splashes of pure pigment. The chromatic intensity of such effects may account for a role of colour in the representation of the melodramatic theme of crossing in the film. The entertainment music broadcast from the different fair-ground stalls which created a variety of acoustic backgrounds can no longer be enjoyed. Now we recover the ominous atmosphere of Elmer Bernstein's Main Title score which is resumed: drums are heard loudly beating a march suggesting the irrevocable progress of destiny, while dissonant chords almost screech the main theme. The opening shot of the credits, printed in a vivid red, was a panning CinemaScope shot of a bus with sleeping passengers, and the action started as the driver was heard shouting, "Parkman!" The colour red had already been Ginny's hallmark, but now it spreads over a large screen curtain, in front of which the innocent victims pause to discuss their plans; it frames them, as if they were performers, and it is closed as if the show were over, but neither of them acknowledges its presence. Because of its similitude with the earlier red lighting on the hotel façade which covered the whole screen, the red curtain also becomes an ominous sign of disaster. Moreover, the red drapery here is combined with a bright green structure, in a daring clash of visual tension which makes colours free from their iconic limitations.

The Backstage

The connotations of the musical become more explicit when the murder takes place. By that time, Dave and Ginny have left the crowd and entered a backstage where several pieces from the different stands have been cast in disorder owing to their uselessness (2:06:31). Here, a red fabric is seen partly

dropping from an unused stand behind them, so that it could be argued that the theatricality of the performance is again enhanced by the red curtain motif. The camera pans upon details of the setting in a deserted place where the protecting crowd will never come, and upon closer perusal, a solitary discarded doll is seen lying among the rubbish. Among the discarded pieces of the fairground equipment, the camera also frames merry-go-round horses which have been cast off in a heap. They no longer belong to the world of entertainment, and instead, gather a new meaning from their desolate backstage setting. The pattern of red can be seen in many places of the setting, as when Ginny and Dave topple upon one another next to a large red object cast amid the rubbish on the pavement, emphasizing the spilling of Ginny's blood (2:07:16).

Therefore, here the film musical trope of the backstage is mainly expressed through colour, a process which enhances the dramatic effect by the loss of encoded meanings (already figured by the disruption of the order and unity of the marriage ritual), as the chaotic backstage stage props become a metaphor of the disastrous ruin and destruction of the characters' hopes of happiness. Because of their backstage setting, the discarded stage-props no longer refer to their encoded meaning. Instead, they depend for their significance on the patches of colours on a site which seems to be littered with waste, which creates a mutual chromatic resonance on the screen. In a modernist manner,[36] Hollywood's early view of colour as realistic becomes a useful means of highlighting different conceptions of colour in the film.

As seen above, Minnelli chose to make up Ginny's face to show her as socially inferior to the banker's wife, but also, as having a strong personal appeal. This oxymoronic conception of the character is typical of modernist art since the subject matter lies in the structure of objects rather than in their iconic image. The figure does not stand for an abstract idea but for the reality, and its unbearable horror, the inner tensions and suffering of the character as bodily experience: the deformations of the proportions of the bodies are not aesthetic but the mark of their materiality. The fact that she is shot through the spine, and the splash of red which accompanies the image is a metaphor for the suffering body, rather than the spiritual essence of the melodramatic self-sacrificing heroine.

However, when one analyses the central icon which stands as a metonymy for all Ginny's dreams, the colourful silk cushion, its colours actually transmute vulgarity into pathos. On the bright yellow background, the primary colour red and a saturated green, graduating through lighter shades of the same colours, certainly transgress the law of restraint advocated by Technicolor consultant Natalie Kalmus.[37] Yet, when Dave places it under her head, once she has given her life for him, it gives her face a special aura; her curved neck and raised arm recall her earlier posture, when she was performing in the night-club, but now it is graceful rather than awkward. As to the letters composing "Sweetheart" on her beloved cushion, they stand for the words she yearns for, and echo the theme for the song "To Love and Be Loved" which roused her before selecting the cushion in the shop window. Vulgarity and sincerity are brought together by the bright golden cushion which, with its scarlet fringe, becomes a visual metaphor of Ginny's desire.

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[36] "Minnelli, like Joyce, had an aesthete's temperament. His work was shaped by the same historical forces that gave birth to modernist literature." Naremore, *The Films of Vincente Minnelli*, 15.

[37] "We must constantly practice color restraint; in the early two-color pictures, producers sometimes thought that because a process could reproduce color, they should flaunt vivid color continually before the eyes of the audience. This often led to unnatural and disastrous results." Kalmus, "Colour Consciousness," 147. And indeed, such excess of colour is used in the early Technicolor film, *Becky Sharp* (1935), to signify vulgarity, in a number in which the heroine misreads her Bath audience and sings an inappropriate lyrical piece; in a similar way, people like Gwen and Agnes think Ginny vulgar. Scott Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*, 48–75.

Conclusion

The crossing of generic borders in this film seems to constitute a form of cross-fertilization: the two genres have in common sound, particularly rhythm and music, as well as the use of Metrocolor, alias Technicolor,[38] and CinemaScope. Furthermore, while musical comedy aims at entertainment, and melodrama is concerned with moral issues, both genres are concerned with the bringing together of cultural and social opposites. Marriage is the focus of melodrama, as Altman argues, and the family is the main issue, while in the show musical, dance and shows are central, even more so in backstage musicals, i.e., shows not meant to be watched by the public in the theatre, but which comment upon the final performance. What *Some Came Running*, which revolves around social and family issues, borrows from musical comedy is a single number, but the "backstage business" is also there, transposed into the powerfully expressive metaphor of tragedy. What the musical brings to melodrama is, essentially, an intensity of rhythm, music, and colour, and freedom from the boundaries of realism, for a more sensuous, even haptic (to borrow Deleuze's term)[39] approach. The significant part of music in the film, both in Ginny's response to "To Love and Be Loved" and in Elmer Bernstein's remarkable score produces great emotional intensity. Ultimately, it seems that Minnelli's film remains remarkably efficient because of its free transgression of generic borders, with the innovative result of a cross-fertilization between the backstage trope of the musical and the melodramatic climax, as well as the interaction between sensational contrasts in stage effects and those allowed onscreen by the cinematography, from CinemaScope and color to rhythm by editing.

Film Synopsis

In 1948, Dave Hirsh (Frank Sinatra) is a disillusioned army veteran who had a career as a writer before the war, publishing two books. He comes back to his hometown Parkman, Indiana, in the company of Ginny Moorhead (Shirley MacLaine) whom he invited during a drinking bout in Chicago. She is in love with him and trying to escape from the harassment of a former boy-friend, Raymond Lanchak (Steven Peck), who soon turns up in Parkman and has a fight with Dave, before trying to shoot him as the plot ends. Dave has a brother, Frank Hirsh (Arthur Kennedy), who is a successful jeweler and banker in Parkman and, together with his wife Agnes (Leora Dana), very concerned about their social status and reputation in the town. However, he is having an affair with his secretary, Edith Barclay (Nancy Gates), which is discovered later on by his daughter Dawn Hirsh (Betty Lou Keim) who decides to leave Parkman. On meeting two of their wealthy social acquaintances, Professor French (Larry Gates) and his daughter Gwen (Martha Hyer), a creative writing teacher, who had asked to meet Dave because they admire his books, Dave is infatuated with Gwen's looks. From then on he is divided between his passionate but unrequited attachment to Gwen and Ginny's own devotion to him which moves him by its sincerity. Dave has also befriended in Parkman a hard-partying but good-hearted gambler, Bama Dillert (Dean Martin). Together they go on a gambling trip out of town, taking Ginny with them. Back in

[38] Jean-Marie Lecomte, "The Genesis and Poetics of the Early Technicolor Voice," in Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard, (dir.), *Cinéma et couleur — Film and Colour*, Paris: Michel Houdiard, 2009, 171-183.
[39] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 111-12,122-23, translated from *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation*, Paris: La Différence,1981, by Daniel W. Smith.

town, where the Centennial Revival Fair has now settled, Ginny visits Gwen at her school to ask if Gwen and Dave are to be married and she confesses her own love for Dave. Gwen is horrified and subsequently cuts Dave off. Dave immediately decides to marry Ginny on the rebound. They marry that night, in a festive atmosphere created by the town fair; but as they walk on the fair ground in a huge crowd, Raymond comes after them with a gun, injures Dave, and then shoots Ginny dead by mistake as she tries to protect Dave. (In the source novel by James Jones Dave gets killed, but Shirley MacLaine with Sinatra's support had the last scene changed.) A scene in a graveyard follows, in an attempt to moralize the story.

To Love and Be Loved

Sammy Cahn's lyrics for the song which arouses Ginny's emotion in Terre Haute. Music by Jimmy Van Heusen

That's what life's all about
Keeps the stars coming out
What makes a sad heart sing
The birds take wing

To love and be loved
That's what living is for
Makes me want you the more
The more we cling

Let others race to the moon
Through time and space to the moon
My goal is greater than this

To reach your lips, to share your kiss
To stay in your arms is the dream I pursue
To be sheltered and safe from the storm
To be cozy and ever so warm

And for always to love
And be loved by you

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/to-love-and-be-loved Accessed 21 December 2021

The Barber as an Ambivalent Americana Icon in *The Man Who Wasn't There* (Coen, 2001): Crossing the Borders Between Arts and Genres

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As uncharismatic and irrelevant a character he may have seemed in films, the barber remains one of the most emblematic figures of North American cultural history and popular culture. The strong iconicity conveyed by the famous tricolor pole most certainly contributed to building such ubiquity, as it made the barbershop a fixture of streetscapes in American paintings, photographs, and films. Historically, like any other common workers, barbers came to America with the first colonists and took part in the colonization of the west with pioneers, soldiers, and cowboys. They brought their modest contribution to the construction of the Frontier myth, as their recurring presence in Westerns will attest later. In a fast-developing country, barbershops "expanded and prospered, becoming fixtures, like the town square and the village church, in almost every town and city."[1] They were there every step of the way to independence and witnessed the building of a strong national identity that their image contributed to mythologizing in the form of Americana culture as reified by their tricolor pole. Looking conveniently patriotic, it soon became another stereotypical cultural icon that epitomizes the American Way of Life, just like Coca-Cola, drive-ins, diners, apple pies, or bowling alleys. The barbershop and its pole have gone through history unchanged and still make part of American life. Likewise, they have crossed borders between arts and genres, positioning themselves as cultural signifiers particularly in Westerns and film noir, which explains why the Coen brothers chose a barber as the unconventional hero of their neo-noir, *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001).

The two brothers have built their whole filmography on their taste for everything typically American that they enjoy deconstructing. Exploring and reinterpreting the American territory and its myths, its regionalisms, folklores and "fakelores" is one of their main concerns. Their taste for dark humor and irony has led them to create characters and situations that reveal the darkest (and often silliest) aspects of American culture. Avid readers, music fans, and moviegoers, they infuse their encyclopedic knowledge of Americana in their films. When they chose a barber as the lead part for their neo-noir, they sought to exploit the intrinsic ambiguity of this cultural icon who is everyone's confidant but also the one holding a razor over his customers' throat. One of the most underrated films in their

[1] Gladys L. Knight, *Pop Culture Places: An Encyclopedia of Places in American Popular Culture*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2014, 80.

career, *The Man …*'s black-and-white treatment (with a constant play on shadows and light), the narrator's voiceover, the love triangle, the embezzlement, immediately evoke a homage to film noir, inviting us to consider the directors' appropriation and renewal of the conventions of this genre. Previous representations of barbers come to mind, from Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1936) to Sturges's *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), simultaneously raising the viewer's expectations and deceiving them.

This paper seeks to reveal how the unconventional choice of the barber as lead character enables the film to cross the borders between arts and genres, thus pushing to the fore its "intericonicity" (derived from Jakobson's "intersemiotic translation"), intertextuality and generic hybridity. I first establish how the visual image of the barber is shaped as a secondary character in American film (Westerns and film noir) and perfected in painting (Hopper's and Rockwell's) to embody contradictory moods, (Hopperian) melancholy and (Rockwellian) all-American positivity, that are both present in the Coens' film. Then I dwell on this ambivalent image to demonstrate how it reflects an identity crisis in Americana culture. Finally, I propose to analyze how the striped motif of the barbershop pole, as part of the global signifier, pervades the whole film, relating the Americana icon to the highly codified noir genre to expose how the barber is used as a vehicle to transcend generic borders.

Images of the Barber and his Shop in American Popular Culture, Building Up a Visual Myth

In Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1936), the barber and his wife seem like a nice, harmless couple until their pernicious gossiping results in the lynching of an innocent man. The whole gossiping sequence at the barbershop could well be the model of one of Norman Rockwell's paintings – incidentally, he will paint a very similar scene entitled *Gossips* in 1948,[2] although a more inoffensive one, depicting this typical small-town-America activity with his traditional kind-heartedness. In *Fury*, crime, albeit by proxy, is associated with the character of the barber through the trust he inspires and the way the whole community chooses to believe the gossips that originate from his shop and spread through town. German-born director Fritz Lang, who had fled the rise of Nazism to start a career in Hollywood, delivered a hard comment on small-town America by exposing the potential danger behind apparently good country people. This early occurrence in the history of American cinema establishes a precedent that will later be amplified by the Coens to debunk the visual myth of Americana. The barber is also known as a regular secondary character in Westerns, typically meek, as in *My Darling Clementine* (Ford 1946). The film featured the conspicuous black-and-white striped pole that could already be interpreted as a signifier heralding a potential danger, in this case the upcoming gunfight. In *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, the submissive barber is simply banished from his shop, becoming, quite literally, a "man who *isn't* there," while Doc Holliday (Kirk Douglas) finishes his shave himself. The barber is thus depicted as a weak, almost emasculated character compared to the manly gunfighter. This type of situation will later develop in revisionist and spaghetti Westerns as the barber is simply deprived of his identity and often brutalized. In *Il mio nome è Nessuno/My Name is Nobody* (Tonino Valerii 1973), the barber and his son are both reduced to silence in the most humiliating way, their soap and brush being stuck in their mouths so that the killer can take advantage of the barber's position above Jack Beauregard (Henry Fonda) to try and slit his throat. Another similar example can be found in *High Plains Drifter* (Eastwood 1973), but this time it is the barber's physical appearance that is mocked, and, once again, he is replaced by a killer who ends up dead.

[2] Oil on canvas, private collection, 83.8 x 78.7 cm (33 x 31 inches). Painted for the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* on March 6, 1948.

In Westerns, the barber is never a criminal, but criminals usurp his identity to commit crimes without arousing suspicions, taking advantage of the innate reliability of the character. He is seen as the ultimate benevolent figure in American culture, as opposed to the European barber-surgeon, diabolized in English folklore in the countless versions of the *Sweeney Todd* story (the most recent being Tim Burton's musical, *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, 2007). This fluctuating image thus qualifies the barber as a vehicle for crossing generic borders. The Coen brothers might have exploited this discrepancy to create their own barber, who is so trust-worthy that nobody would believe that he can kill. Yet he crosses the border between good and evil, no longer a manipulated but a manipulative character, taking revenge on the lack of consideration generations of barbers have received in film history. The treatment of the barber in crime films is quite similar to what we observed in Westerns. He is a secondary character whose identity is usurped to do evil. In *Scarface* (Hawks 1932), for instance, he is easily manipulated into becoming Tony Camonte's accomplice, warning him when the police arrive and hiding his gun in his laundry basket. Finally, he is an easily corrupted character who accepts any mission for money, but he never becomes the gangster's equal. In Bretaigne Windust's noir *The Enforcer* (1951), the barber is intimidated and manipulated by the gangster who takes his place to murder his enemy. Countless examples could be included here, but a significant evolution of this pattern occurs in Alan Parker's crime drama *Mississippi Burning* (1988), in which the violent cop played by Gene Hackman swiftly replaces the barber during a shave in order to intimidate and molest a murderous deputy. A very intense sequence in which Hackman's character tortures the man by performing too close a shave shows, as was seldom the case in past examples, the vulnerability of the customer sitting in the barber's chair,[3] and the power of the man who is holding the razor, completely reversing the benevolent image of this Americana icon partly shaped visually in painting and photographs.

Although they delivered two strikingly divergent visions of their country, Norman Rockwell and Edward Hopper shared an interest in small-town America. It is not surprising, therefore, that the barber and his shop appear in several of their canvases. Hopper's *Early Sunday Morning,*[4] painted in 1930, and Rockwell's *Walking to Church,*[5] two decades later, represent two exterior scenes in front of a barbershop window. At first glance, the two paintings look very similar in terms of composition of frame and colors: red-brick walls and green-colored storefronts, punctuated with large shop windows compose the two backgrounds. Among the closed shops, the barbershop is easily recognizable by its tricolor pole and each canvas also includes a red fire hydrant, adding to the compositions' symmetry. However, Hopper's street is deserted while on Rockwell's, a family of five is merrily going to church. Although no information concerning a possible connection between the two paintings could be found, Rockwell certainly knew about Hopper's classic work, and consciously or not, might have attempted to transform a melancholy, spleenful, typically Hopperian scene into a more optimistic, idealized vision of America, his trademark. If the inclusion of a barbershop pole in both paintings does not appear to add any narrative value to the scene, it does refer to heartland America and Americana visual culture. Aesthetically, the tricolor object provides a touch of color that draws attention to the right-hand side of the canvases. More significantly, the pole can be seen as a reification of America itself and a way for the

[3] The barber's chair is another important element of the barber's apparatus. It is sometimes used to express a character's pride, or even his megalomania, as in *The Untouchables* (De Palma 1987), when Al Capone is interviewed while being shaved, and in *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin 1940), as Hinkel and Napaloni lift the barber's chair higher and higher to express their superiority.
[4] Oil on canvas, Whitney Museum of American Art, 89.4 cm × 153 cm (35.2 in × 60 in).
[5] 1952, Oil on canvas, 47.6 cm × 45.1 cm (18.75 in × 17.75 in), Private collection, painted for the cover of The Saturday Evening Post on April 4, 1953.

artists to embed their paintings in American cultural history. John Updike describes Hopper's inclusion of the pole as follows: "the barber pole, whose slight tilt, in this intensely rectilinear canvas, has the odd effect of making the street seem to run downhill, left to right."[6] The pole creates a visual effect that attracts the viewers' attention, especially because of the emptiness of the street. Updike then explains how surprising it had been for him to find out that the model used for the scene was New York's 7th Avenue as "the effect of small-town sleepiness was so strong."[7] Powerful signifiers, barbershops have this provincial aura that evokes heartland America regardless of their location. Central to the two canvases, they immediately play on the collective unconscious, suggesting a friendly place where men maintained a civilized,[8] well-groomed appearance, socialized with other respectable men and initiated their boys to manhood by getting them a haircut or their first shave.[9]

Such subjects were explored by Norman Rockwell who was keen on depicting scenes of joyful American everyday life. "The simple pleasures of small-town America"[10] is what he tried to convey through *Shuffleton's Barbershop* (1950).[11] Painted in a hyperrealist style, with great attention to details, Rockwell's painting emphasizes the conviviality of the barbershop, as the place seems like a cocoon, softly lit and warm. This effect is conveyed using warm colors (browns, oranges, greys, and reds) and the subjective point of view – it assumes the position of a bystander looking through the shop window. The scene takes place after a workday; the barbers are playing music together in a merry atmosphere which recalls one of the painter's earlier illustrations, *Barbershop Quartet* (*The Saturday Evening Post*, 26 Sept. 1936). The depth of field reinforces the impression of confidentiality; the spectator is witness to an intimate scene which, unlike the barber's daily activities in front of the customers, is not supposed to be public. Moreover, the dim light and signs of time give a nostalgic turn to the whole painting, placing the barber at the center of American past and traditions. Instead of the usual tricolor pole, in this work, American identity is reified by the flag on the "Remember Pearl Harbor" poster pinned to the wall as a patriotic token. In a completely different style, the general atmosphere of Hopper's *Barber Shop* (1931)[12] is cold, almost clinical, due to the predominance of whites and light blues and the lack of contrast and perspective. The barber himself is seen from the back, he is standing on the extreme right edge of the canvas, so that his arms are off frame; the distinctive Hopperian ray of light crossing the canvas obliquely doesn't enlighten the man entirely, leaving the top of his body in the shade. Although he is supposed to be the main subject of the painting, he is portrayed, like the Coen brothers' barber, as "a man who *isn'*t there." A second character, a woman, seen from the front, appears to be the real focus of the painting: like Doris (Frances McDormand, the barber's wife in the film), she occupies the entire space and draws the viewers' attention.

The two types of barbers are depicted side by side in the Coen brothers' film: Frank (Michael Badalucco) embodies the traditional Rockwellian barber, and Ed (Billy Bob Thornton) is the mute, motionless, almost absent Hopperian barber. The presence of these two models, reinforced by the

[6] Beth Venn, Adam D. Weinberg and Fraser Kennedy. *Frames of Reference: Looking at American Art, 1900–1950*. New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1999, 177.
[7] Ibid.
[8] It is particularly the case in Westerns and illustrates Turner's myth of the Frontier – the border between civilization and savagery.
[9] Knight, 80
[10] *The Saturday Evening Post* on YouTube, "Rockwell video minute," *Shuffleton's Barbershop*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=797dJssXD_I. (accessed June 2019)
[11] Berkshire Museum, oil on canvas, 117.5 x 109 cm (46.25 x 43 inches). Painted for the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* published on April 29, 1950.
[12] Neuberger Museum of Art (NY), oil on canvas 152,4 x 198,1 cm (60 x 78 ins).

traditional filmic image of the barber as described earlier, denotes an intericonic process[13] of "resemiotisation"[14] which can be explained as the transfer of two occurrences of an icon from painting to film and the redefinition of what this icon means or evokes in popular culture. The opening credits and sequence focus on the barber's profession and environment as typically American and related to small-town culture. The pole, placed above the entrance, is the main focus of the credits. Shot in a low angle, revolving on its axis, it animates the distinctive stripes to advertise the shop. The pole is what the brothers single out from the beginning, which places the striped motif at the center of the film's aesthetics. Then the camera tilts down and Ed's voice is heard as a customer is coming in: "Yes, I worked in a barbershop, but I never considered myself a barber." Ed positions himself as an outsider in an Americana cliché. An old man comes in and the melancholy music of the opening credits continues, along with Ed's presentation of the context, as the camera slowly moves towards Frank, "the principal barber," cutting a boy's hair while talking continuously. He embodies the Rockwellian barber, disserting on Rockwellian themes, trappers and pelts in this case. The whole sequence looks like a snapshot of the 1940s or a time capsule magnifying the nostalgic atmosphere by use of a subtle, quite poetic, slow-motion effect. But then, the main characteristics of the two barbers seem to be exaggerated in the film; the mute Hopperian barber becomes boring, and the traditional Rockwellian barber becomes annoyingly talkative. These opposite portraits of an Americana icon unnaturally coexist, as if two strikingly divergent paintings had been forced into one single filmic reality, defying the borders between the arts and the genres, comedy and tragedy, and ultimately redefining the icon's meaning.

Frank's Italian origins are also caricatured in a sequence showing a family reunion at the countryside that seems to satirize the supposed vulgarity of the Italian American culture, or is it just heartland American culture? Frank shamelessly takes part in a blueberry-pie-eating contest with a bunch of kids, his hands tied behind his back, covering his whole face with jam; he also rides the family pig, proudly drinking from the distinctive Italian wine bottle in a straw basket, the *fiasco*. His Italian origins participate in making him a burlesque version of the traditional small-town barber. His sister Doris (Frances McDormand), on the contrary, is a self-loathing Italian, who rejects tradition and aspires to a more sophisticated urban life. Ed is in the middle, he just "stumbled into his profession," as he admits, unlike Frank who inherited the barbershop and all the traditions attached to it from his father, Guzzy, who gave his name to the business. Ed is the counterpart of the discrete barber portrayed by Hopper, a mute, expressionless man – recalling a lot of Hopper's similar figures, like the man sweeping the floor in *Pennsylvania Coal Town* (1947)[15] or the one sitting on the wooden floor in front of his shop in *Sunday* (1926),[16] his arms crossed, staring at the floor, a cigar between his lips. He goes through life like a ghost, following his attention-seeking, adulterous wife wherever she drags him to. He is the man no one remembers, not even the salesman, Creighton Tolliver (Jon Polito), who proposed him a partnership in the dry-cleaning business and had forgotten him the day after. As the lawyer, Freddy Riedenschneider (Tony Shalhoub), says after Doris is wrongly accused of murdering her boss and Ed is also suspected, basing his all-defense argument on this simple elementary fact: "He's just a barber," so insignificant that he could not have committed a crime. The Coens play on the usual insignificance of

[13] Evangelos Kourdis and Pirjo Kukkonen, "Semiotics of Translation, Translation in Semiotics", *Punctum*, Volume 1, Issue 2 (2015), 5-10.
[14] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington : Indiana University Press 1979.
[15] Stanley Orr, "Razing Cain: Excess Signification in *Blood Simple* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*," *Post Script*, Spring 2008. "The tableau of Ed sweeping up clippings in the shop may even recall a similar modernist homage, Edward Hopper's painting *Pennsylvania Coal Town* (1947), which celebrates a lone sweeper attempting to clean up the urban wasteland." [American art museum Youngstown (Ohio), Oil on canvas, 52 x 75 cm (20.5 x 29. ins)]
[16] The Phillips collection (Washington), oil on canvas, 73.66 x 86.36 cm (29 x 34 ins)

the barber character in films to redefine a convention of the film noir. For that, they need to create a contrast between the two barbers, the Hopperian and the Rockwellian, who seems to have shaped this stock characters in films. They somehow came to question the visual myth of Americana, that is, the visual representation of the American Way of Life that this iconic character stands for.

Debunking an Americana Icon: A Visual Myth in Crisis

Trudy Bolter identified at least three major periods of skepticism about Americana: the 1920s, 1930s, and 1970s.[17] All three correspond to events that raised a doubt about the American model. The *laissez-faire* policy and debauched lifestyle of the 1920s resulted in the 1929 Wall Street crash followed by the Great Depression throughout the 1930s. American decision-makers had to rethink the American system completely, hence the New Deal coalition that transformed American society durably. The 1970s turmoil was the result of a particularly difficult shift in American society between pre-1960 "old" society, what Kennedy defined as "the safe mediocrity of the past" as opposed to his "New Frontier" program and its "fresh air of progress" (see JFK's Acceptance speech, 1960). In the 1920s, essayist H. L. Mencken had already pointed at the mediocrity JFK referred to, targeting the American "booboisie," a contraction of "boob" and "bourgeois," echoing Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (1922), who denounced the conformism of the small-town middle class, or in Kennedy's words "the stale, dank atmosphere of 'normalcy.'" This "booboisie," these small-town bourgeois people are shown by the Coens in *The Man …* after Doris is put to jail for the murder of her boss, Big Dan (James Gandolfini). Ed, as the film's voiceover, refers to them as "they," these soulless people prone to judge hastily (exemplified by Rockwell's *Gossips*). They are first filmed in slow motion, walking in the street in a lateral tracking shot as Ed is driving his car, observing them; and a second time as Ed is still driving, commenting on the private detective's alleged investigation, as we see the man, still in a slow motion lateral tracking shot, walking under the rain in the opposite direction to the crowd, under Ed's suspicious eye; and a third time as the camera is still slowly tracking laterally, following Ed walking against the stream, explaining how people started avoiding him after Doris committed suicide. "It was like I was a ghost walking down the street." Each of these symmetrical sequences is illustrated by a Beethoven piece (*Moonlight Sonata*) and uses the same aesthetics and composition of frame, each time opposing a stream of smartly dressed, so-called "good people" to the barber driving along or walking against the stream and symbolically rejecting the norm. This series of shots emphasizes the main interest of the film: how an ordinary, docile barber crosses the border between normalcy and criminality. It also exemplifies a recurring process in the Coen brothers' films, the dialogue between the arts, another form of border-crossing that generates implicit meaning and complexifies their reception. The dialogue established between painting and film through the representation of the barber is now enriched by classical music, Beethoven's, which is also a strong signifier as one of the subplots is focused on Ed's sudden and incongruous interest for this music when he hears Birdy (Scarlett Johansson), the judge's daughter, play. Another border is crossed, the one between low and high culture, between small-town America's ignorance (embodied by Ed) and higher-class education (embodied by Birdy). However, it is interesting to notice that both ultimately remain mere embodiments of small-town America and its limitations, as indeed Birdy, whom Ed takes for a music genius, is rejected by a revered instructor from the city.

Mencken had this "fascination with the ridiculous side of the American mentality," so when he

[17] Trudy Bolter, « Le mythe visuel de l'Americana, » in Melvyn Stokes, Reynold Humphries, and Gilles Menegaldo (eds), *Cinéma et mythes*, Poitiers, La Licorne, 2002, 107.

co-founded (with theatre critic George Jean Nathan) *The American Mercury,* which he edited from 1924 to 1933, he made sure to include an "Americana" section that he handled personally, and soon became his sophisticated readers' favorite:

> This department featured a wide assortment of newspaper clippings, wire reports, church bulletins, publicity releases, and other sources which depicted various individuals and organizations – frequently of rural origin – in the throes of some foolish action which Mencken deemed ludicrous enough for its inclusion.[18]

This anti-Rockwellian vision of America is in keeping with how the Coens have been dealing with American foibles in their filmography, using regionalisms, Americana icons and what often looks like local news, to expose the limits of American myths and their staunch supporters (the allusion to Roswell in *The Man …* is a good example). Mencken, like the Coens (although contrary to him, they were never politicized), was a provocative character who enjoyed debunking the myth of superiority conveyed by the American Way of Life.

> Mencken hoped the usage of the word "Americana" would get under the skin of pious readers, for it implied that the feature's contents demonstrated what constituted normal, average Americans. That it was not, of course, never stopped Mencken, whose personal agenda, as his voluminous writings thoroughly demonstrate, was dedicated to the proposition of unsettling early twentieth-century Americans out of their smug, stale, self-satisfied Victorian complacency and forcing them to rethink the values they held dear.[19]

Thus, the term "Americana" used for satirical purposes seems to have emerged in the 1920s and may have resulted in a visual criticism of the American model, or a crisis of visual representation.[20] As the artist Charles Burchfield commented in 1930, discussing Hopper's representation of America:

> Some have read an ironic bias in some of his paintings; but I believe this is caused by the coincidence of his coming to the fore at a time when, in our literature, the small American towns and cities were being lampooned so viciously; so that almost any straightforward and honest representation of the American scene was thought of necessity to be satirical.[21]

Interpreting Hopper's paintings proves challenging yet opposing them to Rockwell's emphasizes the two types of Americans Mencken and later Kennedy mentioned, the ones holding to comfortable, irrevocable traditions and the ones questioning them. These two

[18] Louis Hatchett, *Mencken's Americana*. Macon (Ga.): Mercer University Press, 2002, 1.
[19] Ibid.
[20] The concept of Americana originally emerged after the Civil War and referred to American antique objects related to the first half of the 20th century, when the American Way of Life was mythologized by visual arts and exported worldwide thanks to the development of the mass media, particularly cinema and TV. (For more, see Julie Assouly, *L'Amériques des Frères Coen*, Paris, CNRS, 2015, 90).
[21] Frances K. Pohl, *Framing America. A Social History of American Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002, 404.

concurrent visions coexist in *The Man …*, and in fact have always pervaded American art as they represented two broad political thoughts, namely conservative and liberal.

Various social movements and anti-war/anti-government uprisings in the late 1960s and in the 1970s triggered deeper doubts about the American way. During that period, Rockwell's America had become, more than at any other time in history, outdated and irrelevant. The typical Rockwellian values and icons, including the nice barber, were then satirized by *National Lampoon*, a magazine founded at Harvard which emphasized the political and social transformations America was undergoing at that time and positioned American campuses at the center of a rising counterculture (as was the case in France in May 1968). A first example is the cover of the November 1970 issue, which is the exact replica of the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* issue published on 10 August 1918, illustrated by Rockwell and entitled *First Haircut*. On the *Lampoon*'s cover, instead of Rockwell's mischievous kid whose hair is being cut by a dutiful barber, under the mother's tearful eyes, as she realizes that her son is becoming a man, we see a placid teenager, with a peace-and-love symbol around his neck, having his head shaved by a dumb-looking barber. In the background, his sniggering father (or an old-fashioned barber) is reading what appears to be the first issue of *Time Magazine* (1923), containing a portrait of J. Cannon, the then leader of the Republican Party and Speaker of the House of Representatives, dragging on a large cigar. The satire seems clear: Rockwell's corny vision of America (e.g., the benevolent barber, conservative family values, and the benefits of capitalism) no longer prevails in the context of the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and on the eve of the Watergate scandal. In the same spirit, a 1979 issue of *National Lampoon*, dedicated to "International communism and terrorism" and subtitled "Giving Uncle Sam a real clipping," shows the world-famous personification of America, and symbol of American supremacy, having his white hair clipped by a proud Brejnev dressed as a barber, in reference to the intervention of Russia in Afghanistan the same year. The barber, as one of the pillars of American culture and a personification of the American Way of Life, is also the perfect instrument for satire and criticism. Visually, his image is easily pastiched and his famous striped tricolor pole bears a different connotation depending on the color or black-and-white treatment of a photograph or a film.

The Barbershop Pole, Tricolor Versus Black-and-White Stripes: Changing Signification

The origin of the striped barbershop pole can be traced back to eleventh-century France, when two corporations of surgeons co-existed: those from the academy of medicine and the barber surgeons. The latter would practice bleedings or use leeches to purify infected blood in their barbershops. After each intervention, the barber would usually hang the bloody bandages outside the shop, as a form of advertising. The bandages were placed on a pike, creating a red-and-white oblique stripe which was the color of the first poles; a metal bowl, in which the leeches were collected, was placed underneath it. Through the decades, the pike became the tricolor pole: the blue stripe representing the veins, the white one, the bandages, and the red one, the blood. As for the metal bowl, it later became a sphere

placed on top of the pole.[22] Although the tradition later died in France, the tricolor pole crossed the Channel to England, and the Atlantic to America, where its popularity increased during the revolutionary era as it recalled the new American flag.[23] Not only painters, but also photographers like Walker Evans,[24] used the emblematic barbershop as a model for *Shop Front,* taken in New Orleans in 1935.[25] This rather awkward picture creates a visual shock due to the overwhelming striped pattern covering the shop front, the lamp, the woman's pullover, and the unmissable pole in the foreground. This proliferation of stripes contradicts the initial appeal of the candy-like tricolor pole, and makes the shop look more grotesque than traditional. But what really strikes the eye is the connotation of the black-and-white stripes that are quite different from the colored ones because they lose their patriotic quality. As explained by historian of colors Michel Pastoureau, the black-and-white stripe is, essentially, a negative sign – unlike the revolutionary stripes of the *sans culottes*, for example.[26] He provides a list of various negative instances, recalling the way in which certain categories of people are historically stigmatized by the striped pattern. Examples such as the buffoon, the Jew (*i.e.,* the vertical stripes of the uniforms in concentration camps), the heretic, the juggler, the leper, the executioner, and the prostitute are part of a long list of ostracized characters, all of whom "disturb or violate the good order; […] [and] are linked with the Devil in one way or another."[27] Pastoureau further argues that the bad reputation of the striped pattern might result from an ambiguous statement in the Old Testament (more precisely, the book of Deuteronomy): "Thou shalt not wear garments of different sorts, as of woollen and linen together," which, he believes, may have been wrongly translated and confused with "two different colors,"[28] thus sealing the fate of the striped pattern for centuries. But it might just as well be a purely visual problem, the stripes making it difficult for someone to distinguish between the figure and the background so that "the structure becomes the figure"[29]; a feature which is particularly striking in Evans' photograph.

The black-and-white stripes immediately refer to convict figures; the striped uniform creates a visual effect which is widely exploited in films such as *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Mervyn LeRoy 1932) or, in a different way, *Hell's Highway* (Rowland Brown 1932), in which the prisoners are meant to wear a striped target in their backs so they can be easily spotted and punished. In *The Man …*, the black-and-white stripes clearly alter the symbolic meaning of the original tricolor pole, adding a further dimension to the film. The impression of an imminent, undetermined threat is reinforced by the looming presence of the pole above the main entrance, magnified by a low angle shot in the opening credits, somehow heralding the electric chair finale. Watching the film with this idea in mind, the presence of this visual trope is so conspicuous that it seems to structure it aesthetically. Built on a play on light and shadows obtained by a contrast between very dark blacks and very bright whites, the film's aesthetics recalls German Expressionism as well as classic film noir. Very early in the film, the stripes of

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[22] Further information on www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/brunel/A885062 (Accessed July 2019).
[23] Incidentally, the figure of the barber was also popular during the revolutionary period in France, figuring in several major works such as Beaumarchais's plays *Le Barbier de Séville/The Barber of Seville* (1773) and *Le Mariage de Figaro*/*The Marriage of Figaro* (1778), and their later operatic versions by Mozart and Rossini. The barber and the servant were both symbols of the rise of democracy.
[24] Walker Evans worked with the Farm Security Administration program launched during the New Deal era to document the rural areas impacted by the droughts (the Dust Bowl) and took an interest in the effect of the Great Depression in the South.
[25] MOMA, 23.6 × 17.7 cm (9 5/16 × 6 15/16 ins).
[26] Michel Pastoureau, *Rayures, une histoire des rayures et des tissus rayés*, Paris: Seuil, 1995, 5.
[27] Ibid. (My translation)
[28] Ibid., 6.
[29] Ibid., 5.

the pole are echoed by a multitude of other images which similarly create the feeling that something wrong is about to happen: the shadow of the Venetian blinds on the floor of the shop, or even on the wall behind the barber, make him look like a virtual prisoner. Incidentally, the shop awning, which is seen both from the inside and the outside, is also striped, recalling the setting of *Shadow of a Doubt* (Alfred Hitchcock 1943), perhaps the most obvious intertextual reference in the Coen brothers' film. Such a claim is substantiated by the two films' identical location, Santa Rosa, Ca., considered by Hitchcock as the archetypal American small town, in which he shows the disruptive potential of a single bad seed embodied by Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten). *The Man …* exploits this well-known reference to recreate the atmosphere of a film noir, but follows a different narrative scheme, based on fortuitous criminality and ironic legal mistakes, as opposed to the genre's usual featuring of criminal masterminds. In that respect, the Coens' film owes more to *Spellbound* (1945), in which the suspected killer (Gregory Peck) is traumatized by striped patterns that eventually give him the key to his repressed memories.

In *The Man …* the symbolic jails created by the stripes have a proleptic function and finally materialize when Doris is locked up. From then on, a series of shots in which stripes, formed by the cell bars and their shadows, invade the frame, seem to appeal once again to the spectators' cultural knowledge of film noir, more specifically to the epitome of the genre, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett 1946). Venetian blinds and prison bars are only two examples among many images that highlight the striped pattern, thus positioning this film as a further aesthetic source of inspiration for the Coen brothers, with also many similarities in the narrative. Striped patterns recur throughout the film, subliminally, yet powerfully attracting the viewers' attention, and influencing their judgment in one way or another: the cables of the lift seen in a low angle, the theatre stairs in a high angle, the flying saucepan, the hubcap, the dry-cleaning logo, the hospital pajamas and the pillow underneath the white pillowcase are more subtle variations of the striped pattern that symbolize the characters' inevitable fate; even the electric chair and the long horizontal window from which spectators can watch the execution create stripes on the oddly immaculate white background in the film's final sequence. These multiple examples function as an extension of the original striped barbershop pole, leading the inoffensive and usually insignificant Americana icon to the electric chair, ironically for the wrong crime, but as a just retribution for the sacrifice of his innocent wife's life, thus renewing the codes of a highly codified genre.

Conclusion: Transcending the Codes of the Noir

The Man Who Wasn't There is meant to be a classic film noir, featuring most of its generic codes, but the *femme fatale* is not so fatale and the killer acts in self-defense. Repeatedly referring to classic noir, the film's renewal of the genre relies on the influence of a referential cultural network surrounding the figure of the barber and constructed by American folklore, painting, movies, and stories, thus crossing the borders between these arts. The choice of a barber as the main character and omniscient narrator is unusual, and so was the black-and-white treatment of the film when it came out.[30] Using high contrast, the directors push the noir aesthetics to an extreme, foregrounding the eerily overwhelming striped patterns, deconstructing the codes of the genre in the process. This strategy is reinforced by a series of quirky, typically Coenian elements including the barber's Nabokovian relationship with young

[30] The Coens had to accept to make a color version (that is available on DVD) to get the film funded.

Birdy and his sudden passion for Beethoven; an interaction with Dan's crazy widow who believes her husband was abducted by aliens; an accident involving a flying hubcap which recalls what we later identify as a flying saucer; or a bold homosexual toupee-wearing salesman asking for a haircut and looking for a partner with whom to start a dry-cleaning business. An element that is common to the entire oeuvre of the Coen brothers is the use of dark, offbeat humor, which is usually not in keeping with the admittedly darkly pessimistic and glamorous noir genre. Their peculiar sense of humor is usually expressed through the debunking of Americana icons: wrestlers in *Barton Fink*, bowling in *The Big Lebowski*, the Paul Bunyan fakelore in *Fargo*, the cowboy in *No Country for Old Men*, folk music in *O'Brother*, trailer parks in *Raising Arizona* or Hula Hoop in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. As a result, "the fashionable label of 'postmodernism' is often conveniently attached to the Coen brothers."[31] It is true that the Coen brothers have become masters at manipulating codes and conventions to deceive the audience and at using intertextuality and intericonicity to transcend the borders of arts and genres. In *The Man Who Wasn't There*, they pay tribute to film noir, deconstruct its codes, and thus contribute to its renewal by rehabilitating an eternal secondary character whose ambivalence is magnified by the multiple cultural references with which he is associated.[32]

[31] Ronald Bergan. *The Coen Brothers*. London: Orion Media, 2000, 25–26.

[32] Strangely enough, the barber has now become a fashion icon due to the rise of the hipster trend that (re)emerged in the US and spread to Europe. Male grooming is no longer an Anglo-American specificity and old-fashioned Americana icons such as the famous striped pole can be seen in every European city.

From Making of to "Generic Oddity": The Case of *Lost in La Mancha* (Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe, 2002)

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"It's a sad, sad world" (51:41): this off-camera comment fits to a nicety the "case" of Fulton and Pepe's *Lost in La Mancha*, but only ironically so. Their film is – or was supposed to be – a documentary (what we now call a making of) shot about and around Terry Gilliam's long-expected adaptation of Miguel Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, but when the film was eventually abandoned both directors turned it into something quite different, the record of what critics would call the *unmaking* of Terry Gilliam.[1] The result was not that sad since it led to the production of a very unexpected kind of film, telling how the adaptation whose production it was supposed to document turned out not to be made. This "unmaking" of both Gilliam and the film lends a very particular, autonomous status to *Lost in La Mancha*, which it could never have claimed as a mere making of. It stands at the threshold of two cinematic genres, being both a potential *making of* relating the production of the film (until we realize the film is not going to be made eventually) and a *documentary* about the failure to make it – hence it occupies an uneasy position at the crossroads, which is itself thematised in its narrative construction. My aim here is to research the way the film deals with this status and manages to maintain an ambiguous attitude both towards its topic (whether or not Gilliam's film will be completed) and towards its very nature (partly realistic documentary, partly metafictional comment on the way a film is – not – shot and produced). By this study I mean to show how Fulton and Pepe's film plays out our beliefs as to how a postmodern film (necessarily) stages its own reflexive nature (as cinema *on* cinema) and also how this belief is manipulated so as to point to the limits of our "knowledgeable" approach of postmodernism. This study of the surprisingly reflexive quality of the documentary will be organized

[1] David Sterritt and Mikita Brottman, "*Lost in La Mancha*: The Making, Unmaking, and Remaking of Terry Gilliam," in *Terry Gilliam Interviews*, edited by David Sterritt and Lucille Rhodes, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2004, 208-19.

around three points: the way it mixes reality with fiction; the way it adopts a self-conscious mode of representation; and the way it repeatedly introduces shows within the show to embody this reflexive discourse. In all these cases, the documentary stands at the intersection between a mere realistic record and an aesthetic reconstruction.

Reality and Fiction

Before tackling the core topic of the treatment of the in-between status of the film, a few words ought to be said about the story it relates – the story of the failure to shoot a film.[2] When director Terry Gilliam decided to shoot an adaptation of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, co-starring Johnny Depp and entitled *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, he had intended to suggest a very personal view of the source work. For instance, the character of Sancho Panza was supposed to be replaced by Toby Grisoni, a twenty-first century marketing executive thrown back through time, whom Quixote mistakes for Panza. Filming first began in 2000 but was blighted by an eerie sequence of accidents. Military flyovers drowned out the dialogue, flash floods washed away the set, and then one of the film's stars, French actor Jean Rochefort, was taken ill, having to be airlifted to hospital after suffering a hernia. Insurers decided to stop the shooting, making it one of the costliest cinematic projects of all time never to reach completion. Clearly, the status of the film changes when it becomes obvious that Gilliam's project is about to fail. A crucial question remains – does it really fail or is it not somehow transferred onto the documentary? What I mean is that as we gradually come to understand that the project is not going to be made, the film consistently comes to equate the image of Gilliam fighting the "windmills of reality" (a phrase he will coin himself at the end of *Lost in La Mancha*) with his subject matter, Don Quixote himself. This analogy is not simply suggested, it becomes a literal message from the film, conveyed for instance when the production designer Benjamin Fernandez explicitly compares Gilliam to Cervantes's hero, on the ground that he is too idealistic (17:23). Thus, there *seems* to be a constant intrusion of fiction upon reality, as if the role of the missing Don Quixote (Rochefort being taken ill) was performed by Gilliam himself. Beyond this explicit comparison, I wish to show more specifically how the film visually includes this dimension, which is unanimously acknowledged in the critical debate on the film.[3] In the scene which follows the episode where Gilliam understands that there is something wrong with Rochefort, we see his gradual disappointment and anger at the situation as he knocks into stones; then we have a shot of Johnny Depp dressed as Sancho Panza/Toby Grisoni looking at Gilliam's attitude, and seemingly sharing in, sympathizing with his discouragement. This scene clearly points to the equation between Don Quixote and Terry Gilliam, as Depp seems to pity him as a thwarted director – just as Sancho Panza pities Don Quixote as a thwarted idealist.

The fact that Depp is shot in his costume further blurs the limits between fiction and reality: the actor feels sorry for the director but so does the character for the hero of the tale. We should note this scene is present but reversed when Gilliam screens the footage from the film where Sancho is pulling his horse ahead, and obviously suffering – there he sympathizes with him as another figure of Don

[2] *Lost in La Mancha*. Directed by Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe. With Terry Gilliam, Johnny Depp, Jean Rochefort, Philip A. Paterson, Nicola Pecorini, Tony Grisoni. Production Design: Benjamin Fernandez. Editing: Jacob Bricca. Production: Quixote Films, Low Key Productions, Eastcroft Production, 2002. DVD. Haut et Court 2003.

[3] Brigitte Adriaensen, "Getting Lost in La Mancha: The Unma(s)king of Gilliam's *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*," *International Don Quixote (Studies in Comparative Literature)*, 2009: 251-70 (see page 263); Sidney Donnell, "Quixotic Storytelling, *Lost in La Mancha*, and the Unmaking of *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*," *Romance Quarterly*, 53, No. 2 (2006): 92–112: 103.

Quixote sorry to witness what he has imposed upon his companion (1:20:47).

The film then stages a blurring of fiction and reality, which works as a compensatory movement. As *Don Quixote* cannot be adapted into *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, then it seems the elements of fiction which were to be present in the projected film have found a safe harbour in the documentary. Fiction has migrated into the once realistic making of. Yet it should be noticed how the fictional elements that are integrated into *Lost in La Mancha* do not stem only from Cervantes but also from Gilliam's past *œuvre*. Chief among these are the cartoon-like episodes which are taken up from his Monty Python period and which are present in *Lost in La Mancha* through two main devices. First, the animated sequences which pop up in the film from time to time refer to this period; they appear either when Gustave Doré's illustrations of *Don Quixote* are used to comment on the scenes about to be shot by Gilliam, to explain the context of these scenes in the novel *or* when the past career of Gilliam is alluded to. According to Donnell, this may have a soothing effect on the spectator: "The Gilliamesque animation offers viewers comic relief from what is otherwise a realist documentary that dissects the misery of failure."[4] This significantly realigns Gilliam on the fictional level since his past is dealt with formally in the same way as the story of *Don Quixote* is reminded to the viewers – as if Gilliam was a fictional character like Don Quixote in fact. More significantly still, the whole of the film is punctuated by episodes which I would define as contaminated by a cartoon aesthetics, when for instance assistant director Phil Paterson mimics masturbation to express his utter helplessness in front of the situation which is getting out of control – or when he slaps his own face (58:58) or again, when Gilliam looks so flabbergasted by circumstances that he adopts a very cartoon-like pose. This is again an invasion of reality by fiction: as if the Monty Python aesthetics had become a normal standard of representation, as if people behaved in reality as in cartoons.

The topic of fiction and reality is helpful to present the in-between status of *Lost in La Mancha*, which is both a fiction on Gilliam as a Quixotic figure *and* a realistic account of his attempt at adapting Cervantes. But we should not forget that this topic is not necessarily where the two directors are most reliable, since their presentation of Gilliam as Quixotic is also a biased presentation, as critics recognized and as the film itself suggests; at one point (1:25:21), co-writer Tony Grisoni even says: "No director is gonna start a picture saying, 'We may never get through this.'" Yet, the extent to which Pepe and Fulton distort reality to fit a predetermined Quixotic vision of Gilliam is also in itself a thorny issue. Donnell for instance thinks the initial scene shows Gilliam as a helpless director lost in his creation,[5] whereas Adriaensen, following La Brétèque's contextual explanations,[6] identifies this *incipit* to a scene of open-air theatre that relates the film to a Spanish background.[7] However we may choose to read the invasion of fiction in the film – as a total or partial distortion of reality by the filmic discourse – the topic of this blurring of the limits between fiction and reality puts to the forefront, in a reflexive way, the filmic discourse as a discourse on the manipulation of images and by images.

A Reflexive Discourse

[4] Ibid, 104.
[5] Ibid, 105.
[6] François de La Bretèque, « *Lost in la Mancha* d'Orson Welles à Terry Gilliam: Se perdre dans la Manche pour retrouver le cinéma, » *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, 77 (2005): 33-41.
[7] Adriaensen, "Getting Lost in La Mancha," 258.

The specific narrative discourse held by the film is defined as "Quixotic" by Donnell;[8] this refers to the polyphonic, multiple narration it evinces and which results in an indeterminacy of meaning which according to Donnell, conveys and "adapts" Cervantes's narrative mode. To some extent, the film is metafictional, it deals not with film in general, but with cinema as an "addiction" and an escape from reality into fantasy. But it is not metafictional if we apply the term strictly, i.e., as a work of art dealing with its *own* construction, as Robert Stam suggests[9] – here, *Lost in La Mancha* exposes the making of another film, *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, but it does not do so for itself, for the documentary we are watching:

> Just as the *Quixote* is a novel on the making of a novel, as is clear from the Prologue of Part I, *Lost in La Mancha* is a documentary on the creative process of cinema itself. Or at least, it is so up to a certain point: because if it is clear that the hidden mechanisms of directing a movie, of the secrets of fiction and fantasy in Gilliam's cinematography are laid bare, it is also clear that we not have to do [*sic*] with an auto-referential work on the making of *documentaries*.[10]

This critical debate on the truly or partly valid assertion of the film's reflexivity reveals to us another way in which *Lost in La Mancha* holds a middle ground between two positions: not only does it stand at the crossroads between reality and fiction, witnessing how fiction (Gilliam as Don Quixote) intrudes upon reality (the story of Don Quixote becoming the story of *Lost in La Mancha*, a story of failure), but it also only partly assumes a reflexive status and seems to be focused only on the object of the film – *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* – and not on the *subject* proper, i.e., *Lost in La Mancha* as a metafictional discourse in the making. In short, what discourse does *Lost in La Mancha* hold on its own nature as a documentary, if it does hold a discourse on it? My aim will be here to gainsay – to some extent – the contention that *Lost in La Mancha* is less reflexive than metafictional – i.e., that it deals more with *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* than with itself, *Lost in La Mancha*. Thus, I hope to show that *Lost in La Mancha* once again crosses the frontier between documentary and fiction on another heading, i.e., it assumes the reflexive quality which is usually attributed to fiction only and not to realistically grounded documentaries.

The first point I wish to make on this topic has to do with the style of mise en scène adopted by Pepe and Fulton. Unlike what is expected from a documentary, the film does not try to erase the signs of its enunciation, namely the way it reformulates a story through a specific filmic discourse which cannot and does not purport to be "objective" or transparent. If we take the scene where Rochefort is suffering so much that he can hardly ride his horse (1:01:54), it becomes clear that the staging of the several clapperboards being wielded, interrupting the scene and indicating each cut that was practiced during the shooting of the scene, points to an objectification of the hindrance to Gilliam's project *but* also to a specific desire from the documentary's directors to emphasize this hindrance. It would have been so much easier and more usual in a mainstream approach to do without these cuts.

At no time do the directors try to downplay their direct interference with the enunciation of the film because they want this enunciation to appear. Similarly, the editing of some scenes points to this self-consciousness of style in the film. In a particular scene (1:12:27), a secretary is answering the phone

[8] Donnell, « Quixotic Storytelling, » 98.
[9] Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature. From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard*, New York: Columbia UP, 1992.
[10] Adriaensen, "Getting Lost in La Mancha," 266.

and keeps repeating that they "don't know" the date when the shooting will be taken up. This staging of failure as repeated is hardly innocent and passes for what it is: an emphasis laid by the filmic discourse on what the directors deem a crucial expression of Gilliam's "fight against the windmills of reality," to take up a phrase appearing later in the film. Lastly – but examples abound – the fast forward effect visible when tourists are playing around and being photographed on Don Quixote's statue at the end of the film (1:23:31), right under, it seems, Gilliam's apartment, has a definite aim: by this shot the film seems to mock the standstill to which Gilliam's project has come. But the main point to be made in my perspective is the following: *Lost in La Mancha* does hold a reflexive discourse on its own nature and construction by making such explicit statements as to its style and by forsaking so obviously the realistic, "objective" prerequisite to the documentary aesthetics. As such, it cannot but be associated to metafiction as defined by Patricia Waugh as an exposure of the artificial, constructed nature of fiction, as a "laying bare [of] the device.'[11]

Between fiction and reality, then, *Lost in La Mancha* is also stylistically trespassing the border between objective documentary and reflexive artefact. I wish to make two other developments that will help explain how the film does situate itself in a middle ground stylistically speaking – and most importantly how that situation can be considered to be a sign that it shares essential concerns with the postmodern approach concerning the blurring of frontiers between reality and fiction. First, it must be noted that apart from its style, the film can be considered from a higher vantage point to be an oddity in terms of its very nature and status, beyond the ambiguity between documentary and fiction which we already noticed. The oddity results from the fact that the voice over comment never actually reveals the fact that the film was eventually abandoned until the last scenes, more precisely until assistant director Phil Paterson says he quits (1:20:25). Donnell even claims that the spectator is bound to enjoy the film more fully if he or she is ignorant of the fact that the film was eventually abandoned.[12] It is clear that the suspense-driven "plot" does work a lot better if the spectator does not know the ultimate fate of Gilliam's plan *but* the consistent ambiguity which is maintained in *Lost in La Mancha* throughout as to the completion or not of Gilliam's plan is an ambiguity which is to be felt by the spectator whether or not he or she knows (by reading the DVD cover, the film's reviews, etc.) that it tells the story of a failed attempt at adapting *Don Quixote*. Of course, this film will be made later, and released in 2018 under the initial title *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, but this was not part of the reception context of Fulton and Pepe's film in 2002. The point is that *Lost in La Mancha* as an *œuvre* presents itself (nearly until the end) as a *comment* on a film (*The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*) which never came into existence. In other words, as Adriaensen remarks,[13] the comment has taken precedence over the original work – a phenomenon which is typical of post-modern aesthetics. Postmodernism does provide indeed many similar examples, if one thinks for instance of Jorge Luis Borges's "fake summaries" of works which never existed. It is part and parcel of a general movement of disempowerment of authorial voices and anxiety over the authority of narratives which is, again, a crucial element in the definition of postmodernism.

My point here is again to show how *Lost in La Mancha* manages to maintain an in-between status between original discourse and comment: as a documentary on *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, it still appears as a comment, but when we learn that *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* was never shot (during this attempt at least), *Lost in La Mancha* becomes the only original discourse left to us about a now "lost" film. Similarly, the last sequence which appears after the credits is typical of this in-

[11] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction. The theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, London: Routledge, 1984, 65.
[12] Donnell, "Quixotic Storytelling," 102.
[13] Adriaensen, "Getting Lost in La Mancha," 267.

betweenness of the film's status. Two things ought to be noticed here. First, the use of a real credit sequence presented in a traditional way further reasserts the blurring of a frontier between reality and fiction, as if the "characters" in *Lost in La Mancha* had really been performing a part – as if Gilliam was "playing" Gilliam and ought to be credited for it in the sequence. We saw indeed the large fictional part we can attribute to Gilliam as a "character," i.e., as Don Quixote. Secondly, the giants' sequence following the end credits calls for interpretation because it is very complex. It consists of a return to a scene previously shot by Gilliam and staging the attack of Don Quixote by imaginary giants. Considered as an autonomous sequence coming *after* the film, it can be seen as the promise that the film is still not finished, i.e., that the project will be taken up and that Gilliam will work at it again very soon. Thus, it further ambiguates the status of *Lost in La Mancha* as:

1. a film that falsely presents itself as a making of dealing with *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*,
2. a film that eventually reveals that *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* was abandoned and constitutes itself as a reflexive comment on the failure and a study in cinema,
3. a possible "prequel" to the actual release of the film – "Coming soon" – which is said not to be abandoned by Gilliam.

Given the variety of the definitions *Lost in La Mancha* is playing with, as parts of a self-conscious exposure of its various readings, I fail to see how one could deny the reflexivity of *Lost in La Mancha* – and more importantly, this reflexivity clearly appears as the result of a particular, oriented *mise en scène* that re-attributes the (repetitive) giants' sequence at the end a new meaning through the specific location it is given in the script.

The Show Within the Show

The film's reflexivity then revolves around the way *Lost in La Mancha* constantly questions and redefines its own status regarding its topic – the making and unmaking of *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*. This feature assumes a form which I wish to examine as a last part of this analysis, i.e., the presence of a *mise en abyme,* or the staging of a show within the show.

This is a recurring feature throughout *Lost in La Mancha*, in the sense that while we are supposed (at first) to watch a documentary record of a film production, this record repeatedly involves scenes in which the actors and the crew members become in their turn spectators to another show embedded within the first-level narrative. In short, we are watching a film in which "characters" (this term refers to real-life actors but also to Gilliam himself, e.g., as he is dealt with as a Quixotic character) are presented within other shows. A typical example takes place when the investors come to visit the set and – as things are not improving – we feel a growing tension among the crew as to how they will judge the advancement of the project. This culminates in the sequence where Depp (as Toby Grisoni) is supposed to be pushed by a very reluctant horse, which makes Gilliam angry in front of the investors (1:07:55). Here, we have two levels again: the investors witness the difficulties encountered by Gilliam and his crew, *and* we witness the tension that results from the situation. The first-level narrative – the story of the film being shot, including the investors' visit – meets with a second-level narrative – the scene itself with Toby Grisoni. True to say, this kind of embedding of narratives recurs each time, for instance,

Gilliam screens unedited footage from the film: we often see him watching parts of the film. But more generally *Lost in La Mancha* tends to develop this kind of *mise en abyme* by stressing situations in which crew members witness other kinds of "shows," not only sequences from *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*.

A case in point lies in the sequence where a conference is organised among the crew, with producers explaining how they intend to cope with the present difficulties they encounter. This sequence is duplicating the spectators' situation by attributing a relatively passive watching position to the crew themselves. Similarly, the scene of Depp's long-expected arrival on the set is the occasion for the same kind of development (38:40). In this sequence, Depp suggests his own contribution to the script by proposing that his character, when he is transplanted to seventeenth-century Spain, cries out "Cut" as if he believed he were in a fictional world, on a shooting set. A number of readings have to be made about this scene. First, it shows Gilliam is losing control of the metafictional dimension of his film, as Adriaensen suggests:

> […] Johnny Depp himself suggests that his character should shout "cut" when he is attacked by Don Quixote and his guards. It is not really surprising that this suggestion does not come from Gilliam himself: even if he seems quite enthusiastic about Depp's idea, this kind of metafictional interruptions in his fantastic story does not seem to have been meant to occupy a prominent place in *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*.[14]

Depp suggests the change because he is becoming more aware of this dimension, contrary to Gilliam who is slowly being integrated within the film not as a "master narrator" but as a quixotic character. Secondly, this scene again makes Gilliam and Paterson spectators to the show Depp as *the* star is treating them to. Thirdly, the constraint felt in this scene between Gilliam and Paterson – their hinging on Depp as a major star whose contribution to the film will largely determine its success – further reasserts the fragility of their enterprise and bears an ill omen towards its fulfilment. They cannot but agree with Depp's suggestion because cinema – and *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* in particular – hinges on a fragile combination of circumstances, money, and artistic drive, a combination of which the star system is an essential element. Once again, the show within the show formulates a reflexive statement on the nature of cinema.

But how is this statement a feature of *Lost in La Mancha* as a reflexive work bearing not on another film but on its own status? In other words, is Adriaensen right when she claims that *Lost in La Mancha* is not truly metafictional because it examines cinema in general and does not question its own status? I think the critic herself has answered the question by noticing that the voice over in *Lost in La Mancha* is narrated by Jeff Bridges, the actor who performed in Gilliam's *Fisher King* (265). By using Bridges in this part, Pepe and Fulton implement an underlying development of *mise en abyme*, or show within the show, i.e., the trespassing from one narrative level over another one, whereas logically (or in a more mainstream approach), both should have been kept separate. Using Bridges suggests that the actor from *Fisher King* has become real, has shifted levels from fiction to reality, just as Don Quixote keeps invading reality and "contaminates" Gilliam. This feature also often appears when the shot sequences from *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* are inserted within *Lost in La Mancha* without the usual changes in lighting and image quality – as if the two levels had fused. This overlapping of narrative

[14] Adriaensen, "Getting Lost in La Mancha," 258–259.

levels – in technical terms a metalepsis, according to French theoretician Gérard Genette[15] – again inscribes *Lost in La Mancha* within a discourse that tends to deny narrative barriers, just as the duplication of the spectators' position in the various instances of *mise en abyme* opens the path for precisely this kind of confusion. This is maybe the best way of showing what *Lost in La Mancha* makes of its topic in terms of questioning our spectators' position not only towards Gilliam's project, but also towards itself.

Terry Gilliam did make the film eventually. It was released in 2018 under the projected title and bears many similarities to the script that he was trying to shoot in the 2000s.[16] Similarly, a sequel was given by Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe in 2019 to *Lost in La Mancha*, through another documentary following the production of *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, and entitled *He Dreams of Giants*.[17] Therefore, the story was not really over after all, once the relation of the doomed project had been made in 2002. What testifies to the continuous interest in metafictional content in the "finished product" confirms Gilliam's intent to deal in that film with our sometimes fruitful, sometimes harmful, relationship to fiction in general and to cinema in particular. Thus, whereas Toby Grisoni/Sancho Panza in the 2002 attempt was supposed to be a marketing executive thrown back in seventeenth-century Spain, he is now (in 2018) a film director finding by chance a copy of his first student project film and meeting the former "star" of this project who now lives in the delusion that he *is* Don Quixote. The whole plot again revolves around the difficulty of combining the appeal of fiction and the hard reality of corruption and immorality, just as in the initial project. But the central change in the status of the main character Toby (Adam Driver) takes the metafictional dimension still further, since it becomes crystal clear that Gilliam is dealing not only with the status of fiction but with the role of cinema in reality. Such a move resonates significantly with *Lost in La Mancha*, as a work which questioned the interaction between documentary reality and fictional reconstruction. Yet the sequel to the documentary has been harshly judged by some critics like Caryn James, precisely due to the excessive stress on that question of the link between the real-life director and the idealism of Don Quixote:

> Some clips from *Lost in La Mancha* efficiently fill in the background, including a scene of Gilliam wondering if it might be better to let the dream of his project stand unrealized. "I've done the film too often in my head," he says. "Is it better just to leave it there?" In the contemporary interviews, he looks at how his attitude toward the character of Quixote has changed, so that now he seems, "an older man with one last chance to make the world as interesting as he dreams it to be." Gilliam looks at himself directing today and says, "You realize you're not who you used to be," that is, a young man "talented, energetic, fast on his feet." That guy, he says. "is long dead."
>
> These are trenchant, self-questioning moments that any artist likely experiences, but the film refuses to explore that theme deeply. While the title *He Dreams of Giants* heavy-handedly compares Gilliam to Quixote, Fulton and Pepe rarely go beyond that unoriginal observation. Instead, we're given a broad look at Gilliam's career woven into the

[15] Gérard Genette, *Métalepses*, Paris: Seuils, 2004.

[16] *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*. Directed by Terry Gilliam. With Adam Driver (Toby), Jonathan Price (Don Quixote), Joana Ribeiro (Angelica), Stellan Skarsgard (the Boss), Olga Kurylenko (Jacqui). Production Design: Benjamin Fernandez. Cinematography: Nicola Pecorini. Editing: Teresa Font, Lesley Walker. Production: Recorded Picture Company, Tornasol Films, Entre Chien et Loup, Amazon Studios, 2018. DVD. Amazon, 2019.

[17] *He Dreams of Giants*. Directed by Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe. With Adam Driver, Terry Gilliam, Johnathan Pryce. Editing: Bill Hilferty, Janus Billeskov Jansen, Nyneve Laura Minnear. Production: Corniche Pictures, Low Key Productions, Quixote Productions, 2019.

> contemporary parts. The film is diffuse, not in an imaginatively chaotic Terry Gilliam way, but in the way of a muddled work that can't decide what it wants to be.[18]

Maybe what is missing in *He Dreams of Giants* is the ambiguity that makes much of the richness of *Lost in La Mancha*, where the analogy between director and character is subtle and slowly constructed. Even so, the 2002 film does point to a difficult question that is also present in the 2018 sequel, namely the possibility for the creation process itself, with all its quandaries and potentialities, to be more satisfactory than the completed work – a question that is also truly reflexive.

[18] James, C. (2019). "*He Dreams of Giants*: Film Review," *Hollywood Reporter*, 11.10.2019. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/he-dreams-giants-review-1251390 (accessed on 12.10.2020)

Sherlock Holmes Crosses Borders

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Who needs frontiers? Increasing resistance to globalization leads to a renewed interest in the idea of "*good* frontiers." For instance, Regis Debray[1] has written on the need to reassess and revalorize frontiers, suggesting a response to contemporary anxiety about the loss of identity. The relevance of the concept of frontiers in the context of storytelling is the subject of this essay. Such frontiers do not only concern the boundaries between countries. While rooted in the "geographic metaphor," they offer reflections on a whole range of conceptual, dynamic, and generic issues.

The Sherlock Holmes narrative, in its multiple guises, is a useful locus for investigation. Two main types of borders can be delineated in these narratives: on the one hand, actual and well-marked frontiers (based on the geographic metaphor, explained in the next section) extending from space to time, characters, and genres. On the other hand, moving borders between two poles that form a series of dynamics, such as good and evil, nostalgia and hybridisation, abstract deduction and forensics based on material clues. In the first category, frontiers do not move and are meant to be crossed, whereas borders of the second type move around a fixed object or narrative. In the Holmes example, Sherlock will travel in space and time and across genres, but new authors and new readers will also use his stories according to moving criteria which help regenerate the narrative. In many respects, the original Holmes canon did not imply the range of dynamics produced much later by new narratives, such as *film noir* or American forensics of the *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* type.

[1] Régis Debray, *Éloge des frontières*, Paris: Gallimard, 2010.

Frontiers of the First Type: Adaptations and the Geographic Metaphor

In fiction, geographic frontiers are easy to ignore for those who have a strong, well-defined identity, such as Sherlock Holmes. Such strongly identified entities as the Holmes pattern will travel through space and time and help build worlds of their own. In a way, familiar stories echo familiar places: we come back, we enjoy their unchanged settings, but we live new moments that revive details in our minds and question our own evolution. As we import the geographical metaphor while speaking of stories, we find that words are to be compared with maps (both are abstract signifiers), and that a world outside (real or imaginary) is their signified territory. It is clear that, in the case of Great Britain, the abstract borders coincide with the island's physical shores, and we already know that maps can refer to either an imaginary or a real territory.

The geographic metaphor concerns fixed borders and a moving formula within the games of adaptation. The name "Sherlock Holmes" has become a fixed label that points to a familiar and fictitious territory, often dealt with as if he were not a fictional character (see for example, the museum in Baker Street). Such names generate borderlines and imply a set of rules and elements within them. Their "maps" will import new elements from beyond the border, whereas some typical elements will be exported out of the original territory. In both movements, strong identity (of the territory or of the travelling unit) is required. Reference to Conan Doyle's stories is notably absent in Linda Hutcheon's remarkable defence of adaptation, and yet her concluding observation is apposite: "In the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception."[2]

The nineteenth century offered various canonical narratives organized around a famous character (for instance, Frankenstein, Dracula, Sherlock Holmes), and establishing a map made of diegetic units, motifs, and themes I shall call the *norm*, keeping the word *canon* for the set of forty-six short stories plus the four novels. This norm (a set of rules), included in the canon (the Doyle original stories), can be organized into a formula (a creative set of devices) which, in its turn, generates endless variations.[3] However, it is at least possible to use the formidable corpus as a starting point from which to suggest a general "grammar" of the Holmes offspring in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and to attempt to map and establish the borders between several types of narratives and narrations. In so doing, I shall borrow from Linda Hutcheon's book the tool she calls a "meme." A meme (after Richard Dawkins) is a "minimal unit of cultural transmission" or, even more simply, the basic unit of imitation (Hutcheon 2006: 31). In Laurie King's novel *The Language of Bees*[4] (2009), for example, Holmes is transported in time and space: "My husband sighed but he made no attempt to defend or justify his son's act" (King 2009: 182). The narrator is Mary Russell, a clever and pretty twenty-four-year-old American woman. The husband is Sherlock Holmes, who is sixty-three in 1924. And his "son" – Damian, born to Irene Adler – is the suspect-to-be in this story. The Californian writer uses part of the canon and the formula, but she transposes them by transgressing temporal (1924) and spatial limits (her previous story was set in the US), and by adding characters and events around the accepted set of Doyle characters (for example, Holmes and Mycroft). Above all, the style of the Californian novelist is a florid pastiche of nineteenth-century novel writing.

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[2] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 177.
[3] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes: "The Guinness World Records has consistently listed Sherlock Holmes as the 'most portrayed movie character' with 75 actors playing the part in over 211 films. Holmes's first screen appearance was in the Mutoscope film *Sherlock Holmes Baffled* in 1900, albeit in a barely-recognisable form." I found the article useful as a compendium of "Holmes general wisdom."
[4] Laurie King, *The Language of Bees*, New York: Bantam Books, 2009.

Towards a Typology of the Holmes Stories

The Language of Bees was published in 2009. I shall take this year as a sign of the vitality of the myth and as a sample for a starting point, since it saw almost all types of rewriting and adaptations of the Holmes tradition. Here is a short list of this micro corpus:

Novels

Laurie R. King, *The Language of Bees*, "The New York Times Bestseller," 2009.

Gilbert Adair, *And Then There Was No One*, Faber & Faber, 2009.

Films and TV series

Harry Bradbeer, *Enola Holmes*, 2020 (123 minutes), with Henry Cavill (Holmes) and Millie Bobby Brown (his sister Enola).

Bill Condon, *Mr Holmes*, with Ian McKelen, 2005 (103 minutes). Novel by Mitch Cullin, "A slight Trick of the Mind."

Allan Cubitt (screenplay), *Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Silk Stockings*, BBC, 2005, with Rupert Everett as Holmes (97 minutes).

Robert Doherty, *Elementary*, series from 2012 to 2019, 154 episodes (42 minutes), with Johnny Lee Miller.

Bruno Heller (scriptwriter), *The Mentalist*, 2008–2011, Warner Brothers TV series, with Simon Baker as Patrick Jane (50-minute episodes).

Steven Moffat, *Sherlock*, *a New Sleuth for the Century*, BBC, 2010, with Benedict Cumberbatch as Holmes, (three 90-minute episodes).

Guy Ritchie, *Sherlock Holmes*, 2009, Warner Brothers film, with Robert Downey Jr. as Holmes (123 minutes).

The Wikipedia item cited earlier provides a helpful list of the typical units I call memes: places, times, objects, attitudes, events. These memes now belong to the common knowledge shared by most readers and sketch the original map on which the canon is inscribed. Let me recall a few of them: the canonical Holmes belongs to a well-defined *space* (London, Baker Street, the Docks, the Moors, and later the Sussex Downs), and *time* (late-Victorian Britain and the Commonwealth); he lives and works with Dr Watson, who tells his stories after the fact, but insists on their limited accuracy; Holmes's looks and clothes have been fixed in *A Study in Scarlet*[5] and in the original illustrations by Sidney Paget;

[5] *A Study in Scarlet*, Chapter II: "Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with. He was quiet in his ways, and his habits were regular. It was rare for him to be up after ten at night, and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning. Sometimes he spent his day at the chemical laboratory, sometimes in the dissecting-rooms, and occasionally in long walks, which appeared to take him into the lowest portions of the City. Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion. As the weeks went by, my interest in him and my curiosity as

Watson sees him as a Bohemian, whatever this may mean at the time; his familiar objects metonymise his tastes and habits and are to be seen in his museum: cigars, syringes (the 7% solution), pistols, sword, magnifying glass and so forth. The list is obvious and constitutes the formula itself.

His attitudes too are acutely described: starving himself, bored in a haze of smoke, silent or diving into action, fighting, hiding then coming back in disguise and so on. But the basic narrative implies a mystery to be solved by induction, and an analeptic narration by Watson based on a threefold set of signs: forensic Holmes observes and reads clues; Watson observes and reads Holmes; the reader deciphers Watson's unreliable narrative. Among the other fundamental narrative elements in the canon, most criminals have a connection with past horrors and sufferings; many stories conjure up exotic, distant countries and mysteries; Holmes himself articulates a positivist inductive method with esoteric magic visions of the world, and his stories repeat the shadow of his symmetrical arch-enemy Moriarty in the background. Most importantly, the Holmes canon seems to introduce the idea that, beyond the English gentleman's eccentricity, there is a price to be paid for genius. Most post-Holmes sleuths will have both their Watsons (and Lestrade) and a whole set of weak points: age for Miss Marple; ridiculous pride for Poirot; looks and social status for Columbo; dead wives for George Gently, Lewis, or Patrick Jane; divorce for Wallander and Morse, and so on. The only exception might be happy Barnaby in his idyllic Midsomer England, obviously reminiscent of Miss Marple's Saint Mary Mead.

Narrative Modes

Once this simplified list of memes is recalled under the label Holmes (this is the map suggesting a territory), the question is now: what types of variations do they suggest, what moves within and beyond these borders (when you metaphorically draw a line around the groups of *memes*) and what trespassing or transgression occurs? In considering these variations, the principal polarities within the Holmes territory should be borne in mind. These include:

Analeptic narration/instant action
A taste for "gothic" mysteries/positivist forensics
A weakened persona/a Genius sleuth
Holmes's obsession with accuracy/unreliable Watson

The starting point is the written canon itself (26 stories, plus 4 novels): an illustrated text, told by Dr Watson. This written material can be adapted on the stage or filmed. Adaptations can take liberties with time and space, but they can also verge on pastiche. Typically, Jeremy Brett's impressive BBC collection varies the length of its episodes in proportion to the originals, either short stories (short films) or novels (90-minute films). The obvious intention is twofold: to be as faithful as possible to the

to his aims in life, gradually deepened and increased. His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch, as I frequently had occasion to observe when I watched him manipulating his fragile philosophical instruments."

original, and to regenerate it for our times. But the *narrator* becomes the film itself, even though we are only afforded Watson's partial knowledge. Most attempts to recapture Watson's voice are marred by the rich amount of information afforded by a single filmic picture. For instance, Billy Wilder's *Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* starts with Watson's manuscript and Watson's unreliable voice-over. But although his voice comes back regularly, the spectator trusts what he sees as an "objective" vision of the diegetic world. Most canonical adaptations (for example, those of Basil Rathbone or Peter Cushing) take more liberties with the original than the Brett version. Incidentally, TV series and longer films share the *serial* model, since a Holmes novel is based on a set of repeated, already accepted *memes*.

A second type of variation, near pastiches (written and filmic), respects the canonical formula but adds new items and information. This is not unlike exploring the same territory, but more closely and with a different intention. Note here that there is no chronological progression among the different modes of narration. Total freedom was possible early in the century (viz. Buster Keaton's *Young Sherlock*), whereas near pastiche was written as late as 2009: a prime example here would be an invented short story inserted in Gilbert Adair's novel. When the protagonist – Adair himself – reads a story he had written, called the *Giant Rat of Sumatra* (Adair, 58–87), all the readers know this is a story Watson had promised to tell. This is more than a mere pastiche – it might have been a canonical text working here like Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*. Allan Cubitt's (2005) *Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Silk Stockings*, a 90-minute BBC film with Rupert Everett, offers another meticulous exercise in pastiche. But faithfulness accepts difference: interestingly, where Brett seems to be always shouting, Everett constantly whispers.

The third type of variation involves additions: filling gaps and answering questions. There is a variety of additions based on what could have happened before the canon (*Young Sherlock Holmes* or *Murder Rooms*, in which young Conan Doyle takes his model from a Dr Bell, played by Ian Richardson), after it (*The Language of Bees*) or within a mysterious interval Watson did not describe (after the Reichenbach Falls episode, Holmes disappeared: *The 7% Solution* tells of his meetings with Freud in Vienna). Billy Wilder's *Private life of Sherlock Holmes* is meant to offer two explanations for the Detective's misogyny: 1) could he be gay? 2) he was not, but was in love with a German spy. Such additions are well known in films with their prequels, sequels, and parallel stories. All these examples respect the basic memes within plausible time and space borders, with the debatable exceptions of Holmes's youth and old age, but they add new events. The twentieth century offers many examples of such amplifications, with Dracula, Spiderman, and more recently, Batman (from Burton to Nolan). We note here that Holmes is less interesting as a tormented character than as an active mind. If he acts more than Christie's sleuths, he thinks more than comic book characters of the Superman type.

The fourth category involves variations. In such cases, the geographic metaphor changes significantly: frontiers and landscapes are different, but the traveller is meant to keep them in mind while making comparisons with a new version of the memes. In fact, shifts in space and time were to be expected as soon as the canon built a sufficiently strong norm. Holmes had to go to the USA (with Mary Russell) and to be transposed into the twenty-first century (in the *Sherlock* BBC series). In a symmetrical move, Ritchie's Hollywood Holmes remains in a cyberpunk nineteenth century London, but he also deeply alters his character. Ritchie's film is obviously a mixture of canonical allusions and shifts in narration and tone. For example, he plays with Holmes's so-called bohemian attitude, which he grossly exaggerates, making him dirty, ill-shaven, and clownish while Holmes's addictions (wine, alcohol, and drugs) and potential violence (boxing bare-fisted) become almost grotesque. This version is digitally filmed, and the greenish colours highlight its artificiality, even if it refrains from the *Van Helsing* type of excesses of the same period (in which Frankenstein meets Dracula).

This brings us to questions of import and export. Ritchie's film, for example, keeps most of the canon while twisting it completely. In a way, one could say that he imports the Holmes formula into Hollywood. In contrast, one may suggest that some TV series borrow a few memes from the canon without naming their protagonist Holmes and create a space and time frame which is quite different. The British screenwriter Bruno Heller explicitly recycled the Holmes formula into a new story – *The Mentalist* – in which several memes are preserved even though there is no specific mention of the Holmes label itself. Heller exports them to Los Angeles in 2010: Patrick Jane is a brilliant sleuth but he is rendered powerless by his low status in the police and his personal story (his wife and son had been killed by a Moriarty figure, John Le Rouge). Like Holmes, Patrick Jane works with a Lestrade-Watson figure, in this case, a policewoman called Lisbon.

In the last variation of the geographic metaphor, everything (narration, focus and tone, fixed frontiers and travelling memes) seems to be retained, but the reader will focus upon point-of-view and mood: in other words, same landscapes but different travellers and different contexts. The Holmes canon, like most similar myths of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was very soon parodied, in what seems to be the normal sequel to success. Parody is one of the several narrative moves of adaptation establishing a new relationship between the text and its reader, well exemplified by Buster Keaton and Gene Wilder (in the Mel Brooks tradition). The 1980s saw a flourishing of variations of this type, with Billy Wilder's *Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, Tom Eberhardts's *Without a Clue* or Nichol's *The 7% Solution*. They share a nostalgic approach, and they concentrate on the consequences of Holmes's *persona* rather than on the narrative patterns of the original. First-person narratives in novels are more easily accepted than in films, where they hint at self-conscious narration: Mary Russell simply says: "It's him, I said ungrammatically."[6] But films, too, can make explicit the shifts through the narrative voice itself. Of course, Wilder's Watson immediately sounds unreliable with his old-fashioned precautions and his caricature of a clue (how deep was the *parsley* found in the butter on a hot day?). Or, in *Without a Clue*, Holmes's and Watson's personas are exchanged, the Doctor being the real genius and Holmes a drunken actor posing as the Detective. As a result, what Michael Caine's Holmes says sounds suspicious and full of *double entendres*.

Gilbert Adair's *And Then There was No One*, aims to be the ultimate postmodern retelling of the myth. As his sleuth protagonist says: "postmodernism is dead, it's so last century … it's as hopelessly passé as Agatha Christie herself" (Adair 2009: 254). The book is not a novel but "an entertainment" with the author himself as narrator and protagonist. The Holmes label and *memes* (a museum and a Festival in Switzerland) are only a pretext. The author-protagonist meets his Marple-like sleuth who detects him as the murderer. The novel ends when the author-narrator-protagonist-murderer Adair falls into the Reichenbach Falls and dies. This aims to be the ultimate story with the author as villain, killed by his own sleuth.

Moving Borders of the Second Type

I shall conclude with a different metaphor, borrowed from graphs and computers: moving borders of the second type. Most dynamic oppositions between two poles call for a *moving cursor*, mostly pointing at the situation of a group or a person at a particular moment. For instance, the canon suggests a balance between Watson and Holmes, the doctor and the detective. But Holmes uses two

[6] Laurie King, ibid, p. 327.

techniques of investigation which integrate these two poles: he borrows the doctor's empirical search for material clues *and* the literary speculation of the game player. Both poles (abstract deduction/empiricism) coexist in him, and one has to look at his followers in the twentieth century to realise that they are likely to attract different trends of stories, from intellectual *deduction* (Miss Marple) to empirical *forensics* (*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*).

The Holmes canon already included a whole range of such oppositions (calling for the moving cursors at work when one considers new stories). Countless variations would later produce what may be considered to be mythical tensions between the poles, a few examples of which I shall suggest here: a) The Golden Age of the British *whodunnit* (1930–1940) emphasized the opposition between a couple of detectives borrowed from the Watson/Holmes pattern whereas American crime stories generally relied on teams or the police organization. Nevertheless, the idea of a team had already been suggested by Holmes's "irregulars," and the limit was made obvious by the opposition between two types of twentieth century stories. b) More significantly, the whole conception of Good and Evil implied by the Holmes stories is revisited later: evil is meant to be as total as possible in the whodunit, since it holds the whole pattern together, whereas most American *noir* or later TV series accept complex motivations, doubtful issues, half-responsible madmen, or miserable fools. When Poirot meets an exception with an excusable motive (in *The Hollow*, the murderer acts like an impulsive Nemesis, and is supported both by the other women victims and by Poirot himself) he lies to the police. This is where our moving *cursor* may be useful: it enhances the complexity of the stories and turns them into philosophical questions. The whole net of twentieth century intertextual stories thus retrospectively enriches the initial pattern born of the Holmes canon. c) This leads to the writer's attitudes and the two main poles of rewriting the Holmes stories: nostalgia versus hybridization. Each new version of the canon and each new story connected with it will be positioned between these two poles of centrifugal imagination versus a more centripetal rewriting. Thus conceived, borders are a means of producing new fiction, new approaches and new moods.

Conclusion

Why do we read these stories and *what do we read them for*? There is obviously something lazy and complacent in our love for the Holmes offspring and the comfort of these familiar figures. The stories are both well-known and new, not unlike a place we have already visited with other friends, with a touch of nostalgia, particularly in Billy Wilder or the Brett saga. To speak of fetishism in this context would probably be an exaggeration, but we are aware that any canon may be overrated: we remember the *heritage* debate which led to the BBC being accused of escapism to the lost world of Aristocratic Britain during the Thatcher period. Obviously, Holmes's London was, however, no bed of roses. On the other hand, repetition of the familiar canon calls for parody and bathos, mostly in the mock-museum way of Mel Brooks. The Holmes stories were among the first to introduce the modern habit of mixed genius and ridicule which has become the norm in crime fiction.

What do we read them for? Repetitions play with frontiers in time, closure, and the use of stories: as Richard Dyer noted about pastiches, they "[enable] us to know ourselves affectively as historical beings"[7] (Dyer 2007: 10). The overlapping periods enlighten each other. More important, the canonical story is no longer closed, for it is always possible to reinvent a new variation: the clear-cut

[7] Richard Dyer, *Pastiche*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 10.

borders comfort us, and we know the detective will always succeed in the end, but new doors open to new places and new questions. In the end, revisiting the well-defined territory of Holmes proves both comfortable and profitable if it opens on a "lecture *actualisante,*"[8] that is to say, a proximising and reviving use of the texts.

[8] Yves Citton, *Lire, interpréter, actualiser. Pourquoi les études littéraires?,* Editions d'Amsterdam, 2007, p. 265.

Double Crossing Boundaries: Could *Alice in Wonderland*'s Red Queen Be Fictitious Within Fiction?

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The title of this essay might just as well have been "Hybridity strikes back," as, to some extent, it is the result of my persistent questioning of filmic performance. Indeed, today, Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI), among other techniques, is deconstructing the concepts of the real and the imaginary, in animation and beyond.[1] In the filmic context, how do live actors and CGI merge, technically and artistically? I first tackled this issue a few years ago, with a focus on *Sin City* (Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, 2005);[2] I then dealt with the carnivalesque appearances of Sigourney Weaver as Doctor Grace Augustine – that is: "venerable beauty" – and of her CGF (for Computer-Generated Fake) idealized blue double in James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009).[3]

In the latter, I discussed the extent to which Weaver's intended realistic performances, as both Dr Augustine and her avatar, suffer from a boomerang effect: they somehow fall into the trap, the caricatural and social ghetto of the smoothed-out illusion of eternal youth. Actually, the middle-age look of Weaver as Dr Augustine gives way to her avatar's student-like posture and youthful self-confidence, in which one can sense the weight of today's social values of representation and of existential worries about ageing. Furthermore, one may question the impact of Cameron's own trademark on the aesthetics and personalities of the film's key female characters (Dr Augustine, Neytiri). Whether live actor or CG Creature, both have very strong personalities, and yet both remain highly Hollywood-normed role-models. Arguably, one could consider the conventionality of these female characters, and question the extent to which both Augustine and Neytiri might have been

[1] This paper was conceived in 2011, at a time when many books developing research on the impact of new technologies upon film and actors had not been published. An additional bibliography can be found below.
[2] Pierre Floquet, "Actors in Sin City's Animated Fantasy; Avatars, Aliens, or Cinematic Dead-ends?," in *Animation Studies Online Journal*, vol. 6, 2011, Society for Animation Studies, http://journal.animationstudies.org/
[3] Floquet, « Avatar ou le cinéma du numérique » in *L'Amérique des images*, dir. F. Brunet, Paris: Hazan, 2013, 366-367.

differently represented had the film been shot by a female director, such as Kathryn Bigelow (*Point Break,* 1991; *The Hurt Locker,* 2008), who is known for putting genre and gender to the test, and who, incidentally, is Cameron's ex-wife.

With particular focus on Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), this essay will question the attempts to provide filmic creatures with human appearance, movements, and expression, thereby crossing, or blurring, the boundaries of artistic representation and performance. Rather than considering it as "Malice in Wonderland," my purpose is to acknowledge the director's genuine creative commitment both to his craft and to his actors. One must keep in mind his mastery when he – literally and metaphorically – manipulates puppets' bodies and expressions in motion-capture films. So, what exactly is his intention, when he is just as comfortable with live action as he is with animation?

Alice in Wonderland plays with the public's familiarity with the original tale. Indeed, no one could fail to recognize Lewis Carroll's story in Burton's film. Yet it does not provide a "true" rendering, nor an intentionally "faithful" filmic version, and it actually reveals its differences right from the opening sequences. The book begins with the encounter of a bored Alice with the White Rabbit: "Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do […]" is the first sentence, while the second paragraph ends with: "[…] when suddenly a white rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her." The film, however, opens with a zoom-in from the outside to a lighted window on the first floor of a rich mansion. The next shot shows four men in the middle of a discussion. One of them says: "Charles, you have finally lost your senses. This venture is impossible…" to which Charles (Marton Csokas) responds: "For some. Gentlemen, the only way to achieve the impossible is to believe it *is* possible." The men are discussing a business venture in the colonies when they are interrupted by a silent little girl who turns out to be young Alice (Mia Wasikowska). Charles, her father, says: "The nightmare again?" and she nods. When back in bed, as she recounts the dream to her father, we are introduced to the whole bestiary of Carroll's universe. Carroll's original story is thus presented as a (bad) dream, consequently suggesting a peculiar trope which sustains the whole film: the characters, like the spectators, experience regular crossings between imaginary and "true" worlds, and are not necessarily in a position to distinguish between them. Fantasy and illusion are actually lived in Burton's diegesis. From that perspective, the words spoken by the father at the very beginning of the film are no longer incidental: they announce a different perspective and a different motivation for the film, as Alice, in her adventure, repeatedly wonders where reality, dream, and the possible stand.

This very short sequence (barely two minutes long) functions as a foreword to the story of twenty-year-old Alice. It bridges the narrative gap between Carroll's tale and that of Burton. Moreover, it introduces the prologue sequence of the engagement party, and its symmetrical epilogue sequence, when Alice rejects the conventional life that would have awaited her had she not lived through the timeless experience of the "Underland."

Furthermore, technology serves to emphasize the atemporality of both the original tale (Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is still read today) and its narrative content (When is it supposed to take place? How long is it supposed to last, given that Alice reappears out of the hole, in front of the guests gathered for her engagement party, after what seems to have been only a few seconds?). *Alice in Wonderland* is a 3D feature; and yet, three-dimensional special effects are not seen until the arrival of the White Rabbit, some ten minutes after the beginning of the film. In fact, 3D only really comes into effect once Alice has fallen into the hole. Alice, and the spectators with her, are thus invited into a new universe: that of the wonders of the "Underland" for her and that of new technology and spectacular special effects for them. One could argue that Burton has added the illusion of a "third" dimension to the oneiric dimension of Carroll's fantasy universe. It definitely is a "new" story that the spectators are

about to watch: the young woman, Alice, is about to take them back, with her, as she revisits the dreams (or the memories?) of her childhood experience. The ageing of the main character in the film leaves room for some repetition, certainly, *but also* for interpretation of, and variation from, the original tale, in both content and representation.

Right from the start, Tim Burton's Alice seems estranged from the strictly codified world of the nineteenth century. In that respect, she truly belongs to the gallery of Burtonian characters, in so far as they repeatedly appear to exist outside the formatted society of which they should be a part, as is the case as well of *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) and *Charlie and The Chocolate Factory* (2005). Alice expresses, and actually experiences, her "otherness" compared to the other members of her social group from whom she eventually escapes by diving into the well. She steps into the "other" world, and copes with her regularly changing size, just as Grace Augustine's mind travels into her avatar's body in *Avatar*. In so doing, both achieve on screen, and in virtual reality, the ultimate fantasy of crossing the boundaries of fiction. In this case, however, the double-crossing is that the spectators can only be passive, and that the uncomfortable barrier of the 3D gear on their faces lures them into the illusion of proximity, if not interaction. Alice, just like Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) in *Avatar*, moves from one level to another until she reaches her goal, and the audience can but be the dazzled witness of her progress. To some extent, the spectators of such shows are just as disabled, in front of the action they are watching, as Sully when, seated in his wheelchair, he first encounters what will become his avatar, floating in his blue, amniotic aquarium. Sully is shown from behind, his dark figure contrasting with the height of the pool, as if he were facing a screen. Thus, Sully is in the same position as any frustrated viewer in front of his own film/video game, yearning to get started and to become immersed in its virtuality. Sully and, more metaphorically, Alice, are, therefore, visible elements of the immaterial interval between the reality of the spectator's experience, and the fiction of the show; the added twist is that they already, ontologically, belong to fiction, in the same way that CG images and special effects contribute a further layer to the blurring of its boundaries.

When focusing on the actual interference of CG effects upon live actors, hybridity is the first, most obvious concern. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary[4] offers the following definitions of hybrid: (1) "an offspring of two animals or plants of different races, breeds, varieties, species, or genera," (2) "a person whose background is a blend of two diverse cultures or traditions," and (3) "something heterogeneous in origin or composition." Cameron's avatars physiologically correspond to definitions (1) and (2) within the diegesis. This paper will leave diegetic hybridity aside, and, rather, consider characters in *Alice in Wonderland*, who, like others from *Avatar* or a number of other recent films, correspond to the third definition, if one considers the creative and technological processes from which they issue.

It is sometimes argued that the term "hybridity" bears too pejorative a connotation, reminiscent of nineteenth-century colonial discourse, and, indeed, at that time, the term was related to miscegenation. From that perspective, therefore, hybridity and otherness, even monstrosity, may have been related, and today, they may actually merge when applied to filmic characters in a postmodern understanding of the terms. For some years now, the concept has been described differently. For example, Rutherford states: "For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'Third Space,' which enables

[4] See: https://www.merriam-webster.com/ (checked 11/18/2021).

other positions to emerge."[5] This "third space" (or *tiers-espace*) opens up to a wide range of possibilities, which consequently reach far beyond the scope of both sociology and race, and the term is increasingly used to describe such phenomena in filmic representation. This essay will consider both aspects of hybridity in CG imagery, while keeping in mind that otherness and monstrosity may well not be repulsive, but, rather, that they may offer a fresh aesthetic alternative.

As it is, freaks and monsters inhabit the enchanted world of *Alice in Wonderland*. What we find, on diving into the hole, into the "Underland," is a diegetic, timeless twenty-first century freak-show. Note that the film title, issued from Alice's dream/memory, is contradicted by the name the characters call their universe: arguably, a reference to the Underworld of gangsters – or social monsters – in early twentieth-century America (both in film and in reality). All the characters are hybrid, even Alice, when her size digitally changes from normal or gigantic to minute and back, or when she simply adjusts to the characters she encounters, who are a mix of live action, key-frame animation, and motion capture.

Let us consider, in more detail, the Red Queen and the actress behind, before, or beyond her. Both Helena Bonham Carter and Johnny Depp have haunted Tim Burton's films for a long time and, given that he also directs animation features, Burton himself embodies this extreme hybridity. His favorite actors actually function as one of his creative threads, and indeed, it is easy to recognize Depp and Bonham Carter, respectively, as Victor Van Dort and The Bride (as they provide the voices for the puppets) in *Corpse Bride* (2005).[6] Burton displays his animated representation of live actors, yet keeps a safe distance between the puppets and their models. In *Corpse Bride*, he does not directly confront them with the virtual surroundings, sets, or with partners, contrary to what is staged in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Not only do the puppets recall the live actors, but Bonham Carter's artistic policy includes such connections. Her filmography is rich with parts which relate either to the obscure and mysterious side of human nature, as the gothic drug addict from *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) and Mrs. Lovett (yet another Gothic-looking character) in *Sweeney Todd* (Tim Burton, 2007), or to the uncanny, as a witch in *Big Fish* (Tim Burton, 2003) and in the final parts of *Harry Potter* (2007, 2009, 2010). Unlike many actors, she is not afraid of distorting her physical appearance, being able to express thus alternative beauty through miserable, underprivileged characters, as in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Tim Burton, 2005). Altering her natural appearance generally enhances, rather than conceals, her performing abilities (although her role as Ari, in Burton's *Planet of the Apes,* 2001, might be the exception). In Burton's films, the aesthetic exploration of her looks constitutes a deliberate choice, which tests and celebrates the issue of the real and the imaginary in the cinema. Burton and his favourite actress seem to have actually exploited every possible theatrical device to explore expressivity through performance. And yet, prior to *Alice in Wonderland*, Burton's actors were not required to comply with the dramatic and spectacular metamorphosis that animation would entail when directly applied to them. How can actors adapt to what Paul Wells, in a lecture given at the Dutch Animation Film Festival, Utrecht, in November 2008, called the "post-digital contemporary feature cinema," that is, the integration of traditional live action theatrical performance and computer processing?

It is clear that the Red Queen can be seen as the epitome of illusion. As a diegetic character, her hysterical authority may even inspire worship; as a CG character, she questions the very realm of

[5] John Rutherford, *The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha. Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, 207–221, 211.
[6] Although traits of Bonham Carter can be seen in the Bride, the female character was already taking shape in Sally, created after actress Lisa Marie, in Burton's 1993 animated picture *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.

reality. Within the diegesis, she *is* the Queen, therefore, the norm. The Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp) reflects, "What a regrettably large head you have," before complying: "Nay, this magnificently heroic globe." Earlier on, when the Queen first meets Alice, without knowing who she is, the latter is standing behind rose bushes that hide her body, so that her head alone appears over the flowers. At the time, Alice is of a large size, in comparison to the court members, and does not fit in the scale of the environment. The Red Queen comments: "My dear girl, anyone with a head that large is welcome in my country!" Like the Mad Hatter, who changes his opinion depending on the circumstances in order to nurture the Queen's illusion, the latter is similarly fooled by the size of young Alice. Illusion is a matter of survival; monstrosity has become a reference, as is demonstrated in the sequence when the Mad Hatter is about to be beheaded. One after the other, the sycophants in the court lose their ugly prostheses, which were meant to satisfy the Queen's pride and flatter her ego. As they abandon the props of their masquerade, her angry response is instantaneous and she blames them for what her persona has obliged them to become: "Liars, Cheats, Falsifiers! Off with their heads." In other words, enough of false attitudes, appearances, and special effects! The Queen's words might thus be read as a metaphor of cinema and SFX, or rather, as a distanced comment on what animation and cinema itself have always been.

How do the Computer-generated and live characters of Bonham Carter combine? To some extent, the Red Queen is a cinematic avatar of Bonham Carter, whose head size was increased by up to 75%, with an emphasis on her skull, so that her white forehead and red hair would, quite literally, bulge onto the 3D screen. Her jaw and neck were distorted into a V shape, which would enable her head to fit to the rest of her body, while recalling the outline of her waist and hips. Ken Ralston, the visual FX supervisor on *Alice*, says, in an interview included among the "extras" on the DVD of the film, that the actress's body was "manipulated and slightly mutated, so not quite real, and that is like the missing link between the CG world and Alice, who is always normal looking, even if she is twenty feet tall." "Manipulated," "mutated," the words are strong when one remembers that he is talking about a human being, as he skips one obvious thing: it is not the "actress's body" but, rather, its image on a computer screen, that they have mutated in order to create their illusion. The linguistic short cut in Ralston's speech unveils a significant semantic understatement. Moreover, Bonham Carter wears heavy make-up that hides most details of her face, and yet conceals neither her wrinkles nor her eyebrows when she is required to convey a feeling. Her face even turns CG-red with anger, so that her digital and natural components combine to express emotion. Indeed, one can regularly and easily recognise the actress under the "CG stress."

Such moments reference the essence of cinema, of animation. To some extent, they may recall David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) which, while a very different film, similarly questions the identity of cinema and the vertiginous issue of representation. Take, for example, the moment in *Alice* when the camera zooms, out of focus, into a bottomless box:

> Hatter: You still believe this is a dream, do you?
>
> Alice: Of course, this has all come from my own mind.
>
> Hatter: Which would mean that I'm not real.
>
> Alice: Afraid so. You're just a figment of my imagination.

These are the Hatter and Alice's words, but they could equally apply to Lynch's film.

In the diegesis, Alice is indeed confused, and the viewer together with her, both wondering about the meaning of the show and of its performance *per se*, as is revealed in her brief conversation with Absolem, the caterpillar (Alan Rickman):

> Alice: It was not a dream at all… It was a memory. This place is real. And so are you; and so is the Hatter…
>
> Absolem: … and so is the Jabberwocky!

In other words, if, in fact, the Jabberwocky is real, the fantasy can go on, as well as the illusion. In a multilayered echo of the illusion of illusion, to Alice's comment: "This is impossible," the Mad Hatter replies: "Only if you believe it is." In a logical – and absurd – reversal of references to reality, this comment implicitly tells us that anything is possible until it is denied.

Such a concept is already hinted at in the beginning of the film, when a horse comments that "dogs will believe anything!" in an echo of Tex Avery's gullible dog characters, and his famous statement that "[i]n a cartoon you can do anything!"[7] If such is true of cartoons, it is also true of animation and, in particular, CG films and the actors that enter their digital worlds. Every level and layer of reality and of the imaginary are blurred, in both context and form; any "true" notion of "reality" has vanished, within a Baudrillard-like perspective: one may here refer more specifically to the passage about Disneyland, at the beginning of *Simulacra and Simulation*:

> Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America, which *is* Disneyland. […] Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation.[8]

A similar questioning of the fluctuating boundaries of reality is found in *Avatar*, when Sully reflects: "Everything is backwards now. Like out there is the true world," and yet, here too there is prejudice, given that "backwards" has a somewhat negative connotation, when Cameron could have chosen such words as "inverted," or "interchanged."

Whether creating a digital and fantasized clone, as in *Avatar*, or the ultimate puppet, as in *Alice in Wonderland*, CGI respects its ontological principles of using the latest techniques to create the illusion of life and to suggest emotion, with the option of veracity, realism, and anthropomorphism. Simultaneously, the same swing of the creative pendulum, as a reversed rotoscope, pushes CGI increasingly further from the aesthetics of realism, and into postmodern anthropomorphism.

At this point, it is helpful to quote Paul Wells, discussing the breaking of taboos, or, perhaps more pertinently, the crossing of boundaries: "The key aspect here is in the greater freedoms to address the 'body' in animation, where the physical form is highly mutable, indestructible, and in some instances, immaterial."[9] Alice herself notes: "I've been shrunk, stretched, scratched, and stuffed into a teapot," which recalls the "squash and stretch" principle of traditional cartoon animation, except that here we

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[7] The tag-phrase frequently recurs in Tex Avery cartoons, for example, in *Big Heel Watha* (1944).
[8] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, (translated from the original by Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman). New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, 25.
[9] Paul Wells, *Animation: Genre and Authorship*, London: Wallflower, 2002, 62.

are dealing with a character brought to movement by a live actor. Both Weaver and Bonham Carter endure such treatment, as their characters mirror the digital surroundings that negate the boundaries between fantasy, phantasm, and the real world. If so, what is left of them, their personalities, are trapped in a vicious cycle that Baudrillard recognizes: "Of the same order as the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is the impossibility of staging an illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible."[10] Just like Avery's kangaroo, which disappears after hiding in its own pouch in *Slap Happy Lion* (1947), actors too might finally pass into a digital nowhere, both existing and not existing in the same non-time. Or, from an alternative and more practical perspective, as Wells claims, "it is necessary to properly define animation as an intrinsically 'modern' art that facilitates 'difference' and 'otherness' in the creative enterprise."[11]

Is Grace Augustine a "demon," and the Red Queen a "bloody big head," as, respectively, Tsu'tey (Laz Alonso) and the Mad Hatter suggest? Should we adopt such words to describe the digital treatment of Weaver and Bonham Carter's images and personae? Both Cameron and Burton have attempted to give filmic creatures a human appearance, with human movements and expressions. Referring to Wells's discussion about "auteurist director[s]," one may claim that both directors have attempted in their own ways to mark out "an aesthetic and thematic terrain, and [to offer] a coherent view of the discourses fundamental to its understanding and 'art.'"[12] The Red Queen, beyond and despite the astounding performance of the actress "inhabiting" her, actually perfectly matches the universe she haunts. Yet she is so deeply embedded in her "Underworld" that the intrinsic distance it implies may impede the audience's interaction with the whole show.

And yet, to develop the point further, a parallel can be drawn between CGLAP (Computer-Generated Live Actor Performance) as hybrid, on the one hand, and as polymorphic soundtracks on the other. Either live-action or digital, actors and/or the characters they play manage to keep in tune and rhythm, as they perform and interact within the filmic "ballet." In a study of songs in Bollywood films, Aniruddha Dutta notes:

> The hybridity of quotation and stylistic separation tends to index or bracket musical styles, and can be seen as opposed to hybridity of continuity and stylistic synthesis that tends to deconstruct stylistic boundaries, subsuming "original" or "source" styles in the new. Of course, both tendencies can simultaneously interact in a single piece.[13]

Arguably, when applied to CGI, such hybridity may correspond to entirely digitally created characters as well as to "untouched" live actors immersed in a CG setting. One element is filmed as such, and included into the stream of CG images that show other characters and/or backgrounds, and structure the picture-track. Unlike Augustine and Sully's characters, who retain much of the original appearance of the actors who play them, hybridity of quotation and hybridity of continuity can merge to allow the representations of their avatars. Considered on its own, the hybridity of continuity and stylistic synthesis will match with live actors when computerized and mutated into CG creatures, hence

[10] Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 38.
[11] Wells, *Animation: Genre and Authorship*, 29.
[12] Ibid., 72.
[13] Aniruddha Dutta, *Negotiating a Newer Hybridity: Technology in Bollywood Film Songs*, 14th International Symposium on Electronic Art, 2008. http://static2.docstoccdn.com/docs/160219095/Negotiating-a-Newer-Hybridity--Technology-in-Bollywood-Film-Songs---Aniruddha-Dutta, Accessed 8 May 2014.

deconstructing pre-existing filmic boundaries. So, they suggest new and infinite forms of representation, as Helena Bonham Carter, computerized into the Red Queen, reveals.

As a consequence, in such instances, fiction is yet one step beyond the so-called "traditional" live action generated film which has prevailed so far. Hollywood fosters the evidence of technology in recent features; the obviousness of theatrical processes, such as performance, has somehow become a *raison-d'être*, just as much as the ontological and original cinematic quest for illusion. Technology is sophisticated to the point where, more than ever, live actors have become filmic material. Their human appearance and flesh are turned into digital clay, processed and glazed until their original physiognomies are barely recognizable under their embedded disguises.

It is surely the case that actors are professionally polymorphic. Each character they create is, to some extent, one avatar of themselves. The give-and-take relationship between the fictional character and the actor is ontological. However, the survival of the actor's persona is put to the test with Computer-Generated Technology, so that surviving such heavy digital make-up is increasingly challenging. Creating illusion and conveying emotion require considerably more than the simple manipulation of an ever-growing quantity of pixels. If this fails, the audience could well decide that illusion on screen is disillusion indeed. It could be argued that whether live action, key frame, or stop motion, animated clones or digital mutants, the Red Queen and other characters betray their emotional, pragmatic connection with the audience; the alternative is that they participate in the evolution of cinema as animated art, and thus transcend filmic "reality."[14]

[14] For further references on digital cinema, see: A. Gaudreault, P. Marion, *La fin du cinema ? : Un média en crise à l'ère du numérique,* Paris: Armand Colin, 2013; J.B. Massuet, *Le Dessin animé au pays du film — Quand l'animation graphique rencontre le cinéma en prises de vues réelles*, Rennes: PUR, Le Spectaculaire, 2017; J.B. Massuet, and M. Grosoli, *La Capture de mouvement ou le modelage de l'invisible*, Rennes: PUR, Le Spectaculaire, 2014; S. Price, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality*, Rutgers University Press, 2012.

Gemma King, *Jacques Audiard* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021)

Reviewed by Laura Mason
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As the director of nine feature films, author of at least two dozen screenplays, and the recipient of a Grand Prix and Palme d'Or at Cannes, multiple Césars, and a myriad of international awards, Jacques Audiard merits a book. Surprisingly, Gemma King's is the first, in English or in French. Although her focus is on the features, from *See How They Fall*/*Regarde les hommes tomber* (1994) through *The Sisters Brothers*/*Les frères Sisters* (2018), King is concerned with Audiard's body of work as a whole, which she illuminates by suggesting how some of his longer films resonate with his work on shorts, music videos, streaming series, and screenplays.

The book carefully parses recurring themes and sensory details that distinguish Audiard's films: his fascination with isolated people, abused or abandoned sons, and tortured masculinity; his reformulation of French and American genre conventions; and his dramatic uses of light, framing, ambient sound, and music to capture characters' subjectivity. More globally, King argues, each of these qualities is mobilized in service to the director's enduring concern with the transgression of boundaries social, cultural, and national. Through chapters that move steadily from micro to macro—from "body" to "society" to "globe"—King explains how Audiard's films depict boundaries and celebrate transgressions that enable his marginalized protagonists to find power, pleasure, and safety.

The grouping of films in King's first chapter, on the body, feels somewhat forced in its linking of the toughly masculine *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*/*De battre mon coeur s'est arrêté* (2005) with Audiard's only two films, at that point, to have put women at their center: *Read My Lips*/*Sur mes lèvres* (2001) and *Rust and Bone*/*De rouille et d'os* (2012). *Paris, 13th District*/*Les Olympiades* (2021) is Audiard's third to feature female protagonists, but it was released after this book had gone to press. King justifies the association by explaining how her chosen three films focus on non-verbal sensory experience as means of communication that relieve their heroes' psychic isolation, and she makes a plausible case for that reading. What I found more innovative was her discussion of the similarities between *Read My Lips* and *Rust and Bone*, movies about women with physical disabilities that neither victimize nor "cure." Reading both movies against the literature on "extreme cinema" and alongside Rosemary Garland Thomson's work on disability, King argues that Audiard's protagonists find

"emotional fulfilment, sexual actualisation and self-determination" not despite their disabilities but through confrontation of them (64). In so doing, King not only calls attention to two of Audiard's less commonly discussed works but significantly enhances the reach of French film studies by integrating it with a very dynamic American literature on disability.

King's chapter on "society" positions early films *See How They Fall* and *A Self-Made Hero*/*Un héros très discret* (1996) alongside Audiard's international blockbuster, *A Prophet*/*Un prophète* (2009), to focus on the director's critique of social marginalization and his exploration of mobilities achieved by mastering violence, languages, and cultural codes. "Globe" concludes the book by positioning *Dheepan* (2015) and *The Sisters Brothers* as equally concerned with "profound questions about nation, culture, and identity that have defined Audiard's cinema since the earliest stages of his career" (122). This last point is, indeed, one of the book's central themes, which King firmly grounds throughout. *A Self-Made Hero*, she has already noted, uses protagonist Albert Dehousse's reinvention of himself as a Résistant to reflect on how myth-making about the past shapes national identity, and she rightly insists that all of Audiard's films since *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*—with its Russian gangsters, immigrant squatters, and Vietnamese pianist—have depicted an increasingly multilingual and transcultural France. Moreover, King adds, transnationalism is not just a plot device or recurring theme in Audiard's work. His very processes of filmmaking have long crossed national borders for funding, cast and crew, locales, and generic conventions.

King's account of the transnational in Audiard's films is the dimension of this book most likely to interest readers of *Film Journal*, above all because she so often returns to the director's engagement with North American culture. Three of Audiard's films are based on stories by Canadian or American writers, and *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* is a remake of American director James Toback's critically unloved *Fingers* (1978). King describes *Dheepan*, idiosyncratically but persuasively, as a mash-up of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*/*Lettres persanes* (1721) with Sam Peckinpah's violent, controversial *Straw Dogs* (1971) (53). Most importantly, she returns repeatedly to Audiard's appropriation of "genres typically associated with popular culture and the American B movie"—noir, Westerns, melodramas, and prison films—to argue that one of the director's most distinctive achievements is his capacity to "elevate" such "low-brow" forms "to the level of cinéma d'art et d'essai" (80). That bricolage qualifies Audiard as the auteur King defines at the outset: one who brings a "coherent creative vision" (14) to the films he directs, even when collaborating with others, and who successfully refashions existing representations.

If King excels at explaining the internal distinctiveness of Audiard's body of work, she is perhaps less successful at making explicit what sets him apart from other French directors, above all in his relationship to American culture. Asking whether his "penchant for subverting low-brow genres typically associated with Hollywood is simply an authorial marker of Audiard's, or a characteristically French tendency in the tradition of the Nouvelle Vague," King concludes somewhat vaguely that this is "up for debate" (143). Some of the formal comparisons leave us equally uncertain. Admittedly, she argues that *See How They Fall* differs from French polars of the 1950s and 60s in having neither a discerning detective nor a glamorous femme fatale. And yet, if we position that film within the post- '68 generation to which it belongs, it is like many a modern polar (at least one of which Audiard himself scripted) in refusing the triumph of traditional notions of law and order.

And yet, well before reaching these somewhat equivocal conclusions, King has already explained what sets Audiard apart from predecessors and peers. Above all, she makes amply clear, Audiard stands out for using generic conventions to explore social marginalization. Unlike many a New Wave director, who appropriated American genres for aesthetic reasons, or New Wave heirs, who adopted American

forms for commercial advantage, Audiard uses genre to explore "the various ways in which the socially oppressed can experience twenty-first century French society as rigid and hostile" (74) and to consider how such figures overcome their exclusion. Accordingly, King explains how *A Prophet* fuses the French banlieue film with the American prison genre to explore racism, xenophobia, and socioeconomic disability. *Dheepan*, she continues, returns to the banlieue film, albeit in a distressingly reductive way, and marries it with American gangster tropes to depict immigrants' experience and challenge the myth of a homogeneous France cordoned off from the rest of the world.

But perhaps nowhere is Audiard's appropriation of American genre conventions more singular or more evocative than in his relationship to the western. For although *The Sisters Brothers* is explicitly his first "true" western—set in America at the time of the Gold Rush and cast exclusively with Anglophone actors—all of Audiard's films are "westerns," King quotes Jean-Dominque Nuttens as saying, insofar as they depict "characters at the margins, [who] fail... to find peace—and love—until they've purged the violence they carry within them" (151). I would go still further than Nuttens by highlighting the gendered nature of those "characters." For even Audiard films that focus on women are concerned with how those characters' male partners purge the violence that poisons them, in order to find a new way forward. Audiard is distinctive among French directors for not simply appropriating American genre conventions but for turning those conventions potently back on themselves to cast a critical eye on the violence and supposed masculine self-reliance that these genres celebrate and are meant to sustain.

These last thoughts are less a criticism of King than intimation that there is still more to be said. Hers is a thoughtful, generous, revealing book which, it is to be hoped, will not be the last word on Audiard but, instead, a widening of the conversation about his beautiful, provocative films.

Zélie Asava, *Mixed Race Cinemas: Multiracial Dynamics in America and France* (Bloomsbury, 2019)

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The Black Lives Matter movement, reacting to racial tensions in the US and similar situations in other Western societies, has made it clear that the times of race-based inequality are not over. The idea that we live in 'colour-blind' societies in which racial constructions are outdone has been frequently exposed as delusional, while there are undeniably processes of cultural opening in which more visibility is created for non-white people, a tendency that is especially evident from recent films including more black and mixed-race roles and actors. It is crucial to pay special attention to mixed-race people in this regard, as a rapidly growing minority group reflecting the reality of present-day multicultural societies. However, many representations of mixed-race experience, or 'mixedness', underwrite stereotypes sustaining hegemonic whiteness (think of Vin Diesel and Halle Berry), and it is more generally in depictions of mixedness that racial ideology persists, often in highly ambivalent ways. This is the focal point of Asava's study: departing from recent hit films like *Loving* (Jeff Nichols, 2016) and *Divines* (Houda Benyamina, 2016), *Mixed Race Cinemas*[1] unfolds an alternative film history from the margins, looking at how problematic traditions of representation developed in American and French cinemas are. At the same time, the book highlights the fact that some films were not satisfied with, and hence attempted to revert, racist stereotypes. Mixedness, an identity "in-between cultures and ethnicities and yet often ascribed to one" (27), allows for an extent of mobility between conflicting racial constructions, and the flexibility thus entailed can serve the disparate goals of either affirming or dismantling racial ideology. Understanding that representations of race must be seen in close connection with national narratives and visual cultures, the study's comparative approach is well-aimed, looking at the USA as the dominant global film industry and France as the dominant European film industry. The former is notable for having the longest filmic history of interracial and mixed-race representations, whereas the latter, while only gradually opening up to multicultural themes and reproducing many US American clichés, has generally been more progressive in depicting interracial relations. Tracing these representational histories in context, Asava's book sets high hopes on the power of cinematic mixedness to realise a 'Third Space' in which identities can be fluid and hybrid, and which would reconcile ideals of equality with cultural difference and thus help establish 'post-race'

[1] Asava, Zélie. 2019. *Mixed Race Cinemas: Multiracial Dynamics in America and France*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic. 216 pages.

societies after all.

The study sets out with the first chapter's discussion of the relations between non-white/mixed visibility onscreen and behind the camera, highlighting the enduringly low participation of black and mixed artists in Hollywood productions, who were scandalised when no non-white artists were nominated for the 2015 and 2016 Academy Awards (#OscarsSoWhite). This notable absence, as Asava makes clear, reflects complex representational shortcomings such as white stars overshadowing black stars with greater screen presence, mixed characters being played by white actors, or parts formerly played by black actors being recast with mixed actors in remakes. The chapter also introduces some vectors of mixed representation in America and France respectively: following the ideological example of the lustful mixed housekeeper Lydia in *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), American films like *Hallelujah* (King Vidor, 1929) and *The Black Network* (Roy Mack, 1936) developed the hypersexual figure of the 'tragic mulatta' whose attempts to 'pass' for white ended fatally, whereas the French films made around American entertainer Josephine Baker such as *Zouzou* (Marc Allégret, 1934) or *Princesse Tam Tam* (Edmond T. Gréville, 1935) showed racial mixing in a positive light and made a foray towards an open and multicultural society. Asava notes that, even though people try to control Baker, and despite appearing visually "encaged" by various arrangements, her screen persona "refuses to let her agency be suppressed and ultimately enacts her will, thus acting as the central identificatory point for the spectator" (66).

The remaining chapters further explore these divergent models as they were actualised, updated or revised throughout the history of cinema. Chapter 2 discusses postwar American films such as *Pinky* (Elia Kazan, 1949), *Kings Go Forth* (Delmer Daves, 1958) or *I Passed For White* (Fred M. Wilcox, 1960), interrogating the dichotomies of the later 'tragic mulatta' figures. In this widespread anti-miscegenation narrative, mixed women's punishments for attempting to 'pass' for white—usually to improve their social status—served as warnings to police racial boundaries. According to the 'one drop of blood' rule, mixed-race people in the US were not accepted as white. While the blame in these films was mostly on the hypersexual female transgressor, Asava emphasizes that there was also a burgeoning sense of resistance and critique of society for keeping the racial divide in place. As comes out best in the third chapter's case study of the two versions of *Imitation of Life* (John M. Stahl, 1934; Douglas Sirk, 1959), these notable representations[2] depicted the situation of the tragic mulatta with considerable complexity, seeing her positioned in a tensioned space between black community and white hegemony, between family and career. Both films were vicariously centred around an alternative model of family, in which a white and a black mother live together with their daughters—a model that pointed to a culturally inclusive nation but which, at the same time, was still widely dismissed as impossible and therefore had to stay in the shadows. Still, as Asava argues, the screen presence given to mixed-race actress Fredi Washington in the 1934 version, and the inspiration from mixed entertainer Dorothy Dandridge for the daughter's persona in the 1959 remake (played, however, by white actress Susanne Kohner), should be recognized for providing some limited visibility for mixed actors against the odds of narrative disempowerment. Asava concludes that the mulatta's performance is increasingly transformative, "claiming independence, exploiting her sexuality, expressing her desire and refuting convention" (106).

From the 1990s onwards, French films have explored the possibilities of a multicultural society against the rise of nationalism and the New Right. Asava highlights the influence of *beur* (French-

[2] These films are also discussed by Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris in "Passing and Trespassing in Stahl and Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1934; 1959)", *Film Journal* 7 (2021): 50-56.

Maghrebi) cinema emerging in the 1980s. Often focusing on life in the banlieue, this new wave of filmmaking followed American hood cinema and hip-hop culture to focus on the margins of French society, with a postcolonial interest in depicting social hardships, migrant experience and interracial relations. As chapter 4 makes clear, popular comedies like *Métisse*/*Café au Lait* (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1993) and *Les Trois frères* (Didier Bourdon and Bernard Campan, 1995) engaged more decidedly with the interracial family than the older Hollywood films, considerably decentring its monocultural and patriarchal baggage. Against the imperative to assimilate, Asava makes it clear that these films restored a level of agency to their female and male protagonists while still relying to a great extent on popular stereotypes they underwrote for comic effect. Further following Asava's line of argument, the revision of the family alongside ideas of the nation was taken one step further in the road movie *Drôle de Félix/The Adventures of Felix* (Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau, 2001), in which a young, gay, HIV+, mixed-race man travels across France in search of his *beur* father. The film's protagonist is interpreted by Asava as a rewriting of the Western genre and its hero, whose self-sufficient masculinity is thoroughly decentred. The culturally, sexually and generationally diverse people Félix meets along the way become significant others for him. They constitute a multiracial non-biological family and sense of dialogical identity as he overcomes the traumatic experience of racism. This makes it possible for Félix, whose sexual orientation is "simply part of his identity" (142) to accept himself as "a Frenchman, an Arab and something inbetween, both 'like' and Other" (143). In Asava's eyes, the whole journey amounts to a non-essentialist idea of France in which citizenship is no longer based on *droit du sang* ('blood rights', or genetic heritage) but *droit du sol* (territorial rights), whilst also avoiding the homogenizing universalism of 'colour-blind' French republicanism. A final list of recent French popular comedies demonstrates that such a revised understanding of the nation is becoming more and more influential, testifying to the reality of mixed-race families in a multicultural society.

Whereas the case study of *Drôle de Félix* expresses hopes in arthouse cinema to unfold the post-binary 'Third Space' of identity, the conclusion once again argues for the importance of popular films. However, while in both French and American cinemas interracial family relations and mixed identities are increasingly depicted in a positive light, it would be misleading to assume that persistent stereotypes and racial inequalities have effectively been overcome. As an important step towards true 'post-race' societies, Asava sees science fiction and fantasy movies as especially promising when it comes to experimenting with hybridity and fluidity to challenge hegemonic whiteness, with *Star Trek's* Vulcan-human character Spock as a prime example.[3] Mediating between species can be seen as an analogy to bridging interracial divisions, which in fact the 19th century constructed as species differences. The creative potential of these posthuman imaginations should be fully realised to provide "a space for imagining many kinds of mixedness" (167)—or else, the denied question of difference might return from the repressed, as epitomised in race-sensitive Zombie horror films, from *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968) to *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017). Positive representations of mixedness should proliferate, yet filmmakers should try harder to avoid stereotypes so as to popularise a sense of difference rooted not in tradition but in freedom and empathy, in which "subjectivity is formed in co-emergence with another I, whereby the Other is not a threat to my selfhood but ensures it" (168).

All things considered, I have found Asava's slim-yet-comprehensive study impressive for the sheer density of insights it contains, with over forty films discussed, also containing a helpful index of

[3] A recent collection focuses more extensively on the association between mixedness and fantasy/science fiction: Dagbovie-Mullins, Sika A. and Eric L. Berlatsky. 2021. *Mixed-Race Superheroes.* New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press.

names and subjects to facilitate navigation. Many films are studied in close-up, readings of plot and character are coupled with shot analyses and examinations of mise-en-scène. This well-edited book expertly draws on previous writings on race in film and mixed-race identities by Donald Bogle, Naomi Zack, Mary Beltrán and Camilla Fojas, to just name a few. It also relies on an array of poststructuralist concepts of identity-in-difference such as Homi Bhabha's 'Third Space', Gloria Anzaldúa's 'new *mestiza* consciousness' in the 'borderlands', Donna Haraway's image of the cyborg and Judith Butler's understanding of performance. While some readers might find the book's use of theoretical language repetitive, it does provide a level of coherence in serving as a leitmotif, highlighting the author's emancipatory outlook throughout—an outlook the book shares with recent similar-themed works like Will Harris' autobiographical essay *Mixed-Race Superman* (2019),[4] or Rebecca Hall's film adaptation of Nella Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing* (2021).

[4] Harris, Will. 2018. *Mixed-Race Superman*. London: Peninsula Press. The figurations of the 'mixed-race superman' explored by Harris include Barack Obama and Keanu Reeves, both also covered in Asava's study.

Generic confluence as the art of ideological peddling: *Attack the Block* (Joe Cornish, 2011)

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> British genres are more than an abstract system of formulas, conventions, and codes that are universally applicable. National identity, social history, and ideology play a central role in their formation.[1]

In genre theory, the concept of hybridity is mobilised very frequently, unlike that of confluence[2] though the latter might prove more adequate to apprehend certain films. Hybridity is a concept that percolated from biology to postcolonial studies[3] before being used in film studies in association with genre mixing,[4] although Janet Staiger thinks the word should be reserved for "true cross-cultural encounters", "films created by minority or subordinated groups that use genre mixing or genre parody to dialogue with or criticize the dominant"[5] in keeping with the postcolonial legacy of the phrase. Just as hybridity has generated its own critique in postcolonial studies,[6] the concept of generic hybridity is also problematic within the scope of film studies according to Allen.[7] Hybridity is ambivalent and even paradoxical since

[1] Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11.
[2] See Catherine Bernard**,** "Introduction: Trying to Define Literature's Confluences," *Études britanniques contemporaines* [online], 52 | 2017, http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/3511, and Martina Allen, "Against 'Hybridity' in Genre Studies: Blending as an Alternative Approach to Generic Experimentation," *Trespassing Journal: an online journal of trespassing art, science, and philosophy*, "Genre", no.2 (Winter 2013): 4, http://trespassingjournal.org/Issue2/TPJ_I2_Allen_Article.pdf.
[3] For more, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2007 [2000]), 108-111.
[4] David Duff (ed.), *Modern Genre Theory* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 6; Raphaëlle Moine, *Cinema Genre* (translated by Alistair Fox and Hilary Radner) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 122-126, 155-168.
[5] Janet Staiger, "Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre History" in B.K. Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader III* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003 [1997]), 196-197.
[6] See, for example, Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), Pieterse Nederveen, "Hybridity, So What? The Anti-Hybridity Backlash and the Riddles of Recognition", *Theory, Culture and Society* 18.2-3 (2001): 219-245.
[7] Allen, 3-13.

it perpetuates an essentialist model it is supposed to deconstruct.[8] Even though the concept was reworked from its original scientific, genetic meaning into a cultural approach to reverse what used to be part of the reactionary discourse of colonial racism (racial impurity) into a progressive and positive condition of change and creativity (transgressive crossing, subversive multiplicity), notions such as hybridity and hybrid implicitly keep referring to binary, albeit contested, fixed constructs "as the two poles are still understood as oppositional in nature. In other words: the concept of 'hybridity' is thinkable only in connection with its opposite – that of 'purity'".[9] Hybridity posits the distinctness of biological or literary categories as a precondition for its existence and the formation of hybrids. Yet, despite the initial heterogeneity of the crossbreeding operation it results from, the finished or final product, the hybrid, – whether it is a living creature, a postcolonial literary work or a film – is a fusion, a syncretic mix that comes as a homogeneous whole (in that it cannot be undone). Because of the blurred definition and thereby classification of cinema genres, the concept of hybridity reaches its limits, losing its supposedly subversive appeal, and almost becomes irrelevant – every film being a hybrid of some sort. As such, Allen's conclusion about generic equivocality seems to echo Derrida's famous conundrum ("genres are not to be mixed"[10]) arising from his reflections on "the law of genre" because, ultimately, all genres are impure and therefore mixed. That is why Allen favours instead the concept of generic blending,[11] a cognitive process related to the viewer's reception and production of world-constructions owing to the genre schemata (i.e. building blocks of cognition more than generic markers *per se*) he/she perceives. This spatial and functional reconfiguration also holds a sociopolitical and ideological dimension because when films become "blended spaces", they offer opportunities for cross-space mapping/recoding that can lead the viewer to reconsider his/her own expectations on and off screen.

> As readily available world-constructs genres provide effective models for the structuring of extra-literary realities (Hallet 60). This presents the true political dimension of generic experimentation, because a text's failure to adhere to our generic expectations leads to the foregrounding of these expectations, which renders them accessible to rational critique. Moreover, the discrepancy between generic expectations and textual actualizations may result in the adjustment of our genre schemata and therefore ultimately also to a revision of our understanding of extra-literary realities.[12]

[8] Sarita Malik, "The Dark Side of Hybridity: Contemporary Black and Asian British Cinema" in *European Cinema in Motion, Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 132-134, draws the same conclusion about the hybrid films she studies. "These cinemas appear to be producing their own kinds of essentialism and are therefore vulnerable to the homogenising forces which hybridity is presumed to subvert".

[9] Allen, 8. Although she does not mention him, she echoes Paul Gilroy who contested hybridity because it presupposes illusory anterior states of purity. Paul Gilroy, "Black Cultural Politics: an Interview with Paul Gilroy by Timmy Lott", *Found Object*, no.4 (1994): 46-81; *Between Camps* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000).

[10] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre" (translated by Avital Ronell), *Critical Inquiry*, "On Narrative," The University of Chicago Press, vol. 7, no.1 (Autumn 1980): 55, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343176.

[11] Allen derives the phrase from "conceptual blending" by Charles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 1, 12.

[12] Allen, 14. She notes that genre evocation is often enough to lead the viewer to reinterpret what he/she sees although that does not necessarily lead to genre attribution. Sometimes, the protagonist may give the impression of being in a different genre than what the viewer perceives (as in *Taxi Driver*), the discrepancy adding to the ideological subtext. That example also shows the inadequacy of the concept of hybridity since the film is clearly a blend of the western and the thriller but not a hybrid.

Deliberately deviating from or thwarting generic expectations may thus affect world-views that can in turn affect genres in a repeated blending process, bearing in mind that blending genres can help debunk some reactionary or conservative tropes of one given genre by confronting them with those of another, subversion stemming from the destabilisation of familiar, so far unquestioned schemata/codes.

Beyond the debate over whether or not hybridity necessarily leads to fixity and essentialism, and therefore runs the risk of becoming a useless concept in terms of filmic generic experimentation, an undeniable fact to take into account is that these studies often overlook the collective dimension that is also involved in the process of identity formation, especially in terms of social classes. Most of the literature stemming from postcolonial or film studies resorting to the concept in both a thematic and formal way tends to focus and reflect on an individual's hybrid identity, sometimes related to notions such as in-betweenness.[13] The conclusion is often a celebration of individuals' multiple identities and diversity in a multicultural society i.e. a racial and/or cultural approach. "There is a danger that some accounts of hybridity banally celebrate everyday cultural mixing, instead of analysing the relations of power which produce social differences and political antagonisms."[14] Even though hybridity has been referred to by sociologists such as Stuart Hall,[15] the concept is never really mobilised to apply it to social groups in a classist perspective, probably owing to its inherent problematic status. Depending on how you look at it, any given society is as much a syncretic whole as a juxtaposition of various elements that retain their idiosyncrasies. A hybrid society therefore does not seem a fitting label to describe the mingling of its different social strata, it being more about a coexistence than an amalgam of its parts, and even a transclass individual is never a hybrid of his/her class of origin and adoption as clearly shown by the works of De Gaulejac and Jaquet.[16] Generic blending as defined by Allen thus seems all the more interesting an approach since one key aspect of British cinema is its persistent interest in the nation, social history and ideology as made explicit by Landy's epigraph. Just as the latter establishes a clear connection between the formation of British genres and politics, Allen argues that generic blending is a better way than hybridity to apprehend how some films may resort to cross-space mapping/recodification as a sort of really subversive political tool, notably in the field of collective representations. The definition and various uses of the word "blend" seem to support the idea of a symbiotic relation between generic and social blending. Compared to mixing, blending adds a qualitative aspect to the combination (as in cooking, "to mix different types of sth to produce the quality required", and by extension "to combine well with sth, to look or sound better together" according to the Oxford dictionary). A society in which people can blend supposes harmony, a society in which contact with the Other does not necessarily lead to fusion but can lead to emulation and everyone giving their best. To explore that generic and social parallel further, I would suggest the use of the word and concept of confluence. Confluence is a much more dynamic, fluid and transient process than hybridity (which morphologically refers to a state) or even hybridisation (which is restricted to the

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[13] See, for example, Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, or Yosefa Loshitzky, *Screening Strangers, Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010).
[14] John Scott and Gordon Marshall, *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1994]), 328.
[15] Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" in A.D. King (ed.) *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 41-68; "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in J.E. Braziel and A. Mannur (eds.) *Theorizing Diaspora* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005 [1990]), 233-246.
[16] Vincent De Gaulejac, *La Névrose de classe* (Paris: Payot, 2016 [1987]); Chantal Jaquet, *Les Transclasses ou la non-reproduction* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2020 [2014]).

moment when the crossbreeding operation is conducted) due to the movement and instability of the water currents' point of junction from which the phrase originates. It builds on the concept of genre blending that befits the ever-elusive boundaries of cinematic genres through its association with the idea of concurrence, and also applies well to a more socially-oriented definition through that of convergence.

Along this line of thought, one can argue that *Attack the Block* (Joe Cornish, 2011) is a perfect example of that generic/social confluence. It singles itself out from the cycle of late 2000s and early 2010s British films known as hoodie horror that culminated in the riots of summer 2011. This cycle of films that officially opened with *Eden Lake* (James Watkins, 2008)[17] often used several horror sub-genres (survival, slasher, home invasion, found footage, etc.) and was deemed reactionary because it presented young people from council estates as amoral and bloodthirsty monsters, in line with political and media campaigns of that time (antisocial behaviour, Broken Britain). As such, these films match the definition of genre mixing and hybridisation according to David Duff[18] in that they combine several genres to form a new subgenre. But although they did play on their generic hybridity to put this supposedly reactionary stance into perspective,[19] the confluence of several traditionally more distinct genres is what really opens up new and more subversive perspectives in a film such as *Attack the Block*. The film was presented as a science fiction comedy in which aliens land on a south London estate on Guy Fawkes Night. With its main characters forced to cooperate to get out of a besieged, enclosed place before finding a form of redemption in their heroic resistance, *Attack the Block* is also inspired by genres as varied as the western, the thriller or the action film.[20] But, although comedy is indeed the general tone of the film, the latter essentially blends science fiction, with a horrific tinge because of the presence of creatures, with banlieue cinema[21] to better debunk the clichés associated with a certain British youth and present to a wider audience – and therefore less likely to be already converted – a discourse usually found in social-realist cinema. This film therefore sits at the confluence of two great British cinematic modes of storytelling: science fiction and social realism.[22] And just like water currents

[17] Johnny Walker, *Contemporary British Horror Cinema: Industry, Genre and Society* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 90.
[18] Duff, xiv.
[19] For more on this cycle of films, see Anne-Lise Marin-Lamellet, "Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know? Hoodies in Contemporary British Horror Cinema," *Angles: New Perspectives on the Anglophone World* [Online], 10 | 2020, http://journals.openedition.org/angles/453.
[20] Sarah Ilott, *New Postcolonial British Genres: Shifting the Boundaries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 162, even sees a use of film noir codes in the opening scene.
[21] This loose equivalent for urban drama or estate film is adapted from the French since there seems to be a subgenre in French cinema. Carrie Tarr and Carole Milleliri, "Le cinéma de banlieue : un genre instable," *Mise au Point* 3 (2011), http://map.revues.org/1003?lang=en#ftn16. Joe Cornish speaks of "gang movies" but the films he mentions generally take place in American inner cities (*The Outsiders, Rumble Fish, Streets of Fire, The Warriors).* He also stresses the importance of *Kidulthood* "because it showed that there was a market for the urban milieu." Holly Pyne, "Joe Cornish on *Attack the Block*," *Short List*, 8 May 2011, http://www.shortlist.com/entertainment/films/joe-cornish-on-attack-the-block.
[22] In Simon Jablonski, "Joe Cornish Discusses *Attack the Block*," *The Quietus*, 16 May 2011, http://thequietus.com/articles/06254-joe-cornish-interview-attack-the-block , Joe Cornish explains: "The tone of the film overall is supposed to be 50% kitchen sink realism and then 50% escapist 80s style adventure movie". In Catherine Shoard, "SXSW 2011: Joe Cornish on aliens, hoodies and *Attack the Block*," *The Guardian*, 14 March 2011, he adds: "It kind of does what Mr Spielberg was doing with *ET*. Those dinner scenes are kind of like a Ken Loach film, and then this little alien pops up. Yet it's still realism." Reviews evoke the social dramas typical of British cinema. "When Sam is simmeringly angry with Moses, and tells a police officer that she has no intention of being forced out of her home by a bunch of thugs and bullies, she could almost be in a gritty social-realist picture. *Attack the Block* looks a little like Michael Winterbottom's film *Wonderland*" says Peter Bradshaw, "*Attack the*

flow together, genres thus run in parallel through the film rather than merge/mix (as in a hybrid), this generic confluence being used by the director to call for a social confluence thereby also referring to the more figurative sense of the word as a coming together, in that case of a motley crew of characters who are not expected to mix so much as to blend and blend in, i.e. being able to stand together as a united nation without forsaking their social identity for all that.

Generic confluence

What seems to define generic confluence is the overt nature of the deconstruction of generic expectations in the blending process, which is part and parcel of its ideological critique (against the more seamless, unaware[23], and at times ambivalent one of hybridity). Director Joe Cornish has always made his intention clear about deconstructing the clichés associated with young people living on council estates by playing with cinematographic codes and sociocultural stereotypes.[24] *Attack the Block* manifests this desire as early as its pre-credits sequence in which the camera that scrutinises the dark immensity of the universe first operates a descending crane shot to follow a meteor attracted by Earth's gravity. The latter quickly merges with the fireworks and other firecrackers used on Guy Fawkes Night on London council estates, rendered by a long shot on a tube entrance and a tracking shot along the increasingly narrow and dark street that leads to the estate where the rest of the film takes place. This celebration being known for the excesses it generates due to its carnival spirit, the spectator can expect a context of rioting that is quite typical of banlieue films with, additionally, a possible allusion to *Flame in the Streets* (Roy Ward Baker, 1961), one of the first British films to address social and ethnic tensions in London's inner cities that also takes place on 5 November. After a sequence that combines a ground level shot and a crushing high-angle shot of Sam, the camera lingers on the shadows of the silhouettes that follow her while firecrackers make the atmosphere even more electric. An explosion frightens the young woman. The framing that alternates point of view and handheld camera (she is seen from behind) then the quick shot/reverse shot with various depths of field immediately build up tension. A gang of hooded youths stands at a distance on the pavement. Silent intimidation begins with light touch as the youths pass her by on their bicycles and then the dreaded assault takes place with, among other things, a close-up of the shiny blade of the knife held by Moses, the gang leader. The scene therefore uses all the tropes of hoodie horror. However, the blue-green neon lights that bathe

Block – Review," *The Guardian*, 12 May 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/may/12/attack-the-block-review. This is not surprising because hoodie horror and more generally the new wave of British horror are characterised by this use of social realism according to M.J. Simpson, *Urban Terrors: New British Horror Cinema 1997-2008* (London: Hemlock Books Limited, 2012), 13.

[23] The word is used by Moine, 20.

[24] See the comments available on the DVD (OPTD2013) and all the interviews given for the promotional campaign. As an example, here is what he explained about the origin of the film in his director's note: "I thought that they [the youths who had mugged him] looked weirdly cinematic. They looked like ninjas or bandits in a Western. The bikes they rode looked a bit like something out of *ET* or the hoverbikes in *Return of the Jedi*. The slang they used felt a bit like Nadsat from *A Clockwork Orange*. And I thought, 'Here's a setting that has only been used for depressing social realism, and actually there's the toolkit for an action adventure here.' I started thinking about what would have happened if that mugging had been interrupted by the kind of thing that only happened in American movies when I was a kid. What if ET had actually landed at that moment in time? What if it was an aggressive ET? […] With *Attack the Block*, I wanted to do the kind of thing that American directors did in suburbia in the Eighties. But in the present day, in my suburbia: south London." Joe Cornish in Holly Pyne, http://www.shortlist.com/.

the neighbourhood already connotes the sequence with a supernatural aura and science fiction definitely enters the film with the crash of the meteor on the car parked at the very place of the assault.[25] Therefore, even if Moses's first reaction is to steal what he can in the smashed car and then chase his attacker without knowing that it is an alien, all the tropes of the banlieue film – hoodie horror often offering a hyperbolic vision of them – will be re-coded by science fiction, as confirmed by the lettering and lighting chosen for the title that closes the sequence while the camera operates an ascending crane movement to go up into the sky, which also allows *Attack the Block* to remain a comedy thanks to its parodic aspect.[26]

Recodification is first perceptible in the characters' clothes, including the infamous hoodie which symbolises in itself the reorientation of the spectator's gaze that is requested. Throughout the film, the layers of clothing worn by the main characters are intentionally gradually removed in order to better reveal the young people hidden behind so many stereotypes and prejudices. The goal is obviously to give a face and a name, in one word an identity, to these young people usually defined by their "uniform"[27] (and their habitat). Moses's gang is therefore initially presented in an archetypal way: five silhouettes that barely emerge from the darkness, with hoods pulled over their heads, their faces hidden by scarves that only reveal hateful eyes, and of course close-ups on their trainers. Their names actually appear in a brief shot in the form of tags at the beginning of the film but no one (Sam just like the viewer) then pays attention to what seems to be vandalism typical of these neighbourhoods, owing to this obsession with stereotypes.[28] Nevertheless, the few close-ups on snoods or scarves give more of a desperado or ninja look to these young people (a theme later reinforced by the sword used to defend themselves with also a reference to *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), without the laser, during the moped charge).[29] Even if they are still connoted as bad boys, these markers already take the protagonists out of the cliché of young people living on council estates. We even see Jerome's school uniform sticking out of his big jacket. When they decide to fight against the alien invasion, the hood swiftly pulled over head takes on a new meaning and becomes a sign of determination, like a samurai or karateka who knots his headband before the fight. Moses's khaki parka that was once used to hide drugs and money from his trafficking gives him, after the arrival of the aliens, the look of a freedom fighter, especially since the hitherto taciturn leader presents, even in an awkward and laconic way, a

[25] The diegetic or extra-diegetic music that mixes hip-hop and electro reminiscent of John Carpenter's soundtracks mixed with modern classical music à la John Williams also smoothens the transition from one genre to another by, for example, ending a rap song with a much colder sound that announces the science-fiction theme of the next scene. Over the course of the film, the use of hip-hop and reggae reinforces its social subtext, such as the end credits song ("*Youths Dem Cold*" by Richie Spice). It develops its urban side despite the increasingly invasive presence of creatures, whether through the gangsta rap that the local gangster Hi-Hatz listens to or produces, or the old school rap that Brewis, the student who fantasises about street culture, likes.

[26] The release of the film in 2011 allows it to symbolise not only the culmination of the hoodie horror cycle but also that of banlieue films, and, as for the end of each cycle or formula, parody prevails over serious genre. "It hit cinemas at a time when an intense cycle of 'Broken Britain' social problem films were exploring crime among groups of disenfranchised youth." Dylan Cave, "Why I Love *Attack the Block*," *BFI*, 3 March 2015, http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/why-i-love-attack-block.

[27] Walker, 86, also uses the phrase between inverted commas.

[28] This shot places the film in the genre of urban drama as noted by Cave: "This emerges in the neat but never laboured homages spotted in the early parts of the film: a shot of gang member names sprayed in graffiti as shotgun-like effects explode on the soundtrack evokes early 90s 'new black cinema' like *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) or *Juice* (1992)."

[29] The allusion to Samurai cinema or Kung Fu films is not to be excluded: rappers like the Wu Tan Clan have made albums referring to *The 36th Chamber* (Chia-Liang Liu, 1978) for example and the sleeve presented them as faceless hoodies.

political vision of the fate awaiting young blacks on council estates ("the government bred these creatures to kill black boys"). The editing also highlights this evolution by moving from a series of frantic close-ups of clothes and weapons to a much calmer pace with long frontal or circular tracking-shots that flatter the budding heroism of Moses who is almost literally laid bare, letting his vulnerability emerge when he expresses regrets.[30] His friends undergo the same evolution, including Pest who takes off his two hoods/caps and three trousers to have his leg treated after being bitten by a creature, thus revealing his graceful body as a cute teenager proud to be a "granny magnet" as written on his t-shirt in the last sequence. During the scene of apology to their victim, all the members successively benefit from a close-up on their face that emphasises their guilt. This individualisation (the fragmentation of the shots breaks the homogenisation of the bloodthirsty gang/pack) and this humanisation allow the viewer to reconsider his/her opinion. The hoodie, a class marker that does not say its name,[31] is at the centre of this reconfiguration since, while the young aggressors finally take theirs off, Sam, after putting down her respectable English lady's pea-green coat, picks one up before getting out of Ron's flat and helping Moses to get rid of the creatures. A close-up in the last sequence shows that Moses even lost one of his trainers during the final explosion.

Topography is also used to play with the different levels of analysis of the film, generic blending giving birth to a form of cross-space mapping[32]. Some shots of the council estate where the story takes place thus reveal that each tower block or alley bears the name of a great British science fiction author. For example, the high-rise where the heroes live is the Wyndham Tower as a tribute to John Wyndham whose novel *The Day of the Triffids* was adapted into a film in 1962 by Steve Sekely. The estate that fences in and crushes, the oppressive brutalist architecture that is so much disparaged in urban dramas or presented as a source of anguish in hoodie horror films[33] here turns into a bunker or a protective fortress that young people, who know it inside out, can use to eliminate or at least lose the enemy. The "shithole, the craphole, the ends" becomes a source of pride to protect from the invader ("This is the block and nobody fucks with the block!") and the estate symbolises a social bond that has weakened in the rest of society, a true community solidarity, since various relatives' or neighbours' flats are used as temporary shelters for the group. The glimpsed interiors also confound the viewer's expectations by debunking the cliché of the decrepit and unlivable sink estate since the flats are rather cosy and redolent of family happiness, far from the broken homes put forward by the Cameron government with its concept of Broken Society or by urban dramas. Similarly, the trope of the absent father figure in

[30] The shot of Moses coming out of the lift echoes that of Hi-Hatz but the change of weapon (a sword instead of a revolver) affects genre evocation: the gangster is sent back to the banlieue film cliché while Moses is endowed with an aura reminiscent of samurai or ninja films.

[31] The proof is that the few hooded young people from more bourgeois backgrounds, thus identified because of their relative wealth, their posh accent and their university experience, are not perceived as a threat but as nice losers who dream of being as cool as estate kids (like Brewis).

[32] Fauconnier and Turner, 41-42. This is the generic space created by the blending of "input spaces" that are genre-related world-constructs. In the film, the input spaces are those of banlieue film and science fiction.

[33] The council estate becomes part of the British tradition of "uncanny landscapes" that serve as a backdrop for science fiction or horror films. Peter Hutchings, "Uncanny Landscapes in British Film and Television," *Visual Culture in Britain* 5, no.2 (2004): 27-40. Ro McNulty, "'Because You Fear Them': On Citadel, class and 'hoodie' horror," 9 February 2016, http://emptyoaks.com/2016/02/09/because-you-fear-them-on-citadel-class-and-hoodie-horror/, notes about hoodie horror: "it seemed a given that council flats rather than castles would become the real estate of choice for the new Gothic."

banlieue films is thwarted:[34] Biggz has a rather authoritarian father since, off-screen, his voice alone is enough to make his son comply and take the dog out as requested. The omnipresent tower block is itself located at the confluence of genres and becomes a blended space. Filmed exclusively at night, this often hated symbol of the lowest type of British council housing becomes, thanks to ascending or descending crane shots and extreme low-angle shots of the yellow lit windows and the white beams of the spotlights at its top, a kind of flagship or mothership that the director compares to *Alien*'s Nostromo (Ridley Scott, 1979) in the DVD commentary and which is also reminiscent of the monolith in *2001, A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) as its facade sometimes seems to be only a vertical surface. The film suggests this topographical reconfiguration by using each location twice, before and after the alien invasion.

The presence of the creatures also allows the film to recodify the behaviour of the hoodies because these bad boys prove very useful against the invasion of predatory aliens. The violence of young people that frightens in urban dramas or even terrorises in hoodie horror films is thus requalified. Antisocial acts such as the use of scooters on walkways are a way to escape the enemy. Mobile phones used for happy slapping, symbolised here with the photograph of the first alien killed, become essential tools to organise rescue operations or plan attacks, in addition to being used to call relatives to prove that hoodies have families. The predatory or even killer instinct – perceptible in the early scene of the killing of the creature in the shack that can only be heard until its death, which is typical of hoodies' "pack" attacks/mugging – becomes an asset for survival: Moses uses his flick knife to defend himself against the first creature that lands in the neighbourhood. The nemesis embodied by these creatures who select their victims (those who are covered with the pheromones of the first creature killed) also leads him to meditate on the consequences of his actions and to find a form of redemption.[35]

Just as the use of science fiction in a banlieue film setting puts the tropes of hoodie horror into perspective, the use of comedy in a science fiction context is another way to alleviate the fear generated by council estates. For example, the film mocks the media's obsession with knife or gun culture, without denying the fascination that guns and crime can exert on these young people, since the only one to own a gun on the estate is Hi-Hatz, the gangster, the others having only water or paintball pistols. Following the injunction "let's get tooled up", the weapons collected by these youths to face the invasion are more a hodgepodge than an urban guerrilla arsenal. The dog, Pogo, is neither a bulldog nor a pit bull but a small mongrel who is quickly devoured by one of the creatures. The recurring presence of the secondary characters Probs and Mayhem, nine-and-a-half-year-old wannabe gangsters who look six, introduces comic relief by keeping the film in the world of childhood. This is reinforced by the scooters and BMX bikes used by the teenagers in their chases of aliens that allude to *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg, 1982) and deflate the cliché of big SUVs or fancy cars seen in banlieue films. Ron's remark when the gang rushes out of his flat to fetch weapons ("Quite sweet really, aren't they?") suggests that all this is just childishness. And, in the end, Sam's discovery of Moses's Spiderman quilt recalls his young age.[36] Pest, who wants to play the big tough guy with Sam, screams in pain as soon as she touches his

[34] The trope was noticed by Carrie Tarr, "Masculinity and Exclusion in Post-1995 Beur and 'Banlieue' Films," in *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Phil Powrie *et al*. (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 110-112.
[35] Joe Cornish explains in his DVD commentary: "No mugging, no alien. He wishes it down. Horror is moral. Not gratuitous and indulgent."
[36] The director insists in his commentary that Moses is only fifteen. Sam's aggression is the gang's first crime, they are still immature and far from the cold and bloodthirsty monsters usually depicted, which allows not to absolve

wound. The reference to Parkour, a style of street sport popularised by *Banlieue 13* (Pierre Moral, 2004) and whose devotees' agility often reinforces the fear inspired by hoodies (as in *F.*, Johannes Roberts, 2010), is here used to show that all council estate youths are far from having the necessary physical abilities to perform these feats, even if in case of emergency, they can occasionally take the plunge so as not to end up devoured by the creatures. The language level used serves the same purpose. The film contrasts the youths' colloquial speech with Sam's full-on slang or even vulgar register. The posh nurse who keeps swearing thus contributes to deconstruct the cliché of illiterate and disrespectful young hoodies. The sometimes impenetrable estate vernacular is a trope of banlieue films.[37] This is probably why, in *Attack the Block*, the youths' dialogues are based on about fifteen frequently repeated words (they were sometimes put forward on promotional posters) as if the film was an invitation to decode certain aspects of this estate slang by contextualisation, to better prove to the viewer that it is not fundamentally different, that mutual understanding remains possible.[38]

Generic confluence therefore enables characters to get away from genre-specific clichés, on the one hand by placing these council estates youths in a science fiction context, on the other by bringing a parodic touch to all these blended genres.[39] That is why *Attack the Block* can be seen as a tribute to a number of genre films because it is partly a pastiche of its mostly American models. Its intertextuality is underlined by different types of quotation: that of titles or characters in the dialogue (Gollums; *Gremlins*, Joe Dante, 1984; *28 Days Later*, Danny Boyle, 2002; *Ghostbusters*, Ivan Reitman, 1984); that of their tropes (false scares as when Jerome grabs Pest's leg, the lighter that does not light up, the solution given in an earlier scene by a television show that went unnoticed, the creature that breaks through a door to bite someone's calf, the victim dragged by the legs, walking among the enemy without being noticed, the population that looks up at the arrival or attack of aliens as in *War of the Worlds*, Steven Spielberg, 2005, etc.); and that of some classic shots or scenes (such as when Moses drags the first alien, like Captain Steven Hiller, played by Will Smith, in *Independence Day*, Roland Emmerich, 1996 or the way Hi-Hatz is eviscerated by creatures like Captain Rhodes played by Joseph Pilato in *Day of the Dead*, George A. Romero, 1985). That is also why a kind of ironic distance or comic detachment pervades the whole film. Some dialogues clearly echo certain tropes of banlieue or science fiction films by playing on ambivalence. For example, the negative view of the stereotypical way in which the media portrays these young people is here consciously addressed by the characters.[40] Conversations in Sam's or Ron's flats, where cannabis smoke loosens tongues, allow young people to

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them but to understand them. In the *Guardian* (Shoard), he adds: "There are lots of brilliantly crafted movies which I couldn't have made this movie without but which, for me, are a little bit morally unsettling. That do demonise these kids. These are children we're talking about, and children make mistakes; they test the boundaries of the world. They can come from a shitty place with a limited amount of choices."

[37] For Tarr and Milleliri, it is one of the "formal elements that contribute to make these films true cultural testimonies". (my translation)

[38] Conversely, the film discourages the imitation or adoption of this language by the wealthiest classes through Brewis's rebuffs, the lack of authenticity always having harmful consequences (the commodification of a subculture, class contempt hidden behind the "poor is cool" game-playing).

[39] As Michael Leader, "*Attack the Block* – Review," *Den of Geek*, 27 April 2011, http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/7234/attack-the-block-review, notes, this is perhaps the film's greatest achievement: "*Attack the Block* dares to see the urban working class not as a launchpad for 'issues' or social realistic drama, but as potential characters for a highly entertaining genre film."

[40] Tarr, 110-112. Milleliri also includes it in the list of tropes of the banlieue film that seeks to go against media clichés by presenting the story of a mixed and socially dominated community with a deep sense of injustice facing multiple deprivation, political indifference, police violence and contempt from the rest of the population, in relation to what she calls the black American ghetto film.

hold a self-reflexive or even metafictional discourse on the perception they are subjected to in certain media and sections of the population ("This ain't got nothing to do with gangs, or drugs, or rap music, or violence in video games."), although the film also highlights their obsession with money, brands and celebrity, by-products of their addiction to reality TV. Their constant intertextual references to war films or Fort Knox can be understood in an intra or extra diegetic way: either it is simply a question of showing their taste for this subculture and emphasising their fascination with violence, or the film seeks to show its parodic side by reminding the viewer that the heroes of this kind of films are often military or equivalent super-combatants and never juvenile boys-next-door. But it nevertheless makes them symbolically access this status.[41] In any case, the goal seems to be to blur the viewer's expectations.

Social confluence

This parodic dimension born out of generic confluence ultimately makes it possible to convey *sotto voce* a social discourse[42] because this formal recodification is the pivot on which the reconfiguration of content is based. Genres are "schematised world-constructions" that come with a certain number of expectations/assumptions. So by blending them and foregrounding "the deliberate disappointment of, or confrontation between, [these] generic expectations,"[43] *Attack the Block* can stress the exaggeration that usually prevails in these films and, by bringing the characters out of generic clichés, the viewer is also taken out of his/her rut and possible prejudices.[44] The use of aliens which are the product of cross-space mapping between the banlieue (inner city) and science fiction (outer space) genres[45] is a truly subversive, ironic and parodic way not only to displace the source of anxiety that hoodies usually represent onto these super-predators but above all to question the very notion of monster that is so often used to qualify council estate youths on and off screen. The editing is thus ironic when Sam, who has just been attacked, and her neighbour complain in an insisting way about these young "monsters" by pouring out all the usual media clichés and the film immediately cuts to a shot on the creature that has just landed in the neighbourhood as if to say "youths are not monsters, *this* is a monster". Similarly, the first attack on the gang by a male creature is filmed as the inversion of the pre-credit mugging scene. This time, they are the preys that try to peer through the darkness and only see what they believe to be eyes staring at them. Aliens have always signified malaise in a given society (the Red Scare

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[41] Simpson, 64, explains: "Squaddies have featured prominently throughout the history of British horror and sci-fi […]. They are emblematic of the British response to danger. America, in both reality and Hollywood, responds to threats with overwhelming firepower and massive invasion forces. The UK sends in a squad of well-trained men armed with little more than a beret and a Bren gun."

[42] Simpson, 113, notes: "Great horror movies comment on the world. Great comedies do likewise. Both genres exaggerate – only slightly – to explore the human condition and, when they are of a time and a place, to hold a mirror up to that world". Generic confluence thus allows *Attack the Block* to achieve this goal.

[43] The quotes come from Allen, 10, 12. She adds: "we only become aware of the blended character of a construction when we come across surprising twists, logical inconsistencies or structural clashes."

[44] This is not easy, as shown by the reaction of some critics who did not appreciate this generic blending, finding it in bad taste because of its supposedly immoral result. David Gritten, "*Attack the Block*, Review," *The Telegraph*, 12 May 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/8510145/Attack-the-Block-review.html, speaks of a "genre mash-up marked by jarring tonal shifts." Ben Walsh, "*Attack the Block*," *The Independent*, 13 May 2011, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/attack-the-block-15-2283089.html, explains "the late-night mugging that sets up Joe Cornish's (postmodern mash-up) debut film is tricky to get over. It skews your judgement of the BMX-riding teenage hoodies (the film's 'heroes') at the centre of the action."

[45] This cross-spatial mapping was used more or less consciously by the producers who oppose "inner-city vs outer space" in their poster catchphrase.

in the United States, the decline of the British Empire, the fear of the nuclear bomb, patriarchy in crisis in the United Kingdom, the allegory about Apartheid in South Africa, etc.).[46] In this film, the monster is double or rather offers a mirror effect. These simplistic and primitive beings alternately compared to apes (gorilla, orangutan), bears, dogs, but also inspired by werewolves dear to the director's heart,[47] without visible eyes but with phosphorescent fangs and a CGI ink-black fur that, just like black holes, absorbs all light, are a parodic literalisation of the supposed monstrosity of council estate youths as they are represented in the media ("yobs, thugs, sick, feral, hoodie, louts, heartless, evil, frightening, scum, monsters, inhuman and threatening"[48]) and in a society where the fear of young people is actually the fear of the poor coupled with the fear of blacks – hoodies initially emerged from the hip-hop movement so they are assumed to be black while chavs are their white counterparts. The recurrent speculation about the definition of this species can be interpreted as an ironic reference to media debates that continue to deny the humanity of hoodies. The comments of the gang members on the darkness of these beasts purposefully underline the premise of the film ("That's black, too black to see / that's the blackest black ever fam / blacker than my cousin Femi!").[49] But by externalising monstrosity, the film makes it possible to dissociate this stigmatising view of working-class youth. By opposing marginalised and rejected categories of the population – often "othered" in the media and some horror films – and a much more extreme form of the Other since it is truly inhuman, the film downplays these young people's dangerousness (notably with the insertion of brief rather gory shots) and thereby reintegrates them into humankind. In this, *Attack the Block* stands as the perfect reverse of hoodie horror films like *F.* or *Heartless* (Philip Ridley, 2009) in which young people are first shown as human beings before becoming monsters. Contrary to the darkness of the creatures, Moses's gang symbolically brings light wherever they go through the corridors of the building (unlike their antagonist Hi-Hatz, the only real human monster in the film who embodies the Prince of Darkness). And Sam, first tempted to leave alone to escape her attackers, quickly finds herself in the dark, which convinces her, after a brief moment of reflection during which the beasts can be heard howling in the distance, to finally go back to them. This scene, which echoes the initial aggression but in reverse, signals the film's tipping point, situated exactly in its middle: the source of fear has changed ("Wherever you're going, I'm going with you" she says).

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[46] Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, [1997] 2001), 76, 95. See also Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 9: "Horror film is uniquely situated to engage with the insecurities that underpin such conceptions of the nation; to expose the terrors underlying everyday national life and the ideological agendas that dictate existing formulations of 'national cinemas' themselves." She sees in British horror films of the end of the millennium "a range of British heroes doing battle with malevolent spirits, demons, dragons, and themselves in their exploration of gendered national identity, now marked by increasing political apathy and a loss of faith in the democratic nature of the British parliamentary system" (13).

[47] Joe Cornish in Holly Pyne, http://www.shortlist.com/, explains: "Another film I watched on video again and again was *An American Werewolf in London*. The thing that's fascinating is that it's one of the most brilliantly satirical and perceptive films about London, even though it was made by a foreigner. And it was a Hollywood B-movie transposed into London. It's a comedy horror in the very truest sense […]. It's real before it's fantastic. The priority is the scariness and the reality." He was also inspired by the wolf in *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006).

[48] This list of recurring terms was compiled by the Echo group and Women in Journalism based on more than 8,000 articles about British youth. Fiona Bawden, "Hoodie-winked," *The Guardian*, 9 March 2009, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2009/mar/09/media-news; Richard Garner, "'Hoodies, Louts, Scum': How Media Demonises Teenagers," *The Independent*, 13 March 2009, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/hoodies-louts-scum-how-media-demonises-teenagers-1643964.html.

[49] For Ilott, 162-163, the creatures are a parody of the descendants of the immigrants of Brixton where the film takes place because they are seen as invaders by the local population (a sort of reverse colonisation).

In fact, the evolution of Sam's perception of monstrosity shows this gradual journey towards the complete dissociation between monsters and council estate youths. First, the monsters are the youths as pointed out by the dialogue between Sam and her neighbour, then by her reaction in the police van in which her recoil is accentuated by the camera when she discovers Moses, the monster in a cage. The aggressiveness of Dennis, who came to free him and is filmed like one of the monsters lurking around them, frightens her as much as the beasts. This terror is still present in the scene set in her flat, during the intrusion of the gang (reminiscent of home invasion), where Dennis still aggressively asks her why she does not like the neighbourhood without realising that he is one of the main reasons. Then, the monsters symbolise more generally the evils of the neighbourhoods where they prowl, perceived as real cut-throat areas by the rest of the population because of the media, but also by their own residents who are tired of insecurity and drug-related crime (hence perhaps the hidden reason for the very localised invasion that puzzles the youths: "This ain't London wide, this is localised. / What kind of alien out of all the places in the whole wide world would invade some shitty council estate in South London? / One's that looking for a fight!"). The wire-mesh or reinforced doors of Tia's and a neighbour's flats signal that the residents are the first victims of this social monstrosity that consists in abandoning them to their fate. The two sides are represented by Sam, who plans to move out because the neighbourhood is unsafe, and Pest, who cannot see the difference between the alien invasion and his daily life ("Walking round expecting to get jumped at any moment. Feels like just another day in the ends to me"). Finally, the monsters are totally opposed to the young people that Sam is happy to join as the latter are human after all. After surviving an attack together, she understands that they were telling the truth ("There's worse things out there than us tonight, trust. We're on the same side now, get me?"). But, ironically, she must be accepted by them, thus discovering the humiliation of social rejection. Arguably, she now is the monster, in the etymological sense, the one who is singled out because she is the alien/stranger to the group.[50]

Apart from the alien creatures, the film seems to show that the real monsters are the local gangster and the police. The way Hi-Hatz grabs Moses by the arm is reminiscent of that of the creatures, especially since, in another scene, the youths think they see him when it is actually a creature. As for the police, they are perceived as more dangerous than the creatures by the youths, even though their comment is ironic. The policemen are symbolically linked to the predators when a siren blares as the creatures chase Moses in the final sequence. Those who finally arrive on the premises emerge from the smoke of their grenades like the creatures before and they share with them the denomination of "beast". The youths had nicknamed the first creature "the beast of Brixton" and the rap of KRS-One (*Sound of Da Police*) that Brewis listens to goes "This is the sound of the police, this is the sound of the beast". So everyone is someone else's monster. The association of the police with monsters is also the result of generic confluence. The distrust of the police, and more generally of institutions, typical of the proletarian milieu and directly related to banlieue film, here finds another justification because, in genre films that often advocate an anti-governmental ethos, the cavalry often arrives late or is even completely counterproductive (think, among many examples, of George A. Romero's antimilitarism). This is why, in *Attack the Block*, young people repeatedly complain about police harassment ("they arrest us for nothing already"); why Ron the dealer, who observes the situation with binoculars from his flat (as in zombie/infected films), is pleased to see no blue light in the neighbourhood; why Moses refuses to let Sam call the police when they understand that this is an alien

[50] The term alien is of course polysemic since it means both foreigner and extra-terrestrial. For those who may find that it is not glorious for young people to have to be compared to extra-terrestrial creatures to regain their status as human beings, they should remember that the film largely adopts Sam's point of view.

invasion (just as Pest refuses to go to the hospital for treatment) because the officers would only be one more problem to solve; and why Moses, not averse to conspiracy theories, even thinks at one point that the creatures are sent by the government to eradicate council estate youths who do not kill each other fast enough. The two genres therefore come together to put the state on trial because it is seen as repressive and unjust since it attacks the weakest without being able to protect them from a greater threat.

By putting young people who are often dehumanised face to face with truly inhuman creatures through a generic blending of the monster figure, this film sits at the confluence of genres to better encourage that of identities in a non-revolutionary but humanist discourse.[51] In a multicultural society where inequalities are widening and ghettoisation tends towards the diffluence of communities, *Attack the Block* insists on the benefit that the country could reap from a true convergence of the nation's vital forces. It is interesting to note that when the monsters arrive, they damage the car of student Brewis's father and, later, a police van, in other words the middle class and the institutions. Additionally, they attack very specific targets, so much so that they could be seen as an embodiment of fate or divine retribution or at least of authorial intervention in that they appear as social avengers. Those who perish in the goriest way are thus the policemen (who are distracted because they are too happy to have arrested the one they believe to be the gangster) and the real villains or "human monsters" of the film namely Hi-Hatz and his henchmen,[52] that is to say those who refuse this reconfiguration and remain frozen in the clichés of the banlieue film. Quite significantly, the authorities deny the existence of extra-terrestrials and persist in believing, despite mounting evidence, that all the problems they face are the work of young people in the neighbourhood. The late intervention of the police (with a helicopter chase) maintains the urban character of the film even after the alien invasion until its conclusion with the arrest of the youths in the epilogue, as policemen are convinced that all this chaos is only one more night of riots on the estate. This attitude reveals their conditioning and the implacable nature of the institutions, but their denial of reality leads to their downfall. Unlike Moses who evolves throughout the film, Hi-Hatz, his *doppelgänger*, remains a true cliché of an irredeemable gangster, the embodiment of gangsta bling with his fascination for money, weapons and rap that he listens to at full volume in all circumstances. In contrast, two members from the group led by Moses are killed but these deaths are filmed in a less horrific way. Even if the director seems to think that these deaths occur randomly, Dennis noticeably dies just after reiterating his distrust of Sam while the other youths are rather of the opinion to unite against their new common enemy. As if form followed content, the film then seems to show the dead-end in which class contempt (which works both ways in its "us vs them" perception of society) can precipitate society. The violent blow delivered by a creature against the door of Sam's flat where they have all taken refuge is what puts an end to the class war that reigns within the group expressed with many jibes and wisecracks on both sides. The tensions stirring the United Kingdom would find their solution if the supposed foreigners/aliens acknowledged their proximity and similarities, not going on a space odyssey but just as long and difficult a journey nonetheless

[51] The film does not go so far as to explicitly state that hoodie horror is above all the product of a social horror caused by the ideological system in place. However, the suggested confrontation between supposed and real monsters is already in itself a way of mocking the hyperbolic nature of some films and, consequently, the moral panics they are the reflection of.

[52] There is no excessive idealism in this film, as noticed by Chris Tookey, "Hoodies you want to hug: A teen gang fights aliens in the best monster movie since *Shaun of the Dead*," *The Daily Mail*, 13 May 2011, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/ reviews/article-1386562/Attack-The-Block-review-The-best-monster-movie-Shaun-Of-The-Dead.html: "*Attack the Block* strikes a refreshingly happy medium, neither demonising nor glorifying them [hoodies]."

successfully undertaken by Sam and the youths. Sam is no longer considered a total stranger by the young people when she tends to Pest's leg but she takes time to accept them. Her reaction to Pest's commentary, which could go along the criticism of the film as seeking to overlook the initial aggression, is there to remind the viewer that the term hero is still, at this point in the film, usurped and that a purely individual relationship is not enough to create a healthy society ("He mugged me. / Yeah but afterwards she fixed my leg and we saved her from the monsters so we're mates now and it's all sweet. We're heroes, innit? / Five of you and a knife against one woman? Fuck off!"). Excuses are not enough and it is only after saving each other's lives – which gives rise to a general presentation: everyone has left their social stereotype (us/them) and has become an individual – and especially after Moses's sacrifice to save the whole estate that Sam no longer considers them strangers and defends them against the police: "Those boys over there, the ones you're arresting, I know them. They're my neighbours. They protected me." It is indeed the idea of community and solidarity that the film seeks to develop around the hard core of Moses's gang by including individuals from other social classes (Ron, Brewis, Sam). Incidentally, the film takes a dig at do-gooders who like to help strangers on the other side of the world but do nothing for those who are their neighbours, like Sam's partner who volunteered in Africa. In this call for civil and social harmony (neighbourliness "going towards" vs alienation/alien nation "making foreign"), those who remain distant and individualistic are punished while those who develop a collective spirit beyond social differences are saved or even redeemed. The extraordinary circumstances thus reveal the worth of Moses and his neo-proletarian friends who, thanks to the help of the representatives of the lower-middle class Sam and Brewis, manage to save their tower block, a microcosm symbolising no less than the nation. Moses's name is chanted by neighbours since, after a heroic chase filmed in slow motion, he blew up all the monsters, escaping death by grabbing a flag, the Union Jack, hanging from a balcony. The film therefore also reconfigures a trophy often waved by the racists of the neighbourhood into a symbol of national renewal where the young black man is no longer "the evil Other"[53] but is in line with the British heroes of yesteryear in war films or Ealing comedies,[54] while keeping a psychological complexity that makes him definitely human (capable of evil as well as good). The character of Moses is the catalyst for this generic and social confluence since his evolution from marginal/criminal to have-a-go hero corresponds, beyond the story attached to his biblical name (a reluctant saviour and liberator of his people) to the trope of the unlikely hero of science fiction, an ordinary character caught in extraordinary circumstances that reveal him to himself. As such the word "remake" takes on its full meaning both cinematographically and politically. In a neoliberal society that has sought to "reclassify" certain people as "abject" leading the latter to resist this dehumanising approach by an "attempt to remake themselves"[55], *Attack the Block* does the same thing as the ideology it struggles against but with a reverse goal. By subverting the principle of the

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[53] As mentioned by Mark Featherstone, "'Hoodie Horror': The Capitalist Other in Postmodern Society," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, vol.35, no.3 (2013): 178-196.

[54] According to Bradshaw, "*Attack the Block* draws on the classic science-fiction model such as *Independence Day* and the siege drama – Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* – but there's also something very innocent and English here, something reminiscent of the 1947 Ealing comedy *Hue and Cry*." For Tookey, "There are inevitably echoes of *Shaun of the Dead* fighting off that unwelcome incursion of zombies in Finsbury Park, but the notion of uniting classes and races to resist a common enemy goes back to the heyday of Ealing comedy."

[55] Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books, 2013), 73-74, 211-214. She explains how neoliberalism seeks to deprive certain sections of the population of their citizenship by reducing them to the state of abjection. The film takes the opposite approach by seeking to reintegrate these "revolting subjects" into the nation.

monstrous other ("[that] may be deployed to serve dominant ideologies of class and nationhood"[56]) thanks to genre blending, it gives its characters the opportunity to "remake" themselves or reinvent themselves as science fiction heroes, which allows it to emphasise their human side.

Attack the Block is therefore both a point of junction for various genres and people. Though some might view the film as a monstrous hybrid (i.e. the abnormal and artificial union of two species/genres),[57] the idea is rather to subvert spectators' expectations of a genre by blending it with another, hoping to translate that revisionism/reappraisal into the extra-filmic reality of British society. Generic blending in *Attack the Block* thus contributes to the "politics of genre"[58] in asserting its wish to challenge or even influence its spectators' world-view.

[56] Blake, 142.
[57] Although he ultimately goes against it, Derrida, 57, refers to the potential law of genre as a norm to respect, a line of demarcation not to cross because "one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity".
[58] Allen, 14.

The Ninth Life of Louis Drax: from text to film

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"In any metamorphosis, it's what's different that matters. A replica is a tame and hobbled thing. But a transformation has wings". [1]

Fig. 1: The film poster
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_9th_Life_of_Louis_Drax

[1] Jensen, "Seeing *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* on Screen", *The Guardian*, 2nd September 2016.

Jensen's fifth novel

Liz Jensen is a successful British-Danish contemporary writer, whose work has been translated into twenty languages. She is the author of eight novels, published between 1995 and 2012, of which *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* (2004) is the fifth. These novels range through a variety of subjects and styles, from the neo-Victorian to time travel, but all come under the umbrella of "literary fiction". A small school of "Jensen studies" has emerged in recent years, and while she is most often cited for her clifi (climate-change fiction), which includes two rewritings of the Noah myth, *Ark Baby* (1998) and *The Rapture* (2009), along with *The Uninvited* (2012), a speculative and dystopian tale, the detective thriller is also a distinct subset of her output. It is into this category that *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* falls, along with *War Crimes for the Home*, published two years previously. Using the lens of adaptation studies, this article will examine the relationship of Alexander Aja's 2016 adaptation of *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* to Jensen's novel.[2] However, it is first necessary to give an overview of the characters and plot of Jensen's novel, and to comment briefly on some of the narrative devices it employs, certain of which are to some degree discernible in the film.

If The Ninth Life of Louis Drax can be considered a detective thriller, its affiliation to this genre is not simple: the novel is a twist on the detective story, and is highly metafictional. To summarize the main arc of the story, at the outset, the eponymous Louis, aged ten, lies in a coma ward, between life and death after an "accident" caused by his mother's Munchausen's by proxy (she is driven to harm her own child, whom others believe to be simply accident-prone – a brush with cot-death, a fall onto electrified metro tracks, salmonella and botulism are among the misfortunes which befall him in the first ten years of his life).[3] The novel spans the time in which Louis is living an inner life, at some hidden level of consciousness, until the moment comes when he is able to accept the death of his (step)father, and so "come back to life". While Louis works towards this point, a complementary story arc unravels his past: living in Lyon with his mother, Natalie, and with the often-absent Pierre, whom he believes to be his father, Louis becomes gradually aware that something is being kept from him regarding the circumstances of his birth. It is the truth about how Louis came into being that provides the crux of the plot, that final revelation which is crucial to the thriller form, and Louis's mission – of which he is only patchily conscious, even prior to falling into a coma – is to make sense of his back story. This is the *sine qua non* for continuing to live, since Louis has great difficulty ensuring his own survival in the face of his mother's desire to harm him, a well-concealed impulse which will prove an important motor to the thriller plot. It is not until his "ninth life" that Louis manages to loosen the hold that Natalie has on him. Only in his comatose state will he finally be able to escape Natalie, when he learns to "switch her off" in a way he could not in real life, as if she were the one in a "post-human" state of advanced life support, rather than he.

Louis himself is the narrator of the events leading up to his accident, while his hospital consultant, Dr Dannachet, takes over from that time on, although parts of Louis's narratives are retrospective, so that the two voices alternate. Nonetheless, Dr Dannachet narrates the greater part of

[2] The film rights were sold before the publication of the novel, but the death of Anthony Minghella delayed the release of the film by some years. See Liz Jensen, "Seeing *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* on screen is like meeting an eerie stranger", op. cit.
[3] Liz Jensen, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*. London: Bloomsbury, 2004, pp. 1-2.

the novel. Like Louis, he narrates in the first person, his measured, educated tone contrasting with Louis's childish, breathless and sparingly punctuated febrility. Significantly, it is the sensible and educated Dr Dannachet who lays the groundwork for the central part of the plot, in which Louis, using the doctor as his medium, manages to communicate telepathically from the depths of his vegetative state.

The plot turns on the revision of the accepted version of Louis's birth and near-death at the age of ten. For the greater part of the novel, the story of Louis' latest accident, as told by Natalie, holds: during a family picnic on Louis's tenth birthday, an argument broke out about a packet of sweets, and Louis's step-father Pierre, in a moment of intense anger, pushed Louis over the edge of a ravine, before going on the run:

Louis had sweets in his pocket. Pierre saw him eating one. He got furious. He didn't like Louis eating sweets. He said I wasn't bringing him up properly. […] He went on and on. He was accusing me of all sorts of things. Being a bad mother. Louis couldn't stand it, and he ran off towards the ravine. We both ran after him. Pierre got to him first. He's very strong. He grabbed Louis and started dragging him to the car, saying he was taking him to Paris. Louis managed to get free and run off. But Pierre caught up with him again just by the ravine, and they struggled. [4]

This version of events is finally revised into something much more complicated and less expected: the sweets were not in fact sweets but contraceptive pills; Louis was taking them in order to avoid growing up into a rapist, which Natalie, it turns out falsely, has always claimed his biological father, Jean-Luc, was, and which has come to Louis's ears; Pierre, at some point during the picnic, discovered this, and an argument did indeed take place, perilously close to the edge of a ravine.[5] However, it finally proves, it was Natalie who pushed Pierre over the edge (literally as well as figuratively), and, following this, Louis went over all by himself – his final act in his Munchausen's-dominated relationship with his mother was to inflict an accident on himself, in order to please her. As the end of the novel approaches, Louis recalls his own fall thus:

> I did what she wanted, like I always do. She didn't even need to help me, not this time. […] I walked backwards. I counted the steps. It was five steps. It was easy. One two three four five. And then I thought there might be a six but there wasn't a six. Instead of a six, I fell into the water, and died. [6]

The "mystery" which *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* unravels is finally one of family relations, rather than of crime as such: the "family romance", in the Freudian sense, is the very meat of the plot, and the intimately domestic is reconciled with the detective thriller form in order that history may be rewritten. Within this narrative frame, Louis functions both as the object of a mystery, being investigated by others – as a psychoanalytical case study for his therapist, Marcel "Fat" Perez, and a medical case for Dr. Dannachet, the consultant who runs the coma ward where he is treated – and as a boy detective, trying to make sense of the story he sees enacted by his parents. However, rather than having Famous-

[4] Jensen, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*, op. cit., p. 120.
[5] Louis's origins are different in the novel and the film: in the novel, he believes to be the natural son of a rapist, Jean-Luc, and fears turning into a rapist himself. The film does not dwell on this preoccupation of Louis's, although Natalie still claims – falsely, as in the novel – to have conceived her son through rape, and Louis does at one stage claim that men "did bad things to my mum" (Alexandre Aja, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*, Anticolony Films, Brightlight Pictures, Canada/United Kingdom, 2016, 37'10).
[6] Jensen, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*, op.cit, p. 206.

Five style adventures, he remains tied to his mother's apron strings. While conscious, his investigations centre entirely on the inner workings of the family, with no outside activity, so that his role is less boy-adventurer than spy, and following the accident, Louis's "detective work" takes place entirely within his own head.

In the time leading up to the accident, Louis is as yet unable to formulate his story verbally, and imposes on himself a "secret rule", known as "Don't say anything".[7] While he takes pleasure in provoking Perez, with whom he experiences a turbulent transference, he is not ready to take the consequences of telling the truth. Louis's own interpretation of events is threatened by the greater age and experience of Perez, who, as an analytical psychologist, functions as a much more competent rival detective, as it were a "professional reader" of conflicting discourses. As such, he might at any minute break through Louis's defences and discover the truth – and thus put an end to the mother-son relationship, which, though abusive and unhealthy, provides both Louis and Natalie with the affective nourishment upon which they rely.

While its primary role is to obfuscate the truth of his own experience, Louis's narrative nonetheless draws a precise, and unflattering, portrait of Natalie. While he "does not know what he is saying", he reveals a great deal about her self-help, her conflicts, and her habit of inappropriately confiding in her son. For example, he observes, "Maman's friends keep changing. They keep changing because one day they have a Major Disagreement and the Major Disagreement is always about me", and, again clearly parroting Natalie, "Mothers need air and space and freedom. They're like birds, if you keep them in a cage they go mad. It isn't just dads that need to fly", the reference being to Pierre's job as an airline pilot.[8] Louis is fully conversant with his mother's "Emotional Work",[9] and with the fact that, at least according to Natalie's version of events, many people have "let her down very badly".[10] It is through Louis's repetition of his mother's words that the reader builds a picture of a woman who is ambivalent about motherhood, has difficulty keeping friends, and complains about her responsibilities: "Visiting Fat Perez was Papa's idea, but it was Maman's headache because she was the one who had to take me there".[11] It also appears that Natalie likes to cultivate her son's sense of guilt: "Boys shouldn't make their mamans cry. And if their mamans do cry, boys should be there to comfort them and say I'm sorry things went wrong, Maman, I'm sorry your heart's in your mouth the whole time".[12] Louis is a detective of the unconscious, but he is by no means master of what he is detecting, since he has no effective means of decoding it. He can only provide a lens through which the reader may decode the truth. Moreover, he is aware that he is considered "disturbed", and plays up to this image, chiefly by frequent lying, and by various episodes of acting-out. However, his narrative alsoc onstitutes the locus of truth in the novel, which the other characters – as well as the reader – must learn how to read.

Translation, adaptation

This is, then, a highly metafictional novel, which sets up conflicting narratives which are ironically juxtaposed, and must be decoded by the reader in different ways. To this extent, to use the term

[7] Ibid., p.6.
[8] Ibid., p. 11.
[9] Ibid., p. 12.
[10] Ibid., p. 86.
[11] Ibid., p. .5.
[12] Ibid., p. 37.

coined by Merivale and Sweeney, this novel can be considered a "metaphysical" detective story (Merivale, 1). But what questions arise when such a narrative is adapted for the cinema?

The film version of The Ninth Life of Louis Drax, directed by Alexandre Aja, was released in 2016, and its reception was somewhat mitigated. [2] Although a *Guardian* review did concede, "[I]t is watchable and even intriguing in its weird way",[13] the following criticism from the *New York Times,* which takes issue with the uneven tone, was (regrettably, for Jensen fans) more typical:

> It's not clear whether *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* is deliberately inconsistent or merely an example of confused filmmaking. [...] The film [...] sometimes sounds like a children's fantasy [...] At other times, it feels like a supernatural thriller [...]When the movie finally settles on a tone, it's not quite any of those, and it's too late.[14]

However, while the film was regarded as not entirely successful, it can be interestingly approached from the perspective of adaptation studies.

It has long been established that the original novel cannot be considered as "the reference by which the film should be criticised",[15] as was the case in the early days of film studies, when criticism was dominated by fears of "infidelity" to the original, and the very process of adaptation was considered compromising and reductive. Thomas Leitch warns against seeing an adaptation in terms of "fidelity", [16] Robert Stam against emitting "moral" judgments about such fidelity or infidelity.[17] Some prominent film theorists have always rejected this kind of analysis: George Bluestone warned sixty years ago that comparing a film and a novel as "better" or "worse" than one another is as fruitless as "pronounc[ing] Wright Johnson's Wax Building better or worse than Tchaikowsky's Swan Lake" given that each is characterised by "unique and specific properties" (5-6). Since that time, a vast body of adaptation theory has grown up, much of which posits similar arguments to those outlined above. Such questions are a part of what Linda Hutcheon refers to as the inevitable "haunting" of a film adaptation by the original text. [18] Insisting that the adaptation is not "derivative", but is "its own palimpsestic thing", she holds that an adaptation can be regarded as a form of intertextuality, and "an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work".[19] Thus this article seeks at the same time to avoid taking Liz Jensen's novel as the sole criterion against which Alexandre Aja's adaptation is to be judged, rejecting any notion of a film adaptation as "inferior and secondary", [20] and to compare the two artefacts where this is useful. Aja's film will be analysed as an adaptation, as a visual reconstruction of a narrative, within the theoretical framework this implies.

In order to anchor this analysis among my main critical preoccupations, I have adopted an approach which includes translation and intertextuality as metaphors for adaptation. This article thus aims to show how Aja's adaptation of Jensen's novel navigates between "transposition" of, and

[13] Peter Bradshaw, "*The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* (review): Weirdly Watchable Thriller", www.guardian.co.uk, 1st September 2017. Accessed 12.11.2021.
[14] Neil Genzlinger, "Review: '*The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*.' So, Little Boys Get Nine Lives, Too?" The *New York Times*, 1st September 2016. Accessed 07.05.2017.
[15] Thomas Leitch,.*Film Adaptation and its Discontents: from* Gone with the Wind *to* The Passion of Christ*.* Baltimore: Johns *Hopkins* University Press, 2007, p.3.
[16] Ibid., p.3.
[17] Robert Stam, cit. in Yvonne Griggs, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies: Adapting the Canon in Film, TV, Novels and Popular Culture.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p. 4.
[18] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2013, p.6.
[19] Ibid., p. 8.
[20] Ibid., p.4.

"commentary" on, the original, to use Geoffrey Wagner's terminology,[21] and this with three main objectives in mind: to examine the ways in which the very literary devices present in the novel find corollaries in the visual strategies mobilised by the film version, to establish how certain characteristics of the novel are directly transferred to the film or transformed by it, and to analyse several specific aspects of deconstruction and reconstruction as regards the portrayal of Natalie, Louis's mother. [6]

Linda Constanzo Cahir argues that adaption can be read as a process of translation, which is very pertinent to this film in particular. [22] According to Cahir, adaptation is a misnomer, and the term "translation" better describes the process by which text is made into film. She argues, "'To adapt' means to alter the structure or function of an entity so that it is better fitted to survive and to multiply in its new environment, adding that "to adapt is to move *that same entity* into a new environment"; it might, she concedes, undergo "modification", or even "radical mutation" in order to "*accommodate itself* to its new environment".[23] However, she sees a film made from a novel as a "translation", because "to translate', in contrast to 'to adapt', is to move a text from one language to another. It is a *process of language*, not a process of survival and generation". [24] I have argued in my book on Liz Jensen that the novel on which the film is based seems to be a translation from an absent, French original (the novel is set in France), and that this is one of its most fascinating aspects, since it seems to point to an inaccessibility which is a condition of the text itself:

> Natalie's inaccessiblity is confirmed by and reflected in the fact that the novel reads like a translation from the French, and is shot through with French-sounding structures such as "The mother of Louis Drax", suggestive of the French "La mère de Louis Drax" (*The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* 110), or "You're not aware?" ("Vous n'êtes pas au courant?") (29). The fact that there is no original in existence in itself makes an otherworld of the text, distancing it and placing it, like Natalie, in a "beyond". [25]

If the novel can be read as itself a pseudo-translation, it is interesting to approach the film version as a further translation of the work. One aspect of the film which bears this out is the narrative of the main character, and narrator of a large part of the novel, the eponymous Louis. Aware that he is considered "disturbed", he plays up to his image, but he also plays "the fool" in the way the phrase is understood in *King Lear*: sometimes what he says is very prescient, and "constitutes the locus of truth in the novel which the other characters – as well as the reader – must learn how to read". [26] Louis at once colludes with his mother, covering up her attempts to harm him, and reveals what is actually happening. Jensen herself has emphasised the importance of Louis's voice, claiming that the child "appeared" in 2002, implying that his voice seemed to be fully-formed, without her intervention, and in a further layer, she

[21] Geoffrey Wagner, cit. in Griggs, op. cit., p. 2.
[22] Linda Cahir posits different categories of translation – "literal", which "reproduces the plot and all its attendant details as closely as possible to the letter of the book"; "traditional" ", which "maintains the overall traits of the book (its plot, settings, and stylistic conventions) but revamps particular details, and "radical", which "reshapes the book in extreme and revolutionary ways both as a means of interpreting the literature and of making the film a more fully independent work", while admitting that the three may overlap (Linda Constanzo Cahir, and James M. Welsh, "The Nature of Film Translation: Literal, Traditional and Radical", in *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*. Jefferson (North Carolina): McFarland, 2006, 13-43, p. 16.
[23] Cahir, "The Nature of Film Translation", op. cit., p. 14.
[24] Ibid., p. 14.
[25] Helen E. Mundler, *The Otherworlds of Liz Jensen*, New York: Camden House (Boydell and Brewer), 2016, p. 113.
[26] Ibid., p. 113.

claims to have felt, on first meeting Aiden Longworth, the child who plays Louis in the film, "This kid isn't just channelling Louis Drax: he is Louis Drax". [27]

While Louis appears as a non-symbolic, non-verbal object, to his writer, who feels that she "channelled" him when writing the novel, and subsequently that the actor playing the character performs a similar function, it can paradoxically be argued that Louis's voice, particularly when it narrates in voice-over, is "too verbal" for the medium of film, too anchored in the written word. Tasha Robinson complains, in her review, of "Louis's breathless, stream-of-consciousness narration", that bringing the voice to the screen is not effective: "[T]he conceits that work on the page, like Louis's breathless, stream-of-consciousness narration [...] are jarring and mannered on- screen".[28]

The direct deployment of Louis's words from the novel in the film can, however, be seen slightly differently: it can be understood as a self-conscious device, through which the film acknowledges its status as an adaptation of text (here I am dropping Cahir's translation conceit), rather than a fully visual object. George Bluestone, in his founding work on film adaptation, comments that "Because language has laws of its own, and literary characters are inseparable from the language which forms them, the externalisation of such characters often seems dissatisfying",[29] while Fredric Jameson takes the idea of the clash between the what is symbolised on the page and what is seen further .Michael Walsh, in his work on Film Studies, comments on Jameson's ideas thus: "His ontology of film is dominated by the visual, which in turn is conceived of as an aggressive mastering gaze intent on physically possessing its objects", and mentions a "reduction to the body". [30] Considered in this way, Louis's voice can be interpreted as a textual, novelistic technique which deflects the "aggressivity" inherent in Jameson' "mastering gaze", "intent on physically possessing its objects".[31] A refusal of the "reduction to the body" is particularly pertinent here, since it allows an element of the plot – Natalie's constant, masked attempts to kill her son, her wish to reduce *him* to a body, even a corpse, upon which she can inscribe her own neuroses – to be reflected within the construction of the film. The film is able to emphasise the alternance between these two meanings of "body" by emphasising Natalie as sexual object – film can have a different relationship to Natalie as aesthetic object, and can exploit her, as well as just deploying her. The spectator is thus pushed into a relationship with this character which is different from that of the reader.

"Hitchcock blondes" and melodrama

The third part of this article analyses three aspects of the portrayal of Natalie, and how her character is reconstructed in the film adaptation. These stem from implicit Hitchcock references, melodrama and horror.

Natalie's version of events is finally exposed as a series of lies and fabrications, but she herself remains the ultimate mystery, and her motivation will never be understood. The novel exploits

[27] Liz Jensen, "Seeing *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*", op. cit.
[28] Tasha Robinson. "*The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* (review): a cluttered, confused riff on a Guillermo del Toro fantasy". https://www.theverge.com/2016/9/2/12757786/the-9th-life-of-louis-drax-film-review-book-adaptation. Accessed 09.01.2022.
[29] George Bluestone, *Novels into Film*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961, p. 23.
[30] Michael Walsh, "Jameson and 'Global Aesthetics'", in David Bordwell, and Noël Carroll (ed.). *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies.* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996 (481-500), pp. 484-85.
[31] Ibid., 485.

postmodern techniques of narrative instability, notably through the clash of the narrating voices of Louis and his doctor described above, and also through the concealment of Natalie, who is not a narrator, and will never give any one coherent version of events which might have allowed for understanding and closure.

The film draws out and magnifies the melodrama which is part of the polyphonic mix in the novel. I have analysed the character of Natalie, the child-harming mother, in the novel through the critical lens of "anti-heroine and bitch", this last being elevated almost to female archetype by Sarah Appleton Aguiar in her book on "wicked women" in literature. For Appleton Aguiar, "the bitch" is a "vital woman, empowered with anger, wit, ruthless survival instincts". [32] Natalie's instincts are very troublesome, both in the book and the film, since they lead to harming her own child and deceiving those who try to love and help her. However, the film allows Natalie to be seen in a somewhat different light from in the novel: her reconstruction through the medium of the visual allows ironic and polyphonic reference to be made to what Flo Leibowitz terms "women's films" (while the novel has little to do with "women's fiction").[33]

Natalie's beauty (she is played by Sarah Gadon) contributes to this. Portrayed as fascinating to men in the novel, one critic describes her incarnation in the film as a "Hitchcock-blonde" (distasteful as the classification of women by hair-colour may be).[34] Jeff Saporito notes of Hitchcock, "All of his most renowned films feature a blonde in a pivotal role. These blondes aren't just picturesque stars at whom Hitch directed our gaze." He describes them as "the 'Bond girls' of Hitchcockian cinema, each radiating with beauty while servicing her own mysterious agenda", and claims that as well as being "beautiful and eye-catching", they also "project the qualities of independence, poise, range, determination and, most significant, mystery".[35]

Natalie's relationship to this cliché is deconstructed in both novel and film through reference to the genre of melodrama. Flo Leibowitz argues that 19th-century melodramatic novels and their film counterparts of the 20th century "often had as their primary effect getting the audience to feel pity by presenting a one-dimensional character being abused by a villain". [36] Natalie tries to present herself in precisely such a light, by claiming that her husband was violent towards her and eventually pushed Louis into the ravine. Moreover, Leibowitz argues that another characteristic of melodrama is its "outlandish coincidences".[37] The various terrible things which "happen" to Louis could indeed be interpreted in such a way, with Natalie – who takes centre-stage as his mother – as the eternal victim. However, ultimately there is a turnaround, and the film becomes a sort of anti-melodrama, with Natalie exposed as not the victim, but the perpetrator. A scene towards the end of the film is given over to a flashback to the various means by which she has harmed Louis, most memorably by injecting sweets with poison, and in this way the film plays with the conceits of melodrama, but turns them around.

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[32] Sarah Appleton Aguiar, *The Bitch is Back: Wicked Women in Literature*. Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2001, p. 1.
[33] See note 36.
[34] Bradshaw, "The Ninth Life of Louis Drax", op. cit.
[35]Jeff Saporito. http://screenprism.com/insights/article/what-does-the-term-hitchcock-blonde-mean ? Web. Accessed 06.05.2017.
[36] Flo Leibiowitz, "Apt Feelings, or Why 'Women's Films' Aren't Trivial", in David Bordwell, and Noël Carroll (ed.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies,* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996 (219-229), p. 220. Flo Leibowitz is citing John Morreal. Leibowitz reiterates this point later, adding that "in these films sorrow and anxious concern for a woman protagonist is evoked as a means of calling the audience's attention to her motivations and priorities" (ibid., p. 220).
[37] Ibid., p. 221.

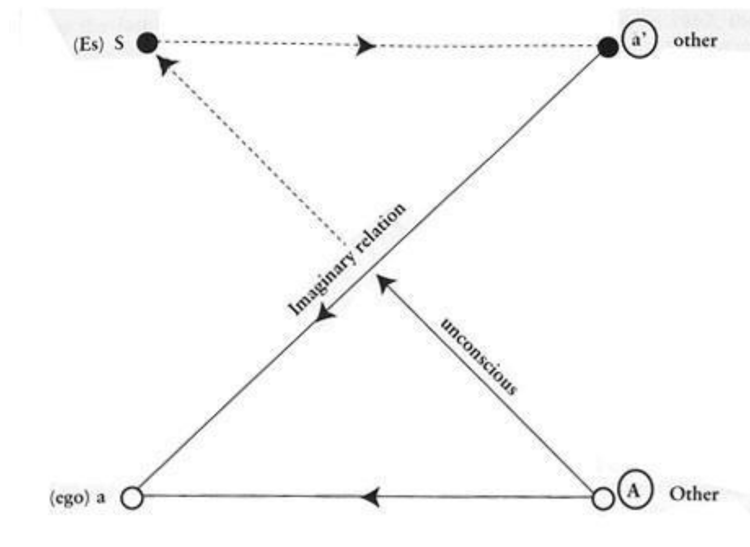
While the visual is very effective in creating tension and shock in this respect, the processes of Natalie's thought are nonetheless streamlined, and the ultimate reconstruction of Natalie by Louis comes over as simplistic: just because she is beautiful, he tells the audience, does not mean she is good. This rather diluted version of Natalie's story has an equally diluted ending: she ends up interned in a psychiatric institution, pregnant again, which could be read as pointing to a possibility of rehabilitation and hope for the future, whereas in the novel she is "punished" for her behaviour by death in a fire, in which she first loses her sight.

This leads to one of the most striking images in the film. While the horrific end Natalie meets in the novel, with its *King-Lear* reference, is attenuated in the film, it nonetheless places a certain emphasis on her eyes, and reflects one of Louis's particularly significant statements about his mother in the book: "You can't see what's going on in her eyes. They always look the same, like there's nothing inside them. That's how she hides from you".[38] Natalie also "hides" from the reader, never accounting for herself, never narrating, and that her behaviour and motivations are never fully explained.[39] In the novel, Natalie's eyes are appropriately punished, but the film brings attention to them in a different way. Walsh, applying the ideas of both Debord and Jameson, describes how the visual, while mediating images of the real, can also mask reality, and this is very much the case here. [40]

Fig 2 : Natalie Drax (Sarah Gadon)
https://www.imdb.com/video/vi299087897?playlistId=tt3991412&ref_=tt_ov_vi , 1'50

While Natalie appears in figure 2 a sort of icon, in true Hitchcock-blonde splendour, at which the viewer gazes, in the image of Natalie in sunglasses, we also see what Louis sees – that is, his own reflection in his mother's sunglasses. This functions like the "petit a" of Lacanian psychoanalysis (see the Schéma L, below). [41]

[38] Jensen, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*, op. cit., p. 86.
[39] Mundler, op. cit., p. 123.
[40] Walsh, op. cit., p. 484.
[41] Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 169.



In searching for a connection between himself as "S" ("sujet") and his mother as "A" ("grand Autre"), Louis is thwarted: Natalie shuts him – she is a mirror, not a mother – and Louis is alone with nothing but his own reflection to comfort him.

The Sea, the Sea

If Louis is to live, he must "construct himself" – a task made difficult by the fact that, in the novel, the relationship between mother and son is described as parasitical and symbiotic, with Louis claiming, "We're sort of twins, her and me, we need each other, we'd die without each other".[42] This relationship is reflected in a passage from a book about sea life, which Dr. Dannachet (renamed Dr. Pascal in the film) reads aloud to Louis, and which describes a whale carcass being stripped by parasitical creatures.[43] Arguably, sea imagery becomes as important in the film as it is in the novel, although it is deployed differently.

From the outset, the film stresses sea imagery: it begins with a wide sweep over Land's End, California (near San Francisco), which is the point where Louis initially falls into the sea, and into his coma (the shot of the Golden Gate Bridge can be read as a visual representation the tenuous thread which connects him to life). The opening credits roll to gently floating jellyfish, accompanied by scribbled illustrations of other sea-creatures. The use of Land's End for Louis's fall, rather than a ravine in the countryside near Lyon, as in the novel, also changes things: falling into the sea is not the same as falling into a ravine. Symbolically, the ravine allows an association with "falling down a crack" which underscores the lack of recognition of Louis's plight by society, including his grandmother, and, for some time, his therapist. Land's End, however, while it does not have that association, is a satisfactorily extreme signifier, suggesting that Louis is pushed as far as he can go.

Sea imagery is also present in the film in the scene of the father-son trip during which Louis's father, Peter (played by Aaron Paul), runs into his ex-wife, Catherine, her new husband and children,

[42] Jensen, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax,* op. cit., p. 8.
[43] Mundler, op. cit., p. 119.

the significance of this being that Peter proves to have left Catherine for Natalie, and to regret it. In the novel, the equivalent outing is to Euro Disney (now Disneyland Paris), which does not tie in particularly with other networks of imagery in the text, but serves simply as a place where a character might be likely to run into an ex-wife with small children. In the film, however, the outing is to Sea World (presumably in San Diego).[44] The advantage of this is that the underlying imagery of the film is harmonised: the viewer is able to make links, for example, between the sea Louis falls into, the huge, threatening creatures which inhabit it, and how the coma can be seen like a deep ocean. [45]This smoothing into one of various networks of imagery from the book – the ravine, and the bonsai trees which, with their largely hidden roots, can be read as a representation of the workings of the brain in coma is presumably for visual effectiveness, in order to have just one repertoire, – in an Iserian sense, for the viewer to draw on.[46] These changes both lay the groundwork for, and account for, the emergence of the sea monster: the imaginary figure from the book – the "scary man", who lives in a cave in Louis's mind while he is in his coma, is also given a marine theme.[47]

In the novel, Pierre, Louis's step-father (Peter in the film) is represented after his death, which occurs when he jumps into the ravine to try to rescue Louis, by a monster which takes the form of a faceless mummy. This creature is known as Gustave, and lives in a cave. Although Gustave seems to have a lot in common with Louis's step-father, his identity only becomes perfectly clear when he removes his bandages so Louis can see his face, shortly before he dies and leaves forever (he is Gustave for as long as Pierre lies dying in the cave, which takes a few days), and the period before Louis gets to see his face is one of ambiguity as to his identity.

The transmutation of bandaged figure to sea monster is relevant to the portrayal of Natalie. The signifier, "mummy", can be read as referring back to her, and it can be thus be argued that the figure of Gustave also includes the mother. At best, this can be taken as a reference to the mothering father, who compensates Natalie's shortcomings. However, the mummy is also an emblem of Natalie's most salient qualities: her capacity for "hiding", her inaccessibility, and the extremely disturbing character that emerges when she is stripped of her beauty. The bandages also suggest something broken, and being held together – a further corollary for Natalie. The term "mummy", already horrifically ambiguous, thus acquires a further layer of polysemy. While this locus of ambiguity is lost in the film version, something new is added: namely, the dimension of horror (the "true calling" of Alexandre Aja, as Wendy Ide points out),[48] who substitutes Hollywoodian kind of horror for another, more verbal, kind, but, in so doing, heightens the commentary made in Liz Jensen's novel on the hidden horror inherent in family life, when novel and film are compared.

In conclusion, the various adaptation techniques discussed above result in a highly unusual film,

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[44] Given Liz Jensen's well-documented ecological engagement, the choice of Sea World as a location is perhaps a strange one. The company has been much in the spotlight in recent years for its mistreatment of killer whales. See Rupert Neate, "Sea World to end killer whale shows in wake of mounting protests", www.guardian.co.uk. 9th November 2015.12.11.2021.

[45] This analogy is more explicit in Jensen's first novel, where the psychiatrist Dr Stern advises, "See the brain as the uncharted ocean on the globe" (Liz Jensen, *Egg Dancing,* London: Bloomsbury, 1995, p. 207). Ocean imagery is important throughout Jensen's work (see Mundler 76-83, op. cit).

[46] Wolfgang Iser defines the repertoire as "all the familiar territory within the text," adding, "This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged" (Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 69).

[47] Jensen, *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*, op. cit., 95.

[48] Wendy Ide, "*The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* (rewiew): a mystery worth solving." *The Guardian*, 4th September 2016. Web. Accessed 12.12.2021.

which engages intensely with Jensen's novel in order to transpose and transform it. On the one hand, it draws out those aspects of the form of the novel which lend themselves particularly to cinematic adaptation: the suspense, the discovery of a mystery to be solved and its unravelling, the riff on the detective story trope. However, on the other hand, it maps the relations between the various parts of the narrative differently from the novel, eliding some, developing others, and deploying its own networks of imagery, most notably in the exploitation of the ocean and in the exposition of the horror genre as background to family life. In other words, Aja's film plots new networks of associations, mapping the characters and events of the story differently from Jensen's novel, but doing so with a degree of inner coherence which results in an adaptation which is in keeping with the complexity and originality of the novel. This is also an adaptation which requires a high degree of engagement from the viewer, who is invited to decode and detect just as much as the reader in the novel – although this invitation is channelled differently, with the shot of Nathalie in sunglasses (figure 2) serving as the most striking example. Ultimately, the very act of transposing Jensen's novel to the visual medium functions as a mutli-faceted meta-commentary not only on the original novel, but on the processes of showing and not showing, masking and revealing.