



# MELTED REALITY

NEW PROPOSALS FROM  
THE FANTASTIC AESTHETICS

EDS. MARIO-PAUL MARTÍNEZ  
& FRAN MATEU

ASOCIACIÓN DE DESARROLLO Y DIFUSIÓN  
DEL GÉNERO FANTÁSTICO  
"UNICORNIO NEGRO"

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ALTERNATIVAS FANTÁSTICAS Y FANTASÍAS

Melted Reality.  
New Proposals from the Fantastic Aesthetics.

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AUDIOVISUALES Y NUEVAS TECNOLOGÍAS



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# **Block 0**

## **MIGRANT FIGURES FROM «LIQUID REALITY» TO «MELTED REALITY» IN THE FANTASTIC GENRE**





## MIGRANT FIGURES FROM «LIQUID REALITY» TO «MELTED REALITY» IN THE FANTASTIC GENRE

Mario-Paul Martínez Fabre and Fran Mateu

### **A new reality of «migrant figures»**

If you type the word «reality» in your Internet browser, you will come across a peculiar group of images: screens full of encrypted data, characters connected to virtual reality peripherals, scenes from reality shows and, even well-known life simulation video games, like *The Sims* (Maxis, Electronic Arts, 2000). A torrent of images where the pattern, contrary to what is expected, is not marked by the idea of «reality», but the discourse of the simulated, of the inconsistent.

This exercise was already carried out in a moment of inspiration by the designer of our book cover, Vicente Javier Pérez, and its melted result is a wink to all this visual imagery that, rather than posing the constitution of our environment, it dilutes it in a continuous «meme» of futuristic topics: 80% of the time, we will see the protagonist of these images absorbed by a source of data and luminescent projections; the rest of the percentage is made up of the aforementioned images, and some that would surprise the reader himself (and which we will leave to his curiosity) due to their strange association with the concept of «real».

It seems that it is difficult for us to separate this idea of «reality» from a kind of technological science-fiction that articulates it, shapes it, or in the last case, misrepresents it, from the media and the digital systems that comprise it. Moreover, in times in which this same technology is defined by a *logic of speed* (Virilio, 1998), enormous in its power of dissolution and obsolescence over objects. In this «jumble» of representations and copies, by force majeure, the ideals of a *consumer society* are mixed —delighted with these accelerated circuits of purchase and sale— and other strata of our own culture and mythology. The video game, comics, literature, or cinema, among many other arts, have become hosts of this «unreality» that also affects the diversity of their creative facets. And it is questionable to what extent we are aware of the true nature of the elements that are currently influencing them. How independent are the signs and signifiers of art when faced with the imperatives (and the simulations) of this digital society?

The philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000) brought together a good part of these ideas under such a suggestive concept as «Liquid Modernity»; a term that alludes to a society that has lost its values of union and stability, in the face of a state of continuous change. Uncertainty, ambivalence, nomadism, etc. are the characteristic features of the «modern liquid human being», and it is in his gaze where a different perception of the everyday emerges, in which the solid is now as inconsistent as the liquid.

As a reflection of this volatile world, as well as the different artistic expressions that echo it, we have also come across (and quite often) a *fantastic genre* equally fascinated by its transience. Consider, for example, of a classic film as visited as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), which presents us with a «melted reality», deformed, with the vision of a future world —November 2019— technified, dehumanized, and dominated by power relations between privileged citizens and the lower classes<sup>1</sup>. Without a doubt, it is a «post-liquid reality», where the fantastic narrative speculates about a future world through the present.

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<sup>1</sup> Which wander en masse through the narrow, dirty alleys of a Moebius-inspired city, dotted with skyscrapers, overcrowding, gas explosions, neon-wrapped billboards, constant rain, air traffic and where it is always night (Candela, 2003, pp. 38-39).

As expected, we also find artistic representations with glimpses of this new reality in previous decades. For example, the union of French symbolist theories and German idealist romanticism, in addition to the latent social concerns in the Central European culture of the interwar period, gave rise to cinematographic expressionism: *Kammerspielfilm*, New Objectivity, and its multitude of combinations with the strange, the deformed. A reality that, as a result of the state of mind of a historical epoch, led to a «melted society» before the world of the occult, the morbid and the nocturnal (Armada Manrique, 2003, p. 365)<sup>2</sup>. In this mode of representation, «the melted» becomes a «migrant element» through the aesthetic. For this reason, the «migrant» envelops those narrative or aesthetic figures that travel through time, finding themselves provided with new gazes, rearticulating their modes of representation and their artistic interconnections.

The book you have in your hands, *Melted Reality*, compiles these ideas and this review of «melted reality» and its «migrant objects», from the perspective of the various international authors who have approached it through recent researches in cinema and audiovisual culture, literature, theater and mass media. From these shifts between the creative and the media, we have established two blocks for the analysis of a fantastic imagery that will address, on the one hand, the «melted» hybridizations of fantastic creatures in current audiovisual culture (zombies, monsters, etc.); and, on the other, its corresponding reflection in archetypal figures such as *mad doctors*, magicians, superheroes, etc. and other «migrant figures» of the *Melted Reality*.

## «Melted Creatures» in cinema and audiovisual culture

Firstly, in Block 1 of *Melted Reality* we have focused the attention on studies derived from cinema, and audiovisual culture in general, towards the creatures or elements that populate the screens, as well as

<sup>2</sup> *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau, 1922) would be one of the masterpieces of silent cinema that reflects this deformed world, an art condemned to disappear, and whose frames inter-textualize with the pictorial art of artists such as Carus, Münch, Kokoschka or Richter, the illustrations of Kubin, or the engravings of Doré (Armada Manrique, 2003, p. 365).

their possible hybridizations and archetypes: from the figure of the *zombie* or the *haunted house*, to the roles of the murderer or the *Scream Girl* inside the *slasher* or the «monster movies». Under this appreciation, we have also wanted to add in this section aspects related to the horror film industry, as a subgenre of the fantastic (Martínez Fabre and Mateu, 2019), as well as an analysis of the factors involved in its current distribution, and the use of the fantastic genre as a vehicle for the political gaze. In any case, and as can be seen in the following pages, these are «migrant figures» that have evolved over time, shaping new narrative and aesthetic realities of the fantastic.

Thus, the first chapter of Block 1 is titled *The figure of the zombie as a political metaphor from White Zombie to Dead Don't Die*, where Michelle Copmans argues that the *zombie* is one of the most visited creatures in the context of horror films. In this sense, Copmans points out that the American film *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932) was the first to adapt this myth, and was made through an eminently political figure of the *zombie* (an aspect deeply rooted in the genre), reflecting colonialism and slavery. The plot involves a couple travelling to Haiti at the invitation of a strange man whose only wish is to capture the girl; and to achieve this, he resorts to Legendre, a sinister character who turns people into *zombies* (performed by Bela Lugosi, who a year earlier played Dracula). Over the years, and after its standardization in Western culture, the figure of the *zombie* has mutated and «migrated» towards a metaphor of the exploitation of the proletarian masses by capitalism, as well as being a reflection of the consumer society. In this sense, Copmans indicates that the *zombie* represents the «brutalization» of the masses in the face of television, the Internet, advertising and, on a more general level, materialism. It is a critique of frenetic consumerism that extends to one of the last cinematographic references, *Dead Don't Die* (Jim Jarmusch, 2019), whose example, in spite of praising this subgenre of terror (was awarded at the Cannes Film Festival; «A» category festival) has provoked mixed criticism.

The next chapter is titled *Confession and Torture: The Haunted House as a Space of Psychological Redemption*, written by Alfonso Cuadrado. Along its lines, the author argues that the *haunted house* has

been consolidated for more than one hundred years as a highly typified cinematographic space to harbor the fantastic theme. This fact can be observed from the first works of Georges Méliès or Segundo de Chomón, where the presence of demons or furniture that moves on its own scares off incredulous visitors, to more recent films with metafictional readings of the genre, as is the case of *Ghostland* (Pascal Laugier, 2018). Likewise, the *haunted house* has been subjected to changes, parallel to those of the very genre in which it is situated, abandoning its stereotype of an evil space to become a psychological space as a reflection of the characters' tormented minds. Under this «migrant» aspect, Theodore Ziolkowski (1980) argues how a process of «disenchantment» has taken place since the Gothic period, starting from a first stage where the magical and the fantastic of a supernatural nature were accepted, to later swing towards a rational explanation and, finally, to confront the supernatural and reason in a psychological conflict. Given this approach, archetypal cinematographic spaces, such as the castle or the mysterious ramshackle house, have progressively given way to more familiar spaces, where the sinister has «migrated» from the environment to the psychological character of the events that occur in these places: the *haunted house* of recent cinema, it's configured as a mirror of the characters themselves, where each room represents the darkest and most intimate spaces of the supernatural drama to which they will be subjected.

Next, in the chapter *When The Girl becomes The Monster. Fantastic-Terror for the feminist discourse*, Celia Cuenca García indicates that the film *Scary Movie* (Keenen Wayans, 2000) did not arrive at the cinemas only to be a blockbuster of what would later be a slasher saga for skeptical teenagers, but also to consolidate the horror genre in the sense that its parameters had become so structured and defined that the industry could already laugh at itself. Especially through the figure of «The Girl» (sometimes *Scream Girl*), and her limited role as a victim within the genre. From then on, «The Girl» has evolved towards new paradigms, being able to also adopt a supernatural and threatening role, which has grown over the years with titles such as *Ginger Snaps* (John Fawcett, 2001) or *Jennifer's Body* (Karyn Kusama, 2009). Initially, this «migration» developed in an isolated and discreet

way, but today it is a subgenre in itself that continues to reinvent itself. That is, although we find antecedents in adaptations such as *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1975) or *Carrie* (Brian de Palma, 1976), these female characters act out of defenselessness in the face of demonic possession or out of revenge for humiliation. However, in later titles such as *The Witch* (Robert Eggers, 2015), *February* (Oz Perkins, 2015), *Raw* (Julia Ducournau, 2017) or *Thelma* (Joachim Trier, 2017), «The Girl» chooses of her own free will to transform herself into a monster, witch, demon or beast because, as such, she is more powerful, strong and savage.

For their part, Antoni Roig and Judith Clares-Gavilán analyze the evolution of the formal distribution of contemporary American horror films, with special emphasis on the digital context, in their chapter *They follow: Experiments in formal distribution of contemporary horror films*. Following the studies of Ramón Lobato and Mark Ryan (2011), the authors consider distribution as a valuable approach to understand not only corporate strategies, but also the complex relationships between the industry and the audience. Thus, the authors present a background of these experiments through various intertwined waves in formal distribution, located in the 2000s and 2010s, where specific emerging patterns of promotion and distribution can be identified. In this process, a turning point is defined that dates back to the late 1990s, through revolutionary low-budget titles such as *The Last Broadcast* (Lance Weiler and Stefan Avalos, 1998) or *The Blair Witch Project* (Eduardo Sánchez and Daniel Myrick, 1999), boosting the use of the Internet as a promotional narrative tool. The presentation of these waves is carried out from a general perspective and, later, Roig and Clares-Gavilán focus on horror and its subgenres, highlighting the work in the genre of digital platforms such as, for example, *Netflix*, specialists in strategies of exclusivity of original content and transnationalism in film distribution.

To finish Block 1 of *Melted Reality*, Raphaël Jaudon takes a closer look at Bong Joon-Ho in his chapter *Spectres of Insurrection in Bong Joon-Ho's Cinema*. Jaudon points out that the works of the South Korean



filmmaker are not intended to hide his political commitment; from *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000) to *Parasite* (2019), his films feature characters who fight against capitalism, authoritarianism, speciesism or consumer society. But Bong Joon-Ho's political commitment does not unfold only through its narrative dimension, since it also relies on the articulation of external images, implicitly situated in his works, that form a series of political and insurgent gestures. These «spectral images» are found especially in two of his films belonging to the fantastic genre: *The Host* (2006) and *Snowpiercer* (2013). In the first, the US army dumps chemical waste into a river in South Korea, from which a creature later emerges to attack local residents. And in the second, the survivors of global warming travel on a train, which crosses the frozen planet, where social classes are very differentiated. Two emblematic gestures of resistance against authoritarian power, whose fantasy (in this case, about the monstrous and the post-apocalyptic) thus opens up to the realm of the historical and the political, without questioning, however, the fictional pact on which it is based.

### **«Melted Characters» in literature, theater and mass media**

In Block 2 of *Melted Reality* we have focused on studies derived from literature, theater and mass media (especially television series) towards archetypal characters of the fantastic genre such as *mad doctors*, magicians, superheroes, etc. In addition, within this second block, we have incorporated dissertations about aesthetic and narrative aspects linked to the fantastic through renowned authors, such as the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar, or more experimental ones, such as the Belgian artist Marc Hollogne. In this case, «migrant figures» expand beyond cinema and audiovisual culture.

To begin with, in the first chapter of Block 2, titled *The scientific basis of the Rick and Morty television series*, David Ramírez Gómez investigates how much of the scientific advances shown in the American television series *Rick and Morty* are credible or fictional (Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland, 2013-). It is an animated content aimed at an adult audience that, however, has also «migrated» to younger viewers thanks

to the combination of its imaginative science-fiction plots and the use of irreverent and transgressive humor. However, behind the image of an entertainment content, there also emerges a lesson about the principles of science, its present implications in our daily life and its projections for the future. As Ramírez Gómez indicates, the interplanetary adventures of its protagonists transmit knowledge from numerous areas of human wisdom, such as quantum mechanics, astrobiology, genetics, virtual reality, new technologies, robotics, psychology or neuroscience. In turn, these areas are embodied and dominated by Rick Sánchez, a *mad doctor* and «nihilist genius» who despises everything that is not governed by reason. Sánchez has reached an almost unsurpassable level of knowledge thanks to his ability to build countless gadgets, among which is a weapon that allows any dimension of a multiverse to contain all possible versions of any living being.

On the other hand, Ana Belén Jara brings to *Melted Reality* the «world of magic», through her chapter *Harry Potter and the cinematographic adaptation of its characters along the series*. The author analyzes the film adaptation of this popular fantasy saga, devised by British writer J. K. Rowling, focusing mainly on the characters and their possible modifications when «migrating» from one medium to another. Likewise, she carries out an analysis of the general characteristics of the cinematographic adaptation of these books, to give an account of how the audiovisual narrative and its semiotics permit to question the decisions taken in the adaptation of the films, allowing to glimpse, for example, what happens with the roles of the female characters, what plots take more or less value in one medium and in another, or how it takes advantage of the political potential of the saga as a reference of the fantastic genre.

Next, Laura Ros Cases studies the relationship that the writer Julio Cortázar had with photography in *Literature, Photography, and Social Commitment: «Apocalypse at Solentiname», by Julio Cortázar*. The correspondence between the «static image» and Julio Cortázar has given rise to a series of artistic productions that «migrate» among themselves (as has also happened in other arts, such as music or cinema), and range from collaboration in photographic essays, to the inclusion of the

image as a theme in his short narrative, through the design of works by the painter and sculptor Julio Silva. The analysis of *Apocalypse at Solentiname*, a story belonging to his collection *Alguien que anda por ahí* (1977), demonstrates the commitment that the Argentinian writer channels through the static image: the appearance of the fantastic within the story depends on the inherent ambiguity of photography, and it is intimately connected to the sociopolitical commitment that the writer began to develop from his knowledge of the Cuban Revolution in 1957. As Ros Cases indicates, in this story, Cortázar manages to unite fiction, social criticism and fantastic narrative.

For his part, in the chapter *Uberized Superheroes: The Fantastic at the service of reality in The Boys television series*, César Oliveros Aya states that the figure of the superhero has been inserted significantly in popular culture to the point of being interpreted as a modern mythology, where mass media has revitalized the plots to create utopian and dystopian universes inspired by comics and graphic novels. As Greg Barret (1999) notes, superheroes are the model of perfection as seen from popular culture: insignia of good, an ideal of public order, and evocative of factors of power with religious inspirations. However, critical positions have also emerged that have questioned the saturation of such characters, to interpret them from more earthly perspectives. Thus, the plot proposal of the television series *The Boys* (Evan Goldberg, Seth Rogen and Eric Kripke, 2019-) questions the conventional *status quo* of the mythical superhero as a «migrant figure» towards a more tangible view, starting, moreover, from recognized references such as Alan Moore. In this context, Oliveros Aya interprets the mimetic capacity of the fantastic to approach the symbology of the superhero as a risk and a singular representation of absolute power, whose references reveal the contemporary fears around transhumanism, global politics, private justice or stubborn nationalisms.

Finally, and to finish Block 2 of *Melted Reality*, author Safa Gharsalli approaches the dialogue between cinema and theater in her chapter *The Fantastic Image and its affinities with Marc Hollogne's Cinema-Theater*. Known especially for his Cinema-Theater pieces, Marc

Hollogne is a Belgian artist whose work flourishes in video, sound and holographic settings, offering theatrical pieces that aim to capture the palpable and introduce «the playful» and «the floating» to the audience. The coming of this kind of works, which emphasize other types of images described as «fantastic», encourages Gharsalli to provide a research of the image and its constantly «migrating» connections with different cultural platforms. It should be noted that the author contextualizes the fantastic image in terms of aesthetics and perception in its continuity of opposition, and not by opposing two entities between them. Thus, another facet of the fantastic image is examined, whose study is limited to the fields of the dramaturgical and the poetic, investigating the effects that the arrival of visual poems and the fantastic image in the theater may have generated.

### **New proposals after the «melted reality»**

Zygmunt Bauman passed away in 2017, and this allowed him, to a great extent, to peer into the abyss of what was to come. However, in just a few years, his «liquid society» has taken a complete turn, requiring the postulation of new sociological and philosophical schemes of this «new reality» in which we find ourselves, and where social media continually alter our perception, pandemics devastate the world order in a matter of days, or the loss of the values inherent in a society prior to postmodernism that Bauman so eagerly remembered is accelerated.

Nevertheless, society continues. And because of this, art also follows its course. We do not know what the world will be like in a century or two, but everything points to the becoming of a «melted reality» that will be provided with new artistic manifestations (some currently inconceivable) faithful to its social and media reflection. For sure that *zombies*, *mad doctors*, *haunted houses* or monsters of any nature will continue to exist in that next cultural imaginary. Another theme, however, will be the changes and mutations to which, as «migrants» of their time, these figures will be exposed. We hope, with this book, to be able to bring some light and reflection about all of them, as well as to offer a glimpse of what this «melted reality» holds for us in the future. Always uncertain, always fluid.

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# **Block I**

## **MONSTERS, ZOMBIES, HUMANS AND OTHER CREATURES IN CINEMA AND AUDIOVISUAL CULTURE**







## THE FIGURE OF THE ZOMBIE AS A POLITICAL METAPHOR FROM *WHITE ZOMBIE* TO *DEAD DON'T DIE*

Michelle Lucy Copmans

### **The figure of the zombie throughout history**

#### **Origin and mythology**

Horror has always occupied a very important place as a film genre in its own right. Cinema and fantasy have been intrinsically linked, the first cinematographic creations were all intended to scare or create surprise. The magic created cinema since the first films in history were, above all, transpositions of illusionism on screen<sup>1</sup>.

Horror cinema finds its true origin in German expressionism. *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* directed by Robert Wiene in 1920 is therefore considered the first horror film. The codes of German expressionism are all present: the sets and characters are distorted and sometimes give the impression of having come straight out of psychoanalysis. Everything is symbolic and nightmarish. German filmmakers drew on literature and mythology to create characters capable of provoking repulsion and terror on screen, but also thought. *Dracula* is one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Méliès was above all an illusionist before using the creation of the Lumière brothers to make his first films, including *A Trip to the Moon*, considered the first science fiction movie in history.

most recurring figures. Subsequently, other illustrious characters were adapted and are now considered horror cinema classics, among them the zombie.

Initially, the zombie is a myth from Haitian folklore. The Creole term *zonbi* means spirit. It originally represents the victim of a voodoo spell that the sorcerer can manipulate as he pleases. While the classic characters, as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* or *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, derive from classical literature and are anchored in an era, the zombie evolves and adapts to what it represents metaphorically. The zombie, however anonymous, symbolises much more than all other characters usually present in horror cinema and its origin, as a character, comes exclusively from the cinema.

### **Zombie goes to Hollywood**

*White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932) is the first transposition of the Haitian myth to the cinema, which then becomes an element of Western culture from which it will never leave.

Director of silent melodramatic films during the Great Depression, Halperin quickly understood the public's enthusiasm for horror cinema. He therefore decided to adapt the voodoo which aroused some curiosity in the United States at that time<sup>2</sup>. The political context is important to understand its symbolic significance which goes far beyond that of the voodoo religion.

Between 1915 and 1934, Haiti was occupied by the United States, who feared too much a potential German influence on the island. For twenty years, the Americans have transformed its economy and its policy by imposing democracy and especially capitalism, converting its natives into slaves at the behest of a new sorcerer<sup>3</sup>. The zombie, unlike other

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<sup>2</sup> Halperin read the anthropological travel book that William B. Seabrook wrote in 1929, *The Magic Island*, a bestseller dealing with voodoo in Haiti and from which he drew his inspiration for *White Zombie*.

<sup>3</sup> The HASCO (Haitian American Sugar Company) was created in 1912 and, although it was one of the main providers of jobs on the island, it was mainly considered by Haitians

iconic characters in horror cinema, has always been a political concept. Through storytelling, it illustrates a proletariat, whose ancestral culture is destroyed, exploited by an ever more violent capitalism and colonialism.

In *White Zombie*, the message is obvious: in Haiti, a voodoo sorcerer, played by Bela Lugosi, is the director of a sugar cane production whose workers are all zombies-dead brought back to life. Workers are dehumanized (literally) and, Beaumont, the landowner, gets rich. Like Stoker's *Dracula*, with which it shares the same Gothic vibe, *White Zombie* is mostly a love story that offers a second definition of the zombie. The voodoo sorcerer offers a philtre to Beaumont so that he can hypnotize Madeline, with whom he has fallen in love, but who is already promised to another pretender. Unlike the plantation workers, the potion does not kill her but plunges her into a lethargic coma, thanks to which, her will can be completely controlled. This is all about love domination, like *Dracula*, jealous of Jonathan Archer, taking control over Wilhelmina Murray-Archer<sup>4</sup>.

### **A-bomb and B-movie**

After the Second World War, horror films ceased to be stories drawn from Gothic literature or folk mythology. The very origin of the zombie is redefined as this is no more a living person being plunged into a state of hypnosis by a voodoo sorcerer, but a dead body who came back to life into a monster form. Through their movies, they tear the legend of the zombie from its Haitian roots to plant it definitively in the United States in a new cultural environment and in a different era. Technological advances, the conquest of space and the fear of a communist invasion have fueled the imagination of directors and scriptwriters of low-budget films. The first monster movies appeared in response to the damage caused by the use of the atomic bomb. Japan, whose wounds left by the bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still gaping, symbolises its trauma by creating Godzilla.

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as a slave company.

<sup>4</sup> The parallel between the two love triangles goes much further than that. *Dracula* and *Legendre* have many things in common, besides being played by the same legendary actor, Bela Lugosi.

In Hollywood, the dangerous power of the atom brings out from their graves undead that are no longer controlled by a voodoo spell but by science, as in *Creature with the Atom Brain* (Curt Siodmack, 1955). However, American fears of the Cold War are far more important than that of atomic energy. McCarthyism is raging and certain directors are put in the pillory and forced to work under a false identity. Therefore, espionage, subversion and indoctrination, specific to the Cold War, make the zombie a perfect and cheap illustration of the collective fear of being mentally controlled in order to serve political interests, as in *Teenage Zombies* (Jerry Warren, 1959).

The space conquest —and still the Cold War— also gives rise to the anxiety of encountering invading aliens. What if they were communists? Normally a breeding ground for science fiction cinema, aliens are also present in some B-movies like *Plan 9 for Outer Space* (Ed Wood, 1959) or *Invisible Invaders* (Edward Cahn, 1959) in which they infiltrate dead bodies and bring them back to life in a zombie form, thus creating an army.

### **The golden age**

Cinema has always adapted its scenarios to the fears and events of its time. Zombie cinema is a glaring illustration of this analogy in this respect, since the definition of this mythical monster has evolved through history. George A. Romero directed *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968. Considered one of the best classics of the zombie genre, the transformation of a living being, animal or human, is now done through an explosion of a satellite brimming with mutagenic radiation. With Romero, it is obviously no longer a question of social control but rather a description, in a particularly aesthetic manner, of the trauma of war and the scientific aberrations of his time. His country is mired in Vietnam, the Cold War accelerated the conquest of space and the launch of satellites in orbit. Romero, in this context, criticises the damage caused by colonial and Nazi genocides, the use of atomic bombs in Japan, racial segregation in the United States and the use of science as a weapon of war.

The zombie film is definitely no longer a love film, but a war film. The mass of undead haunts an America engulfed in a comfortable and capitalist way of life. It represents all the colonial and atomic victims who would populate the nightmares of people who never really asked for forgiveness<sup>5</sup>. In Romero's trilogy, the response of the besieged ones is invariable since they never confront the horde of zombies but resist and therefore, entrench themselves into a house (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968), a shopping center (*Dawn of the Dead*, 1978) or a military base (*Day of the Dead*, 1985). The postwar generations, far too busy building the American dream, will never face the ghosts of their past. They will just build fallout shelters in their gardens.

### In transition

In the 90s, after sixty years of exploitation on the big screens in all its forms and from the register of comedy to science fiction, the character of the zombie became considerably out of breath. Until then, it had represented all of man's fears about the threats he had to face during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The zombie of the 90s is no exception to the rule but, this time, the threat no longer comes from outside. In fact, the world of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is rather peaceful and has not yet plunged into the economic slump. The technologies have been well integrated and, apart from an irrational fear about the transition to the year 2000, there is a climate of optimism about scientific and digital progress. However, family structures are exploding. Before becoming famous with the *Lord of the Rings*, Peter Jackson directed several horror films including *Braindead* (1992) which is a satire of New Zealand society that Sam Mendes would not have denied if he had become involved in the horror genre<sup>6</sup>. As its career seemed to end on the big screen, the zombie made a very successful foray into the world of video games with *Resident Evil* (1996).

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<sup>5</sup> Unlike Germany.

<sup>6</sup> Sam Mendes directed *American Beauty* in 1999. The movie was a satire on American society.

## **Towards a post-apocalyptic world**

In 2002, Danny Boyle directed *28 Days Later*. The new zombie, disappeared from movies for ten years, took its time to complete its mutation. It is no longer an undead, but a victim infected with a powerful synthetic virus, rabid, fast and extremely aggressive. The times have also changed. The American dream has faded, terrorism has struck, the climate has become a source of future fears, as well as scientific manipulation. This time, there is no longer any question of a siege, the title leaves no room for hope. It is already too late. Jim, played by Cillian Murphy, wakes up in a London hospital after a coma and realizes that a strange virus has turned most of its inhabitants into monsters. The awakening scene, quite close to Neo's awakening in *Matrix*, immerses Jim in a new reality. His world has collapsed. It does not exist anymore. Once outside, he realizes the magnitude of the disaster by seeing the empty streets and the messages hanging in Piccadilly Circus. The trauma of the September 11 attacks is still fresh in the collective imagination and the parallels in *28 Days Later* are evident.

While Romero's trilogy gave way to optimism, zombie movies since *28 Days Later* are virtually all existentialists, dystopian and deeply pessimistic. For the first time, the zombie reacts faster than healthy humans. Like the coronavirus pandemic that has hit the world since the end of 2019, government responses have been slow and unsuitable for a virus that has spread at lightning speed. Post-apocalyptic films (and zombie ones as well) all have one thing in common: they are witnessing the metaphorical collapse of Western nations and its consequences. This time it is too late to save capitalism and democracies, their collapse has already taken place. The only possibility left for the survivors of this cataclysm is to remain in perpetual motion, to move away from the cities, in search of a haven of peace whose existence is uncertain<sup>7</sup>. The end of humanity is now

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<sup>7</sup> *I am Legend* (2007), *World War Z* (2013), *Train to Busan* (2016), *The Night eats the World* (2018) share these commonalities despite the fact that they come from different cultures. The myth has become globalized.

approached without any hesitation, with all the despair it implies, as if these movies were releasing a final message as a warning: the bill for the excesses of the past has fallen due, it is now time to pay it back.

### **The inevitable zombification of humanity**

What if we were all zombies already? This is a conclusion that *Dead Don't Die* (2019), Jim Jarmusch's humorous pastiche for the Romero era, invites us to think about. The mythical director himself had already hypothesized that the consumer society would transform us into brainless beings, incapable of perceiving the dangers threatening humanity. In *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), survivors are locked up in a shopping center and, while it is surrounded by a horde of undead on all sides and rather than being frightened by the consequences of this siege, they are delighted to be able to consume the products available to them free of charge. Everything has started to fall apart, but since we can consume freely and wildly, there is nothing to worry about.

In 2019, Jarmusch takes up the idea of a locked up youth, trapped in a society that has not made room for him, except in its consumer hierarchy. To consume or not to consume? That would be Jarmusch's question. In addition to a multitude of references to Romero's films, *Dead Don't Die* is full of diverse cinematographic references, most of them symbolic<sup>8</sup>. Ronnie and Cliff, two policemen from a small American town where nothing ever happens, witness the arrival of zombies caused by the deviation of the axis of the earth. The undead, besides consuming human flesh, continue to succumb to their previous addictions like automatons. Thus, they play sports, take medicine, coffee and use their phones. The media considerably minimise the impact of these invaders and when Cliff and Ronnie's colleague sees these zombies, she does not believe them because the radio simultaneously broadcasts reassuring messages to the population. The end of the world is here but since the media say that everything is fine, why react?

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<sup>8</sup> Adam Driver —Kylo Ren— is wearing a Star Wars keychain, proof that a saga can come to life again, exactly like what a zombie does.



The narrator of the death of Cliff and Ronnie took refuge in the forest where, obviously, nothing happens to him since there is nothing to consume there. Zombies want xanax and wifi.



Figure 1: Lalo Alcaraz, 2012, [www.laloalcaraz.com](http://www.laloalcaraz.com)

## The political metaphor

### Depersonalisation and globalisation

The political and economic system is perfectly well oiled. Globalisation and the flaws of democracy have depersonalised individuals. The zombie, unlike Dracula or Frankenstein, has no name. It symbolises a society in general. It has no conscience and this is why it exists in different cultures of which it is the symbol of the consequences of globalisation. It is also instructive to note that the term is now used by international organisations to define the global economy and society. In its report on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty, the United Nations General Assembly made a particularly pessimistic observation of the digitalisation of society:

As humanity moves, perhaps inexorably, towards the future of digital well-being, it must change course significantly and quickly in order to avoid stumbling, like a zombie, into a dystopia of digital well-being.

The restriction of fundamental rights leads, according to the United Nations, to the zombification of society. Automation of data, surveillance of individuals, digital tracking and sanctions against non-compliance with these new digital social standards violate human rights. Obviously, there is no question of curbing the use of digital technologies whose only beneficiaries are the wealthy<sup>9</sup>, but rather it is all about warning against its discriminatory use towards disadvantaged people. In its report, the United Nations focuses its criticisms on the emergence of the digital welfare state<sup>10</sup> which would result in a restriction of the fundamental rights of individuals. This symptomatic restriction would exclude many of the underprivileged and excluded from the system that could be described as zombies in the future.

Additionally, there are a significant number of examples of these restrictions in social matters: the Chinese social credit system<sup>11</sup>, the use of biometric data in India in order to obtain social benefits, the classification of job seekers in Austria on the basis of algorithms to determine the aid to be collected or the collection and recording of behavioural data on the bank cards of social security beneficiaries in Australia. It promotes the zombification of individuals and the disappearance of the border between what is private and public. Another phenomenon appears, further reinforcing the reality of this contamination.

The *name and shame*, an ancient practice of pillorying and publicly humiliating someone, disappeared with the ideas of the Enlightenment and the advent of liberalism. Social networks have however contributed to a very large extent to the return of these practices of denunciation

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<sup>9</sup> The benefits of digital technology are exclusively focused on the design and sale of products for the wealthy: connected and/or autonomous cars, commercial missions in space, robotic personal assistants... The whole humanity is absolutely not concerned by these benefits. On the contrary, the less favored individuals, excluded from access to these gadgets, are themselves controlled and sanctioned by the digital system.

<sup>10</sup> The Welfare State promotes state interventionism in the area of social protection and distribution of wealth (unemployment, retirement, health and childcare services).

<sup>11</sup> This system is illustrated by the first episode of the third season of the dystopian series *Black Mirror* and entitled *Nosedive*. Thereon, the only free person in the series is excluded from the system. She is a marginal. All the others are already zombies.

and stigmatization. Not only does the Welfare State control and classify individuals, but on top of that, these very completely dehumanized individuals denounce the alleged offenders. Zombies act in packs and the pack tends to get bigger.

### ***Homo zombificus***

Since the end of humanity has never been proclaimed as much as it is today and since no contemporary philosopher, no political scientist or economist can theorise about the future of our civilisations<sup>12</sup>, it appears that dystopian works, whether literary or cinematographic, anticipate our possible futures much better than theoreticians do. The predictions of a major anticipatory author alone, sum up our current society. Aldous Huxley foresaw, twenty-five years after writing *Brave New World*, that the dystopian world he had described was about to become reality. He therefore published in 1958 an essay entitled *Brave New World Revisited* in which he anticipated what most current ideologists still do not dare to admit.

The perfect dictatorship would have the appearance of a democracy, but would basically be a prison without walls in which prisoners would not even dream of escaping. It would essentially be a system of slavery where, through consumption and entertainment, the slaves would love their servitudes. Under the pressure of accelerating overpopulation, growing overorganisation and by means of ever more effective methods of manipulating minds, democracies will change in nature. The old picturesque forms—elections, parliaments, supreme courts and everything else— will remain, but the underlying substance will be a new kind of nonviolent totalitarianism. Democracy and freedom will be the themes of all radio broadcasts and all editorials. Meanwhile, the ruling oligarchy and its highly skilled elite will lead everything and everyone as they see fit.

Aldous Huxley did not foresee the climatic threat due, among other things, to the overexploitation of our planet's natural resources imposed by

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<sup>12</sup> It would even be the opposite since Paul Krugman, Nobel Prize winner in economics, just published in early 2020 a book entitled *Arguing with Zombies: Economics, Politics, and the fight for a Better Future* in which he only delivers a review of the Republican Party.

economic lobbies. However, he predicted the advent of *homo zombificus*, lobotomised by the media and marketing, which seeks only to consume and is moreover ready to break the law to achieve it. Like an undead, *homo zombificus* is only reacting, he is no longer acting. He is dominated by the system, but he doesn't try to break away from its chains, like Jim Jarmusch's thinking, sixty years after Aldous Huxley's.

Hanging on his phone and on trash TV, blind to inequalities, deaf to climate alarms, mute when choosing a political change, would the human being have already converted into a creature emptied of any kind of intellectual life?

Much more than robots, zombies have become the best illustration of what has become of our society: empty, soulless, exploited by economic power, blinded by the media, unable to react, or even to think, it wanders in decomposition towards a single and unique goal, that of consuming frantically<sup>13</sup>. Capitalism and globalisation are the voodoo sorcerer, the nuclear satellite and the virus that caused the mutation of individuals in zombie movies. They are the only common denominator, the metaphor of what is provoking this putrefaction to our souls.

How likely was it that a word from the folk religion of a small Caribbean island would be used as a political and economic concept by the United Nations or even a Nobel Prize? Cinema, as Mass Communication, allowed the assimilation of this figure in Western culture and above all, gave it for almost a century a powerful symbolic charge. In this respect, it is important to emphasise that the cinema has often anticipated much better than political science or sociology the fears, the flaws and the great challenges ahead for humanity. Throughout the history of cinema from its beginnings to the present day, the figure of the zombie has often visually and symbolically translated a multitude of traumas and anxieties to which political and economic powers have never been truly attentive. While remaining a global mass entertainment, cinema is definitely a means of communication which

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<sup>13</sup> This idea was discussed by George Ritzer in his article *Islands of the living Dead: the Social Geography of McDonaldization*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47/2, October, 2003.

combines the artist's acute sensitivity with the allegorical analysis of our societies. But beyond this reflexion, since this slow disintegration of our bodies, our environment and our ideologies has already occurred, the reason why no solution seems to emerge is perhaps much simpler, and more pessimistic, than any explanation: what if it was already too late?

The most characteristic of modern life is not its cruelty or insecurity but simply its emptiness and its absolute lack of content (George Orwell, 1984).

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## CONFESSION AND TORTURE: THE *HAUNTED HOUSE* AS A SPACE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL REDEMPTION

Alfonso Cuadrado

### Introduction

For more than a hundred years, the haunted house has been established as a highly typified cinematic space for dealing with themes of fantasy. From the first short films of Méliès and Chomón, where devils, ghosts and furniture that moved by itself scared incredulous visitors, to the most modern metafictional readings of the genre like *Ghostland* (Pascal Laugier, 2018), the haunted house has suffered a drift in parallel with the rest of the fantasy and horror cinema which has led to the abandonment of the malignant abode stereotype, becoming a psychological space which reflects the tormented mind of the characters.

Ziolkowski, in *Imágenes desencantadas (una iconología literaria)* (1980), reveals how a process of disenchantment has taken place since the Gothic period: from a first phase where the magical and fantastic of a supernatural nature were readily accepted, to later tilt towards a rational explanation, and finally bring face-to-face reason and the supernatural in a psychological conflict.

In this way, the castle and the mysterious mansion gradually give way to more everyday spaces, which lose darkness and where the sinister passes from the environment to the psychological nature of the events. The house is conceived as a mirror of the character and conveys, via its architecture, the disorders of its inhabitants or reflects in its different rooms their internal dimensions. Under this approach, the fantastic becomes a chain of events that physically and emotionally disturbs the characters until they reveal their traumas and secrets of the past. Subjected to the tyranny of the supernatural, the character begins a journey through the house that becomes an inner journey and is formally similar to the process of torture and confession.

### **The psychological architecture of the haunted house**

In order for the haunted house to become a spatial reflection of the character, what Patricia Garcia calls a fantastic hole must be produced: «The hole is then, in my view, the fantastic trope which best captures how the changes of corporeal position, architectural boundaries and spatial hierarchies within the text de-automatise the reader's relationship to space, transgressing the illusion of verisimilitude» (García, 2013, p. 33).

The hole is the centre and symbol of the restructuring that the house will suffer as a result of the fantastic events. The space is reordered around safe and unsafe spaces where risk dominates, and symbolic axes whereby the displacements of the characters are produced - the horizontal axis and the vertical axis. The horizontal axis establishes movements from the outer space to the rooms in the house. It is the passage from the real and mundane to what is deepest and most intimate. The vertical axis symbolises transit from the infernal, represented by the basement, to the spiritual, involving the ascent to the attic. The basement is the space near the earth, where one comes into contact with a dark world and where traditionally the dungeons, cells or confinement spaces are located. At the opposite pole is the attic, which signifies escape to the past and memory. Objects from the past are deposited in the attic, which keeps memories alive and which is often inhabited by a ghostly presence.

Based on this rearrangement of the fantastic space, the architecture of the house is ready to be the scene of the internal conflict of the character.

Not only our memories, but also the things we have forgotten are «housed». Our unconscious is «housed». Our soul is an abode. And by remembering the «houses», by remembering the «rooms», we learn to «dwell» in ourselves. We now see that the imagery of the house goes both ways: it is a part of us as much as we are a part of it.

This quote from *The Poetics of Space* by Bachelard (2000, p. 23) perfectly summarises the game of influences that will occur in the haunted houses between the characters and the space. Beyond the transformations and changes that the supernatural produces in the architecture, the house echoes the evolution of the external, of evil as an external entity, towards the psychologising of paranormal events and therefore the internalisation of the fantastic. It therefore becomes a mirror and symbol of the psyche of the character. Bachelard himself quotes Jung in his *Essays of Analytical Psychology*, in which he uses the metaphor of the successive modifications that time effects on a historical building from the stone age to the contemporary era. For Jung, architectural additions function like a vertical structure similar to that of our soul. The echo of the theory of archetypes and later of psychoanalysis is glimpsed in these metaphors. The exterior of the house is like the appearance of a human being, whose physical appearance determines the first impressions we form. This is true in the case of the house in *The Amityville Horror* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1979) where the skylights look like eyes. There are houses that look good and appear normal and others that from the beginning inspire distrust. The exterior hides the interior that will reveal itself little as we move towards the hidden. Bachelard continues, mentioning how Jung symbolises in the attic and in the basement the fears that populate the house and therefore of the individual:

Awareness is drawn there like a man who, hearing a suspicious noise in the basement, rushes to the attic to verify that there are no thieves and

that, therefore, the noise was pure imagination. Actually, that prudent man did not dare to venture into the basement (Bachelard, 2000, p. 39).

The basement behaves like the subconscious - hiding the deepest fears, the ghosts of a dark past that stir, their echo reaching up above. The character refuses to admit the storm raging down below and, on the upper floor, in the space of normal life, denies what happened, usually with rational explanations. But the evidence continues, and the inevitable confrontation occurs in the hidden rooms of his own soul. Sometimes it turns out that to understand the supernatural functioning of the house is to understand the characters or vice versa, the mystery of both runs parallel. In the films *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963) and *The Legend of Hell House* (John Hough, 1973) the discovery of the forces that dominate the house comes about as we discover the psychological tensions that dominate Eleanor (*The Haunting*), guilt for neglecting her mother and at the same time hate and resentment towards her, the repressed sexual urge, or the truth that is hidden in the figure of Emeric Belasco (*The Legend of Hell House*). In the first, several attempts are made to find the spaces where the hidden manifests itself, such as when they find an intersection of several corridors in which gusts of cold are perceived. The task of the parapsychology professor and his guests leads Eleanor to face her fears and her motivations and admit her place, the house, just as she ascends the unstable spiral staircase that leads her to see the doctor's wife lying dead. In the case of the second, the discovery of the place where Belasco's mummy is located represents the centre of mystery and energy, as if it were a heart, from which the supernatural was radiating. In *The Changeling* (Peter Medak, 1980), the protagonist's mourning over the death of his wife and daughter in a car accident corresponds to the obsession to find out the truth about a dead child, whose spirit seems to be responsible for the phenomena of the house. Here the vertical axis is used as an articulation of two psychological dimensions. The first is the terrible events of the past, the traffic accident that ended the life of his family. Its evidence is the corpse of the deceased child, which is discovered underground, buried in a well. The fears, the feelings of guilt for not having been able to do

anything, the memories, and the desire for reunion reside in another dimension and therefore emerge from another space - from the attic where his death occurred at the hands of a father who denied his own son.

In the case of *The Entity* (Sidney J. Furie, 1982), the spatial structure is not as differentiated as in the previous films. Ghostly aggressions are suffered in any part of the house - the living room, the bedroom or the bathroom. Attempts to delve into the psychology of the protagonist do not lead anywhere and no matter how much is sought in traumas of the past there is no explanation that clarifies what is happening. This frustration corresponds to the absence of a symbolic spatial structure in the house. The house reveals as little as its psychology: evil is neither hidden nor confined in a space. It is always present and for this reason it torments constantly anywhere.

### **The self, the other and the ghost**

The house is a reflection of the protagonist's self. This reflection may be materialised on different planes: the house as a living being, certain elements of the house, such as statues, paintings and mirrors, and finally in supernatural entities such as ghosts. The first case was found in the remake of *House on Haunted Hill* (William Malone, 1999), the house, in addition to the usual external manifestations of life - moving objects and spatial changes - exhibits an intelligence as if it were governed by a spirit that becomes aware of itself and of what has happened in the past, and unfolds a series of carefully measured manoeuvres to exact revenge. It is able to intervene on the computer so that the guest list for a party is altered and the people it wants are invited - the descendants of doctors who in the past escaped from a fire that almost burned the mansion down, back when it was a psychiatric hospital. Its spirit ends up materialising in a nebulous black mass of tentacles and smoke that spreads across the walls. It absorbs the living and in it the spirits of the dead are visible. Like a black hole, it attracts energy and returns it contaminated and harmful.

In the case of statues, paintings and mirrors, their presence is secular in the imagination of all kinds of cultures, as Ziolkowski recalls. Statues have been associated with the animistic idea of creation, interpreted in various religions in various ways, according to which the first men were clay statues that come alive thanks to the influence of a god. The statue can come alive thanks to the action of a positive demiurge but and also a demonic one. In *The Innocents* (Jack Clayton, 1961), the gardens of the mansion are dotted with a wide variety of statues - in the flower beds, on the steps and especially in a small corner of the garden where several are placed in a circle. Their presence helps create the atmosphere of mystery that prevails in the film. Jack Clayton, the director, reinforces the anguish felt by the protagonist, Miss Giddens, owing to her fear of ghostly apparitions, keeping the image of the statues in the background when Giddens is near them. The spectator, like her, feels that at any moment the statues will become human beings, and so it turns out in the end when she sees in one of them the personification of the servant, Quint - the character that for her represents the evil that contaminates the young pupils that are under her care and responsibility. We can also consider in the same way as statues - although their nature is not stony - the devilish dolls of haunted houses, such as the harlequin of *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982) and the famous Annabelle doll from *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013).

The painting offers a qualitative leap with respect to the statue, since in addition to suggesting the omnipresence of a human figure that can influence the living beyond death (the painting usually represents a deceased person), it can trap the soul of the living in its image. The enchanted portrait as a motif is as old as that of the statue. In many primitive cultures the image of a human (drawing, painting or photography) is not considered a representation of the person, but their actual soul. Hence the reluctance to let themselves be photographed or recorded, because they think their lives are being stolen. This superstition is the essence of the motif of the enchanted portrait that, beyond the figure, encloses the very soul of he or she who is portrayed; hoping, yes, that at some point their influence moves beyond the

painting, either because they literally step out of it, or, in a much more modern and subtle way, because the contained spirit somehow flows towards the living, influencing their thoughts and actions. Ziolkowski distinguishes three variations on the enchanted painting:

To the extent that a portrait is linked to a specific place we speak of *genius loci*; insofar as a portrait painted in the past foreshadows present or future events, we speak of a *figure*, designating as *soul* the portrait that painted in the present of the novel has a magical relation with its model (Ziolkowski, 1980, p. 91).

There are several examples that fit into the first category: the portrait of the old Cyrus West in *The Cat and the Canary* (Paul Leni, 1927), whose mere presence seems to ensure that the wishes he expresses in his will are carried out by the descendants who reunite in his mansion. The paintings of two women, Mary Meredith - *The Uninvited* (Lewis Allen, 1944) - and Carolina de Winter—*Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940)- are associated with the places where their memory is kept alive, the youth institution run by their friend Mrs. Holloway and in which attempts are made to confine Stella, the girl possessed by the spirit of her own mother, Mary Meredith. In the second case, the figure of Carolina de Winter, an ancestor of the current Mr de Winter, is linked to the spirit of his first wife that reigns in the mansion, Rebecca, because the dress that she is wearing in the painting is the one Rebecca wore to her last costume party. This fact, which could seem irrelevant, takes on significance since the young Mrs. de Winter - under the malevolent influence of the housekeeper - chooses that same dress for the current costume party, with the consequent disapproval of Maxim de Winter. Without any supernatural effect actually occurring, the image of the painting transmuted in Rebecca comes alive in the current Mrs. de Winter, possessing her.

*The Fall of the House of Usher* (Roger Corman, 1960) is a good demonstration of portraits as figures and at the same time as souls. Roderick shows Philip, his sister Madeline's *fiancé*, the portrait gallery of his ancestors. The Ushers did not exactly stand out for their



values: the lineage is made up of thieves, murderers, blackmailers, prostitutes, smugglers or the mentally ill. Roderick senses that this personal legacy runs through his veins and will eventually destroy him and his sister. But he is also a painter and is composing a portrait of Madeline that is gradually acquiring the style of the faces of his ancestors. In a way it is as if Roderick captures and drives his sister's will towards his goal —the self-destruction and death of both— as he advances in the portrait: his brushstrokes are acts of domination.

The last of the elements that Ziolkowski points out are the mirrors. Its mystery has accompanied man since ancient times for several reasons; the mirror has the power to look behind us and reflect what we cannot see. If one places two mirrors in front of one another, the image breaks from its spatial logic and multiplies, causing an interplay of unrealities that baffles us. And finally, the mirror hides an inverted image of our world that can become the gateway to another altered but strangely similar dimension of the reality we live in. These characteristics build the typology of Ziolkowski's mirrors: the divinatory mirror, which is the one shown as a screen in which we seek information (the mirror of the witch in *Snow White*), the mirror that shows another image as doppelganger of the character and the mirror as a door to another universe (Alice's mirror). The last two are those that have enough power to become motifs that are used again and again, as they represent the possibility of building the alternative of the self or of another world, respectively.

The usefulness of mirrors to reveal what our eyes cannot see is a common expedient in horror movies and its exploitation in *The Conjuring* is notorious: Lorraine Warren sees via the mirror located in the lid of a music box the ghosts that threaten her from behind. In *What Lies Beneath* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000), the bathroom mirror and also the bath water will play a decisive role in the revelation of the ghost that is trying to communicate with the protagonist in order that she discover the truth behind her murder. Words are written in the mist on the mirror as the ghost tries to communicate, and the

dead girl is reflected in the water. Another bathroom mirror is the door to a world from which monsters come out and try to catch Roger Cobb, the writer of *House* (Steve Miner, 1985). Let us also remember a device whose glass fulfils the three functions of the mirror —by which we refer to the television— whose screen offers: images and sounds from the other side, is a mirror of the self and passageway to another dimension. If there is a television that has become an icon of terror, it is that of *Poltergeist* and the image of Carol Anne absorbed in watching the visual noise of the signal when the broadcast has ended.

But without doubt the element that best represents in the enchanted house the figuration of the other that can also be a self, is the ghost. The brevity of these pages prohibits the dedication of a space to the description, typology and forms of such an important figure. Let us simply mention some of the ways in which the ghost arises and how in some cases it interacts with the living. We have already said how it can be seen in mirrors and bathtubs, but it can also be visible in a photo or, even more commonly, wandering around like a living person in the house, emerging from a closet, from the darkness, from behind a door or a curtain. Always with the ability to materialise and disappear moments later. It can be leaning on a wall, walking on it or on the roof. The ghost is always human, or human-looking, unlike the monster, which is halfway between the deformed human and the animal. It can also be felt, but not seen (which is usually worse): its breath can be heard, tracks left on the floor seen or the character might feel his blows (*The Entity*) or how he is pushed or dragged (*The Conjuring*). In this last film, the Warrens mention in a talk the three phases of «demonic activity»: infestation (whispers, steps, sense of presence), oppression (the most vulnerable is chosen and becomes a victim: physical and psychic torture) and possession (annihilation of the person and total control of them). The ghost adheres to these three functions to a greater or lesser extent, and in some cases becomes a true torturer whose purpose is the destruction and control of the person via physical aggression and prolonged psychological intimidation.

## **Torture and Confession**

The journey made by the character through his own house / soul is neither comfortable nor easy. The confrontation with the darkest corners of his soul is a battle that regardless of the outcome obtained, entails effort and suffering. The events that occur in the house physically and emotionally unsettle the characters to the point of death or until their dark secrets are revealed. Structurally and formally this process presents similarities with torture, confession and a psychotherapy session:

Torture —indelible inscription of pain in the body, irreversible incision— is a technique that aims, in a calculated and regulated manner, to cause as much suffering as possible in order to control, degrade and completely weaken the subject. It is, in this way, an instrument that makes use of the corporal to bring about, one suffering at a time, the breakdown of subjectivity (Pérez, 2009, p. 103).

The physical and psychological aggressions that most of the characters who inhabit a haunted house will suffer follow the intention and pattern of torture sessions. Death does not occur in a fantastic film in the same way as in a war film; it is known and accepted as a characteristic of the genre that it is there, but its effect must be delayed. The forces that inhabit the house do not intend to fulminate their inhabitants with immediate effect but to play with them —why? The goal is not death nor fear of it but the most distressing feeling, which also brings about terror, the anguish of infinite pain. But exposure to suffering is not constant. Both torture and terror follow patterns that alternate rest with pain. Every film is based on a succession of small attacks that alternate with moments of calm whose purpose is to keep the characters —and the spectators with them— in a constant emotional curve that goes from pain to fear, via anguish. The pain subsides, but it is replaced by the anxiety produced by the awareness that a new attack may be imminent. These aggressions grow in intensity and are brought about by new means that surprise and annihilate the moral resistance of the character as they illustrate how torture has infinite unsuspected

forms. The aggressors are carnifex, a term that comes from the Latin *facio*, «to do». Carnifex is somebody that makes meat. To reveal the flesh is to evidence the mortal nature hidden by the external appearance of the body (Pérez, 2009, p. 103).

The physical torture that attacks the body to reveal the flesh can alternate with its confessional and psychological counterpart, even though they maintain the same intention and structure. In this case the carnifex use physical torture as a means to arrive at the revelation of sin and repentance:

Clinical psychology dissolves the idea of guilt in favour of morally more tenuous ideas with greater technical backing, such as dysfunctionality, maladjustment, disorder or problem. In the nineteenth century, sin and guilt disappear, illness gains strength and the culture of examination of conscience and psychological obstetrics is upheld as a way to regulate and correct the subjects' activities. Doctors gain ground on confessors—and, in the mid-twentieth century, psychologists on doctors—in directing and providing guidelines for this task (Loredo, 2005, p. 114).

The aforementioned psychologisation of the subgenus changes or overlays the therapeutic process on the development of the fantastic narrative. The physical pain of the characters implies a disorder of the psychic equilibrium that produces a moral pain in response to awareness of the offence and its effects, which can last in time beyond death. The list of plots in which the characters reveal their sins and go on a journey which is therapeutic is endless. Let us quote some of them. In *El orfanato* (J.A. Bayona, 2007) we witness the atonement of a sin, that of mothers with guilt who do not take care of their children. In *The Uninvited*, the ghosts are female characters who atone for their faults, especially the mother who refused to accept motherhood or her husband's daughter. In the aforementioned film *The Changeling*, the protagonist feels guilty for his inability to save his family and assuages his conscience by bringing about justice for a ghost child who murdered his father.

Let's finish this section by remembering a film that offers one of the best examples of the process of torture, confession and regret. It is *1408* (Mikael Håfström, 2007), the film based on the story of the same name by Stephen King. The cursed room of a hotel adopts all kinds of physical and psychological strategies to torture and overthrow a writer, until he reveals his most intimate sin — his failure to accept his daughter's death and the destruction of his marriage. The confrontation with his own ghosts will give him strength to take on the power that wants to annihilate him and with that he will achieve his salvation.

## Conclusions

Haunted houses tell stories about the tensions that are produced by hiding everything that does not fit or cannot be explained by rationality or scientific knowledge. These tensions are still fully in force and, therefore, the genre remains alive. These characteristics are common to what Caweltti calls formula stories, those that repeat a certain structure within a genre:

Formula stories seem to be one way in which the individuals in a culture act out certain unconscious or repressed needs, or express in an overt and symbolic fashion certain latent motives which they must give expression to, but cannot face openly (Caweltti, 1972, p. 123).

Alongside this basic theme, formula stories incorporate others of a secondary nature: the consequences of crimes not solved in the past, blame for the faults committed within the family or conflicts in maternal relationships. Certain authors have gone even further and have seen the haunted house as a symbolic setting, not only for the previous themes, but also of the collective unconscious, which manifests itself through the inversion of values that the destruction of the domestic space supposes. To fulfil these functions, the haunted house has evolved into a model that is the synthesis of several factors:

- The contemporary vision of the fantastic as a product of everyday life. Gone are the monsters of the past and the gloomy settings

located in remote countries. The threat comes from nearby figures and in recognisable domestic environments.

- The nature of the fantastic is born from the revelation of the hidden and repressed, what Freud calls the sinister. The sinister now lies in the everyday, in the closest people, objects, settings or landscapes, upon which a new vision is bestowed, in which is revealed repressed content that becomes a threat and makes it strange and mysterious.
- The characters face the sinister in a journey that follows the mythical model of the descent into hell. This trip was made by the main gods and heroes of antiquity, in order to carry out a task or mission, or to recover a loved one, but in reality they ended up facing themselves, their fears, guilt and sins. These journeys abound with hellish environments like Tartarus, the part of Hades inhabited by the sinners subjected to horrible torments, like Tityos, who was condemned to have a vulture constantly destroy his insides for trying to rape Leto. These mythological references are brought up to date in the modern physical and psychological torments suffered by the characters of fantastic films who face terrible events from their past.

The haunted house as the scene of this hellish process, participates in the characteristics of the contemporary fantastic as a subversive genre, since it upturns the day to day right at the essence of where it is most sacred: home and family. Both feel like oppressive elements that hide the tensions generated by the social and political order, and that are made visible thanks to the irruption of the sinister, the imaginary and the symbolic.

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## WHEN *THE GIRL* BECOMES *THE MONSTER*. FANTASTIC-TERROR FOR THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE

Celia Cuenca García

### 1. Introducing *the girl crisis*

When *Scary Movie* (Keenen Wayans, 2000) was released in cinemas, it ultimately became a *slasher*<sup>1</sup> saga for disbeliever teens. But this movie was not just intended to become a blockbuster, but to echo the totality of a genre: Terror. Its parameters were so well defined, that the industry could already laugh at itself. And, among all those parameters, there was one which wanted to make fun of itself more than any other: *the girl*.

One of the greatest scenes in *Scary Movie* is the encounter between Buffy, the *hot prom queen*, and The Killer, knife in hand and wearing a white mask. When the cheerleader sees the monster with his creepy mask in front of her, she does not scream or cry, but she invites him into her awkward game instead. This becomes some kind of ghoulish scene, which she calls the «Die cheerleader, die!» moment.

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<sup>1</sup> *Slasher* is a subgenre of horror movies identified by violent murders or assaults by an attacker armed with a knife or razor. The term includes films like *Halloween*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *The Cabin in the Woods*.

The sequence shows the murder of the girl and her constant chattering, mocking the situation: «So that's when I'm supposed to beg for my life, Mr. Killer? Oh, please no! Please!»

That scene was not just a *sketch*. That scene represented every *the girl* in horror movies, criticising their limited role within this genre. It was Ginger wondering whether becoming a she-wolf could actually be more exciting than becoming *just a woman* (*Ginger Snaps*, John Fawcett, 2001) or Jenny, enjoying her wild step from *teen-queen* into a cannibal succubus (*Jennifer's Body*, Karyn Kusama, 2009). From that moment onwards, this fantastic-terror genre, in which the female character becomes something unearthly and threatening, has kept growing over the years. First, in a little by little and discreet way, now, with the strength of a genre that is really reinventing itself.

In this paper, we will analyze how the fantastic-terror cinema has taken an absolute turn by introducing a new image around the role of the woman, which finally liberated, not only ceases to be a victim, but also, becomes a violent and powerful entity. As a result, she does not choose this transformation due to resentment, like Carrie, who humiliated, takes her hellish revenge (*Carrie*, 1976, Brian de Palma) or defenselessness, like Regan, daughter of a promiscuous and liberal mother, falls into the claws of the Devil (*The Exorcist*, 1975, William Friedkin).

Today, on the other hand, the female character associated with possession, the devil, witchcraft or any other kind of supernatural creature, no longer represents the conventional fear towards *the other*, but something new. Following Laura Antón's reflection in her paper about the narrative roles of women «while the gaze of a man expresses the conventional fear of *that Other* that differs from oneself, the feminine gaze not only shares the masculine fear, but also recognizes something similar to her own difference in that image» (Antón, 2017, p. 95)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> «Mientras que la mirada del hombre expresa el temor convencional a ese Otro que difiere de uno mismo, la mirada femenina comparte el temor masculino, pero también reconoce en esa imagen algo similar a su propia diferencia». (Trad. a.).

This new kind of terror detects that complicity and the association between the woman and the monster -both being considered different from the norm- and so it exploits the possibilities arising from this connection: the woman not only sees in the monster another figure apart from the male figure, but also thinks of herself as such.

Films like *The Witch* (Robert Eggers, 2015), *The Blackcoat's Daughter* (also known as *February*, Oz Perkins, 2015), *Thelma* (Joachim Trier, 2017) and *Grave* (Julia Ducournau, 2017) explore that exposed possibility. These productions, among others, open the door to a new fantastic genre where *the girl* accepts, chooses or even wishes to be transformed into a monster, a witch, a demon or a beast. Because therefore, as such, she becomes more powerful, stronger, and wild. More *her* than ever.



Image 1: Trailer frame. *Thelma* (2017). Thelma's father knowing his daughter will become a witch and trying to kill her in the woods.

In order to analyze this narrative review and that monstrous liberation of the female figure, we will focus on these four recent productions as a sample within the terror genre: exploring the keys they share as a possible, emergent trend, and on the reason for their

aesthetic choice within the filmmaking field. Thanks to some familiar but mysterious protagonists like Thomasin, Kay, Thelma and Justine, we will discover where the new horror cinema can take us to today.

## **2. Bye victim-girl. Hi monster-girl**

In his book *The Savages in Cinema*, Roger Bartra talks about how the incarnations of the monster and *The Other* express the cultural and political inclinations at one point and in society. And besides, how those, beyond these updates, continue to evoke the modern avatars of very ancient myths: such as the embodiment of something alien, unknown or different, into the monstrous. Bartra focuses on «the verification that industrial rationality [typical of our time and society] does not prevent the expression of archaic mythologies, to which it adds new forms promoted by the popular mass culture of the most developed societies» (Bartra, 2018, p. 12). Today, one of those *new forms* from which traditional stories should be reimagined as the one about the woman who becomes a monster.

There is a whole theoretical trend around gender studies that focuses on the narrative figure of women. Writers such as Barbara Creed or Linda Williams explore this figure, from the classic narratives, going through those well-known myths and stories and up to the most modern stories. These researchers highlight how the woman figure has often been designed as a passive element of the story: always waiting for a heroic rescue or a tragic death rooted in sacrifice. The reason for this is due to re-analyzing of myths and a major dissemination done by the hegemony of male subjectivity. In these cases, women were an alien element, unknown and different to the man figure.

Following this train of thought, it seems inevitable that most recent productions (luckily, less and less) keep repeating the same flawed approaches. Regardless of genre or audiovisual format, new narratives continue to use the same paradigm. The horror genre, -the one where there is also a place for monsters, heroes and sacrifices, as in traditional myths- has shaped, almost automatically, the same *woman-*

*victim* storyline. In addition, in these cases, movies have insisted on associating women not only with helplessness, but to ideas related to desire, virginity and sex, for decades. This matter, certainly has initiated highly questionable moral debates.

## 2.1 Beyond *the final girl*

Along with the progress made by generations, horror cinema itself has been creating figures in which a more active type of woman has been included, such as the *final girl*<sup>3</sup> from *slasher* films. Even in such cases, gender studies have something to say. Authors like Vera Dika and Carol Clover reflect on sadism within this genre, and suggest that this does not seem like the worst and darkest angle in these movies. They suggest that the idea of pleasure, instead, experienced by the viewer when seeing the protagonist suffer, is even more worrisome. On the other hand, they also emphasize, above all, how the audience who seeks out this kind of cinema has mostly been male for decades, and how the submissive heroine that tries to survive is, in most cases, a woman.

Even if the studies from these researchers were published years ago, there would not have been any major changes until now. That clever and usually attractive girl always gets to the end of the adventure. She manages to kill the villain and surviving all her companions in a bloody slaughter. This image still remains on our screens. Two recent films have been released highlighting *Final Girl* (Tyler Shields, 2015) and *Final Girls* (Todd Strauss-Schulson, 2015) as icons of the genre. Regardless of the lack of originality of these titles, it is important to ask ourselves: does this icon really free the female figure from her typecasting role in these stories? On a diegetic level, she is still imaged as that young girl, shy at first, but holding brave convictions, wearing bloody and strategically torn clothing, showing a virginal yet sexy look, who also tries to fight Evil, because that is what good girls do.

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<sup>3</sup> In horror films, the final girl refers to the last girl or woman alive to confront the killer. The term was coined by Carol J. Clover in her book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. The figure has been observed in many films, including *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *Alien*, *Friday the 13th*, and *Scream*.



Image 2: Trailer frame. *Final Girl* (2015). Veronica, a recent example of a *final girl*, bloody and probably traumatized but beautiful and alive.

From Clover and Dika's investigations, which we mentioned above, it is assumed that this progress of the *final girl* is not really enough. That a woman's figure might be more active, braver and more exciting, but isn't it all still an embodiment of a traditional masculine fantasy? Does the *final girl* allow us to explore the narrative female figure as a living, dynamic and complex element? These studies, increasingly visible within contemporary audiovisuals (proof that shows that their conclusions are heading in the right direction) lead us to believe that the female figure needs a totally new space where it can be self-designed again, away from previous norms and parameters.

That is why Anton's reflection, which we introduced the text with, is interesting in terms of reviewing that the idea of the relationship between woman-monster figures is, perhaps, more sincere and symbiotic than the woman-hero relationship. The reason why is that both, the monster-figure and the woman-figure, are conceived as *strange*, in relation to the existing patriarchal system which, for the most part has been the dominant.

Therefore, both figures connect with each other, sharing that feeling of being out of place. From that perspective, *the girl's* design is freer, much richer and more interesting, given that she can now

be whatever she wants: grotesque, lascivious, cannibalistic, violent, murderous or just powerful in her own way.

Thomasin and Telma will choose to be witches and thus, they will dominate those around them; Kay, once exorcised by a priest, will ask the demon to possess her again: and Justine will decide that cannibalism frees her from the repressive role in which she has lived trapped all her life.

## **2.2 Becoming a she-wolf**

It is interesting to see how all these protagonists –young girls who are on the verge of womanhood, being in contact with the authorities and consequent mysteries faced during that phase– have always lived by certain rules that, even in the diegesis, they may seem superfluous to us, but they are actually common for any woman who lives in a western society today: constant associations with motherhood, sermons about the dangers of sex, deep concerns about physical conditions, a subtle but constant submission in the presence of the male gaze, different ambitions and future possibilities with regard to men, etc.

It was inevitable that cinema, as a symptom of the society that created it, echoed these ideas and reflected them in its recent narratives. And where better to do it in the genre that has victimized and humiliated women for years? Those specifically experimental or alternative productions that are not directly focused on the general public, and therefore can afford to be more experimental, are the pieces in which we begin to see this drastic and essential change to the role of women.

Today might perhaps be a constant aesthetic, but the low-budget production *Ginger Snaps* is, as we know it today, one of the inflection points of the narrative for the *monster-girl* figure. It is, undoubtedly, one of those films that has best represented that complicity between the woman and the monster: both are figures that are unable to find their place in a terrifying and complex universe, full of guidelines.



In this quite humble and amateur production, two marginalized and inseparable sisters enjoy recreating and photographing scenes of macabre deaths. One night, Ginger, the eldest, just after noticing that her first period is about to come, suffers the attack of what looks like a wolf, while playing one of her pranks.

After the bite, Ginger will begin to change: hair will grow on her body, spurs will grow on her ankles, her eyes will turn yellow and her fangs become sharp. Regardless of these changes, Ginger began to become overwhelmingly attractive to her schoolmates and she, thinking that the desire she feels is purely sexual, begins to devour them one by one.

Her sister Brigitte, who is terrified, tries to help her with some home remedies found in old books. But to her surprise, (and here comes the most interesting part) Ginger does not want to be saved. Towards the third act of the film, Ginger raises an idea that leaves Brigitte speechless: she has never felt better, and so, she encourages her little sister to become a she-wolf too.

It feels so good, Brigitte. It's like touching yourself. You know every move... right on the fucking dot. And after you see fucking fireworks, supernovas. I am a goddamn force of nature. I feel like I could do just about anything. [...] You would love it. You should come for the ride. We will be our own wolf pack.

If *Ginger Snaps* was, in a way, a teenage gore tribute to *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1942), the films we have mentioned above undoubtedly, owe their inspiration to Ginger and her dialogue and moral approach: regarding the way in which the protagonist embraces and thanks her monstrosity as an opportunity for her release. It might be a grotesque and bloody liberation, but it is just as strange to become a woman anyway, isn't it? *Ginger Snaps* has inspired productions that, like itself, have not been well received by the critics, such as *Jennifer's Body*. However, its message and its images have been penetrating and echoing, little by little, until today.



Image 3: Trailer frame. *Ginger Snaps* (2001). Ginger enjoying at the beginning of her transformation.

This idea about breaking free by becoming monstrous is not only settling in more elegant and mature films (yes, obviously counting on more budget), as the four movies we have listed in the introduction. That gaze is going beyond the cinema and reaching recent TV series, spaces for the contemporary narrative exploration, where we begin to see really strong characters. Victims at first, but ultimately powerful, these women would be figures we would be afraid of, to be honest: Eleven, Sabrina, Daenerys, Penny Dreadful, Dolores... All of them create a new aesthetic of the *monster-girl* that is terrifying and inspiring at the same time. It opens, thus, new ways of research: not only theoretical, but also visual. Now, the stories of our time, can be filled with the most twisted and fascinating heroines.

### 3. The *monster-girl* aesthetics

Writers Jordi Balló and Alain Bergala published a book entitled *Visual Motives of Cinema* in 2016. They wrote about the interesting concept of a recurring graphic element in the cinematographic universe: the *visual motif*, which happens and repeats itself in different productions but, little by little, composes a global story line built on that same aesthetic or symbol.

Although in the history of the cinema we can recognize several outstanding visual motifs, such as some of those mentioned in the book (home, a tear, the abyss), we can assume that there are also other much more recent visual motifs that derive, not from their repetition throughout history, but from its insistence and presence at a specific moment. In recent years, one of those images could be the *monster-girl*.

With that *visual concept as the basis of production* (Barnwell, 2017, p. 23), a shared aesthetic appears to generate the atmosphere in which that *monster-girl* performs her transformation: codes and graphic elements that emphasize the idea of change and female liberation, and therefore, confer a shared tone for these productions beyond the genre.

Because despite all these films containing the variant of terror, they are productions that apparently do not share similar perspectives. They are all *twist-movies* that do not fit into a specific genre, such as *slasher*, *thriller*, or the newest, *elevated terror*. As a result, each one of those movies takes diverse genres and re-contextualize's them altogether, giving rise to something different that does not belong to a traditionally-defined genre. They combine and convert the *coming of age* concept, university plots, drama, gore and scary movies into something else.

On the one hand, this is an important feature: meaning, these films experiment through the cinematographic art in the same way that they would do it with their characters. The scary films' submissive and victimized woman becomes, in these cases, a supernatural, violent and powerful entity. In other words: *the girl* becomes *the monster*. Conversely, this matter is interesting given that we are able to detect the choice and design of seemingly independent productions that actually share their visions in that fusion of elements.

### 3.1 The teenager

The female character necessarily becomes a constant. Because the girl must be the protagonist in this cases, but also, because it is always represented as an identity under construction.

The protagonists of these films are young women about to face new and unexpected experiences and responsibilities. We find that they feel vulnerable during that gap between childhood and maturity, beginning to question the features that define them. Thomasin, Kay, Thelma and Justine suffer a cognitive dissonance that prevents them from deciding. Their education and the parameters that rule their lives call them to adapt to what is expected of them as women: family care, studies, religious vocation, and, in short, what is known as being *good girls*.

However, when their adolescence is coming to an end, there comes a second call, different from the familiar one: a call that makes them embrace that sensation that at first, haunted them. But as the story goes on, this phenomenon will be revealed as an impressive, supernatural power that, once accepted, will allow them to free themselves and eventually, become something new and unexpected.

### **3.2 The duality of color and the fragmentation of space**

In order to visually represent that decision-making and internal debate faced by its protagonists, each of these films has endeavored to propose a very specific color design: a small palette that, above all, is based on the Judeo-Christian heritage of these pieces, and does it by playing with blue and red palette. Thanks to this almost universal code, the assumed opposition to women as a figure in the cinema is represented graphically: purity and sin, virgin and devil, heaven and hell, good and bad, normal and deviant. While these protagonists try to break free and finally assume their monstrous nature, they are aware that their environment will continue to judge their decision and their actions.

That debate, perhaps the most decisive subtext of these productions, also goes to another level, very physical indeed, within the scope of these films. The inherited classifications and prejudices that torment these teenagers are also represented in the diegetic spaces that the protagonists inhabit: grids, windows, bars, corridors or curtains

establish a literal separation between the familiar and the strange. A separation that the protagonists must go through, ultimately, to free themselves.



Image 4: Trailer frame. *Grave* (2017). Justine walking through the halls of the university under metaphorical red lights.

### 3.3 Nature as a symbol

We can also observe how the presence of a periphery and the need to abandon the center to recognize the margin emerges from that *limit* idea and, precisely, because the need to step into the unknown has a key role in these films.

Even despite these films taking place in modern times, technology becomes obsolete when trying to explain what is happening within the plot: we see old cars, old-fashioned household appliances, telephone booths, cord telephones and other *passé* devices such as *cassettes*, *polaroids* and CRT TVs. On the other hand, nature becomes present and ominous, as if it was fencing in the protagonists little by little, calling them.

Likewise, each of these protagonists has a close relationship with natural and animal referent. Thomasin is intimately bound to the forest, which at first looks like a threatening place but in the end, becomes the gate to the coven. Kay discovers what she desires the most when she is lost in the snow and in the open landscapes. Besides, she wants to be possessed by a demon looks like an animal, wild and almost tender. Thelma gets empowered in the forest and, when she does so, the animals around her change their behaviour: birds bump into the windows and the snakes go to her bed. And Justine lives together with all kinds of animals in the veterinary university, but in an odd way: given that those animals are either domesticated, taken out of context, anesthetized, held with flanges or even dead.

### **3.4 The representation of instinct**

One of the most literal references to the concept of instinct is the idea of the anesthetized animal in *Grave*. Nature and animals evoke that intuitive knowledge that the protagonists have lost and prevent them from recognising certain experiences. The animals, pure creatures in a way, they do sense them and due to this, we are reminded that the characters should reconnect with an innate power and knowledge, in order to get what they aim for.

The loss of instinct makes the supernatural bump into the life of these girls, in order to wake them up. This is not only portrayed through the natural environment, that rather works more as a symbolic resource of their internal debate. This supernatural is not external, it does not come from the outside, but arises from the inside of the protagonists, instead, as if it had always been there.

### **3.5 The physical**

With the resources and graphic portrayals of scatology, such as ulcers, wounds, cuts and blood, all this is turned into the representation of the irrational instinct that takes its space.

The physical matter becomes constant in these films, turning the supernatural and the intangible into something immediate and hence, real, similarly to the way the girl's powers and skills keep on improving and invading their bodies and their thoughts. The rashes, vomiting, the fever and the hives go beyond the purest gore and they reveal themselves as attention calls to that forgotten or denied power that the girls need in order to be free, grow, and become what they really are.

This is why the mirror element becomes something compulsory, because it represents the decision of Kay, Thelma and Justine to remain within the assumed codes and embrace the extraordinary. Even Thomasin, whose story happens centuries before the rest of the girls, apparently sees herself when she prays alone in the attic, looking at the sky, and going through all her sins.

In the end, the chaotic and free self-definition will be more important than the security in what has been previously imposed.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Feminism is one of the most present discourses in the new media. As younger generations become aware of concepts such as *patriarchy*, *glass ceiling barriers*, *sorority* or *manspreading*. However, feminism not only takes shape as a theoretical discourse or activism, but also gains presence in today's most commercial artistic and cultural forms, proof that its depth is now greater than ever.

The *millennial* era is eminently audiovisual. And precisely because of that, in order to analyze our environment, we must also pay attention to the images that surround us. If we want to deepen the feminist advancement that we are living, we must also pay attention to the images that define this progress and to those that this advance generates. The cinema, as a symptomatic expression of the culture that creates it, is an area in which we can find a whole discourse around the contemporary feminist struggle. A speech that takes shape in its narrative, but also in its aesthetics. And that presents a new way of

understanding the female figure in the narrative. As Campbell writes in his famous study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, myths must be reviewed in order to adapt them to each moment and society (Campbell, 1953, p. 140).

Horror cinema, one of the genres that has traditionally humiliated, mistreated and abused the figure of *the girl*, has taken a complete turn. It has introduced a totally new trend. Women, finally liberated, not only cease to be victims, but also become supernatural, violent and powerful entities. Now they are capable of fighting those who limited them precisely because they were women.

Images as the natural atmosphere, religious associations, supernatural and the female protagonist in contemporary terror approach the public to the idea that all those parameters and classifications that defined women, are actually inherited concepts. Concepts that can be broken in order to claim new attitudes.

Todorov already explained that the fantastic has always had a *social function* (Todorov, 1980, p. 122). And while this new fantastic-terror is more intimate and elegant than in the nineties, it keeps the same hidden function. Try to ask questions of an unsuspecting viewer, and generate the feeling that there is still much to explain. That explanation has nothing to do with the argument presented, but with our own understanding of the world. From the apparent banality of the *scary movie*, these films question the taboos that still define women today. And they do it from the transgression of genre and aesthetic power.



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## *THEY FOLLOW:* EXPERIMENTS IN FORMAL DISTRIBUTION OF CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILMS

Antoni Roig and Judith Clares-Gavilán

### **Introduction**

Horror films (and related sub-genres) have proved to be historically suitable for alternative ways of distribution and exhibition, either formal or informal (in the terms proposed by Lobato and Ryan, 2011 and Lobato, 2012). This is due to a series of intertwined factors:

- A remarkable range of mid to low budget (even «no budget») productions.
- Along-standing, hardcore fanbase, eager to discover comparatively obscure titles through festivals or specialized distribution companies (deemed as more authentic than mainstream releases with a wider public in mind).
- The transnational condition of horror, which allows for a broader circulation and re-contextualization of titles produced outside the limits of English-speaking countries (Lobato and Ryan, 2011).
- A more diverse range of criteria for assessing the pleasures provided by such films, which go beyond established «highbrow» perceptions of technical or artistic quality (Walker, 2014).

All these factors combined are key to the perception of horror films as comparatively «low-risk» products in terms of return of investment, which in turn stimulate controlled forms of experimentation regarding distribution, including what is considered, in a given period and territory, as the standard delay between windows of exploitation.

Drawing from the consideration of distribution, and its disruptions, as a valuable approach to filmmaking in order to understand the complex relationships between audiences and industries (Lobato and Ryan, 2011, p. 189), we will analyse the role of horror films in the changing landscape of film distribution, and particularly digital distribution, in the first two decades of the 21st century. We consider that the horror genre has been a fruitful testing ground for the limits of the very core of the windowing system, from the reduction of the delay between theatrical and home releases to the different possibilities of Video-On-Demand (VOD) (Tompkins, 2014). Our research shows that the horror genre has headed different tentative trends in formal distribution, anticipating in some cases important shifts in the film industry as a whole.

As we will show throughout this chapter, digital distribution has proven to be a tricky and fluid object of study. This proves to be true even when we approach agents forged in the digital economy, such as Netflix or Amazon Studios, developing their film strategy in a changing environment marked by uncertainty and growing competition.

We will begin this section by introducing some general considerations regarding the changes in formal distribution in the first two decades of the 21st century. Even if informal distribution, (from homemade VHS or DVD copies of a given movie to Bit Torrent activity or YouTube uploads), has been extensively used for horror films (Lobato and Ryan, 2011; Walker, 2014) we will focus our analysis mainly in formal distribution. Specifically, we will discuss the issues regarding the shortening of the delay between theatrical to home releases and the different typologies of VOD releases, ranging from simultaneous releases, also known as Day&Date or D&D, to Ultra-VOD

releases (where VOD precedes theatrical release) or Direct-To-VOD (with no theatrical release). We have identified three main «waves» of experiments, broadly situated in time and our study will be centered on how horror (and related sub-genres) fit into these different waves, and to what extent they anticipate and reflect the potentialities, and also the challenges and contradictions of emerging forms of formal digital distribution, that might shape the future of distribution and also production.

## **Methodology**

For our research, we have selected a sample of horror movies produced from 1999 to 2018 classified according to different criteria ranging from budget, production and distribution companies and release strategies. We have carried out a preliminary non-random selection of 130 titles, circumscribed to the American market, looking for significance and also diversity. We have taken into consideration factors like profitability, variability (regarding sub-genre and production size), cultural significance and singularity in terms of release strategy, at an individual and company level. Our database has included a series of items to be analysed, like key actors (particularly distributors) or delay from main theatrical release to VOD/ Home release. We have also looked into each global timeline of promotional screenings and releases, including festivals and limited territorial releases. In this chapter, we will show some relevant examples for each wave looking for change but also continuities.

## **Release experiments in a transitional period**

Experiments with the windowing system have been carried out for years to try to re-accommodate the industry to the changing landscape of digital consumption practices. New forms of digital distribution have been instrumental in a progressive shortening of windows, not without uncertainties related to consumer behaviour and the interdependence of producers, distributors and exhibitors (Waterman and Lee, 2003).

In Figure 1 we can observe how the delay between the theatrical and home video release has been steadily shrinking, from an average of 200 days in 1998 to less than 120 days in 2014. We will come back to this graph when considering the specific case of horror.

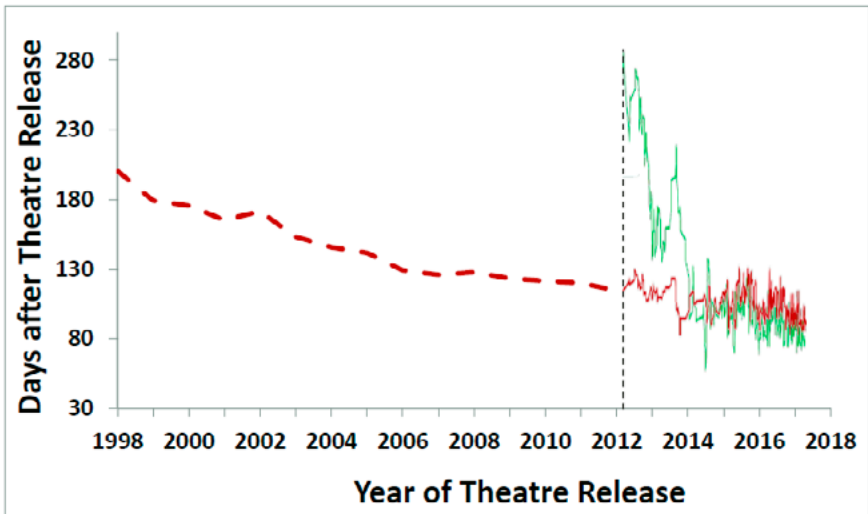


Figure 1: DVD and electronic sell-through release windows (1998-2017).

Source: Granados and Mooney, 2018 (Reproduced with permission)

For the purposes of this section we will cover what we have conventionally called a «transitional period», roughly established between mid-2000s (when Steven Soderberg's film *Bubble* was released on a Day&Date scheme) and the 2010s, when digital actors like Netflix or Amazon consolidated their own film production and distribution strategy. In this transitional period, we have distinguished three intertwined and overlapping moments or «waves»: the first wave of independent experiments that took place in the mid-2000s, later tactical movements carried out by some bigger companies in the early 2010s and the unfolding strategies by US-based but global digital content actors like Netflix from the mid-2010s.

If we observe the evolution of the windowing system during these years, we can appreciate that horror movies are a good exponent of the continuing trend of shortening windows:

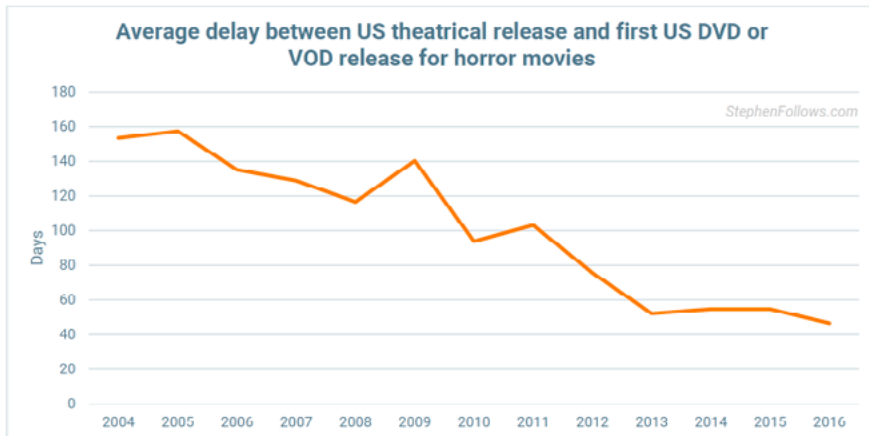


Figure 2: Average delay between US theatrical release and first US DVD or VOD release for horror movies. Source: Follows, 2017 (Reproduced with permission)

If we compare this illustration with the more general graph reproduced in Figure 1, it can be deduced that this trend has been proportionally taken even further, particularly after 2011, when release windows for horror movies fell under the psychological barrier of 100 days. By 2013, the delay was getting closer to the 50-day mark, less than half of the timing for Hollywood movies (see Brueggemann, & Thompson, 2014, or Granados & Mooney, 2018).

Taking into account budget size and the chronological evolution of release delay in our sample, we consider that a three-wave categorization is a useful way to describe alternative strategies to the standard windowing system, taking horror films as a reference. Indeed, there are some continuities between the general experiments and those addressed specifically to horror titles, but we will also point out some interesting differences.



In the following subsections, we will now focus on each wave, starting with a general overview to the experiments taking place in the film industry and then to horror film distribution.

## **Early digital experiments with windowing systems**

### **Industrial context**

In the mid-2000s there was already a growing concern regarding the sales of physical copies of home video. In this context, the Internet was seen as an opportunity as well as a menace, because of piracy and the changes in consumption that affected the entertainment industry. It can be argued that the first wave of systematic experiments in digital distribution were carried out in good measure because of the increasing difficulties in commercializing independent films through theatrical releases (Cunningham, 2015; Perren, 2010). The idea of streaming feature films or even of experimenting with simultaneous releases dates back to the late nineties, with start-ups like iFilm and films like *Quantum Project* (2000) (Iordanova and Cunningham, 2012). But it was not until the mid-2000s when companies like IFC and Magnolia started to conduct some more systematic experiments on simultaneous releases. Both IFC and Magnolia are subsidiaries of bigger companies, AMC Networks and 2929 Entertainment respectively, thus providing the necessary economy of scale to keep on performing these controlled experiments through time. Furthermore, both also have interests in exhibition (Perren, 2010), a move that, years later, Netflix would be considering to counterbalance the criticism towards the legitimization of Netflix's film originals. It is important to note that 2929 Entertainment produced Steven Soderberg's *Bubble* (2005), the starting point for its strategy of Day&Date releases and considered a turning point at the time (San Filippo, 2011; Nelson, 2014). In its turn, IFC started to experiment with VOD and Day&Date releases in 2006 with *CSA: The Confederate States of America* (Hildebrand, 2010, pp. 24-26). These

companies have also experimented with alternative distribution of horror films through Magnet Releasing, a branch of Magnolia Pictures, or IFC Midnight. In addition, Lionsgate, a mid-size studio participated by 2929 Entertainment, will play a key role regarding the experimentation with shorter windows for their horror films.

### **The case in horror: shrinking activity.**

A good place to start can be the resurgence of «indie horror» as a viable trend, made popular by the extraordinary success of the *found footage* film *The Blair Witch Project* in 1999 (Sexton, 2012). The film was already a case of window shortening in a peak time for DVD releases, with just about 100 days between theatrical and DVD release (the average for Hollywood movies in the late nineties was 180 days according to Illustration 1). At that time, low budget horror was being subjected to direct-to-video releases, as in the case of low profile sequels like *From Dusk to Dawn 2* (1999, Dimension Films, 1999) or *Candyman: Day of the dead* (1999, Artisan). It was also a time for mainstream horror films like *House on Haunted Hill*, *The Haunting*, *The Rage: Carrie 2*, *Stigmata* or *Lake Placid* (all with budgets exceeding \$20 M), which complied with the standard windowing system (Warner's *House on Haunted Hill*, for instance, went for 172 days), but they were not generally well received among horror fans.

It can be stated that *The Blair Witch Project* changed the scene for horror films radically in terms of production, distribution and promotion. Its rushed sequel, *Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2* (2000, Artisan) had a very short window release of only 85 days, tied to a series of special DVD and CD releases, which can be considered as an early experiment in adding value to the home video release through a lesser delay; however, the film performed disappointingly at the box office. Thus, even if during the first half of the 2000s there was a greater interest in distributing low budget horror films, most titles complied with the pattern of window releases as well as with the actual average delay between theatrical and home release,

ranging from 110 to 140 days (as seen in Illustration 2). Anyway, some significant titles were released under a relatively shorter window scheme, that is, around or even below the 110-day mark, even if it did not yet crystallize into a consistent trend.

Table 1 shows the already noticeable gap between titles released under standard and short window strategies. For instance, mainstream horror titles like *The Amityville Horror* remake (2005, Metro Goldwyn Mayer) or *Constantine* (2005, Warner Bros), were released under a standard window of more than 160 days, while all the installments of the popular New Line franchise *Final Destination* would be released with a delay longer than 130 days. At the same time, however, other similarly budgeted franchises like *Underworld* and *Resident Evil* (both distributed by Sony's Screen Gems), tended to go for shorter releases between 100 and 110 days (only exceptions being the first *Resident Evil* film and *Underworld: evolution*, which went for slightly longer delays). Other films over a \$10M budget, like *The Grudge* (a remake of the Japanese horror film *Ju-On* from 2002), *The exorcism of Emily Rose* and further—and bigger budgeted—installments of the *Saw* franchise were released also with a short delay.

Thus, budget would not seem to be as determinant as company's strategy. A good example is Lionsgate: as we have seen previously, Lionsgate would become renowned by its Day&Date strategy in the 2010s, but experiments with the windowing system were already in motion through franchises like *Saw*, which consolidated a slate of theatrical release around Halloween and home release the following January, with a consistent delay of around 100 days. Another defining moment would come in 2007 with another ultra-low budget «sleeper hit», *Paranormal Activity*, distributed by Paramount Pictures. Just like in *Saw*, the subsequent *Paranormal Activity* franchise would stick to a short window strategy covering from October to January. More interestingly, it would inform the strategy of the company for further horror films to come, like in the J.J. Abrams production *Cloverfield* (2008), a bigger budgeted *found footage* film tied to an ambitious transmedia promotional campaign and released in a considerably short window of 85 days.

This last example links to another effect of the *Blair Witch Project* phenomenon in relation to horror films: the impact of its promotional website, which played with the blurring between fiction and reality. The campaign displayed a cheap but effective way to raise expectations and reach younger demographics (Telotte, 2001). Furthermore, it allowed other independent films, inside and outside the horror genre to find new ways to become known and relevant by embracing the possibilities of the Internet as a platform for content creation and communication, and even distribution, in coincidence with the popularization of video sharing platforms like Vimeo or YouTube. We would like to vindicate here the early work of Lance Weiler, an independent filmmaker and transmedia innovator who preceded *Blair Witch Project* in 1998 with *The Last Broadcast*, a «lost in the woods» *found footage* horror film which was also accompanied by a website and even an *Alternate Reality Game* (ARG). His follow-up, *Head Trauma*, (2006), was also a transmedia horror film which was connected to a website with graphical, textual and sound content (Hope is missing) that anticipated and complemented the events that shaped the narrative universe of the film (Pitts, 2007). *Head Trauma* went for a limited theatrical release and a short release window of 58 days, and it holds some interesting connections to the sort of experiences carried out in this first wave outside the limits of the horror label by agents like Magnolia and IFC.

## **Release tactics by bigger film companies**

### **Industrial context**

In early 2010s, some mainstream agents started to experiment with alternative ways of distributing content prioritizing new digital distribution outlets, particularly D&D and Ultra-VOD. This is the case of Lionsgate with drama films like *Margin Call* (2011) or *Arbitrage* (2012) (Miller, 2012; Nelson, 2014, p. 65; August, Dao and Shin, 2015, p. 22), and also The Weinstein Company, through its subsidiary Radius TWC, with titles like *The Bachelorette* (2012) (Vary, 2012). Even major players like Sony tried Ultra-VOD in 2011 with Adam Sandler's *Just*

*go with it* (Szalai and McClintock, 2011), while Universal aborted a planned Ultra-VOD release that same year, *Tower Heist*, in fear of a boycott by exhibitors (McClintock, 2011; Nelson, 2014).

### **The case of horror: windows shatter**

In this period, short delay releases have already become more common, which concurs with the general trend shown in Illustration 2. If we observe significant titles from the period, as shown in Table 2, we will be able to notice how some tentative experiments have become much normalized, with more companies involved, even those tied to big studios. New kinds of experiments started to arise, particularly connected to the increasingly popularity of VOD, digital downloads, and streaming services like YouTube or Netflix that, in 2012, already accounted for half the Internet traffic in North America (Daileida, 2013).

Magnolia's subsidiary, Magnet Releasing, would become an essential actor in this second wave for its commitment to short delay and simultaneous releases for horror films, as already shown with 2009's *House of the devil* (see Table 1). Specialized in distribution of selected low budget US and foreign titles, Magnet would experiment with shorter windows with *The Innkeepers* (2011, 81 days), *John Dies at the End* (2012, 67 days) and the anthology horror film *V/H/S* (2012, 60 days). The bid was taken a step further for another anthology film, *The ABCs of Death* (2012), in which Magnet experimented with Ultra-VOD a month ahead of theatrical release. This strategy would be repeated for *V/H/S 2* (2013), *V/H/S Viral* (2014) and *The ABCs of Death 2* (2014). However, only announcements by bigger companies received attention of the specialized press. This was the case of two Paramount-distributed films, *Paranormal Activity: the Ghost Dimension* and *Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse* (both 2015), which reached home video formats only 17 days after theatrical release (Lang, 2015).

Still, the most interesting cases were Radius TWC productions. The first was the *post-apocalyptic sci-fi* film *Snowpiercer* (2013), a South-Korean film shot in English with an international cast ensemble:

in this case, VOD came just two weeks after theatrical release, which was particularly surprising as *Snowpiercer* was considered a high-end specialty product, that is, potentially appealing to wider audiences. As Brueggemann and Thompson (2014) state, *Snowpiercer* was an important attempt towards finding a right balance between theatrical and VOD, even though its idiosyncrasy, (a film based on a graphic novel, with a cult director) made it harder to replicate. Also, the secrecy surrounding its VOD release date contributed to a more favourable predisposition on the side of exhibitors, making it an integral part of its box-office success.

Another -and quite different- example was *It follows* (2014). The film was intended to be released under a similar strategy, that is, a limited theatrical run and VOD release two weeks later. But when it became an unexpected box-office phenomenon, exhibitors exerted pressure to go for a wide release and thus delay VOD, while cable companies and platforms would eventually press for keeping to the original plan of early VOD release (Brueggemann, 2015). After contradictory statements, the VOD date was eventually delayed allowing for a longer theatrical run, consequently, fitting the new standard window established at around 90 days (Han, 2015).

## **The emergence of new digital agents**

### **Industrial context**

One of the most disruptive movements in contemporary film production and distribution has been the entrance of new agents, specifically global Video-On-Demand services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO Max, Hulu (only available in Japan and the USA) or Disney+.

With all their own particularities, each of these services is committed to deliver exclusive original content, initially limited to TV formats, but in some cases expanded to original feature films. This has been done in two different ways: through rights acquisition in top festivals like Sundance, the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) or

South By Southwest (SXSW), also key markets for horror films, or acting as production or co-production companies. Still, the biggest difference between these agents lies in exhibition and distribution strategies: while Amazon and Hulu's bid goes for a theatrical run (wide or limited), closer to a standard 60-90-day delay before making their films available in the platform, Netflix commits to a variety of strategies, including limited theatrical runs in specific territories, but also Day&Date and Direct-to-VOD.

### **The case of horror: the Netflix Paradox**

The controversy regarding the aggressive strategy of Day&Date or direct-to Netflix releases is squarely connected to what can be considered as a *feature film* (or more precisely, a culturally legitimized *feature film*), in relation to theatrical exhibition. Precisely, the particularities of the horror film in terms of distribution has favored their suitability for experimentation, as observed in Table 2.

From this table, we can observe how the trend for window shortening, consolidated through wave two, has reached a standard around the 80 or 90 day mark, which again corresponds to the data from Figure 2 and is a sign of continuity. Distribution divisions of big studios becoming more active in the horror market, like Columbia or Universal Pictures, have followed the way opened by Paramount, Screen Gems (Sony) or New Line/ Warner in setting this new standard, and this trend has also been adopted by the younger but expanding company A24. Again, smaller companies have gone one step ahead: thus, *The Invitation* (2015, Drafthouse Films), *The Void* (2016, Screen Media Films), *The Eyes of my Mother* (2016, Magnet Releasing) or *The Autopsy of Jane Doe* (2016, IFC Midnight) are examples of Day&Date releases, involving theatrical and VOD, while *Holidays* (2016, Vertical Entertainment), opted for a Ultra-VOD strategy.

As for Netflix, it is important to understand that it adapts its strategy to the key audiences and markets for each product. Thus, we can observe how acquisitions from 2016, like Mike Flanagan's *Hush* or

*I am the Pretty Thing That Lives in the House* Were released as Direct-To-Netflix, after being presented in top Festivals like SXSW or TIFF. The subsequent Mike Flanagan film, Stephen King's adaptation *Gerald's Game* (2017), was already developed as a collaboration between producing company Intrepid Films and Netflix, going for a similar release strategy (Festival premiere and Direct-to-Netflix). A different case is *The Ritual* (2017), a British film acquired for international distribution by Netflix at TIFF, but which first had a theatrical run in the UK. Apparently, a similar case is Alex Garland's much anticipated film *Annihilation* (2018), with Netflix acquiring worldwide rights but with a first theatrical run in the USA. In this case, producing company Paramount was concerned about the film not being appealing enough for wider audiences, opting for a short theatrical run in the USA while selling the rights worldwide to Netflix. This posed the idea of using Netflix as a way to avoid the marketing costs of international theatrical distribution (Kit, 2017). This might explain the different windowing delays in both cases, that is, 119 days in the case of *The Ritual* and only 17 in the case of *Annihilation*. Therefore, the *Annihilation* case seems to be closer to *The Cloverfield Paradox* (2018), another Paramount film (this time co-produced with Bad Robot), which became unexpectedly released as a Direct-to-Netflix, in a much-publicized surprise announcement of immediate release just after the 2018 edition of the Super Bowl. The film was met with mostly negative reviews and it was suggested that Paramount used Netflix as a safety net to avoid a box-office bomb (Spiegel, 2018).

## Conclusions

Experiments in informal and formal distribution of horror films abound, even if it has not been enough considered in the specialized literature (see, for instance, the scarce reference to distribution strategies in the otherwise exhaustive Horror Report). Our research, even if limited at this stage to the American market and English-speaking titles, has shown how different horror titles and distribution companies have been experimenting during the first decades of the 21st Century with the windowing system, predating the future steps to be taken in other kind of titles. These experiments have not been



limited to low budget films or small independent companies: in fact, many experiments have been carried out by subdivisions of Majors (Sony, Warner, Paramount, Columbia, Universal or 20th Century Fox), Mini-Majors (Lionsgate, A24), or companies tied to bigger corporations (IFC, Magnolia). A historical approach has been useful to identify different moments, expressed as waves of experiments, which obeyed to various motivations regarding changes in consumption practices, emerging technologies and disruptive strategies by new actors.

As shown by the data and the literature, while following a similar path along time when compared to Hollywood titles, the trend towards the shrinking of windows has been much more noticeable in the case of horror films. But horror has also played a relevant part in experiments with riskier strategies, like Day&Date, Ultra-VOD or Direct-to-VOD. For instance, what seemed contingent in relation to specific experiences in the general approach to the second wave has proved to be much more systematic when we look specifically at horror. Looking at companies and actions taken, it can be said that despite being sometimes undervalued as «popular culture» in contrast to *art-house films*, in terms of distribution, horror is often closer to independent films than to mainstream *blockbuster* movies. These ties have been strengthened around what has come to be labelled as «Art Cinema Horror» (Howell, 2017), associated to titles like *It Follows*, *The Babadook*, *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, *What We Do in the Shadows* (all from 2014), *The witch* (2015), *Get Out* (2017), *Hereditary* (2019), *Us* (2019), *Midsommar* (2019) or *The Lighthouse* (2019). The case of *It Follows* shows that when box-office expectations rise, also does pressure to expand release windows towards what is considered an already established standard.

Although it is easy to establish continuities across waves, each one offers some significant shifts in terms of emerging and consolidating trends, showing a feedback between the industrial environmental conditions in a given moment, distributor decision-making and popular cycles (like *found-footage*, supernatural tales set in homes, exorcisms or *art-house horror*). It can be stated that the second wave highlights

the growing presence of VOD as a home consumption pattern through different platforms, while third wave is clearly dominated by specific subscription services based on the release of original content, like Netflix.

The «Netflix effect» has already been formidable, becoming the window of choice to decrease the risk for some anticipated titles with bigger budgets, either in the domestic or the international market. But it is also the main gatekeeper for what is produced and distributed, while also being an agent extremely reluctant to give away any data that could allow to evaluate the performance of a given movie. It is still soon to assess if further experiments in alternative releases in formal distribution will be subdued by the sense of security provided by an established global actor, eager to acquire original content to build a seemingly infinite catalogue. Or, on the contrary, if it can help to give more exposure to films that otherwise would be lost in the sometimes extremely long and difficult rounds through festival and international market circuits, thus appearing as more appealing, profitable products. This could also be the case for international horror titles, which can become global phenomena through platform distribution, as it was the case of Spanish film *Veronica* (2017). New platforms like HBO Max or Disney+ are increasing the competition based on secure talent for exclusive original production aimed at different audiences, territories and ways of consumption. And horror will keep having a pivotal role in this scenario.

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## SPECTRES OF INSURRECTION IN BONG JOON-HO'S CINEMA

Raphaël Jaudon

### **Spectrality**

It is a banality to say that Bong Joon-ho's cinema is a political cinema. His movies are full of characters diversely struggling against domination, capitalism, authority and the inner violence of the social order. Looking back at his whole career, from *Barking Dogs Never Bite* to *Okja* and *Parasite* (Bong, 2000; 2017; 2019), we cannot fail to notice the constancy of his critical work (Coppola, 2017, p. 109). Bong himself even happened to make it public in several occasions, supporting the Korean Labor Party, standing to condemn the drifts of financial capitalism, or firmly opposing Korea's involvement in the Iraq War (Jeong, 2016, p. 362). After his latest film *Parasite* won the Palme d'Or and the Academy Award for Best Picture, Bong was even mocked by U.S. President Donald Trump, who mainly attacked the film for being South Korean, but probably also for deploying a fierce condemnation of the upper- and middle-class contempt towards the poor.

However, I would like to show that Bong's commitment is not just about political themes, plots and public stance. Apart from these obvious signs, we can wander along another trail, consisting of faint



traces and half-erased footsteps, leading to a global picture of Korea and the world's most recent history. Following up these traces, I will try to reveal the presence of spectral images of insurrection in Bong's movies, i.e. images that bear the tormented memory of a political event in both content and form.

One interesting example can be found in *Memories of Murder* (Bong, 2003). The film deals with a criminal investigation which begins in 1986, during the last period of the Korean dictatorship. Politics is never the main topic, but draws something like a parallel scenario: at some point of the story, one of the characters briefly finds himself confronted to a political parade, disrupted by the rain and then by protesters. At the time, this seems to be of no further consequence. But much later in the film, as a new crime is about to happen and the policemen call for backup, they are told that not a single patrol is available, since all forces are requisitioned to repress a protest in Suwon, not far from Seoul. Thus the social and political context shows up bit by bit and briefly interferes with the main plot, inviting the audience to think about the paradoxical status of the police, dedicated to protection as well as repression.

The film welcomes the vivid memory of a time of struggle, and brings it back to its present viewers when they least expect. Yet this is not any revenant, but one that was facing the threat of oblivion: along with the success of the democratization movement in Korea came the will of «national reconciliation», the desire to move on and pardon former political criminals. *Memories of Murder* is released in this context, and Bong somehow seems to feel that the past is not ready to be forgotten, because it remains emotionally relevant. This is how ghosts are born. As Georges Didi-Huberman wrote, «*what survives in culture is above all the tragic*»: pathetic feelings, frustrations, unfulfilled desires and unpunished crimes (2017, p. 90). Hence the numerous links the film draws between the detective's work and historical inquiry, resting on what a commentator called «spectral historiography» (Jeon, 2011, p. 78).

There are two other movies by Bong that are haunted by political and insurrectional gestures. And strangely, both can be qualified as fantastic movies: *The Host* and *Snowpiercer* (Bong, 2006; 2013). I shall now seize this unexpected convergence as an opportunity to discuss possible relationships between politics and the fantastic genre.

## Repression

In *The Host*, a giant amphibious creature emerges from the Han River in Seoul, then starts eating and kidnapping people, including the main character's daughter Hyun-seo. Many commentators have noted the critical background of the film, since it is an American scientist who unwillingly gives birth to the monster by dumping chemicals into the river, and later on the government tries to kill it by spreading another chemical called «Agent Yellow» -a name which explicitly refers to Agent Orange, a carcinogenic herbicide used by the U.S. Army during the Korean and Vietnam Wars for tactical purposes. Thus one can easily see *The Host* as a satirical, anti-American horror movie.

However, America is just the most obvious target. Another one would be the Korean dictatorship and the Gwangju massacre of May 1980, when pro-democracy student protesters were beaten and fired upon by the police, leading to an estimated death toll of at least a few hundred, perhaps closer to one or two thousand (Plunk, 1985, pp. 5-6). Unlike the reference to the U.S., this one is not an allegory, but a spectre: «something or someone that one cannot forget, and yet is impossible to recognize clearly» (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 12). Popular culture, novels and movies have long depicted ghosts as unappeased spirits, tied to the physical world until they can fulfill their desire for justice. The fantastic figure itself is inseparable from its political and philosophical imagination. Historical events, such as the ones that occurred in Gwangju, can therefore be considered «spectral» as soon as the truth has not yet been established fully, regarding the number of victims, the location of the bodies and the guilt of the perpetrators (Déotte, 2002, pp. 112-114).

In the early sequence of Hyun-seo's abduction, a thrilling shot shows the helpless girl staring at her father as the monster is swooping on her. The impression of fragility is reinforced by the choice of close framing, the creature being too big to be shown in its entirety. In a chapter of the book *The Global Auteur*, Jeong Seung-hoon claims that, in a Korean spectator's mind, the attack of the monster «overlaps with the image of a 1980s college girl protesting on the street, about to be killed by brutal riot police» (2016, p. 367). Although he does not give any precise reference, one could think of a picture taken by photographer Hwang Chong-gun during the Gwangju massacre, which appears in a series of photographs from the uprising edited by the May 18 Memorial Foundation (Katsiaticas and Na, 2006, p. 159), and is quite famous today because it served in various commemoration acts. It is clear that both images share a gesture of contortion, resignation and desperate struggle against an overwhelming power.



Figure 1: *The Host* (Bong, 2006).

We may go further in the interpretation process. This is not only the shot with the monster, but the whole sequence, that welcomes the ghostly presence of the past. Before the arrival of the girl, there is a fight between the monster, the father Gang-du and a few bystanders.

The fight takes place between two big trucks that firstly seem to draw a line of possible assault, but soon turn out to function as a trap for the characters (Figure 1). Again, Bong's *mise en scène* echoes the events of Gwangju, when protesters were brutally charged by the police, and found themselves caught between the buses they originally chartered to gather for the protest.

But rather than the historical events, what is implicitly summoned here is the fictional reconstruction proposed by Jang Sun-woo in *A Petal* (1996): in this movie, adapted from a novel by Ch'oe Yun, the Gwangju massacre is seen through the eyes of a 15-year-old girl and her mother who try to escape the police by running helplessly between buses and other urban elements (Figure 2). Whether Bong was specifically inspired by this scene, we cannot tell for sure, but the composition of the shot distinctly recalls both Jang's images and some of the best-known photographs of the Gwangju events. This detail, along with the general atmosphere of panic and violence, allow us to acknowledge the presence of the spectre.



Figure 2: *A Petal* (Jang, 1996).

In Korea, *A Petal* is one of the most famous movies about the Gwangju Uprising, and it can be identified as the matrix of memory

(Kim, 2002, pp. 104-110): Bong summons images of the protests, but only in a vicarious way, through the mediation of Jang's fictional work.

Now that we have identified this process, we can go back to the abduction of Hyun-seo. The narratives of *A Petal* and *The Host* are very similar: following a dramatic burst of violence, a young girl ends up separated from her family, and a small group of people is formed to rescue her. In both cases, characters don't even know whether the girl is still alive and worth looking for. This is a common feature of dictatorship eras: when caught by the police, political opponents are neither dead or alive, but disappeared. Well, this is precisely the type of situation when a memory is to become a spectre. According to philosopher Jean-Louis Déotte, spectrality is always related to disappearance: there is a ghost when a corpse is missing, which denies the living the right to even mourn the loved one's death (2004, pp. 356-357). In both movies, the story is mainly concerned by the consequences of these disappearances, and so are the characters. But we have to remember what Didi-Huberman wrote, in the wake of Aby Warburg's epistemological work: one can only comprehend the surviving of a pathetic energy through time by addressing problems of form (Didi-Huberman, 2017, pp. 115-125). This advice can prove useful in film analysis, allowing us to see *A Petal*, not as a mere source of inspiration for *The Host*, but as an aesthetic program.

In the abduction sequence, the attack of the monster repeats the framing and composition of the panic following the uprising: the frame focuses on the parent holding the hand of his/her daughter, then the camera moves in order to follow the characters, but too slowly, and seems to be overtaken by the global rush. When the characters finally drop hands, we understand that the girls have been left behind but we don't witness it directly; instead of it, we have a close shot of the parents' faces overwhelmed by terror, all of it filmed in slow motion. What is interesting in the comparison is that, in *A Petal*, the reverse angle never occurs: we don't see how the girl is caught up by the policemen, but only see it through the eyes of the mother. And later in the film, as the girl remembers the dramatic events, Jang abruptly

cuts from her weeping face to an animated enemy that combines the features of a soldier and a beast. Every menace thus tends to be allegorized, postponed or even to remain off-screen. The whole movie rests on a series of absent reverse shots.

Consequently, *The Host* not only summons the ghost of a past insurrection, but the one of an insurrection that was already a ghost, a forbidden or absent image. So, as Bong films the girl about to be crushed by the monster, he represents the exact moment that Jang could not represent in *A Petal*, except that military violence is now personified under the traits of a slimy creature. He accomplishes the missing reverse shot, thereby finding the strength to stare at a power that could not be stared at.

To deal with the Gwangju trauma, Jang also uses the motif of the «hole»: the girl cannot admit her mother's death, and refers only to her body «with a hole» –i.e. that was pierced by a bullet. At this point it is only a literary metaphor, but in *The Host*, the whole sequence rests on the idea of the hole as a figurative event. The monster's oral cavity, of course, is an unfathomable pit where people simply disappear without even fulfilling any alimentary purpose. But the most visible element is the father's mouth, which remains largely open as his daughter is being attacked. The whole body is stunned and turned into a yawning gap, a hole in the character's face as well as in the image itself. The political wound of the mother is incorporated by Gang-du, in the form of a figurative loss: he is not the one who took the bullet, but his body is pierced as if he was. Bong's aesthetics thus combines the victim and the viewer into a single body, which now bears the stigmata, and the responsibility of a coming revolt.

## Rebellion

In a word, this early scene lays the foundations of the whole movie's spectral aesthetics. Bong sets the ghost of the Gwangju Uprising up, so that its memory can be reactivated anytime, when needed.

The end of the movie provides such an occasion. During the final fight, Gang-du and his family manage to harm the monster by uniting their talents. At this time, his brother Nam-il, who was previously defined as a former college protester, reconnects with his own past by ardently throwing Molotov cocktails on the creature. The spectre of insurrection comes back in the spotlight. Bong's aesthetics isolates the protesting body by playing on luminous contrast and the neutrality of the background, only made of industrial wilderness and a pale but dense mist (Figure 3). This contributes to the glorification of the gestures of revolt.



Figure 3: *The Host* (Bong, 2006).

One can also notice a formal scheme that unites all the fighting sequences. Several times the characters try to oppose the monster, with unequal determination and success: Hyun-seo is taken in the beginning of the film, then two homeless boys are attacked and only one of them survives, a few minutes later Hee-bong, Gang-du's father, tries to shoot the monster and gets killed, and finally Nam-il manages to harm and scare it with his Molotov cocktails. In any case Bong stages the confrontation with a strong sense of depth of field, repeating the same composition, with human figures in the foreground and the giant beast's jaws right behind their head. The first three encounters

lead only to defeat and death. Yet the final confrontation is slightly different: while keeping the same composition, Bong deeply alters the balance of the shot. The enemy is repelled and cornered in the back of the frame, whereas the characters are getting the active power they previously missed.

Following the hypothesis of a ghostly political scenario, we can assume that this ending sequence embodies Bong's response to history. In the Gwangju events as staged by Jang –and perhaps as thought of by the Korean people– there was still a missing image of the enemy, be it the assaulting policemen or, more generally, the dictatorial state. The past itself was a spectre, a history without images (Lee, 2014, pp. 109-110). *The Host* thus carries out the protesters' posthumous rebellion, turning what originally was an image of resignation into a possibility of victory. A commentator once wrote that the monster created by Bong was strangely weak, from a certain point of view: like human characters, it happens to slip on a wet floor or a strip of grass (Brinig, 2011, p. 95). It may be strong, but it remains subject to the laws of physics. And it is finally destroyed by ordinary people, not by any military squad or nuclear weaponry. That might be one of the reasons why it is able to welcome a political reading: as dangerous as it may be, the struggle for equality and justice is never a losing battle.

It may not be a coincidence that Bong Joon-ho kept on exploring political themes, a few years later, with *Snowpiercer*. The story is set in a post-apocalyptic future when humanity has been nearly wiped out by a massive failure in an attempt at climate engineering. The few survivors live in a train that is endlessly spanning around the globe to prevent people from freezing to death. The whole movie deals with the revolution led by lower-class tail section passengers against governing people of the front. The protesting energy that remained implicit in *The Host* is now led to its plain potential. What shall draw our attention is the bursting of violence, the instant when an inequitable situation turns into vibrant rebellion. In the film, this happens when Andrew, one of the confined poor passengers, throws his shoe towards one of the visiting officials of the front section.



Once again, Bong summons the spectre of a real political event: the very famous moment when Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zaidi threw his shoes at American President George W. Bush Jr., in Bagdad, on December 14, 2008. This incident happened only a few years before *Snowpiercer* was released, so we can suppose that a large part of the audience still had it in mind; but as far as I know, its presence in the film has never been fully analyzed in an academic way.

Let's begin by pointing out that the shoe-throwing episode does not appear in the comic book *Le Transperceneige* (Lob and Rochette, 1984), from which the film is adapted. It is likely that Bong willingly set it up to echo the political actuality. We shall also note that the protester is shot from behind, thus imitating the framing of the available footage of President Bush's press conference; in both case the face of the so-called aggressor is hidden, and what is emphasized is the gesture itself. The fictional shoe is confusingly similar to the real one: a brown leather man shoe with a thick sole and curvy, highly visible seams (Figure 4). As the guards bring back the shoe to serve as a warning and prevent any further attempt to destabilize the train's social order, a series of two close-ups allow us to examine the item carefully, and reinforces the impression of *déjà-vu*. Moreover, a few minutes after the incident, Bush Jr. called for silence and pretended to resume his speech, but immediately made a joke about the fact that al-Zaidi threw a size 10 shoe -probably bringing up this detail to divert commentators from the political meaning of the event-. Well, in *Snowpiercer*, Minister Mason played by Tilda Swinton fittingly observes that this is not only a common shoe, but «size 10 chaos».

But what seems to have drawn Bong's attention is not only the actual incident between Bush Jr. and al-Zaidi; it is also the way it was absorbed and twisted by popular culture. For example, the silver plate in which the shoe is presented to Minister Mason can recall the copy of al-Zaidi's shoe displayed in «Mmuseumm» in New York City. The very fact of sanctifying the item ironically emphasizes the overdramatic and pathetic dimension of power. It also demonstrates the malleability of the political gesture, that can be qualified as effective as soon as it is fictionalized, distorted and played with by artists.



Figure 4: *Snowpiercer* (Bong, 2013).

Similarly, one could first be surprised that the throwing episode takes up a very short time in the film, and is barely visible because of the camera movements and the lack of light. The gesture is not as glorified as it could have been. But the reason is to fit to the original footage. Indeed, what made the al-Zaidi incident so famous is that it was immediately broadcast on the Internet, on CBS News YouTube channel, reaching high popularity among people from all over the world (the video has now passed 6 million views). The footage is of a poor aesthetic value: it is shot from some place in the audience, and the operator clumsily tries to zoom out to record the action. As a result, almost all the video is dedicated to the President's speech after al-Zaidi has been evicted from the room. The same narrative structure occurs in *Snowpiercer*, the incident leading to a long speech by Minister Mason, in a half-humorous, half-authoritarian manner that accurately reproduces Bush Jr.'s *ethos*. Bong's movie thus raises the problem of the circulation of images in the digital era, and states that the spectre of insurrection is only real when massively shared.

## Gestures

Both *The Host* and *Snowpiercer* are based on a gesture of throwing. Here Bong's aesthetics pertains to a political iconographic tradition that

can be traced far back in time. It relates to a fundamental structure of domination, since the very fact of having to throw an object at one's opponent means that one does have access to (or doesn't want to use) regular weapons. The agonistic dimension of any gesture of throwing therefore mingles with a critical purpose: what matters is the dialectic between the strong and the weak, the dominant and the dominated, the professional fighter and the militant. For example, we find such a motif in the 19th century pictorial iconography of the French «barricades»: while royal guards have got horses, sabers and bayonets, the insurgents of 1930 and 1948 are often represented with rocks, simple work tools and shelters made out of daily objects –the unfairness of the fight can have both a rhetorical and comical function (Pauquet, 1997, pp. 103-107). Bong's characters make a similar use of makeshift weapons, be it Nam-il's handcrafted Molotov cocktails or Andrew's desperate shoe-throwing attack. In the ending sequence of *Parasite* too, the characters use kitchen tools as weapons to get revenge for their social humiliation. In doing so, they all claim the heritage of past revolutions and lay the foundations for an aesthetic community of insurrectional gestures.

One could also read gestures from an anthropological point of view, stating that the repetition of a same body configuration draws a link between protesters from different times and spaces. Every new occurrence reinforces the evidence that all these bodies form a political community, regardless of the context they live in and the enemy they fight. In times of massive political commitment, e.g. in the end of the 1960s, newspapers often displayed similar images of young people throwing rocks at the police, some of them shot in Paris, New York, Rome, others shot in Warsaw or Belgrade: «since the gestures are identical, so would be the political motivations» (Leblanc, 2009). In a more philosophical way, Georges Didi-Huberman's most recent work demonstrates how powerful this idea of surviving gestures is to our visual culture. Gathering images from various ages and artistic fields, he shows that the will to rise up is not only a permanent feature of human societies, but also of the human body (Didi-Huberman, 2016, pp. 133-141).

From this perspective, Bong's science fiction movies provide continuity as well as originality. The persistence of old figurative patterns both confirms their initial relevance and takes their critical potency into imaginary situations that address present issues (class struggle, authority, American imperialism...). It is of no coincidence that this spectral process occurs most vividly in two of the three fantastic movies directed by Bong Joon-ho. Because the fantastic genre allows him to create situations of a greater threat than reality can provide, the characters' ardent will to fight becomes even more inspiring. Gang-du's family and the poor inhabitants of the train thus establish themselves as continuators of the protesters that fought against the Korean dictatorship in the 1980s, then against American imperialism, and never retired from fighting. As he orchestrates the recurrence of all these ghosts, Bong demonstrates that fiction can be a powerful way of reviving and reshaping the people's protesting energies.

Bong also tries to draw our attention to the various uses that can be made of insurrectional gestures: we rapidly pass from a heroic celebration of the people's potency to a both comic and tragic meditation on human weakness (*Snowpiercer*), or the other way around (*The Host*). For it is one thing to lean on the ghosts of our predecessors, and it is quite another thing to learn how to deal with their heritage -*a fortiori* in the form of moving images-. As far as cinema is concerned, it means that any attempted revolt must come with a reconfiguration of the body and its dynamic potential.

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## Block II

### ***MAD DOCTORS, MAGICIANS, HEROES AND OTHER CHARACTERS IN LITERATURE, THEATER AND MASS MEDIA***







# THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF THE *RICK AND MORTY* TELEVISION SERIES

David Ramírez Gómez

## 1. Science transformed into a television script

The American adult television series *Rick and Morty* was created in 2013 as a *Back to the Future* parody. His argument is about the adventures lived by Morty Smith and his grandfather Rick Sánchez, a 70-year-old scientist with enormous knowledge of the universe and an innumerable arsenal of high-tech devices, including a gun that allows him to jump to an infinite number of dimensions of the multiverse and travel in space immediately to any planet within it.

This fanciful premise and its tons of irreverent humor have made the series a true phenomenon among the youngest spectators, which would lead in principle to be considered a mere entertainment program. However, a deeper analysis of the series will lead us to establish that has a more solid scientific basis than is apparent.

### 1.1. Rick Sánchez and the scientific method

Rick constantly mocks any attitude that is not governed by the most elementary principles of the scientific method, especially all

manifestations of tradition or religion. The most elaborate plot on this issue is found in *Get Schwifty* (S2: E5). A giant alien head arrives on Earth and causes chaos due to its immense gravitational mass. Faced with this presence, we can analyse two different positions. Firstly, those who do not know the true nature of the entity, instead of trying to find out about it, choose to worship him as a god. Secondly, the fervent followers fall into a mistake by confusing coincidence with causality when, at one point in the chapter, they pray and the invading head smiles. The application of a rational method would have ruled out this prayer-smile relationship by not fulfilling the reproducibility condition.

On the other hand, Rick does not flinch since he starts from knowledge, he knows that the head belongs to one of the many extraterrestrial races he has studied and deduces that he does not seek to be revered, but entertained, so he composes a funny song. His experiment is reproduced by getting him to smile the two times he plays the song.

In *Something Ricked This Way Comes* (S1: E9), he charges himself against the supermarket when it is discovered that Rick's granddaughter, Summer, works in a shop with a mysterious boss, who will later know that he is the devil, who sells supposedly magical items. Rick, instead of being frightened or assuming the diabolical nature of objects, will fight against him by creating an apparatus that analyzes his operation and neutralizes it, thus ruining the business to the devil.

In *Look Who's Purging Now* (S2: E9), Rick and Morty arrive on a planet with a society which one night a year, is allowed to kill people, without any consequences. Rick is curious and chooses to observe from the distance of his ship, as a good scientist would do: trying to interfere as little as possible in it so as not to condition his behaviour or the results obtained.

Other attitudes that resemble the protocols of reasoning of an analytical mind are found in *Rest and Ricklaxation* (S3: E6) when he tries to calculate the formula for happiness, in *Lawnmower Dog* (S1:

E2), when he launches a hypothesis to immediately doubt it due to the lack of evidence or in *Auto Erotic Assimilation* (S2: E3), when he creates a machine to commit suicide but first tests it on an alien animal as if it were a guinea pig before moving onto the next phase and testing it on humans, namely, himself.

## 1.2. The multiverse

Of course, the authors Rick and Morty are not the first to talk about the concept of the multiverse. The theory of a possible multiplicity of worlds already appeared in the texts of several atomist philosophers of the fifth century BC. However, it is not until the twentieth century that the first hypotheses, recognised as scientific, arrived. In the 20<sup>th</sup>, the foundations of quantum mechanics began to be established, framed within physics and in charge of describing nature on small spatial scales by introducing a series of counterintuitive facts that did not appear in the previous physical paradigms.

One of the first and most important contributions came from Werner Heisenberg's hand with the uncertainty principle, which established the impossibility of knowing at the same time the speed and position of a particle. The greater the accuracy of the speed, the greater the uncertainty about its position, and vice versa<sup>1</sup>.

Another of the fundamental proposals of this discipline was published in 1935 in an article by physicist Erwin Schrödinger, for whom in the measurement of the position of a particle, it can be in several states or places at the same time, not being able to establish a single measurement, but a probability of the possible results. To illustrate this fact, he developed the celebrated and hypothetical experiment of the cat enclosed in a fully enclosed steel box, next to a vessel with hydrogen cyanide and a hammer connected to a Geiger counter. The mechanism would be completed with a source of radioactive atoms, so that if the radioactive decay of an atom occurs, the Geiger counter would fire the hammer, break the vessel and the cat would die. Quantum mechanics

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<sup>1</sup> Mecánica cuántica. ECURED. Recovered from <https://bit.ly/3lXZely>.

would give a 50% chance that the cat dies after one hour and another 50%, that it lives and, therefore, would be alive and dead at the same time. This situation would end when someone checked the interior, for example through a peephole, at which time the cat would become alive or dead.

This experiment gave rise to various interpretations. The majority in the beginning would be the so-called «Copenhagen», the most aseptic when it was pointed out that the important thing was simply that half of the time you will find the cat alive and the other half, dead<sup>2</sup>.

In 1956 Hugh Everett presented a doctoral thesis that spoke of the Many-Worlds Interpretation, better known in quantum physics as the Theory of Parallel Universes because with each quantum event, the universe is divided into two parallel universes. Applied to Schrödinger's experiment in one of those universes the cat would be alive; in the other, dead. This theory was rejected by most physicists of the time for its alternative explanation to that of Copenhagen.

Although a discouraged Everett soon abandoned his work in physics, years later he was rescued by various theorists such as Bryce DeWitt or Aurélien Barrau, who defends the interpretation that every possible outcome of each event can be defined or exist in its own history or universe, through quantum decoherence. These worlds would not be spatially separated, but would exist as parallel universes and disconnected forever due to the rapid spatial creation by inflation. Along these lines, in the 80s the concept was strengthened that the inflationary process that our universe generated could eternally beget new universes. Brian Greene points out that inflationary cosmology would establish that the Big Bang was probably not a unique event, but that it would have created an uncountable amount of Big Bangs, each giving rise to its own separate universe, being that we inhabit only a bubble of a large cosmic bubble bath of universes.

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<sup>2</sup> El gato de Schrödinger. Física fundamental. Recovered from <http://www.fisicafundamental.net/misterios/gato.html>.

Although it is currently a minority view, Yasunori Nomura states that every year the number of cosmologists who accept that what we consider as the universe could be a tiny part of a superior structure, a multiverse with numerous universes, in which the so-called fundamental laws increases from nature they would take different forms. Thus, the primitive universe would have expanded exponentially creating «bubble universes» due to the difference of the difference in rapidity of expansion between different regions.

George Ellis declared that all these concepts tried to jump from fiction pages to scientific journals without success since the indications of the existence of the multiverse at most could become indirect, contravening the principle of empirical verification.

Therefore, the argumentative pillar on which much of *Rick and Morty* is articulated is based on their acceptance of the controversial Theory of the Parallel Universes. The most propitious episode to confirm it is a *A Rickle in Time* (S2: E1). At the end of the first season Rick and Summer have a huge party at the Smiths' house. Morty's parents, Beth and Jerry, return from an excursion and head towards the door of the house extremely angry that the rules of the house had been broken in their absence. Rick then decides to use a device to paralyse time. That break, initially designed so that both he and his grandchildren have time to clean the house, runs for several months, after which, Rick lets time flow again, but not before warning them that for a while they should not hesitate when making decisions because reality may have become unstable.

At first everything went well because Beth and Jerry, although a little surprised, accept that suddenly the house is clean. However, the situation soon takes a twist, because the grandchildren begin to doubt their actions and reality begins to unfold, bifurcating the screen with each variant produced in some of the new realities. This script twist could easily fit into one of the possible interpretations of Everett's work, probably the one with less acceptance, but more spectacular because it is so visually striking. The reference to Heisenberg comes

when Rick tries to measure his position accurately and realises that he cannot do it because of this situation. The three characters are extracted from space-time and end up floating in a vacuum, although within it a large number of Schrödinger's cats orbit, therefore, they will have to dedicate the rest of the chapter to joining the timelines that have been created in order to avoid a collapse quantum.

### **1.3. Extraterrestrial life**

The presence of all kinds of extraterrestrial life forms and their interaction with humans, either in a friendly or hostile way, makes up another of the great narrative axes of the series.

The possibility of a life outside the Earth is accepted by the majority of the scientific community. The infinite extension of the universe / multiverse and the ignorance, almost as infinite, about its characteristics would make it reckless to categorically deny the existence of aliens. Currently, the most complete discipline to address this issue is astrobiology or exobiology that combines physics, chemistry, astronomy, astrophysics, molecular biology, ecology and geology. However, all this accumulated knowledge about planets and satellites has not prevented the attempt of space conquest from giving rise to an unappealable conclusion: every effort to find or contact aliens has been in vain.

Therefore, in this aspect the main source of inspiration of the scriptwriters cannot be science, but the vast imaginary that emerged from the countless cultural samples, mostly novels and films.

### **1.4. Simulated reality**

Another recurring theme in the series is simulated reality. In the chapter *M. Night Shaym-Aliens!* (S1: E4) the Zigerions kidnap Rick, Morty and Jerry and keep them on a platform that simulates the city where the three live three-dimensionally. Morty and Jerry live in it without noticing the difference and once again Rick will be

the rational, the one who is not fooled by the senses and the one who perceives the errors of conception of this vision.

In *Total Rickall* (S2: E4), even Rick is tricked when telepathic alien parasites are responsible for connecting with the minds of all family members to create false memories to think that the parasites have lived a lifetime in Smith's house.

The concept that the human being can be immersed in a simulated reality has been treated extensively by philosophy. From Parmenides to Bertrand Russell, through Plato or Descartes, there are many who have addressed the question of whether the human being lives a fiction hidden from his eyes. However, the scientific community has been much more reluctant to accept this type of simulation as possible. The main treatises on the subject have come from the areas of psychology and neurology. Among the first, highlights the American mathematician and psychologist Elizabeth Loftus, who had to leave the American Psychological Association because of the controversy arising from her studies. In them she writes about the possibility of creating false memories through techniques such as hypnosis or memory recovery therapy, collecting cases of people suggested by their therapists to the point of accepting real fictitious situations from their childhood. She and her team carried out several experiments in that line, the most famous being the one in which up to 25% of the subjects in the study ended up mistakenly believing that they had been lost in a supermarket when they were 5 years old .

Another significant example is found in a coordinated research between the University of Wellington (New Zealand) and that of Victoria (Canada) in which manipulated photographs were used to induce a false childhood memory of riding a balloon.

Loftus points out that the key to implanting a memory of an event that never happened, lies in not creating stress to the recipient, a process that coincides with that carried out in the series. The Zigerions



recreate pleasant situations for Morty, such as his teacher applauding his poor maths knowledge as excellent, and for Jerry, who triumphs professionally, by winning awards and moving up the company with an absurd idea. Similarly, telepathic parasites only have the ability to invent happy memories in the Smith family, which will cause their downfall, since that is how Rick and his grandchildren know who real people are: those of whom they do have unpleasant memories. Everyone else is shot dead.

Abandoning the psychological approach to suggestion, neurology has studied the physical mechanisms that are activated in the brain when a false memory is created. For example, doctors Hongkeun Kim and Roberto Cabeza concluded by means of magnetic resonances that the brain increases the activity more according to whether it considers that the memory is true, the median temporal lobe, or false, the frontal parietal.

In another study, on this occasion carried out by various researchers from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), it was ruled that a group of dentate gyrus cells, a region of the hippocampus, of some mice had the ability to create false memories if over optogenetic mice are applied, a technique that has enormous potential since it is already used to treat neurodegenerative diseases and disorders such as insomnia or epilepsy by selectively activating groups of brain neurons. The technique would start from the development of light-sensitive proteins, to then introduce genes that encode these proteins in the target cells or tissues and finally generate detection systems for the behavior changes of these cells and tissues. Light would function as an inducing agent.

So theoretically it is feasible to create memories in a person, although with the current technology, the possibilities of deceiving the mind touch the impossible for now.

### **1.5. Robotics**

The projection of the future of robotics is not lacking in each chapter and that is probably Rick's biggest hobby. With his own hands he builds spaceships, indistinguishable robots of the human being and mechanisms of all kinds.

The culmination of his technological skills will come in one of the most famous chapters of the series, *Pickle Rick* (S3: E3), in which Rick turns himself into a pickle and then makes an exoskeleton with cockroach legs and mice to which connects to his own nervous system using a cable that transmits electricity.

The idea of controlling a body, living or dead, from its impulses in the head dates back to the 18th century, when the Italian physiologist and physicist Luigi Galvani popularised the theory of galvanism, that is, the existence of an electrical force generated by the organism and that remained even after death. This theory lost strength as the experiments did not reach their goal.

A branch of neuroscience partially resumed the concept in several studies of some relevance, as one of the University of Tokyo later continued by the University of Texas. In both, the researchers were able to control the movement of a cockroach by direct electrical impulses to their brain. It is probably no accident that Rick also uses cockroaches. It could be said that he or the writers of the series have read these studies.

### **1.6. Biology**

Biology is another area of knowledge that is discussed in the series. For example, in *Anatomy Park* (S1: E3), obvious parody of *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), Rick has built attractions inside the body of a beggar named Ruben and, faced with several problems in his operation, sends Morty to his interior after miniaturizing him with lightning.

The miniaturising machine is a classic in the genre of science fiction that obviates the obstacles, which for now are insurmountable, that prevent its materialisation. One usually speaks, citing Isaac Asimov, of three possible mechanisms to carry out such reduction. The first would start from shrinking the atoms, but the orbit of the electrons cannot vary because it is subject to the Planck Constant. Nor is it feasible to reduce the distance between each atom, as their respective clouds of probability repel each other. There would only be the possibility of extracting atoms, but doing so in such a high amount would lead to the loss of the functionality of all organs.

One of the areas of biology, genetics, will be used to construct the plot of several chapters. In *Rick Potion #9* (S1: E6) Morty asks Rick for help to make Jessica fall in love with him with a «potion», using a term reminiscent of fantasy. His grandfather replies with scientific terms: *«I'm sorry to say it, but what people call 'love' is just a chemical reaction that compels animals to breed»*. At the insistence of his grandson, he will end up preparing a product following a formula that mixes oxytocin with DNA from Morty and vole, a rodent who dedicates much of his life to copulate with the females of his species. However, Rick forgets to warn him that mixing it with the flu virus could produce a contagion effect, which actually ends up happening after which all the people on the planet fall in love with Morty almost instantly. Rick will try to solve the problem by creating two more formulas, with other combinations that fail again.

Once again, the script starts with techniques tested in reality and extrapolates them to fiction to achieve a surprising result. To begin with, it is true that oxytocin is a hormone produced by the hypothalamus that also functions as a neurotransmitter and that has been linked from neuroscience and biology to positive affective bonds since it is segregated in greater quantity when we are in an environment of confidence and sexual acts.

Likewise, the on-demand manipulation of DNA has traces of reality. For this, Rick could apply CRISPR technology, a recent genome

editing tool that allows a section of the DNA to be sectioned and then corrected and altered in an easy, fast and highly accurate way. It is expected in the near future to cure diseases with a genetic cause, modify the genomes of human embryos, improve transgenic foods, modify microorganisms for industrial and food use, etc.

It won't be the last time Rick manipulates the DNA in the series. Thus, in *The ABC's of Beth* (S3: E9), Rick's daughter will make a clone from a finger of Tommy, a childhood friend of Beth who she has just killed. Rick achieves it in three hours, in an accelerated and simplified process with respect to the real one, or rather the theoretically real one, since a human being has never been cloned.

Rick does not follow the process of reproductive cloning by which copies of whole animals are currently produced. In it, the DNA of a mature somatic cell is transferred to an ovum that has its own nucleus that contains DNA extracted and that is finally implanted in the belly of an adult female animal that will give birth to an animal with the same composition genetics that donor of the somatic cell, in this case Tommy. Rick opts for therapeutic cloning, that is, the one that produces embryonic stem cells to create tissues, which at most could get tissues, but never a complete Tommy.

To end this episode, it is pointed out that Tommy has sexual relations with various animals for years crossing their DNA and creating hybrids, an absolutely impossible result, more typical of classical mythologies or fertile imaginations such as H.G. Wells.

The closest thing to Tommy's hybrid children would be a laboratory body like the one presented in 2017 by the international team of researchers from the Salk Institute that contained human and pig cells and would be used for future transplants. What was recently considered a chimera, has become possible thanks to advances with stem cells and CRISPR technology that we talked about earlier.

## 2. Conclusions

We will finish with the confirmation that the scriptwriters of *Rick and Morty* have included in their delirious arguments traces of reality so that the viewer can learn or reflect while having fun. Of the six treated areas, only one is completely ruled out, that of extraterrestrial life.

We can also conclude that this program is taken more seriously than scientific dissemination seemed at first, as long as we remember that it never denies its fictional status and, therefore, should not be required to be rigorous as a documentary, nor that it transmits as much information as a good informative book.

However, you can ask for solvency and respect. When the series won the Emmy award for best animation series, Mike McMahan, one of its producers, summed up the whole thesis of this article in one sentence: «What's important is not the science you choose. It's the respect you give to the science and to the characters living and dealing with it, having real responses to it».

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## *HARRY POTTER* AND THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC ADAPTATION OF ITS CHARACTERS ALONG THE SERIES<sup>1</sup>

Ana Belén Jara

### 1. Abstract

In this chapter we will address the analysis of the adaptation of the fantasy series *Harry Potter* for the big screen. Our main focus are the characters, which during the adaptation process, suffer modifications along the transference from one media to another. We are interested in acknowledging not only the general characteristics of the cinematographic adaptation of these books, but also those elements that refuse to be modified (Frago Pérez, 2005, p. 13). In order to mention these two aspects, we quote authors that from the semiotics perspective and audiovisual narrative allow us to analyze and possibly challenge the decisions taken during the adaptation of the movies. In this chapter we will address the analysis of the adaptation of the fantasy series *Harry Potter*, that resulted from this current ongoing degree research paper (Jara, 2015, pp. 7-11). We will retrieve the main characteristics of transposition of these books, but we will mainly concentrate in the characters and the modifications they suffer during the adaptation from

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<sup>1</sup> The results of this paper correspond to the conclusions obtained from research carried out by the National University of Córdoba (Argentina) in 2015.

one media to another. In order to do so, we will discuss the perspective of different authors who, from the semiotics perspective and the audiovisual narrative, allow us to analyze and possibly challenge the decisions taken by the film author (Sánchez Noriega, 1983, p. 64).

We sprang from the fact that in no way could all the characters in the novel be included into the film, no matter how fascinating they all are, since they will not have enough development during a two-hour movie. That is the reason why the script adaptor should select, cut out and combine characters (Seger, 2000, p. 31). This is reinforced regarding series of novels, and the decisions taken in a movie will later fall upon the decisions that the author of the movie has to make.

With this as a starting point, and taking into account our analysis, the questions are: Which ones were deleted? Who has a different approach? Which characters experienced a step-change in the movie? What motivates them? Providing an answer to these questions will allow us more or less to see what happens with female character roles, which plots have more or less value in one media or the other, and how the political potential of the series as a referent of the fantasy genre is condensed or maximized.

## **2. From the literary series of novels to the big screen**

Even though its origin is based on the Nordic tradition (Martos García, 2009, p. 96), the concept of series has evolved in the literary world and has acquired new functions, especially to make reference to sets of epic or fantasy narrations that connect among themselves from the main story. They have an expansive nature and they are open to different languages of the media culture (Martos Núñez, 2006, p. 70). Bearing in mind the complexity of this concept, we decided to call them series of novels or series of movies. Currently, some of the most popular are *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin and *The Narnia Chronicles* by C. S. Lewis, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, and the object of study of this paper, *Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling.

Why do we analyze this series of novels? The last book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was awarded by Guinness as the fastest-selling literary piece of writing for young adults<sup>2</sup>. The last movie of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2*, made history too and beat all box-office records with a revenue of 168.6 million dollars in one weekend<sup>3</sup>. Since Rowling published the first print run, and up to 2017, more than 500 million copies of her books were sold<sup>4</sup>, which turned *Harry Potter* into the highest selling literary series of all times, translated to more than 65 languages, and that is what makes this piece of writing so relevant as a topic of analysis.

All these contributions were done based on a reference frame of authors like Gérard Genette and Walter Benjamin that helped us to realize about the relationship between film-making and literature. Then, we developed specific concepts regarding narrative based on the study of the cinematographic script performed by Doc Comparato (1986) , Syd Field (1995) and Christopher Vogler (2002), and then on the main pillars of adaptation such as José Luis Sánchez Noriega (2000), Linda Seger (2000) and Marta Frago Pérez (2005). Finally, Eloy Martos Núñez (2006) and Alberto Martos García (2009) brought us into the world of conceptualizing contemporary series.

In order to make the analysis, we had into account the following corpus the eight movie adaptations from book to screen, by Warner Bros and the seven books that are part of the literary series *Harry Potter*.

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<sup>2</sup> Lynch, K. (March 5, 2015). World Book Day: Our top ten reading-related world records. Guinness World Records. Obtained from <https://bit.ly/2TaJOy5>

<sup>3</sup> Box Office Mojo (September 15, 2014). *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* [Data base] Obtained from <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/r1265337857/>

<sup>4</sup> Surli, S. (June 26, 2017). The charts that shows how the UK loves Harry Potter. The Telegraph. Obtained from <https://bit.ly/2TdKAdx>

### **3. Analysis of the movie and literary corpus**

We will select the main categories that will help us to address the role of the characters throughout the series by taking into account the categories mentioned by the different authors that talk about the adaptation of a book into a movie. As we have already mentioned, even though there are no authors that specifically analyze this type of adaptation (series), the selected categories come from previous research, essentially linked to the adaptation, and they allow us to observe which factors are the most reluctant to be adapted (Frago Pérez, 2005, p. 13). These difficulties will let us know not only the distances between the discourse produced in different significant matters overall, but also about those barriers that are indeed typical of the task of adapting series of novels.

Next, we will show the different categories and which of their aspects will allow us to perform our analysis.

#### **The narrative voice of the text and the point of view**

We will try to see the transformations that the filmmaker has performed on the literary material regarding the title, topic, narrator and character focus (Sánchez Noriega, 2000, p. 94). In order to do this, the following questions are considered:

Which is the predominant narrator in the books? What about the predominant narrator in the movies? What narrative voice do we recognize? Which narrative mode prevails? What type of focalization prevails?

According to Esther Gispert (2009), the importance of this figure is the responsibility over the narrative action, since during the course of oral discourse is the narrator the one that indicates the strategies to describe fiction (Gispert, 2009, p. 108). The author explains two narrative levels: the «extradiegetic» and the «intradiegetic» narrator. The first one does not participate in the narrated story. However, the

second is the one of interest, since he is one of the characters of the story. This narrator can be a protagonist (homodiegetic) or a witness that experience the actions (heterodiegetic), and can only tell what he sees or what others told him. As a character, he can be mistaken, lie, express feelings and show more human traits than the previous one, which is more trustworthy (Gispert, 2009, p. 109).

When we refer to the point of view, we mean what sets out the distance or perspective that regulates the information of the fictional world (Sánchez Noriega, 2000, p. 91). This mainly offers three interpretations: literary or visual in nature, when it makes reference to what the narrator or character sees; figurative or cognitive, when it refers to what the narrator or characters know; and metaphorical or epistemic, when the narration is from somebody's interest or ideology (Sánchez Noriega, 2000, pp. 91-92). These are the highlighted aspects within the cognitive point of view:

[...] a) Zero focalization, when there is no particular existing point of view in the story, there is an omniscient narrator [...] b) Subjective focalization, when there is a character that perceives the narrative action; the narrator knows as much as a character inside the fiction [...] c) Objective focalization, carried out by an extradiegetic narrator who tells less than the character knows (Sánchez Noriega, 2000, p. 91).

### **Suppression and condensations**

As we have already mentioned, the script writer cannot make the adaptation of a book just the way it is, because we will have a 5-hour duration movie. That is the reason why one of the first tasks of a script writer is suppressing the material he or she can get leave out (Sánchez Noriega, 2003, p. 55).

What are the actions or dialogues that are condensed in the movie text? In the same way that the script writer suppresses elements, he or she also condenses or compresses the material (Seger, 2000, p. 30). This task implies joining actions, simplifying the story and reducing details

and dialogues. In many novels there is a number of characters that have similar functions and that can be combined in their adaptation. The combination of characters does not necessarily mean adding the features of two characters and giving them just to one of them. It may suppose removing a character but keeping the lines or actions and giving them to another character (Seger, 2000, p. 31). «These decisions may be frustrating, since many times writers need to give up scenes and characters in order to make the movie work» (Seger, 2000, p. 31). In our comparative analysis we will focus on the characters that have been totally or partially removed and we will detect how this has influenced the development of the series as a whole.

### **Transformation of characters and their stories**

Are the roles of the characters changed in the adaptation?  
What are the actions that are combined or transformed?

In order to answer to these questions, it is important to explain that the protagonist is considered as the «basis of the dramatic core». In other words, he is the hero of the story (Doc Comparato, 1986, p. 32). Then, following what Christopher Vogler said, the term hero is directly linked with the idea of personal sacrifice (2002, p. 65) which is developed during different stages of a journey (2002, p.46), and that, in this case, we try to recognize in every movie as well as in the complete series. However, the hero is also defined by the relationship with other characters, and to spot the role these characters fulfill not only in the literary play but also in the adapted film, the concept of archetypes will be used. This term was recovered by Vogler «as a fundamental tool to understand the function or purpose of the characters that are part of any story» (2002, p. 61); these are: the hero (which was already mentioned) the mentor, the threshold guardian, the herald, the shapeshifter, the shadow and the trickster (Vogler, 2002, p. 63).

## **Equivalent search and addition**

There are original elements of the movie text that are destined to provide equivalent meanings to the ones omitted in the literary text (Sánchez Noriega, 2003, p. 70). That is to say that the script writer has created elements starting from what is narrated in the book or not. This is crucial in adaptations, because the process always implies adding new information that respond to the particular aspects of the audiovisual text. There, the author highlights additions in complete dramatic scenes that are not present in the original text, but coherent to the plot (Sánchez Noriega, 2003, p. 141).

## **4. Outcomes**

Before we move on to make a revision of the outcomes deriving from the characters of the analyzed series, it is important to mention that the result of the complete work of adaptation in the *Harry Potter* series is acknowledged as «transposition», according to Sánchez Noriega (Jara, 2015, p. 141). The adaptation as transposition implies a bigger intervention, where the movie author tries to extract all the expressive and dramatic possibilities from the literary text. In order to do this, he develops what is already implicit, he searches for equivalents, performs expansions, eliminates sub-plots, etc. (Sánchez Noriega, 1983, p. 64). These choices made by the audiovisual creator are evidenced in the treatment of the characters as we will see next, movie by movie.

### ***Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone***

In this first film there is a presentation and development of the main character, Harry, the hero. He lives in an ordinary and mundane world, with his aunt and uncle, until he is called for adventure (Vogler, 2002, p. 92) when Hagrid tells him that he is a wizard. The story of the antagonist, Draco Malfoy, is also presented, and at least we know to a certain extent, who is the villain, that would be confronted by the hero throughout the series of novels: Lord Voldemort, «the shadow» of the main character (Vogler, 2002, p. 101). Additionally, Albus Dumbledore, «the mentor», comes into



scene to become the most trustworthy person for Harry, and to provide him guidance and knowledge. Then, naturally, «the allies» Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger come into play. The actions of many characters on the book are given to Hermione, since throughout the movie she is the one who provides the data of all that happens and there are very few things she doesn't know (in the book the knowledge role is distributed). The one that suffers most of these changes is the character of Neville Longbottom.

Considering the book, these characters are not exposed to major changes; however, we can mention that those actions related to the knowledge of other characters (especially the ones performed by Neville Longbottom) are given to Hermione in the film, creating a bigger emphasis in her intellect.

Other characters are completely eliminated. Such is the case of Peeves, Hogwarts' poltergeist, who is always trying to cause disturbance and play jokes, and whose role would be mainly combined with the one portrayed by Fred and George Weasley. Another example is the elimination of the centaurs Ronan and Bane that in the original story represent the quest for union between magic creatures in opposition to the image of superiority of wizards over other living creatures. On the contrary, in the movies the wizards are protagonists in the magic world and they do not interact so much with the rest of the creatures.

So far, the adaptation mainly sticks to the book, but if we emphasize any relevant change affecting the future development of the series of films, it is important to mention the narrative voice of the text. All the books include an extradiegetic narrator, with a cognitive point of view focused on Harry, except chapter 1, *The boy who lived* (Rowling, 1997, p. 9). In contrast, in movies, the choice is always an extradiegetic narrator with zero focalization, which means he sees and knows more than the main character and allows the script writer to make additions, especially in those scenes where Harry is not present, as it will do in the following movies.

### ***Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets***

In the second movie of the series there is a reinforcement of Hermione Granger's intelligence, assuming the knowledge of Ginny and Neville that will be shadowed in the next movies. The mockery of Neville is emphasized, for instance, through additional scenes like the moment he faints after seeing the mandrake. There is no reference of this action in the book, and even it is him the one portrayed as a good student in herbalism.

Ginny loses all the attention given in the novel due to her relevance for the main plot. The objective of hiding the character's traits may surprise spectators if they have not read the book, because they will discover the role this girl played in the plot in the end. The importance that the connection between Ginny and Tom Riddle deserves is compressed, and this implies the omission of one of the main reasons why the young lady gets confident with Harry during *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.

Finally, there are changes throughout the cinematographic series that are interpreted as mistakes, for example, the interpretation that is made about the Polyjuice Potion and its effects. In the book, the potion produces a change in the appearance and the voice of the person that drinks it, but in the movies effects vary. In the fourth movie, Barty Crouch Jr. speaks and looks like Mad-Eye Moody, but in the second and seventh adaptation, when the potion is used, voice does not change and characters need to make an effort to simulate it. It is possible that these details disorient spectators.

### ***Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban***

At this stage, the cinematographic author takes more decisions regarding which topics should be emphasized and which others not, being conscious that these choices may affect the future adaptations. During the course of the third volume the story becomes more complex, there are interventions of other characters that start to clear up the past of the hero and protagonist of the series. The condensation of these sub-

plots generates relevant gaps in the connection between Severus Snape and James Potter together with his friends, and his special bond with Lily Potter. What is the outcome? So far, it seems that Snape's character pursues the sole objective of damaging Harry and comparing him with his arrogant father. Another consequence of these compressions is that the anti-wizard plot gets gloomy.

Alternatively, there is a suppression of characters that become relevant in the sub-plots of the following volumes, such as Cedric Diggory and Cho Chang, just to name a few.

It is important to point out that there were some additions on behalf of the cinematographic writer. For instance, the romantic tension between Ron and Hermione, and some hints to the last two books during the conversation between Remus Lupin and Harry in the bridge. The professor speaks about Lily and her ability to see things in people that others cannot see. This scene was making a pre-announcement of Lily and Severus' relationship, which is silenced during the movies but finally developed in the last one.

### ***Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire***

The book *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* meant a big leap regarding the length of the novels (635 pages). Still, there are numerous characters suppressed without causing big problems in the development of main plots. An example of this is Winky's character which is completely suppressed in this one and the following adaptations, and also the characters of Ludo Bagman and Bertha Jorkins.

Even so, the importance of Voldemort's Horcruxes and the role of Death Eaters is underemphasized. Characters are not developed in depth as their roles and their contribution to the story are. One of the most relevant points is the story of Neville's parents: We start getting a better insight of Neville's life but far from being a character with emotional intimacy, the cinematographic author considers him necessary to perform the actions of the omitted characters. To illustrate

this, the movie that mentions that Barty Crouch Jr. tortured Neville's parents does not make clear that this was done until they went mad, which may cause the misinterpretation of them being dead.

The character of Sirius Black also appears with more frequency in the books as Harry's mentor. He is Harry's second mentor and the only adult he can trust. However, this relationship fades away in the movie, since Sirius only has one appearance in the common room at Gryffindor.

Finally, among the omitted sub-plots we can appreciate the campaign that Hermione holds in order to defend the rights of domestic elves, which undoubtedly deletes some commitment to the struggle for equality with other creatures so emphasized in the books.

### ***Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix***

Even though this is the longest book of the series, it was adapted to the shortest movie. This implied leaving behind complete chapters, suppressing very important sub-plots and transforming characters to condense the information. The result is a movie that focuses more on the actions than on the development of the story and the characters. This does not imply that the «darkness» as anticipated in Dumbledore's final speech was not deeply portrayed, since the excessive development of the character of Dolores Umbridge as «threshold guardian» means a serious threat and an obstacle for the protagonist (Vogler, 2002, p. 87).

Regarding the most relevant condensations of this movie we can highlight the not so relevant appearance of the Dursley family: The feeling of Petunia, Harry's aunt, in the books is the evidence of one of the most important sub-plots of the series and it is almost completely deleted in this adaptation. Here, we are making reference to maternal love. The same happens with the actions of other characters, such as Mrs. Weasley, who goes through very sad episodes in the book such as the boggart incident that shows her sons dead, including Harry.

Ginny's character gains even more importance in the book: she is confident, smart, good at Quidditch and spells and has a successful romantic life. However, in the movie she is again on the second place. The same as Neville Longbottom, which is a key character in the book that could have been «the chosen one» according to the prophecy, but this detail is omitted in the movie.

The feelings of the characters start acquiring greater relevance: love, jealousy, guilt. But this movie mostly focuses on the actions more than on the development of the story and the characters, as it happened in the previous movies.

As a result of some suppressions in previous movies, there are some empty spaces generated in this one. For instance, the role of Percy Weasley in the Ministry and his estrangement from his family. However, in the movies, he appears with no dialogues, but he is always next to the Minister. Only the ones that read the book can give this character his identity back.

The information provided about the Black family, and the legacy of the purity of the blood is also condensed, and removes the importance of the social class division affecting this magical world.

One of the key topics this movie gets closer to is the one of dead, which allows Harry to establish stronger ties with Luna Lovegood, but it also signals the end of the only relationship of trust he was able to build outside Hogwarts: his godfather's dead.

### ***Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince***

The kids have grown up and with this, jealousy, love, indifference, envy and other mixed emotions are voiced. Why emphasizing this now? By doing this, are the stories that the spectator wants to know ending? Do the characters need more personal development before the great battle? Still, the main plot for the movie is to discover which are

Malfoy's plans, a character that is not very developed in the previous submissions although he totally has the potential to be the antagonist. He went from being a spoiled kid to be a mysterious and somber young man. In this movie he finds redemption and he is finally about to place himself in the true line that divides good from evil. However, he hesitates and feels the pressure which is evidenced a lot through additions where we listen to him crying or being completely alone.

This excessive attention leads to a complete elimination of the subplot of Merope and Morfin, close family members of Lord Voldemort, which is why the sinister wizard hates muggles and the main reason for the decisions he takes throughout the fantasy series.

When Harry finds out that Snape is the half-blood prince, he does not ask himself if that is the reason why he hates muggles, or if his condition was the reason why he did not trust Voldemort. There are no questions posed in the movie because the emotion of the character is condensed in the loss of his mentor.

Harry's feelings implode, and the discovery of the Horcruxes, his intense hate for Snape, and his knowledge of Draco's weakness, prepare the audience for the climax that will develop in the following and last adaptation.

The movie combines dark scenes and succeeds in keeping the connection between them through the focus on the emotions of the characters, but neglects all the political dimension that explains, to a great extent, the end of the series.

### ***Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows-Part I***

The adaptation of the last book was under two submissions in order to cover the greatest part of the details that were not included in the previous movies. So, the events developed in this movie are contrary to the events presented in the previous ones: The intimacy of love connections between adult characters is deleted, as well as all

those actions that distract the spectator from rebuilding the story, not only from the Deathly Hallows but also from Voldemort's Horcruxes.

There is a prevalence of the following sub-plots that are retrieved: first of all, the purity of the blood. Hermione's image deleting her parent's memories and being back to start makes us already question the consequences and the terror that Voldemort imposes not only on wizards (which he considers to be impure) but also on non-wizards. Another big clue is the death of Hogwarts Muggle Studies teacher in front of all Death Eaters. Indeed, after the retrieval of this sub-plots, all the data related to Dumbledore's biography are compressed in a few headlines of The Prophet.

Ron's character acquires a fundamental role, he is no longer the unconditional partner of the protagonist since he abandons him and reveals his concerns, jealousy and feelings of inferiority he went through when he was next to his friend.

### ***Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows-Part II***

There are some memories belonging to Snape that are omitted, and some other are added to keep continuity between this film and the previous one. Whatever was minimized in previous movies, is unexpectedly solved by Harry within 5 minutes, and the impact of these news is even bigger: he is a Horcrux, and Snape always tried to protect him.

This focalization on Harry implies the omission of an important detail of the series: Before getting into the woods to die, Harry asks Neville to destroy the missing Horcrux. This simple action may be understood as Neville recovering a place he could never have: if the prophecy spoke about any of the two, and since Harry was going to die, Neville could destroy Voldemort, fulfill the prophecy and become a hero. He breaks with the foolishness that always haunted him and he becomes a hero.

Another additions that enhance the drama and solve situations not present in the book are: the moment when Ron opens the chamber of secrets and kisses Hermione; the scene where Fred and George are together before fighting; the moment when Harry finds and kisses Ginny, or when Neville confesses his love for Luna, just to name a few.

## 5. Conclusions

During the development of this cinematographic adaptation, the filmmaker focuses in two main topics that are evidenced in the decisions he made: love and death. The movies combine colorful scenes with dark ones, and they achieve the persistence of the link between them by highlighting the character's emotions.

The use of the complexity of the characters in a selective manner along the development of the series is crucial: We don't know all the characters from scratch, but instead we discover them according to the importance of their role in the movie. Whatever is typical of the character, is taken to the extreme, for example; knowledge. When this can develop from another role, the spectator's surprise is imminent. The characters that seem more affected and lose their development along the series are Neville and Ginny. Other characters even gain more appearance than in the book. For example, Hermione Granger develops actions of these two and she shows herself more and more empowered and intelligent.

To summarize these results, we have decided to highlight the level in which the different dimensions of the series are developed in the movie:

- Complete suppression of sub-topics that affect the responsibility and commitment of the characters with social and environmental causes.
- Political dimension: Condensation of the reasons of the chasing and death of some characters due to their belonging to one or another family of wizards.
- Intensity of personal and sentimental issues of the younger characters but very little emotional development of adult



characters, especially from mothers, whose role is cross-functional in the literary series of movies.

The significant power that these cinematographic discourses possess is enough to generate a thought experience in spectators, which is completed in the multimedia characteristics of the series of movies. It means that, when spectators turn into readers and receptors of the other discourses, they acquire holistic knowledge. However, these results do not pose new questions about the role of movie spectators when they have to demand a greater commitment to the audiovisual producers regarding topics with more political and social depth.

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## LITERATURE, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT: *APOCALYPSE AT SOLENTINAME*, BY JULIO CORTÁZAR

Laura Ros Cases

Although Julio Cortázar (1914-1984) is predominantly famous for his reputation as a writer, his liking for the rest of arts is well known. He made an effort to integrate them within his literary activity: music, namely jazz, stands as a recurring theme in the author's prose and essays, while his passion for cinema would subsequently find itself reflected in the screen adaptations made out of his work, Manuel Antín's 1962-1965 groundbreaking trilogy, Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 *Blow-Up* and Jana Boková's 1998 *Diary of a Tale*, to name a few. Cortázar's taste for visuals is not limited to the seventh art, but includes plastic arts and photography<sup>1</sup>. This article will focus on the inclusion of the latter in his short storytelling and more precisely, it will deal with the analysis of Cortázar's 1976 tale *Apocalypse at Solentiname*, in which the Argentine author's use of the photographic element as a way of showing an ethical stance can be found. Furthermore, Cortázar's own theoretical statements on the subject of the similarities between short narrative and photography will be used as a starting point. His essay *Some Aspects of the Short Story*, compares the conditions of both

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<sup>1</sup> A Ph. D. thesis is underway about Cortázar's relationship with artistic media other than textuality –photography, cinema and visual arts– thanks to fundings from Spanish Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (FPU16/07424).

short story and photography, so as to distinguish between the novel and cinema, respectively. Just as, in the area of photography, capturing the moment is of utter importance, short storytelling must take advantage of the spatial limitation that novel and cinema lacks, the latter one possesses an open and more extensive order. Thus, photography crops «a fragment of reality, [...] in such a way that the obtained clip acts as an explosion that blows the doors open to a far wider reality, like a dynamic vision that spiritually transcends the film encompassed by the camera» (Cortázar, 1994a, p. 371)<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, photography and short stories share a key point in choosing a significant moment or image that:

Is not only worth in itself but also able to strike the spectator or reader as a sort of opening, of ferment that directs intelligence and sensitivity towards something that spans way beyond the visual or literary anecdotes contained in a picture or a tale (Cortázar, 1994a, pp. 371-372).

Cortázar's short narrative proves to be of great interest given the possibilities it grants to such media of artistic expressions, especially tales as the one discussed here, being one that embeds photography as the main focus and element driving the plot. *Apocalypse at Solentiname* is also remarkable considering it signals a shift towards a more committed reflection in his literature. In the aforementioned tale, its realistic content stands out from the rest of his production in short stories; this aspect will be analysed in length further on, because we deem it necessary to outline its plot first.

This story features a first-person narrator, whose name remains unknown though sharing numerous traits with Cortázar, who recounts a journey to Latin America and the return to Paris. Following a press conference in San José, the main character meets poet Ernesto Cardenal, the two of them, along with other friends, head out for Solentiname. There he will find himself fascinated with certain paintings made by local peasants, of a folkloric and *naïve* style, so he takes pictures

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<sup>2</sup> Originally written in Spanish (Literatura, fotografía y compromiso social: *Apocalipsis de Solentiname*, de Julio Cortázar). Translated into English by Diego Morales Arocas, except where otherwise noted.

of the works. Once in Paris, the protagonist develops the photos and sets up a slideshow presentation for his partner Claudine. Much to his surprise, looking at the images he detects dreadful aspects to them that had remained unnoticed before and that disturbs him profoundly. Nonetheless, Claudine examines them and the only thing she comments on is how beautifully they all turned out.

The present tale features, at least, two well differentiated interpretations. In line with Tittler's double approach in *Los dos Solentinames de Julio Cortázar* (1987, pp. 86-87), our analysis is to be divided into two well differentiated sections. On one side we will conduct a review from the fictitious-mythical point of view, in which we will contextualise its content with the theory and practice of the fantastic subgenre; on the other side we will peruse the narration from a historical and political perspective and then point out the relationships between Cortázar and the Latin American revolutions and engagements. Let us recall, firstly, the constituents of the *fantastic* as a concept. Todorov defined the core of this literary subgenre in the following terms:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know [...] there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination —and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us (Todorov, 1975, p. 25).

Altered perception of reality is not the only defining trait of this kind of literature. The fantastic, as asserted by the author, occupies the space of the uncertainty: as soon as we opt for one of two possible solutions for the event that disrupts our conception of the world, we dive into the genre either of the uncanny or the marvellous (Todorov, 1975, p. 41). Hesitation must then arise from the character and the reader alike, for the fantastic therefore implies an integration of the



recipient into the textual dimension and includes hesitation as a theme within the work. Hence, and in accordance with Todorov's definition, the fantastic occupies the space of the uncertainty and the reader must opt for one interpretation of this strange element. However, this choice is absent in Cortázar's texts, at least not *strictu sensu*, as the author does not include a clear resolution in the textual field:

Cortázar leaves it up to the readers to figure out the missing parts in this ellipsis. His choice, in contrast, is to impress verisimilitude into a situation perceived as fantastic at the beginning of the tale, but that we grow to accept with the same easiness Cortázar shows to describe [the events] [...] as realities that owe to themselves (Alazraki, 1983, p. 77).

Cortázar himself reflected on the generic condition of the genre he was cultivating:

The extreme familiarity with the fantastic reaches far beyond; somehow we have already received this thing that has not yet arrived, the door makes way for a visitor who will come the day after tomorrow or who came yesterday. The order will be forever open, and shall not ever tend to a conclusion because nothing concludes and nothing begins within a system of which one possess immediate coordinates only. [...] There is no closed fantastic, given the fact that whatever we manage to know about it is always a part and henceforth we deem it fantastic (Cortázar, 1975, pp. 74-75).

For the writer, thus, the fantastic is signified by the eruption of the unusual into consuetudinary reality; in other words, a sudden insight into other ways of seeing and conceiving reality that up to that point had been rendered void by the logic mindset we the readers are accustomed to. This aperture, which, as we can ascertain from Cortázar's reflections, is also a property of photography, will be the one that suggests to us a new way of looking around; in quite a significant manner, *Apocalypse at Solentiname* will lead us to this new perspective through the visual medium.

Now, after this review of what the fantastic genre means to Cortázar, we can properly start the analysis of *Apocalypse at Solentiname*. Well into the narration, the text can be mistaken with a legitimate testimony by Cortázar, as the protagonist's textual references can easily be traced back to the author himself<sup>3</sup>. The names of some personalities from that era, the occurrences that took place during this stay of Cortázar at the places mentioned, and other verifiable facts are set in stark contrast to the posterior entrance of the unusual into the Parisian apartment of the protagonist. In Yurkievich's words, Cortázar's short pieces «although a realistic simulacrum, despite simulating a historical recount, result in a neat setting in order to frame a microuniverse and to breathe a clear figure and a cohesive tension into it, by means of causal concatenations» (1994, p.14). In this case, the entrance of the unusual is unequivocally represented by using the different types of images that are introduced throughout the story.

The first visual account stems from pictures taken by an instant camera, whose mechanism seems unusual for the narrator:

It seemed totally normal to them because they were used to using that camera, but I wasn't, for me seeing something emerge out of nothing, out of that little sky-blue square of nothing, those goodbye faces and smiles, filled me with wonder and I told them, I remember asking Oscar what would happen if after taking a family portrait the little sky-blue piece of paper started filling up out of nowhere with Napoleon on his horse (Cortázar, 2015, p. 165)<sup>4</sup>.

When the protagonist questions out loud the possibility of the

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<sup>3</sup> Cortázar confirms the veracity of the episodes in front of his students at Berkeley, with the obvious exception of the ending (2016, pp. 109-110). Other personalities mentioned in *Apocalypse at Solentiname* account for the historicity of the incidents. Further information can be consulted in Samuel Rovinski (in Hernández, 2013) and Sergio Ramírez (2004, p. 25).

<sup>4</sup> All the references to Cortázar's tale included here belong to the Spanish edition. The English translation of the tale, however, is credited to Katherine Silver in *Literature Class: Nonfiction* by Julio Cortázar (New Directions, 2017), extracted (e-book format) from: <https://bit.ly/35ilT5n>

fantastic appearing inside what is a novelty device for him, the reader feels the temptation to interpret this consideration as purely anecdotal. Yet, the connection between this excerpt, with the denouement, reveal those words to be a sort of premonition. Between these omens and the final finding, visual interest revolves around the landscape paintings made by the inhabitants of Solentiname. Cortázar's fascinated depiction of these paintings contrasts steeply with the apocalyptic title of the tale and the visions of the final part:

They were all so beautiful, once again a primal vision of the world, the clean gaze of someone who depicts their surroundings as a song of praise: dwarf cows in fields of poppies, sugar shacks people are pouring out of like ants, the green-eyed horse against a background of sugarcane, a church baptism that doesn't believe in perspective and trips and falls over itself (Cortázar, 2015, p. 165).

Besides the pictures taken from landscapes, children and women along the journey, the narrator sets himself to record the paintings in images that will generate the utmost interest: «one by one I carefully photographed them, centering each so it would fill the entire frame» (Cortázar, 2015, p. 166). After returning to Paris, nostalgia prompts him to view the photographs of the paintings once again, turned now into slide film –a double simulacrum of reality– and prepares them to be projected at his apartment for Claudine. The horror that lies hidden in the photographs is soon revealed:

I pushed the forward button without much enthusiasm, I could have kept looking for a long time at each slide so laden with memories, that small fragile world of Solentiname surrounded by water and henchmen, surrounded like the boy I was looking at without understanding. I'd pressed the button and the boy was there against a very clear background, his broad smooth face of surprised disbelief as his body pitched forward, the neat hole right in the middle of his forehead, the officer's pistol still indicating the path of the bullet, the others on either side with their machine guns, a jumble of houses and trees behind (Cortázar, 2015, p. 167).

From that moment onwards, the unusual takes over the narration and storms both the protagonist's and the reader's certainty. Contemplating this spiral of violence makes the narrator feel helpless to process all he is observing, and submerges him into a state of deep anxiety only interrupted by the arrival of Claudine, whom he decides to show the photos while he tries to recover mentally. Hearing nothing but silence from his companion, the fantastic element completes its invasion of the scenario through establishing the consubstantial hesitation: she has perceived the picturesque beauty of the artworks, nothing else. Why is Claudine blind to the barbarity the protagonist and the reader alike have been witness to? Perhaps because she «possesses nor the emotional attachment that bonds narrator with Latin America nor the degree of awareness he has concerning what was going on at many countries of this region» (Pons, 1992, p. 199). Cortázar closes the story and moulds it into a spherical shape through the return of the question about this apparition of the unusual in the photographs that the writer had previously felt uneasy about, although in this case the hesitation about the veracity of what has just happened prevents him from posing the question out loud: «I wasn't going to say anything, what could I tell her now, but I remember I vaguely considered asking her a stupid question, asking her if she had at some point seen a picture of Napoleon on horseback. But I didn't, of course» (Cortázar, 2015, p. 169). Now, is that violence the narrator observes in his own pictures empirically demonstrable? Or is it a figment of his imagination? The denouement, just as the slides, is uncertain and ambiguous; and just as the photographic medium does, Cortázar's fantastic tale fiddles with the plurisignification of the untold, of the words-lacking silence.

Leaving the big question unsolved, Cortázar chooses not to take sides with the uncanny or the marvellous, but it is each reader's task to decide how to process this information. The choice of this particular character as the speaker of this tale is absolutely determinant for the recipient's hesitations, akin to the uncertainty that taints them both. As stated by Alazraki regarding another of Cortázar's stories:

[The choice of the narrator] is also an answer to the necessities of fiction. Those are tales that leave a gap or a hole, an untold or barely implied portion, and therefore call for an unreliable narrator. [...] Their informative limitations are deliberate, and the voice of the narrator creates the necessary distance to create a sense of ambiguity (Alazraki, 1983, p. 238).

Then, it is undeniable that both the intuitive capture of the fantastic deed elaborated by Cortázar and the narrator's partiality exert an impact on the interpretation of the unusual from the readers' side, who are subject to the same process of estrangement suffered by the protagonist. The storytelling in *Apocalypse at Solentiname* takes the first-person voice of a character that will contradict itself a few lines later. At the ending, the protagonist asks himself whether the images he has seen are real or are a byproduct of his conception of photography, shown by the uncertainty that the mechanism of instant cameras provokes for him. But since he conclusively fails to ask a single thing, he and we the readers end up doubting the accuracy of the events. If we are to assume that the violence present in the slides is a figment of the protagonist's mind, the choice of the space in which the events happen is key in informing the fantastic effect. Cortázar deliberately sets this part of the story in a cognitive space, one that Greimas characterizes as the inner space the subjects builds for himself or herself, and hence it is only significant for the subject, composed of parcels of knowledge acquired (1976, p. 120). This third area, halfway between the present Paris and the past journey to Latin America, is mirrored by a subjective space situated in the protagonist's mind. That non-material location place is where the horror he might have witnessed and whose memory he might have erased, dwells.

The story ultimately reflects the ever-growing concern about the veracity of images. As the years go passing by we become more aware that the concept of «that has been»<sup>5</sup> penned by Barthes as characteristic of the photographic medium is the subject of alteration by means of

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<sup>5</sup> *Id est*, the past as referential element of photography is what makes it different from other arts and what certifies the true existence of whatever the image shows us (Barthes, 1981, p. 88).

the perspective of the one who presents, the ideology that takes over it or the manipulation of the original items. Cortázar makes use of this conceptualisation in order to apply his treatment of the fantastic: being narrated in first person and from a totally partial, subjective and one-sided point of view, subjective and unilateral, the reader cannot tell for sure if the facts have taken place as perceived by the protagonist towards the end of the narration. In this regard, Cortázar's figurations «inform a sort of phenomenology of perception» (Yurkievich, 1994, p. 32). In accordance with the genre of the tale in itself, the photographs mentioned in the text have managed to expand the limited clip of reality towards a dynamic vision of a vaster significant amplitude. Ambiguity and plurisignification that are natural to every photograph (Sontag, 2009; Berger and Mohr, 1998) is another one of the arguments that backs the finding upon the examination of the photographs. This new viewing, influenced by the new and different context in which it is carried out, surprises the protagonist with a whole new meaning that had been overlooked, for, as Berger remarks, it is born out of the discontinuity between the moment of the photography and the moment of the sight (1998, pp. 88-89).

This intuitive capture of the unusual fact, of a photographic trait in this tale, could be ascribed to the terms commented by Roland Barthes in his essay *Camera Lucida*. Barthes pinpoints the three intentions that may be hidden behind a photograph: that of the *Operator* or photographer, that of the *Spectator* or witness, and that of the *Spectrum* -that being photographed, or a sort of simulacrum (1981, pp. 9-10). The witness's interest, according to this author, is based on the common presence of two elements: *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* sparks the general interest activated depending on the recipient's knowledge and culture, general, moral, political, etc. It is, in essence, «that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste [...] The *studium* is of the order of liking, not of loving; it mobilises a half desire, a demi-volition» (1981, p. 27), and its identification leads to an understanding of the photographer's intentions, to approve them, discuss them or criticise them, and taking part in the deal of the visual. *Punctum*, for its part, is not desired by the spectator nor invested by

the consciousness, but it divides the *studium*, assaults and practically pokes the recipient. *Punctum* is a detail, a partial trait that draws the *spectator's* attention and carries the power of expansion, often with a metonymic character, that renders it able to fill the frame in its entirety. The detail is not intentional, but a supplement that might not necessarily belong to the whole of what the photographer intends to show; and whether it is distinguishable or not, it is still a supplement added by the spectator to the photo and that, despite all, was already existing there. To sum up, *punctum* departs from *studium* in the sense that, unlike the latter, it is not codified. What remains unidentified is what really grabs the observer; it means, only if, paradoxically, we close our eyes to photography, the detail will reach the affective consciousness (1981, pp. 30-64).

The concrete *spectrum* or simulacrum in this tale is powerful enough to astonish both the spectator and the *operator* himself, turned into *spectator* during the slideshow. In the sense proposed by Barthes, the final images of violence are a *punctum* initially unnoticed by the person who took the pictures and that experiences, on revision, this assault: its metonymic character manages to fill indeed all the photography, and makes the protagonist overlook the previous main interest –which is now the *studium*: the picturesque paintings. This becomes even more relevant if we know that the type of interest generated by the *punctum* is the one granting the image its narrative possibility:

Cinema [...] is not a frame but a hideout; the man or woman who emerges from it continues living: a «blind field» constantly doubles our partial vision. Now, confronting millions of photographs, [...] everything which happens within the frame dies absolutely once this frame is passed beyond. [...] Yet once there is a punctum, a blind field is created (is divined) (Barthes, 1981, p. 57).

Hereto, the existence of this new interest in the images of the protagonist endows them with narrative depth and transcends the former *ekphrasis* written regarding the paintings, and consequently this blind field usually attributed to cinema, is finally made.

Lastly, the slides bring the recent past into the protagonist's present, and are the element that eventually triggers the fantastic, *lo fantástico*, and so we can affirm they bring about the temporal simultaneity temporal of the facts, the perusal of the images and the violent incidents in Latin America. Thus, the tale accomplishes its completion thanks to this second historical and political interpretation that we had mentioned at the introduction, we cannot ignore violence, even if happening at the far side of the world, precisely at a time when Cortázar's commitment with Latin America was becoming increasingly patent in his fiction.

According to Alazraki, this itinerary leading to a raise of historical awareness can be traced back to *The Kings* and *Hopscotch*, despite the fact that it was not until the release of his collection *Someone Walking Around* (1987, pp. 6-17, where the present tale is included) that his actual political engagement took place. Cortázar himself explains his stance in a letter to Roberto Fernández Retamar in 1967. In this text, our writer points out that the knowledge about the Cuban Revolution earlier that decade made him resume his lost connection with Latin America; he, who would have merely shrugged upon being called a Latin American intellectual, found himself trapped in a nightmarish reality as apocalyptic as the one later recalled in his tale. This renovated consciousness, as he clarifies, sprouts from a perspective rather European than Latin American and ethical rather than intellectual. His peculiar personal situation urges him not to focus on local problems, but on a horizontal concern, the concern that appeals to us all (Cortázar, 1994b, pp. 31-34). The writer describes the progression towards this ecumenical vision as follows: «A writer for whom reality, as Mallarmé imagined it, had to culminate in a book detached himself from Argentina; in Paris a man for whom books have to culminate in life was born» (Cortázar, 1994b, pp. 36-37). Faced with the revelation that building a better future demands a political commitment, Cortázar decides to collaborate with his literature: «the eventual echoes attained by my books will always be an irrelevant phenomenon, alien to my endeavour; and nonetheless, today I know I am writing *for*, that there is an intention aimed at that hope of a reader in which the seed of the future man is already planted» (Cortázar, 1994b, p. 41). This literary application of his political thinking



pervades *Apocalypse at Solentiname*, since its transgression of reality starts off in the local aspect of this archipelago and swiftly changes into a panorama of the total violence rampaging Latin America. Two specific passages of the tale are clear examples. The first one during the mass offered by Ernesto Cardenal for the community and in which the episode of Jesus' being arrested at the Mount of Olives is read aloud:

A subject the people of Solentiname discussed as if it were about them, the threat that they would be attacked at night or in the middle of the day, lives led in permanent uncertainty on the islands and on the mainland and everywhere in Nicaragua and not only in Nicaragua but almost everywhere in Latin America, a life surrounded by fear and death (Cortázar, 2015, p. 166).

Such an apocalyptic vision of the Latin American reality serves as a prelude for the images that will haunt the protagonist later on, they might be one of the causes for the final projection, and those images are the second evidence of Cortázar's pan-Hispano-American sensitivity. The moment of its manifestation impels the protagonist to direct his salvation efforts to the figure of Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton. The sight of this terrible violence paralyses him; only at a certain point is he able to react, despite his action being completely ineffective:

And so I pressed the button as if by doing so I could save him from the infamy of that particular death, and then I saw a car exploding right in the middle of a city that could be Buenos Aires or São Paulo, I kept pushing and pushing past flashes of bloody faces and pieces of bodies and woman and children running down a Bolivian or a Guatemalan hillside (Cortázar, 2015, p. 168).

Like his political revindication, generalizing the horror in diverse areas Hispanic America is proof of Cortázar's will of using his fantastic writings in order to transcend from the local to the universal. Starting with the situation prior to the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Argentine writer features a tale in which the unusual has quite an unusual aim, given this genre: «rendering reality more real» (Cortázar, 2016, p. 118).

In conclusion, fantastical and political dimensions go hand in hand in this tale in which image performs the catalysis of the plot. Cortázar's commitment is presented through photography, a media traditionally devoted to record, report and denounce with its documentary eagerness. The fixed image as a theme signals a committed conception of the artistic endeavour, which consists essentially to make the recipient gaze on certain uncomfortable facts and furthermore develop an ethical gaze. Inspired by the events prior to the Sandinista conflict, Cortázar reflects reality not only through the tale's first, autodiegetic half, but also through the eruption of the fantastic, which dwells almost exclusively in a visual dimension, and which manages to open the protagonist's and the reader's eyes and make them acknowledge a reality previously ignored. By means of an unsolved uncertainty, Cortázar channels his own conception of the fantastic and completes it with the possibilities of ambiguity and plurisignification provided by photography; the hesitation created in the text echoes, in addition, the ever-growing concern about the empirical veracity of the pictured object, which is obtained through the point of views partiality and the images' contextual displacement. The Argentine writer forces us to look through the distressed eyes, at violence in this case, to make us part of the events occurring and the alterity they convey. There is no better way of doing so than going through the photographs, which are in essence a way of gaining an awareness where the recording of reality merges with aesthetics.

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## UBERIZED SUPERHEROES: THE FANTASTIC AT THE SERVICE OF REALITY IN *THE BOYS* TELEVISION SERIES<sup>1</sup>

César Oliveros Aya<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

The figure of the superhero has been inserted significantly in popular culture to the point of being interpreted as a modern mythology of assessment similar to ancient Greek mythology, according to the doctoral thesis of Nerea Fernández of the University of La Rioja, entitled *Survival and evolution of concept of literary hero in the North American comic book of superheroes: Apollonian, Dionysian and Prometeic* (2017). The audiovisual narrative, both in cinema and on television, has been dynamizing lines and plot arcs to create utopian and dystopian universes inspired by comic books and graphic novels.

According to Greg Barret, in the book *The Faith of Superheroes, Discovering the Religious in Comics and in Movies*, the superhero is a

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model of perfectibility from the popular culture, badge of good, ideal of public order and evocative of power factors with religious inspirations (1999, p. 10). However, critical positions have also emerged, questioning the saturation of these characters, to interpret them from more earthly looks.

What would be the possible behavioral and psychological deviations of a subject with superhuman powers? Would it constitute an imminent threat? Would it be a new version of totalitarianisms? Today, the answers would not be so positive. Such a panorama is the plot proposal of television series such as the novel *The Boys* (Evan Goldberg, 2019), which in just 8 episodes attacks the conventional status quo of the mythical superhero, taking *Watchmen* direct references in its literary and audiovisual versions in the face of the expectation of the new television adaptation.

From these premises, this chapter sets out the objective of interpreting the mimetic capacity of the fantastic to address the superhero's symbology as a risk in today's world, a unique representation of power whose references reveal contemporary fears around transhumanism, global politics, private justice and obsolete nationalisms.

## **The Superhero Prototype**

The interest in superheroes as narrative referents has permeated all areas of popular culture. Today we find television series, movies, comics, stories, novels, etc., with overflowing merchandising to make them part of daily life.

The superhero figure stands as a recreated model of ancient Greek, Roman and other myths. The relationship between them is evident through iteration, by repeating the basic schemes in the current context, because the concept of hero is inherent in every society, from the moment it assumes its culture. As they are archetypes, their fundamental structure is constantly reused (Fernández, 2017, p. 739). From the academy the complexity of these figures has also been expressed until being considered object of study from different perspectives.

For example, superheroes can be analyzed under premises of inspiration, reflection of needs, illusions, desires, and they could contribute to children's education, in which their qualities are enhanced and can be channeled towards optimal human relationships (Salinas, 2018).

In accordance with the previously said, these characters have emerged as a fantasy of adolescent power, without greater complexity, facing villains, phenomena and threats from other worlds, with the purpose of encouraging children's imagination with the same impact and energy as myths and tales of classic fairies (Morris, 2010, p. 24). Consequently, the ornateness of the clothing they use and the powers they possess team up with their dedication to do good and focuses their help towards altruistic achievements (Morris, 2010, p. 37). But they are not merely comic characters; they are a mythology inspired by the values of the American people that have been progressively adjusted to social needs (Johnson, 2012, p. 2).

When speaking of a hero, from the philosophy's point of view, one refers to a normative concept, characterizes being and indirectly refers to the duty to be. It is projected towards us, towards our condition as individuals and, simultaneously, shows aspects worthy of evoking as goals in our lives. They offer images derived from fiction, magnified but motivating of the heroic with inspiring intentions that work as aspirations. When they formalize a well told story, they find relevance in the environment of those who enthroned them; if done with quality, they draw references of purposes to be achieved:

Plato believed that good possesses an inherent appeal. Unless, due to a blockage, we are unable to see it and appreciate it in its reality, good things will drag us in their direction, motivate us and direct our steps. That is why the portrait of the heroic, in the stories of superheroes, possesses a huge moral force (Morris, 2010, p. 40).

Aeon J. Skoble reflects on *The Dark Knight Returns* (Frank Miller, 1986) and *Watchmen* (Alan Moore, 1986-1987) to rethink our ideas about superheroes, their definition and the axiological construct that justifies



them from that moral perspective that allows us to idealize them (Morris, 2010, p. 59). In this sense, it places us as citizens before the different dilemmas that these unconventional characters formulate, beyond the limits arising from the rules established by the official institutionalism in pursuit of a stable order, especially when villains emerge who manipulate the laws in their favor and legal is inefficient.

In the case of *Watchmen*, Alan Moore introduces the story by setting it around what would have happened if the first Superman comic, once published in 1938, had motivated ordinary people to take the reins of cities and act as masked justices and independent of the public service. It also refers to a new generation that has followed in their footsteps. With this approach, he delves into the psychology, ethics and politics of a justice that is not legal (Morris, 2010, p. 66).

This revisionism of the superheroes, also developed by Frank Miller, allows us to understand the ethics we defend today, the social roles in the world and the interpretation of law, law and social order, as variables of obligatory rehabilitation. These works demand that we look towards the abyss and then use it as mirrors to understand our current reality in order to rethink it with a view to the imperishable search for a lasting peace (Morris, 2010, p. 77).

### **The contrast of the super-anti-hero and the fantastic as uberization of power**

*The Boys* is a comic created created by Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson, published in 2006; it has 72 numbers. In 2019, the first season of the television series premiered, with 8 episodes, developed by Eric Kripke, which chronicles the adventures of a group of subjects whose work is aimed at subverting the actions of public order icons represented in a collective of superhumans, managed by an executive, Madelyn Stillwell (Elizabeth Shue), vice president of Vought International.

Unlike X-Men, who are also shown as an opposing force to the threats that loom over humanity, the «super» as they are called in the series, wear a costume that underlies the psyche of the characters. They are not like the rest of the people, not so much for their obvious abilities, but for what they hide inside themselves. If the fantastic, in this sense, is lavish, impressive, overwhelming, it is not frightening; in fact, that is what people expect, despite the mutant nature that they carry. The terrible thing about their figures lies in the weak mental health that lies behind their actions, which is much more lethal to the world.

Each one wears a suit that becomes a mark of superiority and a symbol of virtues, coupled with the powers it is characterized. *Homelander* is a kind of hybrid between *Superman* (Donner, 1978) and *Captain America* (Johnston, 2011), *Queen Maeve* is similar to *Wonder Woman* (Jenkins, 2017), Translucent is the *Invisible Man* (Whale, 1933), *The Deep* is equivalent to the group's *Aquaman* (Wan, 2018), *Black Noir* to *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018), while *Starlight*, the rookie (who is the only one that represents a shy role model) acts as a *Supergirl* (Szwarc, 1984). They function as a private company that provides a collective, national security service. The first time that the corporation's executive aggregates the group of heroes, with worldwide coverage, appears on the screen, issues the following speech:

Ladies and gentlemen: this is, without a doubt, a good time to be in the superhero business. Our net income has increased by 14%. Our latest film, *G Men: World War*, has raised 1.7 billion dollars worldwide. And this fall will begin the works of a new theme park in Paris. The opportunities of the company are unlimited. But, you know, none of that really matters, because our priority is to serve as a guide, support and advice to the brave heroes who put their lives in danger as many times as it takes for us. Here they are.

The plot begins with the atrocious death of a girl named Robin who was talking with her boyfriend in the street. She is murdered by accident, by the passing of a fast bolt that is nothing other than one of the great superheroes of the moment: A-Train, who in turn chases some

bank robbers. Hugh Campbell (Jack Quaid), the boyfriend, undertakes a crusade to demand justice, but the media and the company to which the murderer belongs, minimize the event, interpreting it as collateral damage. It will not take long to be contacted by a subject who calls himself Billy Butcher (Karl Urban) and accept the invitation to join a group that acts in the shadows to hunt down those superheroes that are a danger to humanity. In his first conversation the role he plays in that society is seated despite the young man's disbelief. Billy reveals the sinister business after the show of those characters, as accidents such as Robin's occur very frequently, being ignored by the society, which defines them as collateral damage. What is the indifference? Butcher describes it like this:

Isn't it obvious? Cinema tickets, merchandising, theme parks, video games, a global multimillion dollar industry supported by corporate and political lobbyists from both sides. But the main reason why we don't talk about it is that people don't want to know. People love the security that the «super» give them, knowing that a golden bastard falls from the sky and saves them so they don't have to. If you knew what they are up to. It is devilish. But that's where I come in, to crush them if they go overboard.

But how is this lucrative business sustained? In another scene, the vice president of Vought talks with the mayor of Baltimore about the need that place has to alleviate the insecurity that overwhelms him. To do this, he proposes to rent him exclusively and for three years the superhero called Prince Nubio, specially selected so that he has the majority approval of the population. The contract price is 300 million for one year. The mayor proposes that it be a sum of 200; however, it doesn't find acceptance; so he resorts to blackmail, claiming that he has knowledge of compound V (apparently a drug related to the power of superheroes).

Faced with such a business, the concern arises in the same terms that Ignacio Fernández indicates in his book *The Superheroes and the Law*, regarding the existence of superheroes in real life:

What if he went crazy? Who was going to stop a guy who flies and can lift planes and ships? He could become a tyrant and there would be no way for us to stop him. Isn't it better for us to solve the problems, the mere humans? If there is an inconvenience for that, we have politicians [...] the police and the judges, isn't that better, that they be the ones in charge, and not a supertype that does what it wants without responding to anyone? (2018, p. 13).

That concern has been addressed in many of DC's works, more frequently than in those produced by Marvel. There are alternative worlds in which the threat of a government formed by superheroes is evident. This is the case of *Kingdom Come* (1997), by Alex Ross and Todd Klein, when Superman, once again brings together the Justice League to face new superheroes who have taken violence as the main resource to play their roles. They were fought, captured and then taken to a special penitentiary, built especially for them, outside the work of the authorities (Fernández, 2018, p. 117).

One character's story ties personal trauma with one of the novel's main themes, fear of nuclear devastation. That character is Jon Osterman, the man who becomes Dr. Manhattan. After realizing the power of the Atomic Bomb and hearing of its effects on Hiroshima, Jon's father, a watchmaker, pressures his son into a career as an atomic physicist, and in a sudden, unexpected accident at work, Jon is vaporized in an experimental intrinsic field chamber. However, Jon does not die in the experiment; he slowly reassembles himself, using his new ability to «control atomic structure» (Moore, 1986, p. 13).

Reformed into a human-like being with blue skin and blank white eyes, Jon attempts to return to a normal life. However, because of his appearance, his super-human powers, and the lasting emotional ramifications of his accident, he cannot. His powers make him crucial to America's defense strategy and the government even renames him Dr. Manhattan after the Manhattan Project so that he will inspire the same fear as the atomic bomb (Moore, 1986, p. 12) but keep him from being able to relate to normal human beings, who look at him as if he is Superman,

a radioactive threat, or God. Physically and emotionally separated from the rest of mankind because of his traumatic experience, Jon is no longer a part of normal society or even of man (Ball Blake, 2009, p. 2).

Undoubtedly, *Watchmen* meant a before and after in the history of the comic, while exploring the narrative related to the dark side of superheroes (Van Ness, 2010, p. 13), to the point of comparing it to a work at the level of Dickens, or the works of Don DeLillo, almost like a sort of Don Quijote (Van Ness, 2010, p. 17). Likewise, the television series, produced by HBO in 2019, with a full story arc in 9 chapters, developed a brilliant continuation of the comic, with themes similar to the original.

Not surprisingly, Translucent does not lose his arrogance, although he has been kidnapped by *The Boys*, as noted in the monologue that snapped at Hugh in episode 2:

I see people as they are. Genie, I feel sorry for you, you've lost your girl. All your senses tell you to save your ass. You should listen to them. My skin is invulnerable, I'm a fucking superhero, man. We fight against gangs, terrorists, we save the world daily. I've had in front of thousands of euphoric fans. And who are you? A water balloon full of blood and flesh. Homelander will find me. You are who you are and I am who I am; You are not the hero of this story. And I am not the one who is trapped.

Supernatural powers function as an asset to project in society and nurture the illusion of the magic that moves, which needs unattainable models of behavior. Starlight clashes in that group that is being decimated progressively; she makes visible the feminine power free of manipulations and she believes in «that different race that shines with the golden light of providence», as stated in episode 7 *Homelander*, when facing the young woman. It is the new one of the group, because Queen Maeve has long been part of the corporate game that absorbs them, and she has accepted it without hesitation although she does not feel very happy and expresses herself with the gestures and phrases of an employee tired of the vicissitudes of a job for which he doesn't feel passion or pleasure anymore.

They do not function as a team, clash and nurture reciprocal rivalries. It is a club of thugs that could destroy the world in minutes. There is no code of honor beyond the superfluous, illusory and fallacious futility of the show that works as marketing. The problem is that they are backed by law. The law allows them to join under an executive authority to market their services worldwide, develop their *conciliabulas* in the face of the needs of those who hire them based on a very detailed service's portfolio.

The series, taking as reference the fantastic universe of superheroes, champions of truth, honor, collective justice, all synthesized in a cluster of values that do not refuse; on the contrary, it is ratified in the duty to be of that narrative orchestrated by most of the usual comics stories. The interesting plot twist lies in twisting the idealist vision and showing the violence that this prototype of perfection can unleash, behind the mask of an unbridled process of globalizing insertion in the dynamics of the world economy.

Soon the story goes from the comic, the adventurous and the fantastic, to dissecting the power game that mimics the lavishness of heroism; slapped the imposed face of perfection after the marketing developed by Vought International and gives reason to philosophical presuppositions on equality, raised by Yuval Noah Harari in the book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, when he says that «globalization, instead of generating the global unity, could lead to a 'speciation': the division of humanity into different biological castes or even different species. Globalization will unite the world horizontally by erasing national borders, but simultaneously will divide humanity vertically» (2018, p. 99).

## **Reasons to hunt superheroes**

During the course of the series, we have noticed the challenges that these characters commit behind society's backs; neither should we lose sight of the fact that we enter his world at the hands of Hugh, and it has not been in the best way, because in a few minutes we understand

that these supernatural heroes make mistakes, bet on their own interests and the good caused to humanity does not. It is more than a service that people pay for.

It is understandable, therefore, that this young man does not fit entirely in that hunting group, which he has reached by accident. In episode 2, for example, he has consummated his desire for revenge in one of those subjects who, it seemed, was unthinkable to defeat. His dilemmas get complicated when he emotionally engages with Starlight. With him is that we have begun the journey of an unconventional story, where, in some way, the fantastic is sublimated to the decision to act as a persecutor of those who represent order and for him that supernaturality no longer represents a threat but a risk that he seems willing to assume.

It is precisely in the supernatural component that underlies the power that unbalances the balance to talk about rights between individuals. The attributes of the brotherhood of superheroes embody danger, the atrocity of that conventional relationship between State and Society, in which it has agreed to subordinate.

For the multinational Vought there is no intention to do good but to sell the idea of doing good under a veil of false security. To do this, the work of superheroes is sold negotiates as a service (considering the dialogue between Madelyn and the mayor of the city of Baltimore). For these reasons, how to know when a superhero has crossed the line of the socially acceptable? When does he become a threat and put his own ego above the interests of those who admire him, idolize him and pay contributions?

No doubt they stand as an authority (Homelander thinks he is more than that, he has a more explosive ego than his abilities, close to being defined as divinity), therefore, they enjoy legitimacy. And who has authority should know that a quality for recognition is piety, the sense of consideration when someone does not literally comply with the regulations. Thus, one reason why people in positions of authority should practice mercy and recognize the weaknesses of others is that

they are also weak and imperfect (Irwin, 2011, p. 16). But in this story, these subjects define themselves as individuals above good and evil, which cause fear, terrify, but also motivates people to disobey them and, why not, challenge them.

The gift of melting things, invisibility, speed, the ability to produce fire and dominate the aquatic element are gifts that human beings have always longed for, especially because they interpret them as divine powers. And in terms of transcendence, humanity has wanted to resemble the gods. In the series those feelings are played with and the heroes are those unreachable stars, surrounded by spectacle, lights and cheers everywhere.

Faced with this popular madness, Butcher and his group have been organized to stop the abuses of power, apparently ominous, that these celebrities represent. Both sides make up a bizarre society that metaphorizes the contemporary era.

For Vought and his fans, The Boys are a subversive group; gangsters without god or law who hide and conspire in order to eradicate superheroes. For The Boys, the paraphernalia created by Vought is an insult to human dignity and, above all, to freedom.

*The Boys'* argument answers a persistent question in the contemporary field of Bioethics: what would happen if an ordinary human being became a superhero? As stated in the final episodes of the first season -with the promise of a second-, those heroes that were seen before, with their disproportionate qualities and defects, are actually modified human beings in laboratories, individuals turned into lethal weapons to combat crime and guarantee with greater level of effectiveness that permanent rule of gold of the States consisting in preserving public order.

Thus exposed, they are Vought properties and the priority of the company, as set out in Chapter 7, is to protect its most profitable assets. In these terms, the role of science is defined to create them in a kind



of series production, especially in the scene when Homelander visits the scientist who was behind the corporate emporium and now refuses his work, saying:

When I cross dog breeds, I choose the genes and get a perfect creation. But no matter how perfect they are, it is not enough. Because raising them without their mothers, makes them become violent, aggressive, full of hate. You should have been raised in a family that would like you, not in a laboratory with scientists.

Interesting diagnosis of that sociopathic behavior that we have seen and that could open new plot lines to future seasons, while insisting on the dehumanization that accompanies the characters, based on those persistent fears regarding the use of biotechnology in the human body. «This is all my fault», says the scientist. A kind of repentance of Frankensteinish shades before the splendor of the fantastic elements.

Homelander is a child trapped in an adult's corporeality, his outbursts of fury are childish, he is selfish and prone to destruction when something does not work according to his whim. In the aforementioned dialogue, it is radical in affirming: «I am the best superhero in the world» but immediately reprimanded by his interlocutor: «You are my greatest failure».

That last sentence rounds the meaning of the series; people are witnesses of a terrifying world, the product of experiments turned into superior beings whose danger hangs over humanity as a constant risk of extermination, unless, of course, their orders are fulfilled and money is available to further guarantee a faint idea of security.

In the final chapter it can be seen how The Boys is not a group of thugs moved solely by revenge. They function as a hidden faction of something, apparently larger and more complex. Butcher himself carries with him a vengeful purpose, which has forced him to abandon his previous life in which, apparently, he was an agent of the FBI or the police. Hence, his farewell in the first season is done with a phrase perhaps premonitory «revenge does not lead to glory, Hugh. It takes you to a dead end».

From the meaning of the figure of the superhero in popular culture,

[...] as in any human being, there can be darkness in a character, as much darkness as light, but that darkness must be held back, in the last place, by the good and the noble or, otherwise, we abandon the realm of the properly superheroic (Morris, 2010, p. 38).

Under that premise, some halo of hope emerges from the narrative tidal wave developed in eight episodes, this time between the two exposed characters with a greater tendency towards virtue:

- Why do you think I should help you?
- Starlight points out.
- Because it's your job and you're a superhero
- Hugh replies.

And in that sense, it's witnessed that finding the balance between those factions that disguise themselves as good and bad, exchanging roles from time to time, will not have an easy but tortuous path, perhaps free of glory and recognition.

## **The fantastic as a critical break from reality**

The vast majority of theories about the fantastic define this category from the confrontation between two fundamental instances: the real and the impossible (or its synonyms: supernatural, unreal, abnormal, etc.). It is enough to review some of the early theoretical approaches to the fantastic: Thus, Castex (1951: 8) points out that it's characterized [...] by an intrusion *Brutal Mystery in the Space of Real Life*; for her part Caillois (1958, p.10) states that the fantastic «manifests a scandal, a crack, a unusual, almost unbearable, irruption into the real world"; and for Vax (1960 p. 6), To quote another 'classical' theorist, fantasy storytelling «delights into introduce ourselves to men like us in the presence of the inexplicable, but within our real world», adding that «Fantasy is nourished of the conflicts between the real and the impossible». A vision of the fantastic that is later reproduced in the works of Todorov (1970), Barrenechea

(1972 and 1991), Bessière (1974), Finné (1980), Campra (1981 y 2000), Cersowsky (1985), Reisz (1989), Bozzetto (1990 y 1998), Ceserani (1996), etc. (Roas, 2009, p. 1).

The hero's behavior is ambiguous: although he performs actions in favor of humanity, he frequently exceeds the rules established by institutions, by laws (Agüera, 2019, p. 161). What impacts *The Boys* is a series of aspects where the fantastic component accentuates the idea that those perfect characters are not really perfect, they keep secrets that deny their apparent crusade to maintain public order and keep society safe ; they lead a double life where the mask is not physical but moral, since they are the same or more perverse than the same human beings; the problem is that they have superpowers and that is equivalent to having atomic bombs in the hands of individuals who frequently submit their will to low passions.

The premise of the story is synthesized in the market presentation made by Madelyn Stillwel (Elisabeth Shue), when she offers the services of Vought, the multinational that directs:

A world without crime, with freedom and justice for all. That is within our reach, thanks to the more than 200 superheroes that are part of the Vought family. We see a great future ahead, where each city will have a Vought hero.

In this order of ideas, it is observed:

- a. The systematic manufacture of superheroes by a company, based on scientific experimentation. It is a transhumanist vision linked to the concept of designer babies.
- b. Creatures are formed to render a service according to the powers they manage to develop. Thus, the company has a diverse catalog of superheroes.
- c. Superheroes are offered as instruments to maintain a social order and offered to the highest bidder, especially to protect cities for a specified period. The price varies according to the popularity and level of power of the respective superhero.

- d. There are no definite guarantees in the event that superheroes cause damage for the service they provide (this is the triggering factor of the narrative and that leads to finding the group known as *The Boys*). Since it is a matter of fighting crime, its actions are assimilated to warfare, in which concepts such as collateral damage are applied. Actions that can be seen as harmful are overshadowed by the end achieved (aspects that border on Machiavellianism).
- e. Society is satisfied with the existence of these creatures, reaching the point of idolizing them, promoting the marketing that revolves around them and making them part of their lives.

From that point of view, the fantastic contains the risk due to the consequences of lawlessness, whether voluntary or not, the fear that these portents think like humans, that is, they put their ego before duty and that they are used as defense weapons, but their autonomy reveals even worse dangers to those who fight.

Since no society is uniform, there will always be a part of it that is opposed to what the majority approves - they are the rules of democracy, ultimately; in this case, does the supernatural factor not facilitate totalitarian perspectives? Is that the reason that moves *The Boys* to declare themselves in open contradiction through the use of force?

This television series proposes these debates, not so much because of their novelty, but because of the forms they take today. This iteration of the conflicts forces us to rethink the ways of social coexistence and not to prevent excesses from happening but to see, between ruptures of reality, what role to play from the individual and in terms of the collective.

## Conclusions

The universe of characters whose property is DC and Marvel, houses that compete with each other and that have given rise to a large number of superheroes of all sizes, conditions, origins and abilities is widely known. Such are the cases of Batman, Flash, Green Lantern,

Green Arrow, Shazam, etc., on the hand, and Iron Man, Spiderman, Hulk, Deadpool, Captain Marvel, etc., on the other.

Their narrative has reflected the fears that arose in the twentieth century regarding politics, society and law, from a fantastic perspective. For example, they have criticized world wars, fear of nuclear threat, space race, espionage, global economy, transhumanism, etc., including hypotheses about the future. This is the case of Captain America, a character created as a form of American nationalist expression during World War II (he even fought against Hitler), a prototype of the super soldier, whose physical condition is altered by a synthetic drug. Dr. Manhattan's abilities come from nuclear radiation, the Hulk emerges from the massive gamma-ray exposure suffered by Dr. David Banner. On the other hand, Iron Man, Batman and Green Arrow, despite not having supernatural abilities, serve as detectives, deal with criminals of all calibers and have the latest technology at their service (all three are billionaires and can afford those luxuries).

The transit of the comic to the big screen has allowed these stories to be part of the popular culture, to the point of adapting ancient myths to the contemporary world.

Most of these stories have shown the profile of the superhero linked to the classic virtues of justice, freedom, the sense of good and the struggle to preserve an exemplary social order. Therefore, a true superhero fights against everything that represents evil, suffering, misery, pain and injustice; seeks to reduce the marginalization gap of a city and puts the needs of individuals over their own.

But what if one day, that set of values were misrepresented? If the icons of order hide secrets and act behind the backs of the people, the same ones who have trusted them deeply? How about giving way to a world in which the main threat was those powerful creatures?

*The Boys* television series proposes a story that answers these questions and exposes the current fears of the globalized world in a

mimetic key. In its corporate interests' parade, the uberization of power, the idea of public order as a privatized service, the megalomania of those who move the threads in the apparent progress of nations, the accentuation of social divisions, with an apocalyptic flavor in each one of its sequences.

The treatment given to fantastic elements produces a tone of dystopia that forces the viewer to question if what he sees is not so strange to the reality he lives.

Behind the reproachable actions of the group that gives title to the work commits, underlies a revolutionary look, a critical perspective on power relations. The reading it proposes uses the fantastic component to adapt to these times the concerns that, at the time, warned the literary creations of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley; not so strange or distant but possible, perhaps imminent, whose seeds are grown today in the back of homes.

It is evident in the story how the intrusion of fantastic components helps to transgress the construct of current reality and that purpose of order that seeks to maintain it. This realistic codification of the world is connected with nuances of sociological criticism (Abello, 2013, p. 226) and allows to mimic the problem of uberized services, the possibility of validating autocracies from the use of force (represented in that collection of superheroes that are produced), an allegory, for example, to the use of nuclear weapons or, even, the Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS).

The hero's iteration, the ambiguity of the hero in relation to the power he holds, the way he should administer it and the position to be taken in the face of the excesses of the subjective use of it, are lines of thought proposed by The Boys among the semiotic layers that it involves the recourse to fantasy as an experiential pretext that even manages to transcend simple entertainment.

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## THE FANTASTIC IMAGE AND ITS AFFINITIES WITH MARC HOLLOGNE'S CINEMA-THEATER

Safa Gharsalli

### Introduction

The subject of fantastic image and such a prominent feature of our culture; is not so completely new, nor is it simply a manifestation of the early years of the television which dominated many living rooms at the beginning of the cold war. As screens proliferate in a post- cold war period, it seems that we were blending multiple facets of fascination since the Lumière brothers<sup>1</sup> «Arrival of a Train» film in 1896. The silent short film depicts a train pulling into a train station in the French coastal town of La Ciotat. The legend goes that the first audiences to see the short film would scream and run to the back of theater because the image of a moving train heading directly toward the audience had never been seen on the big screen before. How does the human mind cognitively process this complex information? Are we able to parse out if we need to consume this kind of image extraordinarily good or attractive? How do screens render the imagination visible and competitive with actors on

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<sup>1</sup> The Lumière brothers: Auguste Marie Louis Nicolas (19 October 1862 - 10 April 1954) and Louis Jean (5 October 1864 - 7 June 1948), were manufacturers of photography equipment, best known for their Cinématographe motion picture system and the short films they produced between 1895 and 1905.

stage? Appreciating the psychological challenge of directing intentional images, we always considers the fantastic image as the cinema of the extraordinary which encompasses science fiction and all the cinema of the strange and fear.

Generating a fantastic image in theater has been the case of nearly forty years from the large-scale performances of the 1980s through the profound changes in theatrical forms in the first two decades of the twenty first-century. Coupled of this shift, conditions of making images appears with a dominant experience of a single screen and just one real actor on scene to make environmental feelings more useful aesthetically. The cinema-theater of the Belgian artist Marc Hollogne was included real live actors on stage to interact with actors projected on the screen. The spectator's attention instead turned away from the stage to the illusion on a screen and the surrounding space with all the technical properties of the moving image. The attractive way of getting a fantastic image, was to make the dimensions of both on the stage and on screen actors the same and to switch naturally and totally between the real and the virtual. With every show Marc Hollogne seeks harmony and equilibrium between reality and virtuality using a procedure linking the spontaneity of the gesture with the freedom of comic speech. He tries to share a multiple viewpoint of his phenomenological experience. These new conditions of *spectatorship* invited movement, dreams, surreal and mental image to erase the gap between theater and cinematic techniques.

When theater architectural dimensions of the space collaborate with computer engineering, they engage not only the authors but also viewers in the process of transforming and combining various technologies with live action to rich fantastic effects. To transform actual space into a complex, expanded, perceptual and performative field, Marc Hollogne used a critical remake of art as a public engagement with the image, as opposed to an act of contemplation of something inherently hidden. For Marc Hollogne, the author -actors of his cinema-theater shows, it is not merely a matter of combining

artistic genres nor it is a staging strategy with a rhetorical and practical displacement of meaning from interior to the outside of an artistic work, it is a whole new cohesion that echoes a scattered multidisciplinary world in search of an often logical work. His show *L'illuminé*, was created at the *Théâtre du Chêne noir* in Avignon in 2010, celebrating at the same time his 30 years of cinema-theater. This show highlights a fantastic cinematographic action that is enriched by the theatrical presence.

Theatricality not only stimulated much subsequent work in cinema and performance art, but also theater was somewhere inherited by the cinema. To facilitate a critical engagement with the notion of spectator itself; *a new spectacularity* was created by using screen as a playful way in his famous *Marciel mente à Paris*<sup>2</sup> (Holloigne, 1997). Hollogne thinks that a paradigmatic theatrical attention to stage and to the participation of the spectator, on the other hand, only detracts from the essential quality of the work. He introduced a truly modern way of telling a story by enveloping and astonishing forms and strategies achieved by the perfect synchronization of the actor's gestures with the cinematic image on screen, while screen compositions continue perfectly integrating the stage. Augmented reality marks the work of the artist, he exaggerates the head of a character to attract the viewer's gaze towards the screen and then towards the scene; which reminds us of the British cinema industry with *The Brighton School* and the birth of British film. Other disruptive effects create continuity between the two worlds; the reality and the virtuality. The goal of this paper has been to trace the roster of influences at this moment so as to explain, not a revolution in cinematic-theater, but the motivation behind the unusual image. With the emphasis refracted away of illusion from the screen to the surrounding space, it was maintained that the dominant experience of introducing a screen was supplanted with *smart acts* and performative situations.

<sup>2</sup> *Marciel monte à Paris* is a play-theater written, directed and directed by Marc Hollogne, presented for the first time in 1997. A screen occupies half of the stage and the two main actors move from one to the other, their character appearing on the screen when they pass behind and interacting with the characters projected on the screen.

## Emerging affinities

Let's make it clear from the start: the subject of this paper is not completely new, nor is it simply a manifestation of a radical enabling technology or a changed theatrical perception. Suffice to recall the concept of introducing digital performances put forward in 2007 to describe shows using new media and digital technology. The use of multiple images to represent information and to tell a story makes new strategies that animate these images on screen. The question of a complex audiovisual device on contemporary stage has been analyzed with a variety of theories, we will move away from theories to enrich Hollogne's artistic vision in a multifaceted way. In an interview in 2010 he artist said: «I was surprised that the out-of-frame looks were lost on the walls of the living room that i could not intervene by calling out to the actors. This necessary «henibition» sometimes works, sometimes not»<sup>3</sup>.

As we look at the new screen and the new works, perhaps we can freshly appreciate the technical work and discover another example of crossing the boundaries of the traditional theater. We know that the cinema is younger than theater which reflected the life of the community from his beginning, this is why in many aspects, theater and cinema become estranged, but on certain points they meet, Hollogne said: «The breath of the first feeds the miracle of the second». The appearance of cinema has never obscured the theater, but on the contrary has made it much more dynamic. We can see that actor's play on stage has many elements that parallel current screen environment; color, projection and other effects were used to create settings of visual intensity where the inherent illusions of perception were let loose. Hollogne is well known for delving into various possibilities offered by new media; he involves his entire crew in experimentation. In corporation with engineers and other specialists, the author makes a complex visual field proliferate in other forms to create his fantastic image. Interdisciplinary construction is required to make image even more exaggerated with video editing. Filmmaking offers new possibilities and helps to create another type of a fantastic image on stage which goes so far. We add that to the others

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<sup>3</sup> More information in: [https://youtu.be/1iByNck\\_fz8](https://youtu.be/1iByNck_fz8)

possibilities, when the camera goes up to actors, it would be unthinkable that it exaggerates their gestures and their words mixing cinema and theater, even though many other actors coming from theater changed their way of acting which became less exaggerated with the arrival of the cinema. This form of expression always has tendency to be maintained by links with classic forms. In a step with critical tendency, we intend to reveal reasons which encouraged this practice to renovate its habitual system of signs across epochs by giving virtual or imaginary pictures. Because of this the theater, besides the fact that his presentation of the actual can make us return in the past by reincarnating a myth or a story, cast in future by showing a futuristic picture which can be surreal.

The agenda of artistic research introduced the theories of intermediality as a creative tool and a subject of a scholar analysis, the reason why spectators are less and less interested by the classic forms of art because they find new medias an attractive way of getting their dreams done. This image gives audience the opportunity to have an emotional experience they would not otherwise have had. To provide a panoramic view of fantastic image in Hollogne's cinematic-theater, cinema's plans and theatrical scene are which could be classified in total perception. He also points to a mutation in the text and in the performative attitude, which affects the basic structure of a performance with his adjoining screen. To make it hybrid, the author significantly shared the change from a frame to another in the same time and space which have a growing impact in the creative process. In the continuity of these ideas, we confirm that the purpose here is to show that the broadcasting theater, the multimedia theatre and the movies-theatre do not play on the same ground therefore do not produce pictures even. Something else to underline here, it is that the different plays are very often hardly identifiable, because they do not belong as in the classical theatre in already defined theatrical types. Using what we can call avatars on screen is bringing a profound change not only on the stage, but also in the way that spectators maintain their relation with real actors. These transformations are also affecting traditional theatrical professions, such as sound engineering, video production, directing and even acting. Hollogne said:

Launching a cinema projector to synchronize with the actors that respond on a canvas is not particularly pleasant. I don't see them, I'm just hearing them. I'm talking to the frame on the screen, [...] «Filling» these spaces, these silences in which my sentences must be placed, gives rise to an indescribable jubilation<sup>4</sup>.

One of unexpected developments of the last decade is the relationship between the cinematic projection, the actors and the viewers. The relationship between performers and their image became more and more interactive because screens are more used to restore and serve something bigger than a complementary information; however the relationship between *audience/ actors/ screen* is no longer obvious and can't refer immediately to a simple interaction between people and a machine. From this point of view, we will focus on the collaboration between the actor and spectators, we will analyze the mutual exchange of ideas and energy by introducing a fantastic image. My main example which is *L'Illuminé* show a project not recommended for children under 10 years, presented at *Dejazet Theater*, Paris. The artist while interacting with his replicas projected on a screen; introduces a reality mixed with artifices to stimulate sensations and mysteries reinforcing the unity of the show.

## **Hollogne and the philosophy of fantastic images**

In this seminal work we will focus on the last two centuries as there were significant changes in the way in which image and content have been communicated in theater. The emergence of a fantastic image altered the principal channels of performing art communication. The literary theater founded on a linear theatrical text has been increasingly challenged by visual production based on reproduction of imagery rather than dialog or text. To speak about how the fantastic image was changing in theater and going beyond a purely technical dimension, toward creativity and research, we must speak about one of the symptoms of this transformation which is the involvement of engineers and scientists in the creative process.

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<sup>4</sup> More information in [https://youtu.be/1iByNck\\_fz8](https://youtu.be/1iByNck_fz8)

Valorizing the achievements of the communicative image in the cinema-theater of Marc Hollogne will be presented by informing, guiding and endorsing work plans through participatory dialog and sharing of knowledge and resources. The proliferation of screens in the contemporary shows attest to this gradual mutation. The image is very precisely extended and expanded on stage. These types of changes are partly relevant in the broader context of anthropology and artistic theory. *L'illuminé* evokes: the computer, the digital and the GPS and all of this environment today full of technological dependencies. By his cinema-theater; Hollogne, like many European thinkers and artists, was searching for new ways of expression and practical contexts. Since he was 14, Hollogne has had this fixed idea of making actors interacting with their replicas projected on a cinema screen and move naturally from the scene to the screen. This experience of mixing mediums proves that it is not by a simple juxtaposition of ways that the artist tries the practice of video theater. The creator adores the cinematographic image, he was fascinated by colors and lights then he decides to combine the digital image with the scenic image in his creations.

The amplified gestures give to his choice of a *non-linear narrative* and *visual* theater an injected kind of language to his perspective . Hollogne used hybridization between theatre and cinema by enjoying the ambiguity of his intellectual theater and by introducing shots; he was more than an artist, he was a thinker and a creator. At first sight and by focusing Hollogne's works, we discover the magic effect created by the continuity of forms and postures as well as the extension of the sceneries that are found in a single unit. This playing space brings us to the many disciplines; avoiding making one value and devaluing the other. The artist, in all his pieces, tries to narrate the passage from silent cinema presented in black and white to colorful and sound screens. Marc Hollogne, as the director, the scriptwriter and the actor of his cinema-theater positioned his screen on the same side of the stage, sometimes moves away from the center, leaving a wide margin for him to articulate his movements, gesticulate as well as travel from the stage to the screen.



Despite the fact that he spent most of his time thinking about how to deal with frames, however his greatest philosophical theory influences many rhetoricians and artists who introduced exaggerated image in their works to make a specific art actions in a new artistic adventure, drawing on connections between movement and artistic practices in a multicultural portrait such as the French duo José Montalvo<sup>5</sup> and Dominique Hervieu<sup>6</sup> in their show *Paradis* (1997) and *Orphée staged on 2010*. The question here is how we can differentiate the real and the virtual which are somewhat difficult to interpret. The centerpiece of this article is an analysis of the exchanges of fantastic image, cinema and theater, and there is no doubt that the popularity of cinema in part can be explained by the age of theater because it is older than cinema and media arts. Fantastic frames that Hollogne introduces on stage using screens; involved terminology and visual characteristics from both theater and cinema. I will focus on the first phase of the show which is producing cinematographic images. The hypothesis is that on the basis of the collaboration between engineer and the actor there is a preparatory period which needs sensitivity and creative talent. To characterize the subject of the study, I must first of all characterize fantastic image; his effects and why it is designed. The results are divided into three processes: creativity, hybridization and sensitivity. The first process, is a form of expression that always has tendency to be maintained by links with classic forms. The second, which is hybridization, has always had a critical proclivity, intend to reveal reasons which encouraged this practice to renovate its habitual system of signs across epochs by giving virtual or imaginary pictures. The third process is to ask whether the audience became fascinated with the possibilities of a new experience introduced by live images behind all change. Here is the time to ask if theatre is really an art that does not talk about here and now, but about beyond and the past? The creative work demonstrates a futuristic picture via myth and legend. Reaching an important conclusion at this level; the performing art and theatrical

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<sup>5</sup> José Montalvo (Born in 1954): Is a prominent French dancer and choreographer his work has been performed in Europe, America and Asia.

<sup>6</sup> Dominique Hervieu (Born in 1962), France in 1981 she met José Montalvo and she developed with him an original gestural language.

discipline can expand or minimize hybridization. This complex destroys classical text to change it into what we call technological approaches or digital image.

### **The *vi transmediality* vision of an artistic imagination**

This altered relation between text and consumers was designed to connect theater, cinema and technology. The cinematographic presence tries to create a colorful universe where the ideas and thoughts are very different from theatrical text. To analyze the function and skills of theater, we must speak about the significant difference between acts and takes. Perhaps it is this idea that made cinema-theater so influential with Marc Hollogne's attempt. It seems to suggest that it is a methodological image from a linear procedural and narrative sound associated to an historical process providing epistemological tools. Initially three distinct areas were selected to learn more about the mixed image. The first one is the stage angle and the reverse shot inspired from cinematic takes in particular high-angle shot and low-angle shot to search the equilibrium in the digital codes on stage. The second area is the relationship between the image and the spectator focused on a single or multiple movement using static shot, wide shot and tracking shot. The ultimate purpose of using cinematic shots was to introduce and communicate successfully with a new digital avatar on screen in front of an audience composed of different ages facing the stage in a classical set up. The third additional equipment in Hollogne's process was the full shot, American shot, close-medium shot, the close shot, the close-up shot and the extreme close-up shot to build a unique and a special relation with the viewers. The overriding goal of this mixing of cinema shots and theatrical acts is to introduce a different image on stage and to push contemplation, fascination and admiration to their extreme limit.

### **The transmediality vision of artistic imagination**

Working on these topics which are fantastic theatrical image, mixing techniques and their interaction was the aim of this study. A

new image took place on stage before an audience composed one. It was able to be investigated by the participants who took part of the fantastic show by a visible incarnation. The discussion will be composed of two parts: the experimentation and its results and the fantastic theatrical composition, where the results of the experimentation were shown to wider audiences. To focus on his media theory of the demise of text, Marc Hollogne introduced betrayal affinity involving scientific and political taking place in his show *L'illuminé* and in various other attempts. The projects were interdisciplinary and transmedial perfecting theatrical dispositive by including a multi-phase work in progress to activate audience's mental image. It is important to note the distinctions between multimedia and intermedia and transmedia along the lines of the functioning of media next to each other *Nebeneinander* and with each other *Miteinander*. The German opera composer Richard Wagner said:

The true Drama is only conceivable as proceeding from a common urgency of every art towards the most direct appeal to a common public. In this Drama, each separate art can only bare its utmost secret to their common public through a mutual parleying with the other arts; for the purpose of each separate branch of art can only be fully attained by the reciprocal agreement and co-operation of all the branches in their common message<sup>7</sup>.

## Conclusion

Audiovisual dialogue offers an escape; thus a special anthology using modern thematic based on the proliferation of visual images offering another way out from totalitarianism of the official theater. A closer examination of his texts reveals that the center of his work is the possibility of a dialogue and the concept of cinema-theater, it is neither cinema nor theater, it is both. The cinema-theater image describes a system of communication structures constructed through various cinematic combinations and technological discourses. On this

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<sup>7</sup>Wagner, Richard. (2001), *Multimedia: from Wagner to Virtual Reality*, 3–9. New York: Norton. ed. Randall Packer and Ken Jordan.

basis, Hollogne developed his own concept of fantastic communication structure. In short, the idea of combined scene led to a free theater as an act of communication. Here we speak about according and developing a rudimentary acting method or systematic mental image which is far from the theatre's vocation often exposed at the beginning of the play, to be solved in the end of the scene. Fantastic images were maps that enabled their creators to orient themselves in their environment exceeding the *fourth wall* by their magical behavior and with enlightened consciousness. On the other hand, Hollogne's theater seeks to maintain classical texts, the creator think that cinema and theatre can also come together and have common links by giving an unusual creation on the perceptual space. These are all aesthetic and theatrical theories that profoundly disrupt the old perceptions of the theatrical act aimed at putting into action, not only the first look adopted by the classical spectator, but also to feel the need for change before changing. Under the advent of these new visions, theatre changes radically after an oscillation between an old and a new perceptual space. The artist introduces us a baroque world in the confluence of types. We find an alliance in these rooms between theatre, mime, parody, jazz and cinema.

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