MAGICAL REALISM IN TRANSNATIONAL CINEMA

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Abstract

This project is an analysis of the magical realist genre in cinema, specifically its multiple forms found in transnational cinema. The status of magical realism in film as a genre will be questioned and this project argues that the concept is best understand as a transgeneric critical category rather than a genre in the conventional understanding of the term. Magical realism as academic concept has been discussed in-depth in literary theory and this project extends those discussions into the field of cinema. The history of criticism of magical realism is summarized as it applies to studying film with special attention given towards the semiotic differences between literature and cinema. Furthermore, this project explicates the distinct ways that magical realism operates in cinema in contrast to literature while also noting the shared aesthetic strategies between each media. Each section covers a thematic topic observed in transnational magical realist cinema: metafiction in overt and covert forms; the representation of historicity; and the representation of marginalized subjectivities, specifically looking at how magical realist cinema presents issues of class, gender, race, and sexual identity. The final thematic discussion discusses the possibility of utopian discourses in magical realist cinema, the attempts to envision a less exploitative social collective according to a variety of cultural and national contexts in late-capitalism. Key films discussed in this project include: *Death by Hanging* (1968), *Underground* (1995), *Naked Lunch* (1991), *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (1974), *Miracle in Milan* (1951), *The Tin Drum* (1979), *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), *Tropical Malady* (2004), *Gozu* (2003), Daughters of the Dust (1991) among many other works.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This project is the study of the paradoxical term magical realism as it appears in cinema. Like its literary counterpart, magical realist film is in many ways, more so than other film genres, an international category. But unlike its literary counterpart, it did not begin in a specific geographical space but disparately in pockets of international cinema throughout the last 100 years. I first came to this project by a sort of backwards trajectory, wanting to study certain filmmakers, such as Jacques Rivette, Jerry Lewis, Alexander Sokurov, Takashi Miike, and Raúl Ruiz, that used anti-realist or non-realist forms of narrative filmmaking that I found difficult to classify, and the writing on these filmmakers also did not have any satisfactory way of explaining their breaks with realism. The term I found most appropriate was magical realism because it captured the way these filmmakers simultaneously use and reject realism in their films without simply using fantastic modes such as low- and high-fantasy films. Understanding how magical realism manifested itself in the context of the medium of film necessarily led me to specify the modes it shared with other film genres, such as surrealism, horror or gothic, science fiction, and fantasy. Studying magical realism's hybrid nature and generic complexity also elucidated the way artistic discourses function in concert with or in contradiction to each other, illuminating how genres function in general as multiplicities of various discourses that coalesce into a stable artistic form.

The argument I will develop throughout this analysis regarding the generic definition of magical realist film will be to define the term in cinema as a transgeneric phenomenon. Specifically, I will show how magical realism in film is not primarily defined by a codified narrative structure, a distinctive film form, semantic materials, nor is it defined by particular

period or national contexts. It is a type of narrative strategy that is primarily defined by the complex mixing of realist and fantastic discourses into a synthesis which resolves the tension between those two, historically, opposed discourses in narrative works. Transgeneric as a concept allows one to explore how magical realist cinema is able to become a relevant artistic form in a variety of cultural contexts, periods in film history, and most importantly how it is able to attach itself to other formulaic, industrial, and popular film genres like the comedy, the crime film, romance stories, and historical dramas. I will demonstrate throughout this work that magical realist cinema is primarily defined by its essential narrative strategy of combining two aesthetic discourses with very specific thematic concerns: the representation of the process of a narrative work, or metafiction; and the interrogation of the past and the way it is constructed, or historicity; oppositional subject positions, or the ex-centric. The final section will deal with the political interpretation of this critical category, the utopian dimension of the transgeneric phenomenon in cinema called magical realism.

Magical realist film has not enjoyed the same amount of scholarly attention as other film genres of the fantastic like science fiction, horror, fantasy, gothic, and surrealist films. The majority of the research on magical realism is focused on the literary form of the mode, its origins in the Latin American context, and its eventual export to the global context. Therefore, to summarize the discourse of the term involves summarizing with the way it has been used in literary criticism. It has also become a minor term in art history as well, both before and after it was used in literary theory. In what follows, I will trace the history of the term magical realism in painting, literature, and film.

The first use of the term in aesthetic theory came from Franz Roh in his discussion of post-Expressionist paintings in the Weimar Republic during the 1920s.[1] Roh defined "magic realism" in painting as a return to reality that celebrated the mundane and everyday. The "magic" in the term refers to the perceptual gaze used to capture reality which made the everyday seem uncanny, strange, and marvelous.[2] It was not so much that the subject matter made this painting mode distinct from previous works, but by scrupulously depicting familiar objects it generated a new way of seeing the world and rendered the everyday in an uncanny fashion.[3] In this context, magical realism is framed in epistemological and perceptual terms; it refers exclusively to the way objects and subjects are presented in art but not what is represented. The only stipulation that Roh observed against the content of magic realism was a general rejection of spiritual subjects.

In Latin American literary criticism, the term was used independently of Roh's writing to explain how Latin American literature differs from European works, especially surrealism, realism, and naturalism. The Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier used the term *lo real maravilloso* (the marvelous real) to refer to Latin American culture and its representation in literature. He described Latin American literature as marvelous because, in the culture that produced it, the marvelous, the strange and the uncanny are part of the quotidian. Latin Americans' attempt to

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[1] The German philosopher Novalis used the term "magical realism" to differentiate the term from his philosophy of "magical idealism" but did not use the term to discuss painting or literature. See Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 19.

[2] Franz Roh, "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 16-22.

[3] Irene Guenther, "Magic Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts During the Weimar Republic," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 36.

write fiction in the realist mode, fiction that is primarily inspired by stories from everyday life, necessarily produces *lo real maravilloso*, because according to Carpentier their cultural setting was already marvelous.[4] This formulation connects magical realism to a specific geographic location but does not establish any clear generic boundaries for the term. *Lo real maravilloso* is inspired by Indigenous thought, myths, and ways of seeing the world that are counter to Eurocentric norms of rationalism and instrumental reason. Not only was *lo real maravilloso* different from the conventional forms of European realism but it was also distinct from other European literature that use fantastic discourses. Carpentier tried to show how *lo real maravilloso* differed from European surrealism by arguing that surrealism creates the marvelous through artificial means, from artistic imagination or, in his words, "premeditated" and "manufactured" versions of the marvelous.[5] In contrast, Latin American writers produce the marvelous organically by representing their culture which is already marvelous irrespective of artistic imagination and embellishment. His formulation of magical realism is meant to describe Latin Americans' own version of surrealism and, paradoxically, realism that is distinct from European literature, similar to a type of folk form of cultural production that Angela Carter believed was the main literary tradition for her version of magical realism in the British context. It is worth noting here that Carpentier's description of surrealism as creating the marvelous through artificial means would also characterize much of what we consider magical realism today, which is probably why Salman Rushdie positioned magical realism as a development from the surrealist tradition and not necessarily opposed to it.

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[4] Alejo Carpentier, "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 102.

[5] Ibid., 103-104.

Carpentier's definition betrays his own perspective as an artist who was as much influenced by European art as he was by Latin American culture. He was born in Lausanne, Switzerland and his family moved to Havana, Cuba when he was twelve but he moved to Paris to attend University. He was well-versed in European literature, especially French writers such as Balzac, Zola, and Flaubert, and his explanation of Latin American literature implies betrays an exoticizing perspective on the Global South even though it champions its premodern, creole culture. He quotes early accounts from the European conqueror Bernal Díaz del Castillo who, in *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, was amazed by the precolonial practices and culture of Latin America, as one of the first examples of *lo real maravilloso* in literature. The term *lo real maravilloso* therefore has colonialist *ideologemes* embedded within its very premise because it exoticizes the culture of Latin America, attributing its "magical" culture as premodern rather than as alternative form of cultural sophistication.

Angel Flores and Luis Leal introduced the term "magical realism" after Carpentier to describe literature from Latin America. Both of their writings on magical realism provided the theoretical foundation for the term as we understand it today in literature and film produced outside of Latin America, and nearly all future definitions of the term are based on their designations of the concept. Flores defined magical realism as a trend of Latin American fiction that breaks with European romantic, realist, and naturalist literature. The publication of *A Universal History of Infamy* by Jorges Luis Borges in 1935 is the beginning of this trend but the roots of it can be found in Kafka's writing, especially *The Metamorphosis*, which combined a cold, detached, realist writing style with a fantastic scenario. Flores defines magical realism simply as the synthesis of realism and fantasy where the fantastic appears to exist on the same

ontological level as the real in the literary reality of text. The amount of works that Flores summarizes in a brief article is impressive, and he catalogues a diverse set of texts as an emerging category for literary criticism, including many works that are scarcely mentioned today and most likely deserve to be re-examined in light of the history of magical realism. Leal's article was written as a response to Flores's work and limits the term so that it categorizes a list of much fewer works. Leal's definition of literary magical realism extends Roh's theory stating that magical realism is defined by the tendency to expose the mysterious relationships of reality. The problem with Leal's definition is that it is so general that it is almost meaningless. Many literary modes, including magical realism, expose the "mystery" behind reality, even the modes Leal distinguished magical realism from such as fantasy, realism, and surrealism. Leal rejected many of the works listed by Flores as magical realist but did not identify a satisfactory set of traits for the genre to explain his reasoning for excluding those works.

Literary theory following Leal's and Flores's defined magical realism as a synthesis between realism and fantasy and situated the major works in Latin America between the 1940s and 1960s with *The Invention of Morel* (1940) by Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Men of Maize* (1949) by Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Pedro Páramo* (1955) by Juan Rulfo, and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) by Gabriel Garcia Márquez. The immediate precursors to this category were the writings of Jorges Luis Borge and Alejo Carpentier, *Macunaima* (1927) by Mario De Andrade, and a select group of works by Franz Kafka. Literary theory also recognized that magical realism, as it appeared in Spanish American fiction, resembled earlier modes of European literature like

fantastic fiction and, in general, the romance genre.[6] Northrop Frye's definition of romance

shows how romance as a broad narrative category contains some similarities with magical

realism. In romance, magical beings and events happen on the same plane of existence as the

natural world, and it was not until later in the history of European literature that fiction began to

separate fantastic modes from realist discourses. The fantastic was eventually relegated to certain

types of works after the emergence of the novel form, and magical realism breaks down these

boundaries.

Magical realism also has similarities to earlier works from the Baroque period and the

Romantic period, the latter of which reacted against the dominion over the imaginary from

Enlightenment scientific reason.[7] Another way to categorize magical realism as part of broader

literary genres would be to understand it as part of another category that Frye described in his

work: the ironic mode.[8] Frye defined the ironic as a parody of romance where mythical forms are

combined with extreme mimesis.[9] Cervantes's revision of the chivalric romance in *Don Quixote*

or Kafka's descriptions of fantastic events as metaphors for a fully administered society are

examples that anticipate the way magical realism applies fantastic elements to a world that

resembles our own. Identifying the roots of magical realism in the ironic rather than the romantic

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[6] Lois Parkinson Zamora, "Magical Romance/Magical Realism: Ghosts in Latin American and U.S. Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 518.

[7] Amaryll Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America: Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Dominant Paradigms," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 125.

[8] Arturo A. Fox, "Realismo magico: Algunas consideraciones formales sobre su concepto," in *Otros mundos, otros fuegos: fantasia y realism magico en Iberoamerica, Memoria del XVI Congreso Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericano*, ed. Donald A. Yates (Pittsburgh: K. and S. Enterprises, 1975), 53-56.

[9] Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 223.

mode explains why so much of magical realism in literature dramatizes class struggle, political

oppression, and historical trauma more so than it dramatizes the simple wish-fulfillment

narratives that define the romantic mode.

There is a near complete consensus in literary theory on how to define the political

ideology of magical realism: the only point of contention seems to be to what degree can we

think of magical realism as an exclusively postcolonial mode. Writers from the dominant centres

of the world have written significant magical realist works as well, including *What the Crow*

Said (1978) by Robert Kroetsch from Canada, *Nights at the Circus* (1986) by Angela Carter from

Britain, and *Kafka on the Shore* (2002) by Haruki Murakami from Japan. The first cycle of

magical realist literature that came out of the Global South subverted the codes of European

literature. This subversive impulse was then exported to other countries on the periphery of

global capitalism: India with Salman Rushdie, South Africa with J.M. Coetzee, Nigeria with Ben

Okri, the Black Diaspora in the US with Toni Morrison, the Czech Republic with Milan

Kundera, and Morocco with Abdelkebir Khatibi and Tahar Ben Jelloun. The widespread use of

magical realism from the periphery led Homi K. Bhabha to conclude that after the Latin

American fiction "boom" magical realism became a *de facto* postcolonial mode.[10]

Stephen Slemon has extended this notion to include subversive literatures produced from

dominant centres of political and cultural capital, like Canada, with his analysis of *The Invention*

of the World (1978) and *What the Crow Said*.[11] Even though these works are not written by

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[10] Homi K. Bhabha, introduction to *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 7.

[11] Stephen Slemon, "Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 407-426.

postcolonial subjects, they use magical realism to dramatize the oppression and historical effects of colonialism. The setting of the text becomes a stand-in for the country as a whole, the reduction of the history of colonialism to the temporal scheme of the text represents the long process of colonization and its aftermath, and the rhetorical attention paid to the absences and silences produced by the colonial encounter are then reflected in the text's disjunctive narrative mode that subverts both realist and fantastic codes by combining them.[12] Slemon locates the postcolonial element in the formal ideology of the work, revealing how the text's narration and thematic structures embody postcolonial ideas specific to the context of a nation that belongs to a dominant centre of power in global capitalism. Slemon's analysis of postcolonial literary discourses can be extended to other works outside of the Canadian context by Angela Carter, John Fowles, Haruki Murakami, Toni Morrison, Janet Frame, and Italo Calvino. Of note, Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Nights at the Circus* and Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* depict an anti-colonialist-feminist perspective. Frame's *The Carpathians* presents a utopian literary form that rejects the boundaries between centres and margins which are so central to the aftermath of colonialism and the contemporary discourses of neo-colonialism. Finally, Calvino's *The Nonexistent Knight* satirizes notions of identity and traditional authority.[13]

The source of magical realism's postcolonial ideology, according to previous scholarship, is the supplementation of realism with another discourse that disrupts the ideological

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[12] Ibid., 411-412.

[13] Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 260.

assumptions of realism. This duality in magical realism (realism plus fantasy) is present in nearly

every conception of the term and typically engenders another theoretical subdivision for

explicating magical realist texts. One of the most influential dichotomies that critics have made

is the distinction between ontological and epistemological forms of magical realism.[14] The

ontological refers to Carpentier's definition of *lo real maravilloso*, claiming that Latin American

culture is fantastic and uncanny when compared to the Global North. The ontological also

includes the general trend of Latin American magical realism that involves realistic portrayals of

magical events and characters. The epistemological variant refers to literary art that transforms

the everyday into something strange, uncanny, and fantastic, similar to how Roh defined post-

Expressionist paintings in Germany in his writings on "magic realism". The limits of the natural

are not transgressed, but the natural is now depicted as fantastic in itself, thus transforming the

realist mode without including fantastical events in the storyworld of the text. Christopher

Warnes adapted this typology but imposed another semic opposition onto it that invokes the

institution of secular forms of rationality in European culture with the dichotomy of "faith" and

"irreverence."[15] Magical realism and faith refers to the suspension of rational empirical

judgements in favour of an expanded view of reality held by non-Western worldviews and the

faith in the capacity of literature to depict an expanded conception of reality.[16] Magical realism

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[14] Roberto González Echevarria, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 108; Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 165-166; William Spindler, "Magic Realism: A Typology," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 29, no.1 (1993): 78.

[15] Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and The Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 12-13.

[16] Ibid., 12.

and irreverence refers to the writing style of Borges and other Modernist writers outside the conventional confines of magical realist literature. Irreverence in magical realism disputes claims to truth and coherence in Enlightenment philosophy. Truth claims of causality and reality are deconstructed as contingent on political consensus, language, and discourse rather than on reality itself.[17] Another dualist typology is found in Jean Weisgerber's distinction between magical realisms termed "scholarly" (philosophical and speculative) and "folkloric" (Indigenous magic and pre-Enlightenment world views).[18]

Many of these distinctions rest on the unspoken assumption that Kafka and Borges should be considered magical realist. Critical texts on magical realism that exclude Borges from the genre do not usually employ a dualist conception of magical realism.[19] Other critics have defined writers like Kafka and Borges as part of another literary category called the "neofantastic" and claim that magical realism is an offshoot from that literary mode.[20] The neofantastic is defined by Jaime Alazraki as the naturalization of the supernatural, an adaptation of Todorov's conclusion to his structural analysis of the fantastic genre.[21] Todorov described Kafka's fiction in this way, as an emerging, original development of the fantastic genre that

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[17] Ibid., 13.

[18] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 165; Jean Weisgerber, *Le Réalisme magique: Roman, peinture et cinema*. Brussels: Le Centre des Avant-gardes littéraires de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1987. Is there a page citation?

[19] Luis Leal, "Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 122.

[20] Kenneth S. Reeds, *What is Magical Realism? An Explanation of a Literary Style* (Lewiston: The Edwin Melle Press, 2013), 40.

[21] Jaime Alazraki, "Neofantastic Literature – A Structuralist Answer," in *The Analysis of Literary Texts: Current Trends in Methodology*, ed. Randolph Pope (Ypsilanti: Bilingual Press, 1980), 286-290.

resolves the tension and the implied readerly hesitation that characterized fantastic literature in the nineteenth century. The fantastic is a hybrid mode much like magical realism that exists between belief in the supernatural (suspension of the laws of nature, marvelous fiction) and the supernatural explained according to Western understandings of reality (the laws of nature remain intact, therefore the uncanny is explained). The neo-fantastic no longer produces an implied hesitation but naturalizes the fantastic into everyday reality. For many critics, this description would suffice as a definition of magical realism while others feel it lacks the political focus of a great many magical realist works that include overt thematics dealing with historical oppression and cultural identity. Nevertheless, Alazraki's definition of the neo-fantastic corresponds in many ways to Wendy B. Faris's list of five characteristics of magical realism: an irreducible element of magic, a detailed description of the phenomenal world, readerly hesitation between contradictory interpretation of events in the narrative, the merging of two worlds or realms, and the rejection of conventional understandings of space, time, and identity.[22]

Faris's description of magical realism is a productive way to theorize the category because her list explains the variety of texts we encounter from the magical realist mode. The only disadvantage of Faris's description is that it is too inclusive and risks including works that are better defined as fantastic or possibly even science fiction. An alternative way to theorize magical realism would be Kenneth S. Reeds's definition: the naturalization of the supernatural into a realist discourse combined with the recasting of history from the point of view of

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[22] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 167-174; Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004), 7.

marginalized cultures.[23] This definition has the opposite problem of Faris's definition because it now becomes too exclusive. Reeds's definition excludes works that have all the qualities of magical realism from Latin American literature but lack their postcolonial discourses. Magical realist works produced in the North American context like *The Witches of Eastwick* by John Updike and Woody Allen's short stories do not share the same anti-colonialist politics as those produced in Latin American or Canadian contexts, nor in works from Rushdie or Carter, among many others of course. This is also true when you consider the way magical realism has manifested in cinema because it does not present a near exclusively postcolonial ideology like it does in literature. In cinema, magical realism is politically ambiguous when looked at as a whole, however, I will would argue that the most sophisticated magical realist films have an oppositional ideology buried within their aesthetics.

Another prevalent assumption from previous scholarship is the argument that magical realist texts necessarily criticize the realist mode (by including magical elements) rather than criticizing the fantastic mode. Rarely do we find the assumptions of the fantastic mode under question even though both emerged from European fiction. The realist mode is typically identified with Western rationality and colonialism along with various forms of oppression because the principles of realism correlate to instrumentalist conceptions of time and space that were installed with the emergence of capitalism in Europe. The inclusion of the fantastic in magical realism is always identified with postcolonial political impulses in magical realist scholarship. This is curious because fantasy is just as much a part of European literature as realism is. E.T.A. Hoffmann, Daniel Defoe, and Guy de Maupassant were discussed in detail by

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[23] Reeds, *What is Magical Realism?*, 40.

both Penzoldt and Todorov in their respective works on the fantastic mode.[24] Furthermore, the gothic mode has manifestations that align with reactionary impulses, supporting traditional systems of oppression in society.[25] The ideological problematic for this blind spot is Eurocentric. Literary critics associate realism and all of its ideologemes (secularism, rationality, scientific reason) with Europe, the West, and the Global North and magic or fantasy with the periphery, Indigenous perspectives, and pre-modern ways of thinking. This perspective fails to recognize the prevalence of magical thinking that persisted within European modernity and the use of fantasy in European literature as well. While there was a strong dominion of mimesis overriding the European literary imaginary, the fantastic and mythical is just as much part of their tradition even if it was suppressed. To consistently associate realism with Europe and magical thinking with the colonized is to maintain the inferior complex that was instilled by colonialism in the first place. One way to symptomatically interpret the Western scholarship on magical realism is to acknowledge that what we define as magical, premodern, and fantastic is always against our own referents that we have inherited from European modernity. This would explain why works from countries in geopolitical peripheral spaces are defined by Western critics as magical realist and not as modernist or now postmodernist.[26] This includes Carpentier who used the term *lo real maravilloso* is also guilty of an unexamined Eurocentrism. If we consider the statements made by novelists from the periphery we can see another theoretical perspective that does not use Eurocentric biases to define magical realism. Garcia Márquez situated his work within realism

[24] Peter Penzoldt, *The Supernatural in Fiction* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

[25] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror. Volume 1. The Gothic Tradition* (New York: Longman, 1996), 47-48.

[26] Liam Connell, "Discarding Magic Realism: Modernism, Anthropology, and Critical Practice," *A Review of International English Literature* 29, no. 2 (1998): 95-110.

and not fantasy, a different form of realism from a Latin American perspective. Toni Morrison

rejected the label magical realism because she felt it was an attempt by Western critics to

homogenize the African-American perspective in her novels under a formula that did not apply

to her context. In these formulations, magical realism is not opposed to reality or realism. It does

not reject reality like surrealism but expands the horizon of reality. It challenges European

notions of realism and fantasy simultaneously by dismissing the boundaries between mimesis

and myth, the foundational poles of all literary art. Magical realism combats the Eurocentric

ideology in the literary terrain not simply by appealing to pre-modern ways of thinking but by

expanding our notions of what counts as reality and what types of subjectivities are worthy of

attention. They also position spaces within the Global South as worthy content for so-called high

literature. Because many of these peripheral spaces have been subsumed into the logic of capital

historically later than the Global North, capitalist ideologemes of individualism, measured time,

and consumerism did not become regimented into the cultural spaces of the Global South, and

these novels express ways of being that have been cut off from us. What Western critics are

interpreting as magical, pre-modern ways of thinking might simply be non-capitalist ideologies

emerging in postcolonial literature.[27] Numerous magical realist works are post-colonial not

because of their use of fantasy but because they substitute alternative notions of reality that reject

Eurocentric constructions of space, time, and identity. They refashion what we consider as

legitimate raw material for literature. In the spirit of this criticism, Anne C. Hegerfeldt goes so

far as to argue that all magical realism is postcolonial by default because these narratives subvert

cultural hierarchies, reorient the reader to alternative definitions of space and time, and correct

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[27] Jesus Benito, Ana Ma Manzanas, and Begona Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 77.

the Eurocentric worldview with a supplementary aesthetic logic.[28] What magical realism demonstrates is that we also need to readjust the critical methodology for understanding this relationship in order to not dive back into the ideological framework that these works are criticizing.

The other reason why it is inaccurate to associate magical realism with primitive or pre-modern ways of thinking is because so much of the magical realist literary canon comprises the postmodern canon, a set of texts that critics normally associate with the most sophisticated literary works that have followed modernism. The terms modernism and postmodernism might be too broad to be useful any longer. But as general ways of categorizing how literature conceptualizes identity, space and time, memory, the subject, and history, these two categories are useful in explaining the differences across literary history. Linda Hutcheon includes several magical realist novels in her work on postmodern fiction: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *The Tin Drum*, and *Shame*.[29] Hutcheon argues that what defined postmodernism in fiction is not pastiche or a lack of historicity, as Fredric Jameson has argued, but its tendency to produce "historiographic metafiction." The reconceptualization of history is one of the primary features of magical realism, especially works after *One Hundred Years of Solitude* like *Midnight's Children*, *Foe*, *Beloved*, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, and *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*. Hutcheon does not distinguish between magical realism and postmodernism but simply includes canonical works of magical realism in her definition of

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[28] Anne C. Hegerfeldt, *Lies That Tell The Truth: Magic Realism Seen Through Contemporary Fiction From Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 3, 6, 52.

[29] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

postmodernism. Other literary theory on magical realism argues that magical realism is a sub-

genre within the broader category of postmodernism. Theo D'Haen locates magical realism

within postmodernism because of the way magical realism disrupts established ideological

centres of power.[30] Jon Thiem discusses how magical realism uses metafictional techniques

much like other postmodern fiction.[31] Another way to conceptualize the relationship between

magical realism and postmodernism (and thereby connect magical realism with not the pre-

modern consciousness of European history but with the most sophisticated literary works from

the Global North) is through Faris's argument that magical realism exists between modernism

and postmodernism. Magical realism exhibits features of both trends (challenging conventional

understandings of space and time, deconstruction of identity, blurring the boundary between fact

and fiction).[32] This formulation accounts for the long period in which we observe magical

realism as a mode in literature, beginning from the early twentieth century to the present. The

tendencies we associate with many magical realist works, an irreducible level of magic that

appears without explanation in a real world and a naturalization of the fantastic, can be found in

important modernist works like Kafka's short stories and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. The same

tendencies appear frequently in postmodernist works and magical realist literature. Faris argues

that magical realism is a subset of postmodernist literature with roots from the modernist period.

Modernism uses mythical, historical and personal pasts, and magical realism turns these

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[30] Theo D'Haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community,* ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 193-195.

[31] Jon Thiem, "The Textualization of the Reader in Magical Realist Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community,* ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 243.

[32] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 24.

mythological ideas into literal figures in the reality of text. Modernist works create stories out of psychic depth, and postmodernist works create narratives out of events, histories, and intertextual bricolage, while magical realism mediates between these two literary cycles. The novels that Faris discusses in her in-depth study on magical realism are mostly works from the postmodern literary canon, but she shows how they exhibit features from both modernism and postmodernism.

However, these discussions of where magical realism fits within the broader Western literary canon can only explain so much. Stating that magical realism shares features of both modernism and postmodernism demonstrates that magical realism is a literary mode or genre that spans longer than half a century. The terms modernism and postmodernism are also too broad to explain anything beyond general periodizing labels. This is most likely why a theorist like Hutcheon developed a more specific term like "historiographic metafiction" to describe the works in her analysis of postmodern literature. The same is true for magical realist cinema. The early magical realist films are from the transition period between silent and sound films – the final scene of *Arsenal* (1929) by Alexander Dovzhenko and *The Blood of the Poet* (1930) by Jean Cocteau – which are part of the early modernist style in film. In the sound era, magical realism was already too diverse (and sparse) for it to be associated with the second phase of film modernism (the European and international auteurs of the fifties and sixties). Films like *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *Miracle in Milan* (1951), and *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), the last of which was inspired by an important magical realist novel, *The Invention of Morel*, cannot be easily explained by simply including them under the umbrella term of modernist film. But like

literature, magical realist film spans across both modernist and postmodernist periods, and the bulk of the works in both film and literature emerged in the postmodernist period.

Jameson, in one of the first essays on magical realist film, argues against the position taken by most literary and film critics on magical realism because he differentiates magical realism from postmodernism. The main point of division is the way postmodernism represents history. Jameson's theory of postmodernism stipulates that postmodern aesthetics are symptoms of a general lack of historicity in late-capitalist culture. He notes that paradigmatic postmodern films like *Chinatown* (1974) or *American Graffiti* (1973) present the past in superficial ways that reduced history to changes in fashion. The lack of historicity has a debilitating effect on politics because if we cannot properly register the past then we cannot demonstrate the historical nature of capitalist society and any future vision that imagines an alternative form for the social collective. The enfeeblement of historical thinking discourages any attempts to imagine a different set of social relations for the future. In contrast to postmodernism, magical realism registers history by presenting a clash between two modes of production in the narrative content of the work. The representation of clashing modes of production presents history as a dynamic battle between classes. From Jameson's point of view, magical realist films present history through a Marxist perspective while postmodernism presents it through an idealist one that registers historical change as shifts in superstructural content. According to Jameson, magical realist films receive their magical discourses because of the clashes that arise from one mode of production becoming obsolete while another replaces it. There is some evidence for this description of magical realism as Marxist discourse if we consider the way *One Hundred Years of Solitude* registers Colombian history, especially the violence in the Banana Company episode

which referenced a real violent labour dispute in Colombia. Gerald Martin's essay on *One Hundred Years of Solitude* demonstrates how Garcia Márquez's text articulated Colombian history since its independence from Spain in the period of neocolonialism through a literalized allegory of the Buendia family.[33] The historical conditions that gave rise to a novel like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* had to do with the nostalgic desire for precapitalist relations and the impending rapid industrialization and urbanization created by neocolonial practices in Latin America after World War II.[34] Martin describes the clash between different modes of production as clashes between different ideologies, one that is prescientific and traditional and another that is associated with European modernity.[35] Where *One Hundred Years of Solitude* differs from Jameson's claims on magical realism is that the novel clearly exemplifies the metatextual aesthetics of typical postmodernist novels, whereas Jameson argues that magical realist films do not use any postmodern aesthetics. According to Martin, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the zenith of the Latin American boom which began with Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* in 1963.[36] Because it came at the end of a cycle of novels, Garcia Márquez's novel is self-aware that it is part of literary movement. We can observe this self-consciousness through its references to other novels from the Latin American "boom" like *Explosion in a Cathedral*, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, and *The Green House*.[37] Because Jameson defines postmodernist aesthetics as primarily

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[33] Gerald Martin, "On 'Magical' and Social Realism in Garcia Márquez," in *Gabriel Garcia Márquez: New Readings,* ed. Bernard McGuirk and Richard Cardwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 95-116.

[34] Ibid., 98.

[35] Ibid., 103.

[36] Ibid., 112.

[37] Ibid., 122.

pastiche which betrays a lack of historicity, metatextual and metahistorical references are excluded from his definition of postmodernism that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* exemplifies.

All of this is to point out that Jameson's discussion of magical realist film is based on very idiosyncratic definitions of both magical realism and postmodernism. The fact that he only includes three films in his discussion without any reference to others that could easily be defined as magical realist betrays that his definition of magical realism is limited and has little explanatory power beyond the films he addresses. These films are united by three qualities: they have a vibrant colour palette, they use graphic violence and sex to register historical trauma, and they are set during a time when the mode of production in society is in transition.[38] Compared to other magical realist films, these three films contain no irreducible element of magic. Therefore, there is no synthesis of realism and fantasy and that is one of the most essential characteristics of any magical realist work. Subsequent writings on magical realist film have not elaborated on Jameson's formulation because of his restrictive uses of both the terms postmodernism and magical realism: with respect to the latter he abandoned his unique theory of magical realism in his analysis of *Days of Eclipse* (1987).[39]

The majority of scholarship on magical realist film has discussed the mode according to particular geographical spaces. The most sustained analysis of magical realist film is *Magic Realist Cinema in East Central Europe* by Aga Skrodzka. This text demonstrates how magical realism emerged in East Central Europe as a response to the geopolitics of this sub-continent. The uncanny atmosphere evoked by magical realism represents the cultural feeling of being alien

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[38] Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 190-191, 209.

[39] Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 87-113.

within one's own space. They are European but are treated as second-class aliens with respect to Western Europe. The uncanny combination of realism and fantasy is expressed through vernacular forms specific to each country in East Central Europe. Emir Kusturica, Jan Jakub Kolski, Dorota Kedzierzawska, Béla Tarr, and Martin Šulík responded to the desperate economic and political trauma of post-Communism in Europe with magical realist representations of their societies.[40] They created vernacular representations found in the rural countryside, provincial towns, the memories of childhood, and the margins of oppressed ethnic communities.[41] Vernacular in this context refers to the local spaces that are left behind by the hyper-fast modernizing forces of late-capitalism by including the voice of the internalized Others that challenge official historical records. This vernacular depiction has two forms: a miserablist aesthetic that focuses on the despairing society of the locality or a utopian vision of the locality where the community is imbued with vitality and magic, for example, the Romani community in *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998). The second type of vernacular magical realism brings to mind Ernst Bloch's theory of utopia which is founded around the concept of non-synchronism of time. The out-of-time-ness of the vernacular communities resists Eurocentric ideologies of progress and the gradual subsumption of every social space by capital within late-capitalism. Bloch's theory refers to non-synchronism because the utopian projection creatively incorporates revolutionary elements from the past to project them into the future. This theory of utopia also recalls the way Benjamin refers to historical revolt in his famous essay on the philosophy of history. Benjamin formulates a version of negative utopia that rejects the current state of affairs

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[40] Aga Skrodzka, *Magic Realism in East Central Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 2.

[41] Ibid., 2.

while not succumbing to a metaphysics of presence. The revolutionary moment, according to

Benjamin, is one that rips an image out of the past and places it into a new context so that it can

disrupt contemporary ideological relations. The utopian vernacular version of magical realist

film in East Central Europe seizes upon these anachronisms and presents them in new forms that

clash with the ideological domination of late-capitalist culture. The primary way this is done with

East Central European films is in the resistance to consumer capitalism and to regulation of

everyday life by the market.[42] In general, magical realist films from East Central Europe respond

to geopolitical exploitation and colonizing forces from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by

countering these global developments by developing a distinctive style of film representation.[43]

Scholarship outside of geographical studies on magical realist films often uses an

auteurist approach by discussing directors like Emir Kusturica and Raúl Ruiz and how they use

the magical realist mode in idiosyncratic ways. Most of the scholarship on Kusturica situates him

in the same manner that Skrodzka did with East Central European directors. Kusturica, like his

fellow directors from Eastern Europe, examines the way Eastern Europe is viewed from the

West. Kusturica presents a different culture that is anachronistic and certainly resistant to capital

subsumption and consumer capitalism, especially with respect to his two films about Romani

culture, *Time of the Gypsies* (1988) and *Black Cat, White Cat*. Ruiz's work is discussed in the

context of exilic cinema. Ruiz escaped Chile for Europe after the U.S. military removed the

Allende government from power in 1973. Ruiz is a political filmmaker that uses a bricolage

style, combining the rhetorical devices of magical realism, surrealism, fantasy, and the film

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[42] Ibid., 31.

[43] Ibid., 15.

essay. Many of his films are complex political allegories for Chile as a nation under the rule of a dictator, for example *City of Pirates* (1983) and *Memory of Appearances* (1987). His career spans several decades, and he worked in a variety of formats, so the way he uses magical realism is not as coherent or consistent as other filmmakers addressed in this study or other writing on magical realism. Nevertheless, he is one of the most important directors in the mode so we will pay special attention to his work in this study of magical realist cinema.

The previous scholarship on magical realist cinema has been limited in scope, most of the time by design according to a particular geographic region, whereas this study will expand the analysis by explicating the aesthetic and ideological strategies of magical realist cinema across national contexts. The methodology employed is film textual analysis which includes considerations of genre, ideology, and historical analysis of magical realist films. Against *explication de texte* hermeneutics that can be broadly defined as phenomenological, I will use what Paul Ricoeur has defined as the "hermeneutics of suspicion," those interpretive strategies inherited from the theoretical problematics of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche.[44] This approach has now become as conventional as any other methodological tool used in film studies even if some film scholars have no use for it anymore after being scarred from the great theoretical debates in the seventies involving the British film journal *Screen*.[45] The methodological advantage of this approach is that it combines formal and content analysis. By doing so it is thereby able to demonstrate how aesthetic form can have ideological content in its own right. This is not a novel approach to film studies, as it has been practiced in various forms since the inception of the

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[44] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

[45] David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, edited by David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

discipline. However, the way Jameson has outlined the methodological principles of this approach is the most systematic and sustains explication so I will summarize the methodological arguments from *The Political Unconscious* below.

Jameson theorized that interpretation should take the form of three interpretive moments that correspond to ever-increasing horizons for situating the text within the concrete world. The first horizon is the political, and the text is theorized as a symbolic resolution to a real contradiction. This definition is largely influenced by the formulation that Lévi-Strauss theorized on the way myths function in societies.[46] This form of interpretation demonstrates how narratives reference real political contradictions or conflicts that are not resolved in the so-called real world but that find a sort of resolution within the dramatized world of the text. This interpretive approach works well for the kind of analysis Lévi-Strauss did in his research, which is to say in very situational and localized settings with particular groups of people. It is less difficult in that context to identify a real contradiction that cultural practices are unmasking, or resolving through imaginary means, for narrative works that can be mechanically reproduced, works of art that no longer contain the aura of their creation, as Benjamin would describe it.[47] The disappearance of the aura means the multiplicity of audiences and the polyvalence of meaning for works of art. Adorno anticipated this problem prior to Benjamin when he argued that the class struggle determines the political potential of work. This means that if some work was originally consumed as subversive, its political effects could eventually be neutralized once power relations

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[46] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic, 1963), 206-231.

[47] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217-251.

reconfigured themselves in such a way that nullified the potency of the work.[48] So the interpretive notion that a narrative symbolically resolves a real contradiction becomes much more complicated when discussing imaginary resolutions to real contradictions that undergo mechanical reproduction unlike the types of practices that Lévi-Strauss that was studying in his work. It would only be manageable as an interpretive technique if the critic simply uses some generalized social context as reference for the text's symbolic work, but that type of analysis is too broad and lacks the specificity that Jameson and Lévi-Strauss intended in their work.

A better theoretical model for this interpretive act would be the way Jameson theorized the difference between ideological and utopian narrative structures. This distinction is based on syntheses found in narratives that combine certain contradictory semic content. Jameson frequently referenced A.J. Greimas's theories of structural semantics, in particular Greimas's theory of the semiotic square. Greimas proposed not only that two opposed notions produce meaning because of their difference but also that their relationship within the web of meaning is further complicated by two other contradictory notions that each seme necessarily implies. So, for example, if we had the binary opposition Town (city, urban, metropole) versus Country (village or small town, rural, remote location) we would also have two contradictory notions that are implied by each seme in the binary. The contradictory seme of Town would be "Not-Town" and the contradictory seme of Country would be "Not-Country." Each of these semes would then be invested with narrative content from the plot so their binaries would be more meaningful in whatever context they are being studied. Each semic binary (the original binary and the one formed by the contradictory elements) can represent narrative resolutions. When narratives

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[48] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 228.

resolve by combining the two original semes that make up the first binary, Jameson defines it as ideological because political and social contradictions are smoothed over and superseded, the narrative is finalized, and equilibrium is established once again. Utopian narratives occur when the two contradictory semes are combined together in a synthesis that does not resolve the social and political contradictions intimated by the text. Jameson's description of how narratives resolve their central conflict and the social contradictions depicted in them is a better explanation as to how texts symbolically resolve real contradictions.

The second interpretive horizon is to conceive of the text as a series of class discourses in conflict. Jameson refers to these as ideologemes which are discrete symbolic units within a narrative work that contain class ideologies. We can expand this interpretive moment beyond class analyses and include gender, racial, ableist, heteronormative, and anti-environment ideologies as well. The systems of power relations within a society are now mapped onto the text so that characters, settings, narrative strategies, atmosphere, and all elements of narrative media are transcoded into dynamics of power. Jameson's own literary research emphasized the ideology of good and evil which implied a bourgeois set of ideologemes and ultimately a vision of reality that precluded all other forms of social organization aside from capitalism. The number and choice of ideologemes is internal to the text in question or a group of texts that make up a genre. This methodological point is crucial for the present study because of the way it allows the critic to isolate aesthetic strategies and relate them to power dynamics.

The final interpretive horizon is the analysis of the formal properties of the text in relation to the Marxist concept of the mode of production. Jameson refers to this interpretive moment as the "ideology of form." The theoretical basis for this term is the "content of form," a

concept Louis Hjelmslev created for analyzing the content of formal properties. In the context of

Jameson's research, it means that the formal properties of the text have ideological content in

their own right. This horizon of interpretation requires the critic to uncover the text's formal

system of signs, symbols, and aesthetic strategies and relate them to an outmoded, current, or

emergent mode of production. This is another instance where the distinction between ideology

and utopia is pertinent. Emergent modes of production could refer to social systems beyond the

exploitative and irrationality of capitalism, and utopian aesthetic forms anticipate these new

modes by creating corresponding aesthetics that would comply with them. Jameson's writings on

science fiction literature demonstrated how utopian formal systems correspond to new modes of

production. Utopian aesthetics can take positive and negative forms. The former refers to a new

conception of social relations which are depicted by the aesthetic form of the work. The latter

refers to negative utopia, an idea from Adorno and Benjamin where there are no positive

prescriptions given, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of the metaphysics of presence or positivity (as

Adorno would call it).[49] This form of utopia refers to aesthetic forms that reject the current state

of social relations without providing a new vision of reality. Benjamin's theory of negative

utopia affirms the suffering of historical trauma without cancelling it out with a positive

conception of the future.[50] The negative term means the rejection of the present social formation

without fixing to one conception of the future that could then become neutralized and lose its

dynamism. The final horizon of interpretation locates the work within a broader aesthetic history

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[49] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 260-261.

[50] Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London and New York: Verso, 1981), 68, 147.

of genre and style. Interpretation at this level involves theories of genre and stylistic analyses that relate aesthetics to the social formation and alternatives for human societies.

The methodological advantage of Marxian hermeneutics is that it allows for immanent criticism of the text so that the particular is never lost in the universal. The critic does not have to imprint a series of theoretical arguments onto the text and force it to fit into them like a predetermined mold. Poststructuralism has shown how a humanist form of interpretation, one that avoids immanent criticism, necessarily destroys the particularity of the text. Marxian hermeneutics allows the particular discourses of the text to emerge in analysis. Jameson refers to that aspect of the text that the critic uncovers as the political unconscious, a concept that synthesizes the symptomatic interpretive theories of Freud and Marx.

The aim of this project is an examination of a cinematic style that problematizes conventional understandings of film genres. Magical realism, because of his hybrid nature, is a problematic category because it frustrates attempts to classify it as a genre which is why I have chosen to describe as a transgeneric critical concept, a phenomenon that is primarily defined by a certain narrative strategy but not codified enough to be defined as a film genre. I will explicate the differences between the media of literature and film, highlighting the differences in mimesis both media are capable of while demonstrating the similarities. This section will proceed with a discussion of phenomenological and semiotic theories of the image, showing how the notion of mimesis is achieved in cinema differently than literature and how this relates to differences in magical realism across both media. Cinema in contrast to literature are iconic signs (they contain some of the reality that they depict) by the very fact that they are visual analogies while literature is composed of textual signs. After the theoretical discussion of media specificity, I will then

discuss what features are germane to magical realist cinema as a transgeneric film concept. I will do this by isolating a series of themes and trends that have emerged in magical realist cinema after the fifties when the form was distinct enough from surrealist and gothic films. I will explicate four thematic trends of magical realist cinema: metatextual and metafictional elements; the concept of historicity; the idea of the ex-centric; and utopian discourses of magical realist cinema.

The first aspect mentioned above refers to how some magical realist films break with the fictional space created by the film and the discrete boundaries created by the realist film form between diegetic and non-diegetic reality. Magical realist cinema does this in numerous ways: Jerry Lewis's foregrounding of the artificiality and creation of film images; magical endings filmed with documentary style cinematography like in *Deadly Outlaw: Rekka* (2002); the stories about the creation of the stories we are watching like in *Kafka* (1991) or *Naked Lunch* (1991); metafictional casting and references to extra-filmic reality such as the casting of Peter Faulk as a version of himself who also happens to be a fallen angel in *Wings of Desire* (1987); and the casting of John Malkovich in *Being John Malkovich* (1999). These metatextual and metafictional devices are an example of the interpenetration of two distinct worlds that we find in magical realist narratives. In this case, the fictional reality of the film is combined with the reality "out there," the reality we recognize as our world. In these narratives, characters become transported into fictional spaces that they create through artistic craft, wherein they became "textualized" in a story within-a-story, turning their reality into fictional spaces, confusing the boundaries between the real and unreal. This section will show that magical realist cinema sits uncomfortably between modernism and postmodernism, in the same way its literary counterpart

does, and against what Jameson has written about magical realist cinema, wherein he argued that

it is an alternative to the postmodern mode of storytelling.[51] Magical realist cinema depicts

fictional spaces penetrating the extra-diegetic world and foregrounds the metafictional aspects of

movies themselves, making this mode not opposed to but rather part of postmodernist aesthetics.

Magical realism has always been discussed in relation to post-colonialism. This is the

case because magical realist novels have a tendency to imagine new worlds and societies that

have either broken away from colonialism or rewritten colonial narratives. In film this is best

exemplified by Julia Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) which imagines an island of African-

American people living relatively untouched by colonialism, slavery, and capitalism. Magical

realist films use epistemological and ontological approaches to representing history. The

epistemological approach refers to how Roh discussed magic realism as a particular way to

approach reality which let its strangeness and uncanniness appear, whereas the ontological

variant refers to the creation of fantasy in the real world. This section will explore how magical

realist cinema, like the films mentioned above, and films such as *Beloved* (1998), *The Tin Drum*

(1979) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), depicts historicity.

Closely connected to the discussion of the historicity of magical realist cinema is the

concept of the ex-centric. This refers to the inclination for magical realist films to represent

marginal subjects, spaces, and cultures. Magical realism is itself an ex-centric phenomenon by

effacing the cultural traditions of global capitalist centres, hybridizing various types of

Eurocentric literature like realism, modernism, and postmodernism. Its aesthetic is ex-centric by

default and its subject matter reflects this fascination with the margins. In cinema this takes the

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[51]Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 179.

form of depiction of marginalized subject positions and social classes. Examples of the ex-

centric include the frequent use of working-class characters in Lewis and Tashlin films that

disrupt the bureaucratic and capitalist norms of business and culture; the depiction of racism

against immigrants in Oshima's *Death by Hanging* (1968) and Miike's *Dead or Alive* (1999) and

Deadly Outlaw: Rekka; and the redemption of women in the new wave in Rivette's *Céline and*

Julie Go Boating (1974). American directors using magical realism have depicted the

marginalized history and reality of Black people in films like *To Sleep With Anger* (1990),

Daughters of the Dust, and *Beloved* (1998). The ex-centric in magical realist cinema creates

alternative worlds and histories and presents marginalized people disrupting oppressive social

forms.

The final section will discuss the utopian impulse of magical realist cinema. This section

will discuss the way the transgeneric form of magical realism has political content in its own

right, projecting utopian visions of the future that negate the present irrationality and exploitation

of global capitalism. The discussion of the utopian potential of magical realism will bring

together the three sections mentioned above, metatextuality and metafiction, historicity, and the

ex-centric, by showing the political unconscious of magical realist cinema as a transgeneric

category.

The film sources used in this project will cut across national boundaries, recognizing that

magical realism in film, like its counterpart in literature, is a transnational phenomenon and that

to focus on one particular region would provide an incomplete analysis of the genre. Because this

project focuses on a discussion of the magical realism as a critical category in broader terms

itself, my scope will be a generalizing one that locates the various similarities across regional

cinemas rather than including a series of close readings of films. Focusing on the transnational

context has the obvious limitation of omitting extended close readings of particular films and

particular regions which would provide a deeper understanding of how magical realism is used in

one region compared to another. However, in order to convincingly elaborate the structures,

preoccupations, and ideologies of a film genre it is essential to consider the breadth of the films

made across the globe. Limiting to one region or time period would limit the applicability of this

project which seeks to discuss the workings of this transgeneric category.

This project will also not favour particular canonical auteurs and will take an explicitly

anti-auteurist approach. The majority of studies on magical realism proceed by examining a few

works by noteworthy authors (usually Carpentier, Garcia Márquez, Rushdie, and Okri) that are

explicated as paradigmatic of the literary genre as a whole. This project will not favour one

director over others nor will it favour one work against the larger set of films within the

transgeneric category. The most complete analysis of any film genre moves beyond single works

and expands the scope to explicating formal, ideological, and thematic trends that go beyond one

work. Benjamin argued that one of the best ways to understand an artistic form is to study the

works made by marginal creators. He maintained that because of their lack of creativity or genius

they must rely on generic clichés which makes them more visible for the critic to identify and

study.[52] This is why I will consider directors that have been excluded by the established canons

of cinema (like Lewis, Tashlin, and Ruiz) and established understandings of magical realist

cinema (Oshima, Miike, Suzuki, Lewis, Tashlin, and Rivette). Explicating the workings and

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[52] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 58.

preoccupations of a cinematic genre is most successful when the analysis avoids the humanist

pitfalls of categorizing films according to authorship.

Ultimately, the aim of this project is to explicate a film transgeneric style that has often

been ignored in film scholarship and recent academic writing on magical realism. The

methodology proposed above is useful only because it outlines a system of operations for

synthesizing various types of criticism – formalist, content analysis, and political criticism – that

are usually kept separate. My hope is that I can create an intellectually sound foundation for

future writing on magical realism in cinema.

Chapter 2. Magical Icons and Magical Words

This chapter is concerned with the ontological status of images (and sounds) and words in relation to representing reality and fantasy, that is, it is concerned with the semiotic materials of film and literature. Semiotics is important for any study of magical realism because of how dominantly and somewhat exclusively this term has been used in the field of literature and its relative scarcity in film scholarship. This chapter will provide a theoretical foundation for explaining the differences between magical realism in literature and film, the subject of the following chapter which deals explicitly with how each medium constructs reality and fantasy and their synthesis in magical realism.

I will begin by discussing the different dimensions of the image and of literary text. The primary source of difference between the two media occurs on semiotic lines. Film by its very nature contains more semiotic dimensions than literature. Literary art is made up of textual representations in the form of words and, very rarely, sometimes figures or pictures. I will then discuss the way realism as an aesthetic set of discourses is used in film and literature, and subsequently the break with realism that magical realism represents by naturalizing the fantastic.

We can start this discussion by noting the distinction Charles Sanders Peirce made between three different signs: an icon, an index, and a symbol.[53] Peirce's definition of the sign is much broader than Saussure's which allows us to explore more dimensions of the way we make meaning beyond written and spoken language. Peirce defines the sign as anything that compels a being that interprets to refer to an object which the sign refers to in the same way. Within this theory of the sign there are three dimensions of meaning. The first is an "icon," a sign that

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[53] Charles Sanders Peirce, *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 239.

possesses some of the reality that it represents so the relationship between sign and the thing it represents is based on visual and aural resemblance. The second is an "index" which refers to the material existence of something but does not need an interpretant (the mental conception of the object referred to by the sign imagined by someone who can interpret signs) to ensure its existence (Peirce gives the example of a bullet hole signifying the existence of a bullet). Thus the index has a "causal and existential link between the sign and the interpretant."[54] And finally, a "symbol" is a sign that is only meaningful when interpreted by an external consciousness, for example, words from a written and spoken language. Symbols are connected to objects by linguistic and ideological convention, which is to say, what nearly every other linguistic theory on signs states, that the connection is arbitrary. Peirce's theory of the different types of semiotic dimensions allows us to differentiate the way film and literature produce meaning. The concept of the icon or iconicity is especially important for any discussion of film semiotics because it does not reduce the aesthetics of film discourses to linguistic analogies that have in the past failed to account for the semiotic dimensions of film.

Umberto Eco expanded on Peirce's definition of the iconic dimension of the sign. He argued that even though iconic signs contain some of the reality that they represent and therefore appear to convey meaning without a codified system of symbols, they do in fact contain meaningful codes. These include codes of perception; cultural, stylistic, iconographic, and aesthetic codes; and material codes (Eco listed ten cinematic codes but upon closer inspection

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[54] Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterma-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and Beyond* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 6.

there is a quite a bit of overlap between them so they can be summarized in this shorter list).[55]

Peirce never outlined these various codes that could exist within iconic signs but he did note that

the dimensions of signification could overlap and interact with each other. Eco's argument is not

so much an advance on Peirce's theory but a clarification of the ways that the dimensions of

signification can co-exist with each other in a given sign. Peirce's theory suggests that the iconic

sign contains non-linguistic components that convey meaning and do so according to another set

of conventions or without conventions at all. One attempt to explain this non-linguistic

dimension of meaning in images can be found in Deleuze's theoretical discussions of iconicity,

signification, and film images in his work on cinema. All of the reality that the iconic sign

signifies that is outside of the symbolic codes is what Deleuze called the "system of the

movement-image," a system of horizontal and vertical axes, a system of relations that are

established between objects governed by "differentiation" and "specification."[56] This is what

Deleuze calls the "language system of reality." This is a reference to Pier Paolo Pasolini's

semiotic theory, something Deleuze argued that film achieved by representing objects, but it is

not, however, language in the sense that linguistic theory defines language.[57] Yet we rarely view

films as simply a physical-relational system between various objects that are moving vertically

and horizontally on the screen, but rather as images of things we recognize from our social

reality which inescapably have aesthetic and ideological connotations. Eco made this point prior

to Deleuze's writing on cinema when he stated that Pasolini's "language of reality" ignores the

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[55] Umberto Eco, "Articulations of the Cinematic Code," in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology Volume 1*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 596-597.

[56] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 28-29.

[57] Ibid., 28.

sets of social and ideological conventions that code physical movements, gestures, and actions

that appear in iconic signs like film images.[58] Pasolini's (and by extension Deleuze's) theory of

the image does away with the distinction made between signifier, signified, sign, and referent

which then ignores not only the observations that can be made from semiotics but also

dimensions of meaning that exist within the film image. Deleuze was correct to reject the forms

of film semiotics that relied on the linguistic metaphor too much, those that tried to find exact

equivalents between film and natural languages, but semiotics is much broader than linguistics,

and Eco showed that iconic images like the film image have sets of codes that are culturally and

socially constructed but do not rely on any linguistic analogies to be understood. This notion

would also apply to the use of film scores which introduces another layer of meaning that is both

non-indexical and non-iconic. The main difference between linguistic signs and film signs refers

back to Peirce's definition of an iconic sign. The relationship between signifier and signified

(Peirce did not use these terms himself) in a film image is motivated in this way: an image of

apple on the screen is interpreted as an apple because of its physical resemblance to an apple.

This is obviously not the case with the textual signifiers which are arbitrarily motivated. Deleuze

is describing this domain of meaning that escapes textual signification because it is based on

resemblance or analogy. It is another reality created by the image track that refers directly to

reality as we know it, and this reference, this connection between image and object, is direct,

motivated, and pre- or extra-linguistic according to Deleuze but does not escape the various

codes of meaning that Eco observed in film signs. Eco challenged naïve understandings of iconic

signs in his works on semiotics but did not exclusively discuss the semiotics of film images but

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[58] Eco, "Articulations of the Cinematic Code," 599.

rather the broader group of iconic signs in general. I will summarize his critique of the theory of the iconic sign and, given that the category of iconic signs includes much more than film images, we will note which criticisms apply to the iconic dimension of the film image and which do not.

Eco argued that four assumptions about iconic signs must be questioned: the iconic sign has the same properties as its object; the iconic sign is similar to its object; the iconic sign is analogous to its object; and the iconic sign is motivated by its object.[59] Complete rejection of these assumptions risks accepting another naïve principle which is that iconic signs are arbitrarily coded, that is, culturally determined. To not reject these assumptions completely is favourable because Eco argues that there are degrees of iconicity that exist in the category of iconic signs. The co-existence of properties between an iconic sign and an object differs between media. For example, a portrait of a person is less similar than a film sequence of the same person because the portrait is not able to duplicate the movement and sounds of that person. Furthermore, the filmed sequence of the person is not as similar to a 3-D image sequence because it exists in two-dimensional space and it has none of the tactile properties of the person it is depicting on film. Film produces a similar perceptual effect of the thing filmed but its similarities are restricted to relations within the frame of the thing being captured on film. In many ways the film image lacks too many characteristics of the original to be considered something that shares properties of the original in the way previous semiotic theory defined the iconic sign. Peirce however did not use such a naïve definition of iconic signs because he used the concept of similarity to suggest the motivated relationship between iconic sign and the object it is representing. However, the concept of similarity or similitude is not without its own sets of

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[59] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 191-192.

codes because the concept of similitude is culturally and historically determined. Any judgment

of similarity implies an emphasis on certain properties and the disregard of others. Most

discussions of semblance or similitude between film images and real objects are using an implied

definition of similarity that is equivalent to "geometric" similarity. That is, the two things being

compared are similar because they share the same system of relations between the parts even

though they might differ in size. Geometrical similarity preserves certain properties of the

original in its representation. Film images are similar to the things they represent but only in this

specific sense of the term, which is to acknowledge that a transformation is taking place between

the object and the iconic sign that represents it and that corresponding cultural codes of

interpretation permit audiences to read them as similar. At other points in history, other notions

of similarity could have been dominant and thus not privilege geometric similarity as much as

capitalist and late-capitalist societies. Film requires the least work with respect to producing and

learning similitude, but the ideological work of interpretation produces a correspondence that is

therefore not entirely motivated in the semiotic sense of the term. Furthermore, the meaning of

images in films goes way beyond the relationship of objects within the frame, or rather the

intended meaning of these objects in a frame go beyond simply where one thing exists in relation

to another. For example, think of the various dramatic scenes that took place in domestic

staircases in Hollywood melodramas from the 1950s. Images of James Mason's character

traversing the staircase in *Bigger Than Life* (1956) signify more than a middle-aged man running

around a house: in melodrama, the staircase is the battleground for familial conflict, strife, and

personal anguish, and its lines of movement denote more than a human running up and down a

diagonal line. Geometric similarity, the foundation for similitude in iconic signs, does not

account for all of the other semiotic dimensions of the film image. We will return to these ideas

below because they are concerned with how film images have multiple dimensions of

signification according to Peirce's semiotic theory.

The other notion involved in the iconic sign which has resurfaced in other semiotic

theories of the image, notably from Metz and Barthes, is the notion of analogy. Eco demonstrated

that the concept of analogy when used to explain the iconicity of a sign uses circular logic: when

we assert that two things resemble each other we say that they have a reciprocal iconic relation.[60]

Metz corrected his earlier positions on the film image as analogy and stated that the analogical

film sign does indeed have codes, but that does not nullify the analogical status of the image,

rather it simply shows that the coding is less motivated than Metz argued previously in earlier

points in his research.[61] Outside of the notion of geometric similarity, the concept analogy is

defined by iconicity and iconicity is in turn defined by analogy. The other problem with the use

of the concept of analogy to define iconicity is that it is typically used in a less precise sense.

Both Metz and Barthes use it as metaphor for resemblance but in any case we should note that

the notion of analogy itself does not escape cultural conventions because metaphors are cultural

conventions themselves, hence the relationships they denote are unmotivated in the semiotic

sense of the word. Eco did not reject the notion of the iconic dimension of signs entirely but

demonstrated that iconic signs and their relation between signifieds rest on culturally and

historically determined codes of similarity. He demonstrated that in the relation between icon and

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[60] Ibid., 201.

[61] Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 111.

object the relation is actually between icon and a previously "culturalized content."[62] This

culturalized content refers to systems of expectations that determine how we define the concept

of similarity in the first place and then subsequently how we use the term to understand signs

themselves. Eco cites an example from representative painting where an artist paints something

in such a way that the lighting and shading techniques emulated real perception, but when the

painting was first exhibited the viewers interpreted this mimetic technique as a strange artistic

intervention and did not perceive it as what we would consider to be realism or naturalism (he is

referring to Ernst Gombrich's discussion of John Constable's "Wivenhoe Park" in Gombrich's

text *Art and Illusion* (1956)). However, we should note that this example is using an aesthetic

medium that is not inherently iconic in the same way that film is. Furthermore, if film began as a

technology first and then developed into an art form shortly afterwards can we extrapolate Eco's

problematization of the iconic signifying dimension to film? We can apply this particular

example to the history of film style, and this has been done by early film theorists up until the

present. But the ability to capture reality with such a high degree of resemblance occurs before

film could develop its own unique aesthetic history. Eco separates film as a distinct phenomenon

from theatre, radio, and literature in his critique of the theory of iconic signs. Much of Eco's

remarks can apply to theatre as well, but film is still distinguished from theatre because it is

second-order of representation whereas theatre is a live performance of a text. Eco's statements

regarding certain forms of iconicism as aesthetic styles that are developed, learned, and then

modified by future artists is valid but it does not explain the extreme degree of mimesis

contained in the iconic dimension that exists in the film image by default. In this sense we can

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[62] Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 204.

speak of different degrees of iconicity that exist within artistic media and at different points in

the history of art.

The high degree of mimesis which follows from film's iconicity relates to the common

misclassification of metonymy in iconic signs as motivated types of signification. Eco proposes

that sometimes a form of metonymy is mis-classified as a form of iconicism. For example, if a

barber were to present one of his tools as a way to indicate that he is a barber, this tool stands in

for the signified of "being a barber." Eco calls this semiotic operation "intrinsically coded acts"

which means that part of the signified is "semioticized" and is arbitrarily interpreted as symbolic

of a complex thing to which it refers to through the use of metonymy. But in some cases we no

longer have a sign but rather something from the "whole complex thing" that is being used, it is

being "semioticized" to represent that thing, the referent of the sign.[63] Another example would be

the way colours are signified in iconic signs. Eco cites the colour red in a drawing of a red flag.

The colour red used in the drawing is not a representation but *the* same thing used in the original.

It is the same colour red. To extend this observation to film images we notice that several of the

same properties of real objects photographed by the film apparatus remain in the image: colours,

physical relations, and temporal relations. Film images are however more complex than the

example Eco used. His example involves a selection of certain properties of the flag that are then

duplicated in the drawing: for example, the rectangular shape is chosen from a selection of

several properties inherent in the real flag to represent the flag in a drawing. In a film image,

there is no selection of properties of the object that are then chosen as more important than others

to achieve resemblance. Bazin belaboured this point in his ontological theory of the photographic

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[63] Ibid., 210.

image as one of the defining characteristics of photography in relation to other figurative arts. Bazin noted that figurative arts developed toward a sort of pre-photorealism, a classicism that was based on simulation of reality, but that this level of similitude was achieved immediately by the camera without any artistic effort on the part of the operator. Metz refers to this aspect of the film image as "the pseudo-presence of the thing" it has photographed.[64] This is not to say that films do not use metonymy in their images – they obviously do because of the inheritance from poetic and figurative arts that have influenced the conventions of narrating stories with images and sounds. But that type of metonymy refers to a heavily coded one beyond the basic level of semiosis that Eco is referring to in these examples. However, at the most basic interpretive level (the level of denotation) this metonymic operation does not occur with film images so therefore Eco's criticism of iconicity in semiotics does not apply to film.

One aspect of Eco's semiotic theory that is significant for the present discussion is his theory of the triple articulation of the film image. Semiotic theory observes that spoken and written languages have two levels of articulation: one level refers to the phonemes of the language and the other level refers to the textual signifiers called monemes. Cinematic codes work differently according to Eco because they exhibit triple rather than double articulation. Eco uses the term "triple" because of the possible hypersignification (an analogy with hyperspace as something that exists between two-plane geometry) in the combinations of one sign with another sign. A cinematic code contains "figures" combined with each other into signs, "signs" which join together into syntagms, and then "elements" that arise from the combination of signs.[65]

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[64] Metz, *Film Language*, 76.

[65] Eco, "Articulations of the Cinematic Code," 601.

Triple articulation arises from the temporal dimension that presents objects moving in space, the objects which, analyzed synchronically, have their own semic content that follows cultural conventions of these semes being combined together in a frame (for example, an ice cream cone with a child has a different meaning than a parent with a child). Movement turns the iconic figures into "kinesic" figures, iconic figures that are moving, or icons into "kines" which then can be arranged into "kinemorphs," iconic figures whose illusionary movement contains meaning as well. The existence of a third level of articulation results from the co-presence of synchronic and diachronic levels within the cinematic sign. Individual movements in the frame give rise to diachronic combinations which then give rise to a third level of articulation that consists of units of meaningful actions, whose meanings are coded.[66] Eco's theory of cinematic codes explains the aesthetic richness that so many film theorists exhorted about the cinema. With respect to the other arts, those theorists that considered cinema to be the accumulation of various media into one art form viewed film as a medium that combines and supersedes all forms that came before it. The signifying abundance of iconic signs that move along a diachronic axis makes cinema a richer and more complicated semiotic experience than speech and written language. The semes in the image track are combined concurrently and interact through a diverse set of connotations. The impression of reality provided by the triple articulation is then further complemented by articulations of sound and speech in the movies which then move beyond cinematic codes to filmic messages. Iconic signs like film (and this is not true for other iconic signs) are not simply defined by their iconic dimension. Other culturally and historically determined semiotic dimensions are involved in the way we use film images to make meaning

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[66] Ibid., 602-603.

beyond the level of triple articulation that Eco theorized. Eco's theory explains the full extent to which iconic signs like film images have a different set of semiotic operations when compared to textual symbols, but their potential for conveying meaning is still that much richer because they utilize symbolic codes as well.

In contradistinction to literature, cinema has attributes of all the types of signs that Peirce articulated in his theory of semiotics. We have already explained the iconic dimension of the film image. Anything made without CGI is considered indexical because the nature of the medium involves photographing objects, the world, and individuals in space and time. Film images are also symbolic because cinema uses cultural and linguistic codes. This is especially true for narrative cinema but less so for abstract expressionist, constructivist, structural, and experimental films that evoke sensations, the passage of time, the exploration of space, and visual structures or figural patterns. But as Eco noted, these images would still contain historically determined sets of codes for their creation and comprehension. Bazin noted that film has a language of its own, distinct from spoken and written language systems that show up in films in dialogue or inter-titles, which he explored as various stylistic approaches according to how each one adheres to the default aesthetic principle of film (according to Bazin's ontological theory of film) which is to represent spatial and temporal reality.[67] Bazin's notion of film language is pre-semiotic, resting more on a generalized use of the term as an aesthetic metaphor for artistic styles of representation and expression. The term "language" in this context means something more specific than simply symbols that represent something else and refers more to something like a film grammar, a set of rules for making meaning in films. In a semiotic analysis of film as

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[67] Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 23-40.

language, Metz argued that film is a language and not a language-system, which is something

that is much more codified, rigid, and exclusive than simply the term language.[68] This language,

especially for narrative films, depends on the spectator understanding the story which then

contextualizes what camera and editing techniques produce with respect to the passage of time,

the movement within space, and ultimately the meaning of the narrative. For example, filmic

codes such as dissolves and match-cuts only mean something if we understand the story first and

do not signify anything by themselves. The term language-system of film is not as broad as a

language would be in general. Saussure defined a language-system as *langue* plus speech which

means the deep syntax of the language but also the infinite ways that syntax could be used in

practice. In Peirce's formulation symbolic signs refer to language systems and also to language

in the broad sense of the term. Because cinema is a language and not a language-system it allows

for multiple levels of signification and for languages to co-exist within its texts. Language-

systems are more exclusive and rigid in comparison. The nature of spoken and written languages

explains this rigidity: if I speak to someone in English I simultaneously am not speaking to them

in Spanish, Japanese, or French. We cannot communicate with two language-systems

simultaneously without creating a series of confusions and distortions whereas languages

(broadly meaning forms of meaning and communication, linguistic or otherwise) can overlap and

be superimposed on each other and still be meaningful.[69] Godard's films, especially the ones

made after *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) are very successful at displaying this semiotic potential of

cinema available for sound-images to stack various languages within a single filmic sequence.

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[68] Metz, *Film Language*, 31-91.

[69] Ibid., 59.

One of the main differences that Metz presented between language-systems and film as a language is that film does not contain any type of second articulation. This is a crucial concept for linguistic theories on language-systems and it does not have a corresponding dimension in film images. Second articulation refers to Saussure's concept of double articulation which is the matching of phonetic differences to differences in concepts: the differences in phonemes become matched with differences in monemes. Second articulation also refers to the phonetic level of differences which as a second level of difference does not exist in cinema, according to Metz, because the gap between signifying expression and the content of its expression is too small. In Metz's terminology, he states, "[t]he signifier is an image, the significate is what the image represents."[70] There is also not a direct correspondence between first articulation either. The shot does not correspond to the word in a language-system; a shot might correspond better to a sentence but a sentence is a syntagmatic chain not a moneme. This leads Metz to conclude that the "image is therefore always speech, never a unit of language."[71] This means that cinema does not have a universal syntax for producing meaning on a morphological basis but codes that are produced on a syntactical basis. This is especially important for theories of film genres because it explains why the semantic and syntactic components of any film genre could potential be unstable over even brief periods of time in the history of film. The systems of meaning in cinema never solidify into morphological structures. If we also look at the practice of speaking a language in contrast to producing a film, we can understand this difference better from another point of view. Most individuals in any society eventually learn a language-system so well that

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[70] Ibid., 62.

[71] Ibid., 67.

they have no problem creating and interpreting sentences as they communicate on a daily basis with other people that are competent in their language. Whereas one cannot do the same with communication in film, which is based on education, creativity, and access to the film industry and its technologies. Even someone like myself who has watched thousands of movies and knows a vast number of filmic conventions and codes is not able to construct filmic signs with the ability of a competent film director, whereas I have no problem engaging in verbal and written communication. The filmic utterance is closer to the action of creating something new rather than using rules outlined in a lexicon like the ones found in natural languages. In general, artistic discourses are much more fluid and open to change than natural languages. The ability to change film language has to do with social, political, and economic capital and distribution of works to the market, whereas this is not the case for natural languages. If I developed a creative new way of speaking English, it would not have any effect on the language-system of English as a whole because I am one user up against a stubborn structure that has predated my existence. Whereas an influential film director with enough resources and audience for their work can redirect the way stories are told in films by developing new aesthetic techniques. The differences that Metz explicated between a natural language-system and the language of cinema explain the consequences of the iconic dimension of film images and how iconicity differs from symbolic signification. However, in his discussion of the differences between film and language-systems he has moved beyond the iconic dimension of film and referred to the specifically symbolic conventions of film as well that co-exist with the iconic dimension. It is also important to note that Metz is usually only discussing the semiotics of fictional narrative films whereas other semiotic theorists like Eco and Peirce are discussing iconic signs, which are like images but in a

more general sense. Because of this methodological bias Metz's work is especially important for this present chapter given that we are discussing the construction of reality and the fantastic within literary and filmic narratives and not other macro-genres like documentary or experimental film which would have their own semiotic conventions that would differ greatly from narrative fiction films. We will now explore the other signifying dimensions of the film image that overlap and co-exist with the iconic dimension in film images.

Metz argued in his essay "Beyond Analogy, the Image" that analogical signs like film contain codes and systems of meaning that go beyond analogy and contain what Peirce would define as symbolic signs.[72] This is to acknowledge that the interpretation of iconic signs like the film image necessarily involves a mediated procedure, because the meaning of images is based on codes and therefore not motivated. Peter Wollen argues that the symbolic dimension of the film image, or what he refers to as the conceptual dimension, is a necessary condition of criticism. The iconic dimension of film is elusive and ambiguous with respect to connotative meanings so symbolic codes and their interpretation are necessary for any sort of critical explication of the text. Wollen notes that these signifying dimensions are the product of the cultural and aesthetic origins of the cinema and not simply the product of the ontology of the film image itself. The film's technological apparatus developed from various technological experiments with photography and moving pictures. But cinema is more than the apparatus used to make it. It developed from a long list of technologies but also from "strip-cartoons, Wild West shows, automata, pulp novels, barn-storming melodramas, magic" which is cinema's history of

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[72] Christian Metz, *Essais sur la Signification au Cinema, Vol. 1 and 2* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971, 1972).

"narrative and the marvelous."[73] The co-presence of symbolic and iconic dimensions in the cinema present a distinction between the iconographic and the iconic, a distinction Wollen takes from Peirce's work. For example, the way the colours of the characters' dress are used in *Johnny Guitar* (1954) refers to a set of symbolic conventions found in Western films that had been up until this point an obvious trope for the genre. The villains wear black and the heroes wear white. The use of black and white clothes signifies beyond the iconic dimension of presenting these two colours in vivid Trucolor to audiences but rather signifies the emotional drama and violent conflict and calls attention to the use of colours in films as symbolic codes for the audience. Wollen concluded, as mentioned above, that cinema contains all three dimensions of the sign that Peirce outlined in his semiotic writings.[74]

In contrast to film, literature is typically understood as lacking the dimension of iconic signs. There are certain exceptions, such as novels that include photographs, like Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001), but this work is atypical of the general aesthetic properties of literature, especially the properties of novels with respect to definitions of the sign. However, some aural components of literature like onomatopoeic words are iconic because they resemble the sounds of the referent that they represent.[75] Iconic textual signs also present a relationship between sign and object that is less arbitrary than textual symbols in general. The word "buzz" is chosen because it mimics like the sound it is referring to in reality so its connection is motivated by something beyond difference in a language-system. Other types of iconicity can exist in literature

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[73] Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 153.

[74] Ibid., 125.

[75] Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterma-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*, 6.

as well, for example figures created with the words on the page that resemble their referents. Alfred Bester utilizes iconic elements in the finale of the novel *The Stars My Destination* (1956), when the protagonist Gully Foyle encounters a burning man from the future. Bester creates figures out of the words on the page to signify aural and visual intensity and perceptual breakdowns for the reader. Aside from these noteworthy exceptions, literature is primarily not iconic simply because literature is written language. There is a higher degree of mediation or separation between the sign/image and the real referent compared to film, simply because text lacks the resemblance of images and sounds. With respect to the indexical dimension, literature is certainly not indexical in the sense that Peirce defined the term, because its semantic existence wholly relies on a reading public to interpret its signs. Words only have physical resemblance to other words in literature. It is definitely symbolic because its primary sign structure is written language which is made up of symbols whose meaningful existence depends on beings to interpret them.

Another dimension of signification to consider when comparing literature and film is the material codes of each media. Literature and film as signs have material properties. The words on a page are black, and printed in a certain font, while images on the movie screen are colour or black and white, but both contain properties that are found in other objects in the world. The material properties of the text are where literature's indexical properties begin and end (nothing of the materiality of the text on the page in book or backlit screen index anything in the narrative for the reader). The materiality of the image in film and TV is defined by Eco as "codes of transmission" which affect the way visual media transmit messages. The material qualities of the film, TV, videotape, and digital cameras contain their own sets of connotations and denotations

as well. That is to say, meaningful codes have been developed from the materiality of film images, and their use depends on generic conventions. For example, security footage in a film is usually presented on a video screen with a degraded image with subtle scan lines which denotes to the viewer that this part of the story is told/shown from the perspective of a CCTV. The use of Super-8 and Super-16 footage often denotes memories, with connotations that usually have to do with family activities or friends going on a road-trip like in the colour scenes in *Raging Bull* (1981) or the Super-8 footage in *Milk* (2008). The texture of the image conveys meaning and signals to audiences knowledge of extra-cinematic information that refers to the mode of production of the film itself. In the early days of digital cinematography, the appearance of digital effects on film connoted to the audience a large budget feature beyond the film and then the use of digital cinematography for the entire film connoted the same as well. Now, with the ubiquitous nature of digital work flow for mainstream cinema, the presence of film connotes a large budget (recent directors for Warner Brothers like Zack Snyder and Christopher Nolan both produce big-budget movies on celluloid), while digital images now connote lower-budget films or international art-house movies. The material texture of the film image connotes meaningful content and diegetic and non-diegetic information to spectators. There are analogous type of codes of transmission for literature that are determined by material conditions of production and distribution. Prestige publications of novels still receive physical printings whereas less popular works are distributed digitally, and the printing of hard cover and certain types of paper over others would signify similar connotations like the ones mentioned above for cinema, but the differences between different levels of production in the literary sphere do not register as distinctly as they do in film.

Again, these differences in signifying effects have to do with the fact that the materiality of literature is limited to text whereas film is not. Because film contains some of the reality that it represents by necessity (though this does not mean there is no artifice, aesthetic creation, or distortion in the images) it represents reality, and by extension fantasy, in a much more immediate fashion than literature ever can. Bazin's phenomenological account of the photographic image corresponds to this notion of the iconic and indexical properties of the cinematographic image as a sign. He famously noted that a photograph "embalm[s]" the past because of its ability to create a copy of what it photographs and reproduce it mechanically with very little effort from the hand of the artist.[76] Bazin's phenomenological account combines the iconic and indexical properties of the film image. In contrast, Siegfried Kracauer, explained this relationship somewhat differently but still with phenomenological language, arguing that film "reveals" reality or the true nature of reality.[77] Kracauer's theory of film, more so than Bazin's account of film, is very far from a semiotic account of the image and does not have much correspondence with Peirce's theory of signs or other semiotic theories of the image. What is important from Kracauer's philosophy of the image is that he acknowledges the importance of films that capture physical reality against ones that do not, and he listed a series of "cinematic" and "uncinematic" content according to these principles.[78] He also observed that literature has more difficulty representing material reality compared to film. Kracauer argued that literature is better suited for interior states of mind whereas film is better suited for capturing physical reality

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[76] Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 13.

[77] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 28-29.

[78] Ibid., 263-272.

in its fullness.[79] Kracauer's observations on literature and film, without semiotic theory, circle the difference that Peirce discovered between symbolic and iconic signs. We do not have to fully accept Kracauer's ontological theory of film to appreciate his observations, especially given that many films made in Kracauer's lifetime, such as Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), and *Muriel, or the Time of a Return* (1963), are able to do just what Kracauer claimed novels do better than film and without resorting to what he would label "uncinematic" means (a heavy reliance on dialogue rather than mise-en-scène and montage). What is important from Bazin's and Kracauer's theories of film realism is the specificity of or using an inordinate amount of exposition with a voice-over) the film medium can achieve compared to literature.

Barthes elaborated on Bazin's ontological theories of the image with theoretical advances from semiotic theories of the image. Barthes defined the ontological reality of the image as messages that are "continuous" which means they convey meaning without adhering to a meaningful code.[80] His writing on this subject was ostensibly about photographs but can be extended to film in the same way that Bazin's ontological theory of the photographic image can be applied to film as well. Barthes's theory of the semiotics of the photograph is another expansion of Peirce's theory of iconic signs. According to Barthes, the image does not contain any division into units that we would then define as signs because the image is no different from the object that it represents. Or rather it is a "reduction" in the sense that the image's proportionate sign, colour, and perspective might be altered in some way but it is never

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[79] Ibid., 237.

[80] Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (Hammersmith: Fontana Press, 1977), 17.

transformed in the sense that a textual representation of a scene in reality transforms it into a text. There is no need to create a set of codes between the object copied and the image copy itself because it is a near perfect *analogon* of that reality, and this analogical dimension is what defines the image as a sign.[81] Photography, like film, painting, and theatre, is analogical work that does not have codes but rather "styles of reproduction" which Barthes defines as its secondary meaning, whose signifier is the very general term "style" and whose signified is the aesthetic and ideological content that is contained by that style. Following from his distinction between the two levels of signification, iconic signs also have a denotative and connotative level of meaning. The denoted message is the *analogon* itself, what is captured by the image, and the connoted message is how a particular audience interprets what is photographed and whose codes of meaning are determined by the social context of their usage. This leads to what Barthes called the "photographic paradox" which is the fact that the denotation level does not have a code while the connotation level does.[82] Barthes is writing before Eco's critique of iconicity so he does not consider the various types of codes that Eco introduced as existing at this level of meaning but instead locates those codes observed by Eco as existing within the second level of connotation. The connotative level is the "style" of the film image, which has aesthetic and ideological sets of codes which develops first from a message without a code (the image of something in reality, an *analogon*). The denotative level, because it lacks a code according to Barthes, masks the artistic effects, the style, of the connotative level. The photograph's denotative level has no code and its semblance to the thing in the image hides the second level of meaning which uses a set of codes.

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[81] Ibid., 17.

[82] Ibid., 19.

Therefore, we can note that there are two levels of meaning within iconic signs like film that produce reality effects. At this point it is important to note the difference between the technology that film and narrative films possess with respect to secondary levels of meaning. Barthes's discussion of the denotative and connotative levels of meaning of photography corresponds to the technological apparatus of film. Barthes refers to the emergence of the photographic image as "a 'flat' anthropological fact, at once absolutely new and definitively unsurpassable, humanity encountering for the first time in its history *messages without a code*."[83] In photography and pre-narrative film, the denotative level produces meaning without recourse to any codes whereas the second level adheres to linguistic and semiotic codes that are aesthetic, historical, and ideological. At the most basic level of semiotic transmission Barthes is correct and the various codes that Eco outlined for the image exist at the level of connotation.

The secondary level of meaning is where narrative films code their mimetic or fantastic artistic discourses. Metz made a distinction between two types of reality-effects in narrative cinema from a phenomenological theoretical point of view that differs from Barthes's semiotic theory. First there is the "impression of reality" that is produced by the universe of the fiction in the film and then there is the representation of reality in the medium itself called the "perception of reality."[84] He arrived at this distinction by juxtaposing the impression of reality given by cinema and theatre. Metz accepts the basic phenomenological premises of Bazin's theory of the image in photography and cinema. But he noted that cinema does not embalm the past like photography does, but rather presents the past as present reality because the psychological effect

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[83] Ibid., 45.

[84] Metz, *Film Language*, 12-13.

of motion makes whatever is represented appear as really happening in the now.[85] A

photograph's impression of reality appears more unreal compared to film because of the lack of

motion. Movies provide a stronger impression of reality because real motion is insubstantial to

an individual viewing it from any perspective. We cannot grab hold of motion or touch it so

moving pictures create a much stronger resemblance than still images because of the

insubstantiality of motion. The words "real" or "reality" (clumsy terms that we seem to not be

able to stop using) are often associated with tangibility and tactility, the haptic experience of

feeling something, connected to our sense of touch. This is one way that we differentiate between

objects and copies. Real objects can be touched whereas their copies only appeal to visual and

auditory perception (the photographic copies have a different set of tangible elements as well).

The fact that motion lacks the same tactile dimension is how movies provide a "presentness"

sense of reality more so than photographs. The strict distinction between object and

representation on the basis of tactility dissolves with moving pictures. It is no longer a question

of reproductions because the reality of movement is basically the same, at least visually, for the

spectator. Metz concluded that "the impression of reality is also the reality of impression, the real

presence of motion."[86] There are special cases of this phenomenon in narrative film with respect

to the passage of time: narrative films whose stories unfold in real time so the time scheme of the

diegesis matches the literal running time for the audience. This ability to capture the unfolding of

time and pair it so closely to real time is an aesthetic that is not available for literature. When

narrative time unfolds in real time the dimension of time and objects in motion achieve a higher

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[85] Ibid., 8.

[86] Ibid., 9.

degree of mimesis than literature can achieve, simply because of the different semiotic nature of the two media.

The distinction between "impression of the reality" and "perception of reality" also explains why film appears to be more realistic than theatre. The implied conclusion of the argument summarized thus far from film theorists on the reality-effect of the film image is that the more reality that the aesthetic device inherently contains, the greater the reality-effect it produces which would mean that theatre should have a stronger reality-effect than film. Metz showed why this is not the case. Theatrical performance cannot be a convincing representation of life because it is too immediately present visibly and aurally for the spectator. The material presence of the stage, the actors, and the social rituals involved in watching theatre counteracts the reality-effect of the narrative, as the material presence of the actors, the stage, and the sets override the establishment of a diegetic world on the stage. This is why the distinction between narrative reality (the impression of reality) and aesthetic/formal/representative reality (perception of reality) is important. Film produces a stronger reality-effect with respect to the diegesis, the narrative reality of the film, because of the "segregation of space" of the projection screen that shows the movie and the seats where the spectator sits in a dark room.[87] This segregation of space allows for the reality of the fiction to remain undisturbed from the reality of the spectator, whereas in theatre the spectator shares the same physical space as the performers. The segregation of space in cinema allows for a stronger impression of reality with respect to the diegesis. We should note that this high degree reality-effect is not entirely the result of cinema's iconic dimension. Barthes referred to this experience of film as the "being-there-of-the-thing"

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[87] Albert Michotte van den Berck, "Le caractere de 'realite' des projections of cinematographiques," *Revue international de filmologie* 1, no. 3-4 (1948): 256.

which is what makes film radically different from photography which produces a different effect, a "having-been-there" of the thing represented.[88] Film creates an experience of present tense in the spectator whereas photography creates a feeling of past tense. In fact, the strong impression of reality of narrative film has as much to do with the reality of the representative formal properties as it has to do with the obvious separation from the material screen of the spectator. Metz concludes that there is some optimal combination in the medium where the right mixture of reality and unreality of the art form produces the strongest reality-effect for spectators. Film exists at some midway point on a continuum of theatre and photography where theatre's representative methods are too real for the fiction to have a strong impression of reality and photography's methods are not real enough: we are never tricked into believing a photograph is anything but a photograph because of the frame, the lack of motion, and the texture of the paper, and it also has difficulty creating a diegetic world without the addition of natural language.[89] Film has such a powerful iconic dimension that imbues its narrative reality with more semblance than the other arts. There is also a temporal aspect to film images that interact with cultural codes of semblance that change over time. Watching a film in black and white from the classical era in Hollywood is similar to look at a photograph from the far historical past versus a photography taken yesterday in colour. Literature lacks this dimension and therefore the impression of reality of its narrative space is less powerful than that of film.

The notion of segregation of space is another area of intersection between film and literature. Magical realist films and novels are narrative works of art. This distinguishes narrative

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88 Barthes, *Image Music Text*, 45.

89 Metz, *Film Language*, 13.

from the real flow of time and space. Novels and films have a first word or image and last word or image. They might evoke an ending that is a non-ending like the final sentence of the novel *Finnegans Wake* (1939) which joins up with the first sentence or the end of the film *The Patsy* (1964) which creates a new narrative problem by exposing the entire story as a fictional story-within-the-story of the film. But each of these non-endings must end because the movies and novels inevitably end (there is a final word and a final image). They suspend their ending in the imagination of the implied reader/spectator but not in the work itself.[90] Narratives create their temporal sequence from the beginning and end points which then occur in our own temporal sequence. The experience of time when reading a novel is much more fluid because we usually do not finish a book in one sitting, and watching movies on home video approximates this experience as well by giving spectators more control over how they consume a film. Narratives then create a double temporal sequence, a sequence of time unique to the narrative that happens in our sequence of time, and films also create a sequence of space within our sequence of space.[91] Both media segregate the time and space of the fiction to the time and space of the real world.

If film can represent reality with more relative ease than literature (a medium primarily constituted of symbolic signs), it is better suited for representing the magical for the exact opposite reason. Textuality does not privilege the real nor the fantastic but both are equivalent from the perspective of how the textual medium represents anything outside itself. One way of understanding this equivalence is to consider the similarities between a text from the tradition of

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[90] Ibid., 17.

[91] Ibid., 18.

European realism and that of low-fantasy. Metz pointed out that there is the same unreality with

respect to visual and aural perception in *Madame Bovary* as there is in *Cinderella*.[92] This

equivalence does not necessarily exist in film. The ability for films to represent reality and

fantasy in equivalent ways is largely determined by industrial factors relating to the state of

special effects. The level of industrial and technical sophistication is in turn determined by the

level of capital accumulation an industry which is obviously not distributed evenly across

nations. Industrial and geopolitical factors greatly affect this equivalency in film in the global

context. This equivalency is also dependent on when, in film history, we are making this

comparison. That is to say the ability for a live-action film to faithfully adapt *Madame Bovary*

and *Cinderella* with the same ease is equivalent now but it was not in the 1920s nor even the

1970s. Literature has no such problem because the words used to depict a fantasy world and a

world that resembles our own have no technical discrepancies as they would in film. There is no

need to rely on a corresponding literary version of trick photography, as Méliès used, in a textual

art like literature. And there is no corresponding long technological waiting period in literature

like the one in film for special effects like CGI to contain enough photorealism so that Middle-

earth could be depicted on screen with higher degrees of plausibility and materiality than in

previous high-fantasy movies. The building blocks of literature are sentences, and their

semblance to reality is minimal, so fantasy and reality exist on the same discursive plane of

plausibility and believability. This comparison also raises a point that defies the supposed general

superiority of film images over literary symbols in depicting reality at the level of connotation.

Because of their unmotivated nature, symbolic signs create an equivalence between fantastic and

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[92] Ibid., 22.

realistic signifiers. It is only at the level of signifieds and the level of connotation that we can

demonstrate any difference between realism and fantasy. At the second level of connotation this

is also the case for film, but not at the denotative level.

The paradoxical notion that we mentioned above of iconic signifiers of imaginary

signifieds achieves a greater sense of uncanniness in film than in literature. The iconic dimension

is now problematized because the referents are the products of our artistic imaginary and not

empirical reality. We can use an example from a magical realist film to demonstrate this point. At

the end of *Dead or Alive* (1999) by Takashi Miike, the two main characters increasingly perform

a series of magical actions: pulling a rocket launcher out of the inside of a suit blazer, retrieving a

glowing ball of pure energy from inside his body, and then finally the destruction of the entire

world when they shoot these weapons at each other. Here we have iconic symbols that contain no

real referents. The signifieds are imaginary and thus its resemblance is to something that does not

exist in reality as we know it. Fantasy is now given more reality than it could achieve in

literature because of the iconic dimension. This depiction deforms the whole logic of iconicity. If

iconicity is predicated on similarity to a real thing then similarity in this case is meaningless

because its referent is imaginary: it is entirely the product of human artistic creativity. This

reality-effect of fantastical phenomena explains why so much of magical realism produces strong

metatextual overtones. The semiotic contradiction of iconicity of fantasy calls attention to the

status of images themselves.

This contradiction points toward a more general problem with the iconic dimension of

film images: the reality-effect of all film images is fundamentally illusory. The entire perception

of motion is a trick of the eye created by exhibition technology. Images are not animated or

moving. We perceive them as moving, and they resemble real objects that move in time and space, but they do not actually move themselves. The conceptual notion is that magical realism embodies the nature of film itself which then produces a semblance of reality through illusion. This does not directly exclude film images from the category of iconic signs because we register film images as achieving a strong resemblance to reality without giving much thought as to how film achieves that effect. This is why I do not consider the introduction of digital cinema to be as dramatic a change as say the introduction of sound technology in the late 1920s from the perspective of film style and language. The production, exhibition, and distribution of movies have changed dramatically with digital cinema but this has more to do with the advent of streaming content services and not the technology of how the movie is constructed. I can watch Stan Brakhage shorts that were shot and edited on 16mm on *YouTube* just as easily as I can watch the latest Adam Sandler comedy shot with digital cameras. This illusory status of filmic signs is another point of contrast between literature and film in relation to how each medium signifies the real and the fantastic. Literary signs are already interpreted as a codification of the real and do not produce an immediate semblance with reality. Therefore the potential for creating the illusion of reality is minimized. We can now rearrange the conventional understandings of the two poles of early cinema. Traditionally the Lumière brothers represent the discourses of mimesis and Méliès represents fantasy. If film images create the illusion of movement and subsequently in the sound era film synchronizes images and sounds into a unified system of meaning, then Méliès now could stand as the representative of mimesis because his films present the visual illusions that are made possible by the film apparatus and thus demonstrate the true nature of cinema. And the Lumière brothers demonstrate how film can create the illusion of

reality, a fantasy of mimesis that is achieved by visual tricks. Their films produce a reality-effect

that is an illusion, therefore they document the illusory nature of film images. This basic

reformulation of the conventional understanding of the origins of film aesthetics is a

modification of Godard's comments of the origins of cinema when he claimed that the Lumière

brothers are impressionistic painters and Méliès was a documentary filmmaker because he

showed humans going to the moon before we did sixty years later.[93]

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[93] Robert Stam, *Literature Through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 13.

Chapter 3. The Construction of Reality and Fantasy in Magical Realism

We will now discuss the various aesthetic strategies for creating the reality-effect (and its obverse) in literature and film and the medium-specific differences between literary and filmic magical realism. At secondary levels of meaning, the appearance and use of realistic content in literature has changed over time. What counts as realistic depends on the historical, aesthetic, and ideological conditions of the readership at any given point in time. Carpentier noted this point in a somewhat cryptic manner when discussing Central American literature. He stated that the use of *lo real maravilloso* in Caribbean literature depended on an epistemological framework of faith in the fantastic and magical, a notion that implies pre-secular perspective.[94] If we consider literature as a whole, everything before and including the novel form, what counts as "real" or "realism" in literature is a moving target, one that parallels changes in the ideological framework of its respective period. One way to track these transformations is to consider how narratives treat the "powers" or "abilities" of the protagonist compared to the readers. If we were to place this comparison on a continuum we could say that the protagonist is greater in power, strength, and intelligence than the audience, is equal to them, or is inferior to them. Northrop Frye defined these changes in his theory of literary modes. He noted that there are five primary ways to categorize literature based on the way the protagonist is related to the audience: superior in kind (the main character is divine or supernatural); superior in degree (simply a much better version than any human that has ever lived, and the laws of nature do not apply to them); superior in degree to humans but not the environment (the main character has outstanding characteristics but is subject to the laws of nature and society as we are); not superior to humans or the environment

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[94] Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America," 86.

(the main character is modelled after the average person, the protagonist found in most comedies and realist fiction); and, finally, inferior to humans and the environment (the protagonist of ironic fiction where the main character suffers from bondage, and cosmic absurdities).[95] Frye labeled these five modes that occur chronologically in the history of literature as myth, romance, high-mimetic, low-mimetic, and irony. Magical realism in Frye's terminology would be considered a sub-genre in the ironic mode but one with stronger tendencies toward myth narratives. Many characters in magical realism possess abilities and characteristics that make them superior to the reader, like Oskar's magical scream in *The Tin Drum* or Fevvers' wings in *Nights at the Circus*. Frye demonstrated the differences between the five modes with a discussion of how each treats ghosts. In myth and romance, ghosts are on the same level of existence as everything else which is to say they are not considered supernatural because nothing is considered supernatural. Once we move into the high-mimetic mode, ghosts are part of a separate realm, and they trigger surprise and fear in the other characters because they would trigger that response from the readership. Moving to the low-mimetic with the beginning of the novel form made popular by Defoe's work, the ghost is relegated to "ghost stories", comprising their own sub-genre of fiction. And in the ironic mode ghosts appear as allegories for disintegrating personalities like in Henry James' writing.[96] The use of ghosts in magical realism continues the strategies of James's fiction by questioning ideologies of the centered-subject and individualism which are represented by spectral presences from the past. For example, the ghosts in *Pedro Páramo* (1955) which populate the town of the main character's deceased mother. The presence of the ghosts in the

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[95] Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, 33-34.

[96] Ibid., 50.

literal "ghost town" collectivizes the psychological conflict of the main character so that his

narrative arc now includes the trajectory of a community from the past. Magical realist films like

Take Shelter (2011) visualize the character's psychosis as materially manifesting in the reality of

the storyworld, likening his deeply entrenched melancholia with the end of the world. Lois

Parkinson Zamora noted that the shift from the individual to the collective and eventually to the

cosmic perspective is signalled by the presence of ghosts in magical realist stories.[97] The

inclusion of ghosts to represent collective consciousness in fiction that uses realist discourses

like magical realism removes the cultural division of serious fiction from low-fantasy narratives

like ghost stories that began with the novel form. Zamora's observations coincide with Frye's

argument that literature was now circling back to more mythic forms of writing in the twentieth

century. In the chapter on historicity, I will discuss in detail the mythic dimension of the ghost

character that embodies a collective trauma of real human history in Jonathan Demme's

adaptation *Beloved* (1998).

The different ways that literary fiction treats the protagonist are the direct result of the

two essential gravitational poles of literature: one pulling toward mimesis and the other toward

myth. The changes in literary fiction throughout history demonstrate a gradual increase of

mimesis that peaked in nineteenth-century European realism and then decreased with various

modernisms and postmodernisms that questioned the status of the real. Narrative plot structures

have remained stable throughout history, for example, the structure of detective stories followed

a formula from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The same can be said of film genres and their

narrative structures. Even though the history of film is much briefer than that of literature there is

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[97] Zamora, "Magical Romance/Magical Realism," 501.

still enough of a history to the medium to demarcate a chronology of generic changes across time

(for example, the so-called "slasher" film developed out of the Italian *giallo* thriller, a mode that

in turn developed from police procedurals). The changes we recognize in literature are changes

of social context: political, historical, ideological, and ethical changes in the content of the

stories but not the structure of narratives. The gradual movement towards mimesis throughout

the history of literature does not mean that literature became more truthful but rather that it

became more plausible.[98] Character motivations, settings, semantic content, and historical

representations gradually emulated the majority of the reading population which coincided with

secular society emerging in the Global North as production become more industrialized and

incorporated into the market system. The tendency toward mimesis coincided with the

dominance of capitalist forms of space, time, and identity excluding other conceptions that could

be described as mythic or reflexive.

The current mode of literature that Frye has called the ironic is now moving away from

mimesis toward more mythical forms of writing. This would explain why magical realism

contains numerous references to mythical narratives from antiquity. Faris included the references

to mythical and ancient forms of storytelling in her supplementary list of magical realist

characters. She noted that there is an almost "postmodern pastoralism" in magical realist works

because many works take place in rural settings and rely on rural perspectives, for example *What

the Crow Said* and *Beloved* that are mixed with mythical character types and plots.[99] Michael

Ondaatje used the term "mythic realism" to describe prairie novels whose use of the Western

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[98] Ibid., 51.

[99] Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 182.

landscape is divorced from European realism. These works reference a form of mythical thought

that arises from the particular geography of North America.[100] Ondaatje's description of novels

set on the Canadian prairies echoes Carpentier's writing on *lo real maravilloso*. Carpentier

observed that the emphasis on the landscape and creole culture produced a marvelous reality that

influences the literature of that region. Mythic, in this context, refers to mythical worldviews that

are connected to the geography of these spaces which then make their way into magical realist

writing. Magical realism dramatizes metaphors and allegories as literal events in the narrative

reality of these works. Jeanne Delbaere-Garant expands on this notion of mythic/magical realism

by applying it to works from regions that still have spaces that have yet to be modernized,

urbanized, and, in general terms, subsumed within capitalist markets. Delbaere-Garant argues

that Ondaatje's term is especially suitable for regions where Indigenous cultures have largely

vanished but remnants of their worldviews and culture haunt the present.[101] The widespread

references to myths, use of mythical figures, and archetypes are an example of what Frye

observed in the current form of literature moving away from the pole of mimesis to that of myth.

The tension that magical realism breaks by combining realist and fantastic discourses is a

refutation of the separation of styles by modern novelistic modes. Magical realism's rejection of

this dichotomy represents the two poles of literary art as they began in the creation of the novel

form. The origins of the modern novel as a literary form began with Miguel de Cervantes's *Don

Quixote* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, demonstrating that, like film, its origins are not

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[100] Michael Ondaatje, Afterward to O'Hagan's *Tay John* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989), 271-272.

[101] Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Groteseque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 253.

committed to one aesthetic set of discourses over another. Cervantes represents the reflexive, magical, and parodic dimension of literature, while Defoe's writing became the template for the tradition of the mimetic novel that reached its aesthetic peak with European realism and then became the default mode for paperback novels in late-capitalism. It is true that early magical realist writers were breaking with European realism, but this is also the case with modernist European fiction. And as we mentioned in the introductory chapter, we betray an Eurocentric aesthetic bias when we do not recognize that magical realism emerged as a unique form of modernist literature and then subsequently as postmodernist writing in peripheral spaces in the global system.

In Barthes's narrative theory, the resolution of magical and realist discourses that is so typical of magical realism can be explained as the mediating act of narration that resolves two opposed sets of symbolic semes. The mediation between these two symbolic semes inevitably results in the expansion of the realist narrative discourses, what Barthes refers to as the "proairetic" code or voice in the text, to include magical actions, characters, events, and worlds within our world. Barthes's theory of narrative, which is very similar to Bakhtin's theory of narrative discourses, is extremely useful for a discussion of magical realism because his work explains the diversity we encounter in literature as a combination of what he calls the five "voices" of the text, each vying for dominance over the others in the work. The five voices are hermeneutic (mystery, intrigue, things hidden from the reader), semantic (words or phrases that contain extra literary layers of meaning, they connote but do not denote), symbolic (multivalent meanings, an organized system of semes), proairetic (realistic actions of the story that provide momentum for the narrative), and cultural codes (cultural competencies and bodies of knowledge

that are shared by the reader and writer).[102] The two most important symbols for Barthes's narrative theory are antithesis and paradox which are subdivisions of the symbolic code. Magical realism as a narrative mode is an example of a paradoxical code because its conflict is resolved by the work of narration that presents magical discourses as emerging naturally from the real-world context of the fiction. Barthes specified that this conflict is resolved by the narrator in the text but we can extend this definition of paradox to the act of narration itself because it performs the same function in the text. Magical realist texts usually include various sets of cultural codes along with the proairetic code which is significantly expanded to include narrative action of fantastical events and characters. Rushdie, Márquez, Carpentier, Morrison, Kroetsch, and many other magical realist writers refer to cultural and historical bodies of knowledge, ones that contain magical ideas and different ways of viewing reality that comingle with conventional realistic perceptions of the world. Magical realism formulated in Barthes's terminology means referring to marginalized cultural and historical bodies of knowledge as well. This expands the process of hybridization beyond the symbolic set of semes and involves the cultural set of semes also. Barthes's theory of narrative is useful because, like Frye's structural myth criticism, it accounts for the variety of aesthetic discourses within a text that combine in various ways to produce new types of narratives. Magical realism is defined by a narrative discourse that expands the parameters of the proairetic code, refers to cultural codes regarding political and social history, and combines the symbolic codes with proairetic codes such that allegories, metaphors, and all sorts of symbols achieve the status of reality at the level of narrative action and characters.

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[102] Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 19-20.

Magical realism is somewhat unique as a narrative mode because of the way it treats metaphor and allegory. It produces connotations from symbolic semes that simultaneously exist at the denotative level, those events and characters that occur within the reality of the story in literature. This process of making a metaphor become literal is one of the main features of magical realist narratives. It is an artistic technique that is used in both literary and cinematic magical realism. In film for example, the symbolic content of the yakuza genre, specifically the homoerotic overtones of fraternal bonds in yakuza movies, is turned into a literal piece of narrative action in the third act of *Gozu* (2003), when the protagonist falls in love with a female version of his yakuza mentor who then gives birth to his male friend, and the three individuals comprise a romantic triangle in the finale. In Barthes's terminology, this involves moving from the level of connotation, a second order of meaning, back to the level of denotation: for example, the two characters falling out of the sky and their subsequent transformation into angel and devil at the beginning of the novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988). The two protagonists, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, are travelling from India to Britain when their plane is hijacked and then explodes over the English Channel. Gibreel and Saladin are both magically saved and transformed respectively into the angel Gabriel and into a demon. The novel takes the metaphorical content of two Indian postcolonial subjects, and their subsequent transformation into angel and demon represents the experience of living as subjects experiencing similarity and difference, acceptance and rejection.[103] The novel still contains metaphorical content even if the reader is intended to interpret these sequences as literally happening in the story and not simply allegorically. In this sense, magical realist literature collapses the two levels of meaning that

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[103] Rawdon Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 221.

already happen with all symbols, metaphors, and allegories in narratives. Metz noted that this disintegration of levels of meaning is actually germane to cinematic semiotic operations. He argued that the levels of denotation and connotation collapse into each other in cinema with respect to symbols. This is the case because at the second level of meaning symbols are represented by a signifier that is not completely unmotivated, that is, there is a direct connection between the image used and the symbolized content. The additional meaning given to the signifier is also literally present in the image itself because it is what it is also symbolizing.[104] A thematic visual or aural trope receives its meaning in a film from its position within the narrative. Therefore, its status as a signifier is motivated, which is why Metz asserts that motivation is not based on analogy at the level of connotation but on the level of narrative significance. The paradigmatic magical realist trope of using literalized metaphors is achieved more easily in film because of the use of motivated signs at both the denotative and connotative levels of signification. Magical realism in this context embodies an essential aspect of cinematic signification and turns it into an aesthetic discourse in its own right. It brings to the surface what cinematic realism effaces in the production of reality-effects.

This brings us to another aesthetic point that involves both literature and film. Magical realism includes signifieds that are imaginary. The status of the signified for the magical events, characters, and beings in magical realism does not have any literal *analogons* in the real world. Literary criticism on magical realism has discussed this topic in relation to the way magical realism proposes alternative histories for oppressed nations and cultures. The narrative events of these repressed histories are highlighted as magical because these texts concern themselves with

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[104] Metz, *Film Language*, 110.

real human history, but they are supplemented with magical events. Kenneth S. Reeds's

definition of magical realism includes this characteristic as an essential one for magical realism

as a literary genre. Reeds calls this aspect of magical realism the "recasting of history" as it

supplements dominant accounts of history with marginalized perspectives.[105] For example,

Carpentier's depiction of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1803), Henri Christophe's monarchy, and

its aftermath is supplemented with depictions of secondary historical figures, fictionalized

accounts of their lives, and a cyclical representation of history. The voices of fictional narrators

in magical realist historiographic texts perform what Richard Todd has called "narrative

trickery." Magical realist narrators manipulate the notion of analogy by using realist discourses

to depict magical events in a world that resembles our own. This type of narrative trickery is best

exemplified by novels that produce alternative or magical historiographies like the ones

performed in works from Carlos Fuentes, Salman Rushdie, and Toni Morrison.[106] In film we

observe narrative trickery with respect to alternative historiographies in films by Raul Ruiz,

Takashi Miike, Alexander Sokurov, and Theos Angelopoulos. However, the notion of narrative

trickery as a performance by the narrator of the story can be extrapolated to the operation of

narration itself. In magical realist film narrative trickery is not performed through a narrator

character in the story but in the narration of the film itself. However, the narrative trickery that

Todd identified in magical realist novels exemplifies the way fiction, realist or otherwise, creates

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[105] Reeds, *What is Magical Realism?*, 26.

[106] Richard Todd, "Narrative Trickery and Performative Historiography: Fictional Representation of National Identity in Graham Swift, Peter Carey, and Mordecai Richler," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 305.

a reality that has the effect of the real while being wholly imaginary. Magical realism simply demonstrates a characteristic that both literary and film narratives possess.

Now it will be useful to present a summary of how realist discourses emerged in narrative arts, primarily in literary art, and to chart their correlations in film images. The purpose of the following section is to show that magical realism in both literature and film achieves its unique effects by preserving some aspects of realism while rejecting others. It also removes some of the artistic effacement of effects that realist aesthetic discourses developed to achieve their own reality-effects in literary and film narratives.

Frye detested the term "realism" in discussions of literature because he felt that it was too vague to be useful for literary criticism (he often placed the term in quotes to signal to the reader his distaste for the term). This reticence to use the term signals the many problems that Frye discovered when critics tried to establish a theory of literature that is grounded in one particular style of writing against others. This tendency is to invert the universal and, in particular, to use deductive forms of criticism which take canonical works known as "masterpieces" and then derive a theory of criticism based off of the principles used in those works. The emphasis on mimesis from early theories of literary art to the present are all products of this type of deductive literary theory. The theory of literary modes we discussed above, where Frye charts the diachronic changes in literary art over time as the gradual movement away from myth and folklore stories toward the realistic novel and then back to mythic forms, avoids inductive theory. The theoretical advantage of Frye's research on realism as it pertains to literature is that he formulates the relationship on an aesthetic foundation rather than on an epistemological one. Theories of realism in literature, especially ones that implicitly champion it as an aesthetic form

over others, attach an epistemological dimension to the term. Realism is then equated with epistemological empiricism, a theory of knowledge that states reality is knowable and transparently available to our senses and therefore artistic forms like literature can depict it without any consideration for mediation, distortion, and ideology. The other advantage to Frye's methodology is that mimesis is no longer understood as the main function of literary art. This notion has been the case since Aristotle's *Poetics*. Mimesis, which according to Aristotle meant the imitation of a "complete action," a movement involving individuals in the world ("men in action"), with characters that embody various moral types, is the function of poetry.[107] The function of all art in general according to Aristotle is to imitate reality in a multifaceted manner that gives an accurate picture of the world. Aristotle – and future philosophers did not advance his theories of tragedy and mimesis too greatly – argued that the impulse to imitate the world and the amusement and moral education we receive from it is part of human nature, and it is one of the distinguishing features between humans and animals. Not only is it mimesis the fundamental purpose of art but its source of inspiration is within the soul itself: it satisfies our need to represent the world back to ourselves. Aristotle goes beyond the moral dismissal of mimesis as inferior to truth that Socrates stipulated in Book Ten of Plato's *Republic*. As Plato's *Republic* outlines, Socrates believed that because painting and poetry can only represent the appearance of things and not their true essence they contain a morally inferior character. Again we observe the equation of realism with truth or in Socrates' estimation, a lack thereof. Frye's theory of the mythic dimension of literature and the tracking of its changes along a diachronic axis showed that fantasy, magic, and myth are just as essential to literary art as mimesis is.

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[107] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 52.

Literary realism is typically understood as the opposite of sentimentalism or various forms of melodrama that embellish the world, distort it as in Expressionism, or reduce it to superficial clichés that are disconnected from everyday life, real problems, and real tragedies. Erich Auerbach argued that various forms of melodrama, even works that make significant political statements, do not capture reality but rather distort it. Realism in literature, from the ancient works to the novel form, involves combining various modes of writing so as to capture the dynamic experiences of reality. Auerbach's exhaustive treatment of mimesis in Western literature testifies to this point: the writers that achieved realism did so by combining various literary modes in their discourse. Everyday reality was typically relegated to certain types of literary styles that were considered "low" in relation to the elevated style of tragedy and drama. The broad literary movement known as European realism that includes writers like Balzac, Flaubert, Gissing, Stendhal, and many others treated everyday life, domestic issues, characters from the lower classes, everyday activities, and work in an elevated style that continued the trends of tragedy and drama from ancient literature. This led Auerbach to conclude that the foundations of modern realist literature is the elevation of characters from the lower social positions in society that were ignored by literature or relegated to supporting characters to main characters in the narrative. For works that have a strong attachment to real human history this also meant the embedding of random persons in the historical, political, and social events in the shared space between the reader and the fictional world of the novels.[108]

Realism then is both a style and a dimension of literature according to Auerbach's analysis. Literature always represents reality or, in his formulation, takes reality as its subject

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[108] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), 491.

matter. But literary history shows that the separation of styles and their eventual mixture, inspired by the "creatural" dimension of reality from the Christian theology, turned the occurrences of the everyday, the lower classes, and unheroic people into objects for literature itself. Even within modernist works like *Ulysses* (1922), that transform the objective stance of the narrator into subjective fragments of reality, contained clear historical referents (the narrative is set in a definite place and time, Dublin, June 16, 1904) and elevated lowly subjects to the status of serious literature. Modernist works may not use the same textual strategies of European realism but they still have as their subject the everyday reality and the people of low social positions that Auerbach defined as the main components of realistic representation in literature. This is similar to how Brecht characterized modernism in contrast to Lukacs's objections, stating that expressionist works captured new forms of reality by adapting to changes in society. If social reality has become fragmented and contradictory, then a literary form that emulates this psychic splintering is more mimetic than older forms of realism that captured a centered-subject position. Rushdie also made a similar remark regarding the mimetic power of magical realism being the appropriate mode of literature for capturing a reality where we possess the power to annihilate ourselves with nuclear bombs. Rushdie's observation accords with the fact that magical realism is the expansion and not the rejection of reality. In Auerbach's estimation mimesis in literature refers to, on the one hand, a particular style that was constantly developed and became more sophisticated over time, and a truth principle of literature.

What is necessarily involved in "capturing the everyday" is defining a clear and knowable place and time for the story itself. This means including real cities, towns, places, references to real events from human history, in short, what literary theory on magical realism

calls rich phenomenal description. With a clearly defined setting for the place and time of the work's narrative there is also the inclusion of well-defined characters, whose characterizations follow the rules of psychological realism, behaving according to conventional understandings of how individuals behave in everyday reality. This would disqualify much of gothic literature from the label of magical realism because gothic characters are very much in touch with the sensuous realm and have sensitive psychological profiles that deviate from psychological realism considerably. The strategies of realism in literature lend themselves to emulating sources of writing from the non-fiction genre like the memoir, the essay, and historical texts, which then leads to a general illusory façade of the lack of aesthetic creation. It is the opposite of the reflexive literary style that *Don Quixote* presents that brings the attention of the reader to the creation of narratives and the artifice of the work itself. This self-effacement of the aesthetic mode of production has a near equivalent in classical cinema's aesthetic strategies that largely follow the same principles of aesthetic realism.

Faris included the depiction of the phenomenal world as one of the five characteristics of magical realism that she itemizes.[109] This observation is important because the strong phenomenal description allows the reality effect of the text to appear and then synthesize with the fantastic elements. The rich description of the "real" world in the text and magical events has the effect of levelling any difference between these two discourses (a difference that was both established on extra-textual terms and within literary history itself as gothic works distinguished themselves from romance which distinguished itself from European realist fiction). Rich phenomenal descriptions are also combined with historical accounts of infamous events, a

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[109] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 7; Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 169-171.

nation's history, and marginalized perspectives of history that have been ignored.[110] There are

many films that focus on phenomenal details in the same way that European realism would,

highlighting the materiality of the world and depicting a complex social system in society with

its many contradictions. Two historical dramas, *Matewan* (1987) and *Heaven's Gate* (1980), are

examples of films that feature strong phenomenal depictions of the world because of how much

attention is given to period details and material reality of the historical setting. We find this

materialist tendency even in experimental films like *British Sounds* (1969) where Godard

includes a long sequence of manual labour in a car factory to convey the way alienated work

feels to the audience. In magical realist films there are a few examples of this attention to the

phenomenal world but not enough so we can say it is a primary characteristic. *Days of Eclipse*

(1987) features a cinematographic style that mimics surveillance footage (not in the same way

that found footage horror movies do) so there is a lot of attention to the dilapidated buildings and

streets of the small village it is set in, the ragged landscape, and the people of Turkmenistan.

Sokurov, a director that made documentaries before making this film, shoots the people and

space like a documentary filmmaker, which has the effect of making the fantastic elements seem

even more uncanny than they normally would. In literature, a strong description of the

phenomenal world is most certainly an essential condition for magical realism because it is one

of the primary ways for a novelist to create a fictional world that resembles the world of the

reader.

In contrast to the more or less linear development of realism in literary art, the

development of the supernatural, the magical, or the fantastic does not follow the same sort of

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[110] Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 169-171.

trajectory that can be mapped out as a continual series of literary stylistic mixtures and breakdowns of modal boundaries. The fantastic, defined in this context as that aesthetic discourse representing the mythical pole of literature, was to a certain extent suppressed by the introduction of the novel form and Defoe's particular use of the form as opposed to Cervantes's work. Gothic fiction, as it appeared throughout different centuries, during its peak in the mid-1790s and afterwards, featured the supernatural and fantastic in its explorations of terror. The degree to which writing in the gothic mode followed mimetic literary conventions varied from writer to writer. Matthew Lewis favoured a less poetic and a more straightforward mimetic approach that presented the fantastic in a realistic fashion whereas other important authors in this tradition were fundamentally antirealist because of their poetic treatment of thematic juxtapositions which tended toward sacrificing narrative plausibility.[111] The gothic tradition breaks with the general tendency in Western fiction after the Enlightenment that limits the imaginary to realistic and scientific representations of reality. Amaryll Chanady argued that Romanticism was the first to challenge this dominion which suppressed the mythical pole of literature to scientific reason. This dominion over the literary imaginary was obviously challenged again by magical realism which cannibalized European literary traditions, removing certain elements like the complete adherence to plausibility and rationality, and produced an alternative form of literature to European works that were never able to break away from the dominion over the imaginary that began with scientific rationality and instrumental reason.[112] The general literary techniques that define this rupture are the gradual introduction of poesis with

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[111] Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 58-74.

[112] Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America," 141.

mimesis – in magical realism this involves the literalization of metaphorical content and thematic ideas – the gradual expansion of what is considered realistic subject matter in so-called elevated literature, and the introduction of "otherized" subjectivities into narratives. The literary techniques of literary magical realism follow the gradual trends of mimetic forms that Auerbach outlined in his study along with the Romanticist challenge to scientific reason over the literary imaginary. And more important than both of these general stylistic trends is the overtly political nature of these works which are profoundly critical of European colonialism, Global North neocolonialism, and the irrationality and exploitation of late-capitalism. Nearly every magical realist literary work has a political dimension to its narrative, and its literary techniques necessarily result from those politics. The same cannot be said of cinematic magical realism and its aesthetic techniques. There are equivalents in some important works like those made by Rivette, Ruiz, Miike, Angolopoulos, and Kusturica, but the cinematic mode as a whole is politically ambivalent in comparison to the politically charged works of magical realist literature written from the Latin American boom and beyond.

We can chart a similar chronological path for realism in film but it is exponentially smaller than the one Auerbach charted for literary art. The realistic aesthetic principles of film have been institutionalized from 1917 to 1960 in Western film industries, largely dominated by the classical Hollywood mode of production and then subsequently challenged by various global new wave movements that emerged in national cinemas across the globe between the late 1950s and the early 1990s. As in literature, there was always the existence of two aesthetic poles of narrative film: the mimetic and the mythical/fantastic/magical, represented by the Lumière brothers and Méliès respectively. Griffith's innovations in narrative construction, story

continuity, and montage helped institutionalize not only narrative filmmaking as the primary mode of the cinema in Hollywood but also a realistic style that subordinated the style and plotting of the film to the easy delivery of the narrative to the audience. This meant that stylistic excess was minimized in favour of a transparent transmission of the plot. Realism in this sense refers to a particular mode of cinematic production and not simply the content of the stories. Griffith delved into the fantastic but still used the same principles he developed for realist stories, that is, the film style used for *The Avenging Conscience* (1914) is the same as *A Corner in Wheat* (1909). In fact, even within the cycle of German Expressionism which created a new way of creating sets and a film environment that veered away from mimesis, *Nosferatu* (1922) by Murnau utilized archive footage, extensive coverage of natural phenomena, and real architecture to represent the elements of horror and supernatural that broke with the movement's own antirealist tendencies. All of this is to say that the representation of reality and fantasy in early cinema generally used the same filmic techniques and aesthetic strategies. There was not a separation between low and high forms of work where fantasy was relegated to a low form, and neither was this the case for the everyday experiences of middle- or lower-class people. Chaplin elevated the lower classes to the status of serious drama consistently throughout his career. We can say that the development and sophistication of the representation of reality in Western literature that was charted by Auerbach, and where it ended up in the early twentieth century, impacted the way narratives were constructed for early cinema. The already given mixture of styles that treated the everyday reality of the world with the same seriousness as high drama was present in early narrative films and rapidly became more sophisticated through each decade of film history. There was always a separation of certain genres from so-called elevated, more

respectable ones, and B-film genres like the horror and science-fiction movie were not treated on the same level as western, crime, romance, or war films. The exception to this trend would be the serious and proto art-house genre films made by Jacques Tourneur for Val Lewton. The film style, those techniques of film art creation like cinematography, editing, sound design, and mise-en-scène, did not differ too greatly across genres. Within gothic and horror stories we still observe similar principles for situating characters in a scene, sound design for action and speech, and camera setups for staging scenes and sequences (for example, the typical movement from wide to medium to close and then back when the scene ends), and general historical trends of cinema and film technology are not exempted from so-called "lower" genre films in Global North film production. The depiction of the everyday, of the lower-classes, and random individuals becoming embroiled in serious historical moments, was there to begin with and only becomes more prominent as we move along through film history.

The basic presuppositions of realist narrative from literature survived more or less in narrative films. The unified psychological identity of characters and their behaviours coincided with the aesthetics of psychological realism. These are somewhat variable according to the genre in question: Chaplin's and Keaton's movies feature exaggerated performances, and the same is true for gothic-horror films such as *The Hands of Orlac* (1924). A realistic setting in a space and time that imitated the world of the spectator was established as a convention quite early on in narrative film. This was even the case in early examples of low-fantasy stories like *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) which treated the world of the fiction realistically, setting the characters in clearly defined place that spectators could recognize as similar to their world. And, finally, the editing principles for maintaining the plausibility of

this fictional world were based around matching everything into a continuous flow, a seamless presentation of images and sounds that was unified and motivated by the movement and personal drama of the characters in the narrative. The logic of time and space in realist film forms approximates that of the real world and of scientific and rational understandings of time and space. All of these precepts of the classical style of narration correspond to the characterizations of mimesis according to Auerbach's analysis. In this sense the mimetic potential of the film image and sounds as iconic signs matched up with the narrational strategies of narrative cinema in the Western film industries.

Magical realism enters film when these realist conventions of the fiction film are either rejected, mixed with other conventions, distorted, or presented metatextually. However, not all realist discourses are dispensed with, and the choice of what remains from realism and what is suspended is essential for the creation of magical realist discourses in film. As we observed above, stylistic and narrational principles governing the depiction of space and time in low-fantasy films – and we can include high fantasy films as well – are consistent with those of so-called serious dramatic films. The filmmaking strategies for creating a believable and plausible world with well-defined characters cross over from genre to genre. The element that makes one film a serious realistic drama and another a fantasy movie is the narrative content: one could have dragons eating humans and the other does not. But the worlds in which they take place are vastly different as well. If we consider a fantasy film made before the widespread use of CGI, *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) takes place in the world of Greek mythology where there exist many gods and monsters and humans are just one type of sentient beings among others that are more powerful. The principles for continuity editing and cinematography, aside from the

techniques used specifically for filming stop-motion animation sequences, are consistent with the historical poetics of the time. If we instead consider one of the first magical realist films that was released around this period then we will observe stylistic and narrational principles that distinguish this narrative mode from typical realist filmmaking and high-fantasy. *Miracle in Milan* (1951) presents a scenario that would not be out of place from most Italian neorealist films and certainly not De Sica's other films from this period. The story concerns an orphan that grows up into a happily naïve, trusting young man that joins a homeless commune on a patch of undeveloped land on the outskirts of Milan. The characterizations are more bombastic and embellished and clichéd than typical neorealist movies, and the introduction of the fantastic elements (Toto, the main character, receives a magic dove from the soul of his mother from the heavens which allows him to manifest his desires like a magic lamp with unlimited wishes) completely go against the principles of neorealism. It is important to note that the way the film represents these magical scenes is through visual techniques that were once used as aesthetic solutions in the silent era but were subsequently phased out of sound cinema. The presentation of ghostly figures is done through superimposition, and the sudden appearance of edits is done through static quick cuts that were made popular by Méliès. *Miracle in Milan* is also noteworthy for its deviation from Cocteau's version of magical realist cinema. Cocteau's work ventured quite close to surrealist film but was soundly rejected by Breton as a misunderstood version of surrealism. Breton was right to reject *The Blood of a Poet* (1930) because the film had a definite time and place that was not part of a dreamscape, it did not sever itself completely from rational conceptions of the world like surrealism as an form championed, and it featured an early example of the synthesis of realism and the fantastic. De Sica retains the realist principles of

setting and time, psychological realism, and the accurate depiction of class struggle in society. The cinematic introduction of magical realism relied on maintaining several of the narrational principles from classical/realist cinema while expanding the content of the story to include non-realist elements, those metaphorical elements that were explained away in earlier realist films as psychological manifestations or allegorical moments in the story. Much of the later magical realist films would follow suit: *Death by Hanging*, *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, and *Days of Eclipse* are all paradigmatic examples of magical realist cinema and establish a real world that resembles the world of the audience. At times, they use more mimetic strategies than conventional realist films would use in the 20th century to create a plausible phenomenal world that resembles our own only to break with the realist tropes with fantastic semantic content. The three films mentioned above, while quite different from Italian neorealism, use filmic discourses that resemble documentaries and the cinema vérité style of filmmaking. The beginning of *Death by Hanging* plays like an educational documentary on the death penalty until it introduces its irreducible element of magic which complicates the impression of reality it had created. All of this is to show that from the perspective of narration, magical realism in film creates its particular effect of the neo-fantastic by maintaining several of the key components of realist film style.

In both literary and cinematic magical realism, one primary shared characteristic is that both media challenge realist conceptions of fixed identity for the characters. The multiplicity of voices that Salem hears in *Midnight's Children* complicates any notion of fixed identity for that character. In film, Jerry Lewis, Miike, and Ruiz do away with this realist trope almost entirely.

One of the main features of magical realism is that the intrusion of the fantastic into realist discourses is done without much reaction from the characters in the story. Let me demonstrate with an example from the first scene in Kroetsch's novel *What the Crow Said* when the character Vera Lang has sexual intercourse with a swarm of bees:

> People, years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang, that started everything. How the town came to prosper, and then to decline, and how the road never got built, the highway that would have joined the town and the municipality to the world beyond, and how the sky itself, finally, took umbrage: it was all because one afternoon in April the swarming bees found Vera Lang asleep, there in a patch of wild flowers on the edge of the valley.
>
> The coulees and the flats along the Bigknife River were too rough for wheat farming so the sod was never broken; the crocuses bloomed in spring as they had always bloomed, the buffalo beans cracked yellow, the violets and the buttercups and the shooting stars took their turn. Perhaps Vera had gone simply to pick a bouquet of crocuses, or to gaze down into the long, clay-shouldered trench of the valley, at the meandering river still locked in ice, at the town of Big Indian, its six grain elevators, its gravel streets, hardly a mile downstream, and yet so distant from the farm.
>
> Why she took off her clothes, no one explained that either; nor why she lay down: perhaps it was the April wind, and the breaking clouds, and a girl's – a young woman's – simple desire, after a spring rain, to dream in the spring sun. But when she first stirred awake, out of her expected sleep, the bees were already arriving. Scouting for a nest, a new place to hive, the first bees had found the scent of her sun-warmed body. What her terror must have been at the soft caress of those touching bees, at the trickle of gold along her bare things; what ultimate desperation caught in her throat at the ferocious and innocent need of those homeless bees, at the feverish high hum, she never told. Locked into silence, she lay as transfixed as death, the bees hunching into the first resistance of her blond pubic hairs.[113]

In this opening narration, Kroetsch establishes the setting of Big Indian with great detail and rich phenomenal description. The remote culture of Albertan rural communities is perfectly evoked in this section which is why the intrusion of the fantastic should be jarring for the reader, and in

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[113] Robert Kroetsch, *What the Crow Said* (Toronto: General Publishing Company, 1978), 7-8.

fantastic or realist literature, for the fictional characters as well. This stylistic aspect is one of the essential characteristics of magical realist narratives and it is near universal among literary and film critics when discussing this narrative mode. This "lack of reaction" or acceptance of the magical is only significant insofar that the text establishes itself in a reality that resembles our own. We observe a similar register of the fantasy in high fantasy narratives, but the difference is, obviously, that these stories take place in a reality that does not resemble ours. Middle-earth and Osten Ard may well have allegorical meanings pertaining to real human history but at the most basic level of narrative interpretation, what is happening in the story and where is it set and who are these characters, the fictional reality is starkly contrasted to ours so the banal acceptance of the fantastic is not the same in this mode. Todorov made a similar observation about the fantastic genre in his study on the topic. He noted that one of the primary, but not essential, characteristics of the fantastic was that the characters in the narrative hesitate when confronted with a fantastic intrusion on reality. This hesitation, which should correspond to hesitation experienced by the characters, in the ideal reader of the text is the essential characteristic of the fantastic. Fantastic works can feature characters that hesitate or ones that do not but they must contain, at the level of narration, a hesitation in the implied ideal reader of the text.[114] Magical realism usually contains no hesitation which is why we can say that it is closer to what Todorov called the "contemporary fantastic"[115] and what Alazraki referred to as the "neo-fantastic."[116] The banal acceptance of the fantastic is described by Todorov as the naturalization of the fantastic: the

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[114] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cleveland and London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 31-33.

[115] Ibid., 168-169. Is this from Todorov? Page range doesn't match up.

[116] Jaime Alazraki, *En busca del unicornio: los cuentos de Julio Cortazar* (Madrid: Gredos, 1983); Alazraki, "Neofantastic Literature—A Structuralist Answer," 286-290.

supernatural occurrence or character is introduced without surprise or hesitation and increasingly given a natural atmosphere. The modern origin of this type of narrative style is Kafka's work which introduces a supernatural element almost immediately after which the narrative uses realist discourses almost exclusively to create an equivalence between the realist and fantastic content. The banal acceptance of the fantastic is then duplicated in the implied ideal reader of magical realist texts.

This trait of magical realism just mentioned, where the fantastic element is immediately introduced while the rest of the narrative has to reckon with this intrusion, does not have a correlation in magical realist film. Angel Flores observed that this trait was one of the defining features of magical realist literature. The majority of magical realist films introduce fantastical elements gradually throughout the story and these elements occur in higher frequency as the film nears its conclusion. Films in this mode, whether because they are adhering to a narrative structure trope that was established during the classical era or for some other reason, establish a strong phenomenal description of the narrative reality as realistic and plausible before they problematize that notion as the story progresses. Often the third act climaxes with an extremely magical and unrealistic event that further challenges the mimesis of the first act. This is one of the few cases where magical realism differs between literary art and film.

In film history narrational modes change and develop into other ones over time. Magical realism in film emerged as a post-surrealist type of filmmaking influenced by Cocteau and Italian neorealism. Other types of magical realist films come out of modernist film works that reflexively treat popular genres either for the purposes of parody or not. In these cases different components of the realist film style are maintained while others are discarded. There are more

variations of magical realism within film but what these examples show is that most magical realist films do not have film-specific types of narration that produce the synthesis of realism and fantasy. In this respect, both media express the fundamental poles of aesthetic creation of both literature and film, that of myth/fantasy and mimesis. The only differences in them have to do directly with the ontological properties of the media themselves, that is, the difference we noted in the earlier section between iconic and textual signs, the difference between iconicity and textuality. From the perspective of formal properties, aesthetic strategies for representing the realistic representation of magic and the magical representation of reality, and narrational combination of realist and magical discourses, film and literature are remarkably similar in these general terms. Historically they have different paths in terms of what they are actually representing, and the main difference can be accounted for by the fact that literature is one of the preeminent forms of postcolonial narrative art while its corresponding mode in film is not. The way magical realist films as a transgeneric category depict historical struggle, trauma, and utopia is the subject of the rest of this project.

Chapter 4. Magical Metafiction

In the two previous chapters I argued that magical realist cinema is a disparate,

multifaceted, and international phenomenon. Its history in film lacks a centralized geographical

and political centre like the Latin American boom cycle in literature which catapulted the literary

mode to international literary consciousness. Its recognition in the international sphere made it a

viable aesthetic strategy for other regions on the periphery in order to differentiate their literary

art from that of the Global North. In magical realist cinema, the lack of a centralizing region or

artistic cycle in film history resulted in magical realism emerging as a response to various local

cultural and political contexts. Various aesthetic problems emerged in these contexts to which

magical realism was the solution. The problem was how to expand the scope of a realist film

form which became the standard form of commercial and mainstream filmmaking practices in

the West. This is not the same realism that magical realist literature was reacting against, namely,

European realist and naturalist literature, but the classical mode of production institutionalized

by Hollywood filmmaking practices from the 1930s to the late 1950s, and its counterpart in

Western European cinema, which had been exported to the rest of the world through Western

domination of exhibition practices. The emergence of magical realism in film, beyond its early

manifestations, appeared in the numerous global new waves in the late 1950s and early 1960s in

Brazil, France, Japan, the Czech Republic, and Britain. In Hollywood it emerged from the

absurdist comic directors Frank Tashlin and his protégé Jerry Lewis. Magical realist films

emerged as part of what is now called "late-modernism" in film as reactions to mainstream

realist film style. These films embodied the reflexive tradition of the novel form initiated by

Cervantes in contrast to the realist principles that were initiated by Daniel Defoe. The Cervantes

strand of the novel form represents the original impulses of what we now refer to as metafiction, fiction that takes its own linguistic processes and the construction of narrative as the subject matter of the work. In this chapter we will discuss the intersections between magical realism and metafiction, and the unique forms of metafiction that are found in magical realist cinema.

Beyond Cervantes's influence on the mode, magical realism in film and literature is actually a model for textuality itself, the act of creating fictional worlds that produce a reality-effect for the reader and/or spectator. The cryptic ending of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* features a metafictional scene that anticipates much of the metafictional strategies in later magical realist fiction. After many years of trying to decipher the writings of Melquíades, Aureliano suddenly, and inexplicably, discovers the keys to Melquíades's manuscripts which contain the entire history of his family, which is also the novel we are reading, which is now discovered to be Melquiades's manuscripts. We discover as readers that the ending of the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the act of reading a manuscript "One Hundred Years of Solitude." See the quote below for the way Garcia Márquez dramatizes this scene:

> Macondo was already a fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane when Aureliano skipped eleven pages so as not to lose time with facts he already knew only too well, and he began to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchments, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror. Then he skipped again to anticipate the predictions and ascertain the date and circumstances of his death. Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled f rom the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth. [117]

The language of the manuscripts is a combination of Sanskrit, the private cipher of the Emperor Augustus, and the Lacedemonian military code. Aureliano is now able to read them as

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[117] Gabriel Garcia Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper Perennial, 1970), 416.

if they were written in Spanish, and they contain the entire history of his family, every small detail, written one hundred years before it happened.

Early, paradigmatic examples of magical realism like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* have used metafiction to reflexively address the process of creation. Rawdon Wilson argued that the use of fictional space in magical realism makes apparent what was always present in the textuality of the novel form, the co-presence of real and fantastic spaces that occur in the act of reading any novel.[118] The hybrid nature of the literary discourses in magical realism emulates the act of reading fiction itself where the reader encounters the imaginary and fantastical space of the text. The co-existence of two worlds in one, or rather the erasure of the boundary between reality and fantasy, suggests a model for textuality itself. This aspect points toward the fundamental co-presence of fictional and realistic worlds that occur in the act of reading.[119] When we sit down to read a novel, we encounter an imaginary fictional space so that an imaginary exists for the duration of the act of reading. Wilson refers to the experience of reading as the creation of one space within another. The literary genre of magical realism dramatizes this fundamental aspect of storytelling, and reading a story, because of the very nature of its aesthetic discourses. The combination of realist and magical discourses models the encounter of the imaginary with the real in the experience of textuality itself. Metafiction is then a necessary trait for all magical realist works by default because the mode draws attention to the experience of textuality. It exemplifies the essential nature of fiction itself which is the imaginary construction of a world within a system of signs, whether they are cinematic or linguistic.

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[118] Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 226.

[119] Ibid., 226.

If magical realism is necessarily metafictional then it would appear that all metafiction has a magical realist dimension to it as well. When texts address their own construction, the semiotic and aesthetic building blocks of narrative, and the extra-textual, they are actualizing or thematizing one of the primary characteristics of magical realism, the encounter between reality and fantasy, the synthesis of the empirical world with magic. This explains why key texts on magical realism discuss narrative works that have been primarily understood as metafiction and key texts on metafiction cite examples from key texts of magical realism. However, I will argue that not all metafictional texts are magical realist. There are two reasons for this: metafiction does not necessarily involve diegetic thematization of the creation of the text, and not all metaphors or allegories in metafiction are made into literal diegetic events, like they are in magical realism. Metafictional narratives are therefore a broader category than magical realism which we can classify as a sub-category of metafiction. The cases of metafictional magical realism I will discuss in this chapter are ones of higher intensity and explicitness as compared to the general dimension of metafiction in magical realism. They are works of metafiction that have distinct magical realist narratives that depict the encounter of realist and fantasy. The following discussion will examine magical realist films that have metafictional elements, describe what forms these take, and then address explicitly magical realist forms of metafiction itself.

To begin, I will summarize a typology of metafiction from literary theory and extrapolate its insights for cinema studies. Linda Hutcheon's research on literary metafiction, which she refers to as "narcissistic narratives," designates four types of metafiction: overt diegetic, overt

linguistic, covert diegetic, and covert linguistic.[120] The terms diegetic and linguistic refer to the narrative process and the semiotic building blocks of narrative respectively. Hutcheon's research was exclusively about literary fiction hence the use of the term linguistic. For film analysis we can use the term cinematographic instead of linguistic to specify the distinct semantic and semiotic tools used by film in relation to literature. Overt and covert refer to the way metafiction is purposed in the text. Overt refers to texts that self-consciously refer to themselves as texts created by an artist: they directly implicate the reader into the process of artistic creation, and they thematize this process in the work. Covert refers to works that are not self-conscious but nevertheless emphasize the fabricated nature of texts. Rather than thematize the artistic process, they actualize that process in the very structure of the work. The difference between overt and covert metafiction is obvious if we compare metafiction's use in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Finnegans Wake*. In the first novel, John Fowles's impresario narrator character directly addresses the reader, includes various endings to the story literally moving time backwards, and presents the reader with choices regarding the fate of the characters. This is what overt means in metafiction: the story is literally about the creation of the work itself, the process of imaginary construction is a theme of the work, and the characters act out that theme. James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* uses a covert method, one that foregrounds the semantic and syntactic raw material of fiction itself so that the fiction is the product of language creating language so that the infinite interpretative possibilities of the text are now shared with the reader in the process of making the text concrete through the act of reading.[121] The story of *Finnegans Wake* itself may

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[120] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 27-35.

[121] Ibid, 34.

not thematize the artistic process but the use of language actualizes this process of creating imaginary worlds with words whose creation is shared with the reader. In overt metafiction, the text explicitly addresses the reader, teaching them new rules for interpretation, while in covert metafiction the text assumes the reader knows these rules so therefore it simply hails the reader into the collective act of actualizing the new rules of metafiction through the process of reading.

Covert diegetic metafiction is markedly different from its overt counterpart because within the aesthetic structures a metafictional component is apparent without being self-conscious. In literature, the detective plot, the fantasy story, the game structure, and the erotic tale all covertly address the constructed nature of literary works.[122] As mentioned above, detective plots contain a hermeneutic dimension for any act of reading because the reader is hailed by the text to decipher the meaning behind actions, events, and dialogue much like the detective character within the text does. The fantasy story emphasizes the act of imagining a fictional world because the literary referents do not refer to our world, unlike detective fiction. The reader is forced to use more of their imaginative faculties in imagining the world of the text. This increased level of emphasis on imagination covertly refers to the process of constructing the text. The latter two identified by Hutcheon, the game and the erotic story, are not as common or significant for cinema so we will not discuss them in detail. The game structure involves displaying a set of rules to the reader for creating something, and if the rules are not understood then the text's imaginary world cannot be created. The erotic metaphor represents the possession of the reader through literary fiction so the erotic refers to the relationship between the writer and reader. In place of these last two metafictional forms I suggest instead that we consider the

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[122] Ibid., 31-34.

"mockumentary" or the comedic documentary structure and the film essay as cinematic forms that actualize metafictional properties. The mockumentary has a "fictional" audience and production team that are creating the film-within-the-film and structurally involves the emphasis on the constructed nature of the film (or lack thereof). The film essay is an inherently metafictional cinematic form because the address to the audience is constantly actualized in the form itself. The film essay is designed to be persuasive and it addresses an implied interlocutor. The rules of fiction are systematically suspended or transformed in the service of developing an argument or presenting a discussion of some political, cultural, or cinematic topic. Godard and Marker's films best represent this type of metafictional film essay and more recently so too do Lars von Trier's latest films *Nymphomaniac* (2013) and *The House That Jack Built* (2018).

Magical realist films exemplify most forms of metafiction that Hutcheon described in this typology. The covert forms of metafiction are not overtly magical realist in the strict sense of combining fantasy and realism because those forms actualize rather than dramatize narcissistic narratives. The metafictional aspect is too structurally ingrained in the text itself and therefore not dramatized. For example, using clichés from the detective genre in magical realist work is metafictional in the covert sense because it emphasizes to the spectator narrative structures that are overly familiar, and the act of watching the movie has a hermeneutic dimension to it for the spectator but the diegetic world does not address the spectator directly. Ruiz's magical realist films used this type of covert diegetic metafiction. *Three Crowns of the Sailor* (1983) begins with a mysterious murder committed by a student against his mentor. He is on the run from the local police, avoiding random gunfire from fights in the streets until he meets the "sailor" character who takes him to a bar that only sailors know so the student can hide from the police. This

detective story pastiche establishes the structure of the story immediately by establishing that the student is a surrogate for the spectator, but one who has no time to listen to the ramblings of a sailor because he is trying to evade capture by the police. The film noir introduction sequence segues into a series of supposedly "tall" tales of the sea that with the expectation that these stories are embellished and fantastical. Ruiz abruptly abandons the detective noir conventions, the high-contrast black and white cinematography and noir atmosphere, but maintains the hermeneutic dimension of detective plots because the murderer must listen to and understand the strange stories of the sailor in order to be saved. Detective plots covertly refer to the act of creating fiction through the process of reading because mystery narratives have an inherent intensified hermeneutic experience to them compared to the other narrative types. The mystery or detective narrative plot involves sifting through a series of phenomena to discover answers to a problem. The deciphering of the phenomena by the detective character is mirrored by the reader's own attempts to discover the answer to the mystery as well. Ruiz combines the hermeneutic dimension of the detective story with that of the nautical tale inspired by Orson Welles's film *The Immortal Story* (1968) with Jeanne Moreau, made for French television. Welles adapted the short story of the same name by Karen Blixen about an aging sea-merchant that wants to recreate an old sailor's story about a rich sea merchant paying a young sailor five guineas to impregnate his wife. Welles's film has a covert metafictional element as well, the recreation of a sailor's story about an old merchant, at the request of an old merchant, that Ruiz utilizes in his film. The only difference is that Ruiz's sailor story presents those embellished elements typically found in sailor stories as really happening hence we can classify the film as magical realism. *Three Crowns of the Sailor* is located in an older oral tradition of sailors' folk

tales filtered through a postmodern appropriation of classical Hollywood B-films. As a piece of metafiction, *Three Crowns for the Sailor* actualizes the process of creating a fictional universe as part of its own narrative.

Another example of covert diegetic metafiction includes Steven Soderbergh's magical realist thriller *Kafka* (1991) with Jeremy Irons as the depressive novelist. Soderbergh does not adapt one individual Kafka story but dramatizes our culture's impression of Kafka as writer and his mythos in the European literary canon rather than present a conventional biographical story. Like Ruiz, Soderbergh was also influenced by Welles, specifically his adaptation of *The Trial* (1962) which was filmed in black and white expressionist cinematography that Soderbergh emulated for his film. Welles's baroque cinematographic style influenced future magical realists because he was adept at making the familiar and everyday seem strange and uncanny, an essential aspect to creating a magical realist tone and atmosphere for film. Soderbergh's depiction of Kafka the writer is told through a conspiracy thriller narrative structure, one that recalls Alan J. Pakula's paranoid neo-noirs from the 1970s. Eventually Kafka's investigation into the mysterious deaths of the incompetent anarchists leads him to a large castle called "The Castle," an obvious reference to his posthumously published novel. The film presents the subject matter of Kafka's work as real and not imaginary. We discover that Kafka's inspiration for his novel is the secret organization that is experimenting on humans in the hopes of creating the most efficient worker for the modern labour force. Soderbergh's magical realist biographical story presents the structures of conspiracy thrillers as they intertwine with elements from Kafka's own fiction to present the conventions of both. Full comprehension of the movie's jokes and plot twists requires more demands on the viewer to recognize the structures of conspiracy stories and,

more importantly, the biography of Kafka which for this movie is transformed into another textual reference of the narrative. The magical realist aspect to this metafictional example is the depiction of real nightmare bureaucratic organizations which are presented as something that really happened to the writer and not simply the product of his creative imagination.

The above discussions of *Three Crowns of the Sailor* and *Kafka* are examples of how covert diegetic metafiction intersects with magical realism. Both movies use visual and atmospheric conventions from film noir that had become highly formulaic and recognizable at the end of the late 20th century. Furthermore, Soderbergh expanded the terrain of so-called biographical films with *Kafka* by depicting the life of the writer becoming embroiled with events that resemble the events in his fictional works. An apocryphal representation of a real person with fantastical elements is another form of magical realist metafiction that removes the layers of allegory found in other magical realist texts that are about real human history. If we compare these films to Ruiz's *City of Pirates* (1983) then the different ways that they treat history will be apparent. *City of Pirates* is a magical realist thriller about a woman encountering a mysterious young boy. The purple tint of the lens transforms a coastal town into a bizarre and strange setting. Ruiz's film is meant to be a representation of a post-Allende Chile under Pinochet, a nation that is warped and twisted because it is governed by an authoritarian ruler supported by the imperialist countries from the Global North. The film however does not address this historical context directly but presents this strange setting as an allegorical representation of Chile, introducing magical realist and horror elements to show that the country became a living nightmare. In contrast, *Kafka* directly references the historical person Kafka but then obscures the historical referents of his biography by introducing magical realist elements. The spectator is

forced to reconcile the historical "Kafka" with the character performed by Jeremy Irons who encounters the magical realist events from Kafka's works.

The depiction of Kafka by a contemporary actor is not much different than novels that use real figures from human history. Watching Irons portray Kafka is similar to the experience of reading about Lauren Bacall in Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985). We do not mistake these depictions for real depictions of these figures because of the phenomenological discrepancy between the literary sign of Lauren Bacall and the historical Lauren Bacall which is the same case for Irons playing Kafka. But other magical realist films increase the degree of metafiction when they cast actors as versions of themselves. An early example of this covert cinematographic strategy is Jerry Lewis's portrayal of a caricature of himself in *The Bellboy* (1960). *The Bellboy* is an absurdist comedy with intermittent magical realist sequences. The magical moments are always used in service of a joke and they fit perfectly within the non-narrative, structuralist style of his movies. In this film Lewis plays two characters, the titular hotel "bellboy" who does not speak until the end of the movie, and a self-deprecating version of himself visiting the hotel with an entourage of Hollywood handlers. Seeing both characters played by the same actor breaks with established conventions of classical realism (one character assigned to one performer's body) but not enough to qualify as magical realism especially given that Lewis does not dwell on this aspect of the story but only calls attention to the doppelgänger element for a brief joke. Luis Buñuel used the opposite approach for *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), where he cast two different actresses to play the same character. It is an uncanny effect for the viewer which is compounded when the change of performers is not motivated by the narrative events of the film. This type of casting is not

magical realist but it is metafictional in the sense that Hutcheon described jokes and anagrams as examples of covert linguistic metafiction. Covert linguistic metafiction refers to the building blocks of literature. For narrative film, one of the most important tools for expression is the performer. Buñuel's unconventional casting then calls attention to the entire process of actors creating a performance in a fiction, the way an actor's body becomes temporarily fixed to a fictional character. It is the opposite type of metafictional casting that Lewis used throughout his career.

The next most significant example of this type of metafictional casting in magical realist cinema is Peter Falk as an angel in *Wings of Desire* (1987). In the film, Falk's character explains that he transformed to a human from an angel thirty years ago which corresponds to the actor Falk's first historical appearance on television in 1957 on *Robert Montgomery Presents*. Like Soderbergh's depiction of Kafka, Wim Wenders's portrayal of Falk combines the actor's biography, treating it as one text among others that is now brought to the same level of reality as the magical events of the story. The film establishes a high degree of naturalism with its documentary-esque coverage of Berlin before the Wall was torn down, and now casting Falk as a magical version of himself produces another layer of mediation between this magical realist story and the historical Berlin. This type of metafiction has to do precisely with the iconic status of the filmic sign to which literature has no equivalent but can only approximate with the aforementioned Lauren Bacall character in the Murakami novel. Films that use the actual performers and their biographical texts synthesize the imaginary fictional world of the film and real biography of the performer. The biography of the actor is also not a completed text but one that is still in the process of becoming because they are still alive (and that includes the

metafictional performance they have created in the film), and that creates another level of metafiction and metatextuality that is unique to magical realist cinema.

Being John Malkovich takes this magical realist *topos* to its extreme by inventing an interdimensional plot that involves John Malkovich the actor and a secret portal to his mind. Not only does this film use the type of covert cinematographic metafiction discussed above but it is also an example of overt metafiction as defined by Hutcheon. It is overt because it uses an allegory about artistic creativity, performance, and the influence of celebrity on making art, which draws attention to the filmmaking process itself and the constructed nature of film performances by actors. John Malkovich is not so much the protagonist of the film as he is the central premise, namely, he magically has a portal that exists between the world and his brain, allowing individuals for a brief time to exist within him and view the world from his point of view, in a very literal sense (the characters see everything through his two eye-holes). The sequences when individuals are "inside" Malkovich are filmed like the classical film noirs that experimented with finding an equivalent to the first-person narration techniques found in hardboiled novels. This technique is best seen in Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1947) and the first half of *Dark Passage* (1947) with Humphrey Bogart, but *Being John Malkovich* makes it more comedic by muffling the sound and obscuring the peripheral vision to capture the experience of looking at the world through a pair of eyes that the visitor cannot control. The movie even mocks its own metafictional premise by having the John Malkovich character enter the portal to his own mind which results in an absurd mise-en-abyme. Malkovich's journey into his own mind results in himself being duplicated into every facet of reality: his name is used for all dishes on a menu, he performs as a sexy jazz singer on a restaurant piano, every human being

in this looped feedback reality has John Malkovich's face, and the only word anyone can speak is "Malkovich." If this scene wasn't so funny it would have the makings of a nightmare. Eventually the protagonist, Craig Schwartz (played by John Cusack), an amateur puppeteer, is able to control Malkovich like a puppet, and he decides to pursue his dream to become a famous puppeteer. Now that he controls Malkovich and enjoys the benefits of his celebrity he is able to turn his passion into a legitimate artistic enterprise.

The treatment of John Malkovich the actor as an empty vessel for others to use as they see fit is an allegory for the creative personalities behind the movie itself. Both Charlie Kaufman and Spike Jonze enjoyed critical and commercial success after this and continued to collaborate with each other. Kaufman's script about John Malkovich uses the celebrity of the performer just like Craig Schwartz did with John Malkovich in the film. And much like how the John Malkovich character becomes an empty vessel for Craig, and his identity is reduced to his physical body, the real actor John Malkovich is an empty vessel for the film's auteurs, Kaufman and Jonze, who use his celebrity to make an unconventional magical realist film in Hollywood. In this sense Jonze and Kaufman combine covert cinematographic metafiction with covert diegetic metafiction because the allegorical content of the Craig the puppeteer abusing another performer's body, face, and celebrity for his own success metafictionally mirrors the use of Malkovich by Jonze and Kaufman.

Another type of performance that is noteworthy for this discussion of covert cinematographic metafiction is when a fictional character and events in the film include elements that connect to the performer's biography. Takashi Miike's *Deadly Outlaw: Rekka* (2002) has two members from the Japanese progressive rock band Flower Travellin' Band, and the entire

soundtrack for the film is from their album *Satori* from 1971. The singer-turned-producer of the band Yuya Uchida plays the father of the main character, Arata Kunisada, in the movie, and the other singer from the band, Joe Yamanaka, plays a counsellor to yakuza bosses. The father character is assassinated in the opening scene which sets off a chain of attacks involving the main character against the yakuza group that paid for the assassination. The film has a narrator character that appears to be omniscient, or nearly so, but who is also a character in the story he is narrating. He is an elder statesman in Kunisada, and his father's yakuza group, and at the end of the movie he speaks to the audience about the fate of the yakuza after they die. He declares that death is simply a transition to another existence for the yakuza warrior, and as the movie ends Kunisada's father, played by Yuya Uchida from Flowers Travellin' Band, appears from beyond the grave like the dead Jedis do in the *Star Wars* movies and addresses the audience with the phrase "Let's Rock" as music from his album *Satori* plays over the credits.

Miike's use of metafictional casting is intended as nothing more than an intertextual joke. This is a film equivalent of covert linguistic metafiction, as described by Hutcheon, which is performed through playful uses of language without directly calling attention to the artifice of the work within the diegesis of the story. In *Deadly Outlaw: Rekka* the performers' reference to extradiegetic realities, and the soundtrack music, play with the building blocks for meaning in a film. The correspondence between the soundtrack being used and the creators of that soundtrack performing in the movie is covert cinematographic metafiction because it plays with the semantic elements of storytelling with images and sounds. It becomes overt in the final scene when Yuya's character directly addresses the audience whilst appearing in ghost form to alert the audience to the heavy metal that is about to appear on the soundtrack.

The other form of metafictional performance in magical realism is the inclusion of characters from other fictional universes in the seemingly naturalistic fictional universe established by the film. This form has a high degree of variety depending on the film in question. Lewis and Tashlin frequently included characters from popular movies that were contemporary with their films. An example of this was in *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957) when Jeff Jefferies from *Rear Window* (1954) appears to be surveilling Rock Hunter from an apartment window across the street. Ruiz often liked to include fictional characters from literature. In one of his final films, *Night Across The Street* (2012), the main character Don Celso meets with Long John Silver from the children's book *Treasure Island*. Like the rest of the film, this scene recalls Ruiz's own past work as a filmmaker, specifically his own metafictional adaptation of *Treasure Island*. Don Celso's brief visit with Long John Silver metafictionally mirrors the recollection by the audience of Ruiz's adaptation of the work made twenty years earlier. Metafiction of this intertextual type in magical realism can be traced back to Garcia Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Garcia Márquez used a supporting character, Lorenzo Gavilan, from Carlos Fuentes's *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962), a key novel from the Latin American boom. The fate of Lorenzo was not explained in Fuentes's novel so Garcia Márquez decided to show readers what happened to Fuentes's character. Lorenzo is described as a Colonel of the Mexican revolution who was exiled in Macondo and was a witness to the heroism of his good friend Artemio Cruz. When the newest Aureliano had his first birthday a conflict broke out between the workers and the Banana Company in Macondo. The leaders of the union, José Arcadio Segundo and Lorenzo Gavilan, were taken from their homes and sent to jail in the capital of the province without having committed any crimes. They were eventually set free because neither the

government nor the Banana Company could agree on who was to feed the union leaders that were imprisoned. The army eventually invaded Macondo, declared martial law, and tried to break the strike by working for the company themselves. The union responded by sabotaging their work but finally they were trapped in a courtyard where the army opened fire with machine guns killing Colonel Galivan. The massacre was then covered up by the military and government, even convincing the pregnant woman that lived in Galivan's house that he left Macondo to return to his home country rather than die in the attack. Garcia Márquez's overt reference to another fictional universe exemplifies the self-conscious metafictional aspect to his work as part of a literary cycle. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* came at the end of the Latin American boom, it references the great works of that cycle, and it self-consciously uses characters from other microcosms to demonstrate an awareness of a tradition that this novel is a part of in the history of literature. In the same way, Ruiz's inclusion of characters from his early films and other novels gives *Night Across The Street* a self-awareness of a work that is coming at the end of a director's long film career.

The examples discussed above concern magical realist films that have brief metafictional moments but they do not comprise the central conceit of the narratives. The most sustained engagement of metafiction in magical realist cinema involves the depiction of creating art, the thematization of the creative process, and the merging of fictional worlds with a world that resembles our own. In literature, the overt diegetic version directly addresses the reader and the process of reading as creation, introducing a more active readerly position. In magical realist film this type of direct address is rarely used and when it is, it is only for brief moments and not sustained throughout the entire narrative. What is more common is what Hutcheon has called

overt linguistic metafiction where the elements of creating fiction, language and signs, are directly involved in the plot. This is usually depicted through allegories about artists failing to create a work they have imagined because language is unable to capture it or, the opposite of this dilemma, the enormous power of fiction to create fully realized imaginary worlds. When the characters of the novel are able to enter the fictional universe they have created (the story-within-the-story) then we have a distinct magical realist form of metafiction because two worlds, that also function as allegories for the two literary discourses of magical realism, come into contact with each other. In magical realist literature this process is called the "textualization" of the reader.[123] This type of metafiction is specific to magical realism because it involves the merging of the fantastic with the real. Textualization of the reader in magical realism is the overt aesthetic strategy through which magical realism engages with metafiction. It refers to one of the primary narrative techniques of magical realism which involves making allegories into literal narrative events. Textualization is a literal depiction of the allegory of creating a fictional world through literature and bringing that world into existence through the act of reading. Textualization of the reader can happen in two ways: the first is when the reader, author, or non-reader is literally and magically transported into the world of a fictional text, and the second is when the world of the text intrudes into the extra-textual world or the reader's world. This encounter is also an allegory for the process of reading a book, which recalls Wilson's theory of fictional space in magical realism being a model for textuality itself. The textualization of the reader is a metaphor for the psychological phenomenon of reading a novel, which refers to how the reader "enters" a fictional world through the act of reading. The reader always has some level of detachment by their very

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[123] Thiem, "Textualization of the Reader in Magical Realist Fiction," 235-247.

status as an extra-textual being outside the confines of the fictional text, and this detached

involvement in the world is a precondition for their own enjoyment of the novel. They can enjoy

the dangerous events of a fictional world free from anxiety about the consequences of these

adventures because they are simply reading about them. Textualization in magical realism

dramatizes the allegory for reading itself, and it can therefore be understood as a parody of

postmodernist writing that attempts to break down the boundary between the textual and extra-

textual worlds. This type of magical realist metafiction also refers to the creative work of the

postmodern novelist. For example, in some cases the protagonist assumes the authority to control

the fictional world of the text, demoting the "author" character in the story to simply another

character among the rest. The reader becomes a rival to the author by transcending their typically

passive position as a reader. Magical realist metafiction of this sort threatens the authority of the

postmodern writer by doing to them what they do to the texts that they parody and rewrite in

their metafiction. In another sense textualization narratives represent a solution to the

postmodern author's anxiety about losing their audience within the play of codes and complex

rewriting of other literary genres and texts.[124] Postmodern writing is usually doubly coded: one

code imitates forms from popular or past fiction which helps appeal to wider readership – to

some extent even the nouveau roman did this with the use of detective plots – and the second

code is where postmodern philosophical ideas are demonstrated through pastiche, parody, and

experimental rewritings of previous works. The ideal reader would comprehend both sets of

codes, but there is always a lurking concern that only the first, more recognizable code will be

understood, similar to how the television series *Twin Peaks* was first received by the viewing

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[124] Ibid., 243.

public as simply another murder mystery series and not a postmodernist parody of American soap operas and detective stories. Textualization of the reader is an imaginary solution to the novelist's anxiety regarding the failure of the division of labour in the reader. The character that enters the fictional world or is confronted by a fictional world in these magical realist works is never able to ignore the codes of the work because they become immersed in them. Readers can no longer be escapist and simply enjoy the popular code being used because they are forced to engage with the postmodern breakdown between fiction and reality. This writerly anxiety is both expressed and resolved in magical realist metafiction of this type.

The film equivalent of this narrative strategy is best exemplified by Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) which is befitting for this discussion given that Allen's short story "The Kugelmass Episode" is one of the best examples of textualization of the reader in literature.[125] In this short story, the protagonist, Kugelmass, is a professor who is trying to have an extramarital affair without his wife finding out. He visits a magician in Brooklyn named Persky who possesses a magical box that can transport any person into the piece of literature that accompanies them. Kugelmass wants to have an affair with Emma Bovary so he jumps into the box with a copy of *Madame Bovary* and is transported into to the heterocosm of that novel. Allen's film *The Purple Rose of Cairo* dramatizes the opposite procedure: a character from a fiction film decides to magically leave the film screen so he can be with a spectator named Cecilia (Mia Farrow). The inspiration for this film was most likely from Allen's knowledge of magical realist literature, including his own short stories that use this aesthetic mode and film comedies from the classical era that dealt with the interplay between screen images and reality,

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[125] Ibid., 235.

such as *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) and *Hellzapoppin'* (1941), as well as Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). Allen's film is set during the Great Depression, and the protagonist Cecilia is a restaurant server unhappily married to an unemployed abusive husband (Danny Aiello). The only time she is happy is when she is at the movies watching comedies and adventure films. The film-within-the-film is also called *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and Cecilia has watched it so many times that the character in the film has fallen in love with her, and he decides to escape the fictional world of the movie so he can be with her. This sets off a chain of silly events where the other characters of the film begin to assert their autonomy and they start to mock the other people in the audience and refuse to keep playing their roles in the movie. The actor that played the character in the film-within-the-film is now in trouble with Hollywood executives because he cannot keep control of his own creation. He tracks down his fictional creation (both characters are played by Jeff Daniels) and tricks him into returning to the screen to save the actor's career. *The Purple Rose of Cairo* is Allen's most sophisticated use of magical realism in film. It perfectly encapsulates the textualization of the reader, or in this case, the textualization of the spectator in film. This is type of metafiction is peculiar to magical realism because it involves the literal depiction of the main aesthetic component of magical realism itself: the merging of two worlds, the world of everyday reality and the world of fantasy, artistic creation and the world of the artist.

A more recent example of this type of magical realist metafiction is the comedy starring Will Ferrell and Dustin Hoffman, *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006) directed by Marc Forster. In this film Ferrell plays a mild-mannered IRS agent named Harold Crick who suddenly discovers he is the main character of a novel called *Death and Taxes* that is in the process of being written by

famous writer Karen Eiffel (Emma Thompson). The narration of the novel becomes audible to

Harold, and he believes he might be suffering from schizophrenia. After discussing these bizarre

events with a professor of English literature, Jules Hilbert (Dustin Hoffman), Harold discovers

that his life has become a piece of fiction, and the novelist Karen keeps experimenting with

different, often life-threatening, scenarios for Harold because she is experiencing writer's block.

She wants to find a creative way to kill him, and Harold experiences all of her aborted attempts

in real life. Eventually he contacts her with the help of Hilbert and pleads with her to keep him

alive in her novel.

The characters in this movie do not enter another world, nor does another enter ours, but

rather everyday reality is transformed into part of a novel. The writer character is given the

powers of a god, as she controls the world through her writing, and the consequences for her

creative decisions are now real. *Stranger Than Fiction* dramatizes the postmodernist author's

anxiety, discussed above, regarding the lack of comprehension in the reader when using two or

more codes in a work. The reader might comprehend the popular code but ignore the metatextual

or philosophical codes, thus missing a portion of the experience of the novel. It would be like

reading Pynchon's *V.* or *The Crying of Lot 49* as conspiracy thrillers and not as an exploration of

the concept of conspiracy itself and our inability to visualize massive structures of oppression in

late-capitalism. Harold's character is the analogue for the reader that can no longer ignore the

other codes of the postmodernist work because he is now implicated in the events of the novel.

The film also dramatizes the part of the division of labour of reading where the reader brings the

novel's imaginary world into existence. Harold's life is both real and the product of creation by

Karen Eiffel, and this synthesis is achieved by virtue of magical realist discourses using both

realist and magical film forms. The film depicts the movement from a passive reader into any active creator of their fiction which corresponds to Harold's own personal transformation into an assertive individual. He pleads with Karen to change the ending of his book because he does not want to die. The novelist's detachment from her creation is also reduced to a minimum because she now feels responsible for her own creation. And the entire film moves beyond an allegory for the process of reading as creation, the division of labour of the reader in postmodernist fiction, or the parody of postmodern metafiction in general, and becomes about the philosophy of existence. Harold assumes an active role in the creation of his novel because he asserted himself in all other areas of his life.

The final concept I would like to discuss regarding the relationship between magical realism and metafiction is that of the mise-en-abyme. Hutcheon argued that this was one of the central ways in which overt diegetic metafiction is used in fiction. Mise-en-abyme is often used as an allegory for the creative process, and in magical realism this allegory becomes a literal thing within the diegetic world of the narrative. However, mise-en-abyme is the duplication of meaningful figures, ideas, and texts-within-the-text so there are usually more levels of mediation in magical realist works.

David Cronenberg's 1991 adaptation of William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* uses a complicated set of mediations between the characters in his movie, those of the novel *Naked Lunch*, and the biography of the author of *Naked Lunch*. Cronenberg's film is set during the Beat era in New York City. The main character is William Lee (Peter Weller) who works as an insect exterminator and is married to a junkie named Joan (Judy Davis). William is friends with two writers, Hank and Martin, who are obviously based on Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Both

real-life writers helped Burroughs compile the various chapters together into the novel *Naked*

Lunch and found a publisher for Burroughs so it is befitting that they are in this movie about the

novel and its creation. Cronenberg's approach to adapting this film is a response to the difficulty

that the source text poses for film adaptation. The novel *Naked Lunch* rejects many conventions

of the novel form, while the film adaptation has nothing resembling the typical three-act

structure commonly used for fiction films. The novel was described by Burroughs as anti-novel,

presumably because the chapters appear to be self-contained pieces of writing similar to

encyclopaedia entries, with no clearly defined antagonist or obstacles for the protagonist, and the

writing style is not at all consistent from chapter to chapter. Burroughs also claimed that the

chapters could be read in any order and that the order of the chapters in the final published text

was determined by coincidence. The novel's literary form ranges from extreme mimesis (the two

subsections titled "Habit Notes" and "Habit Notes Continued" are painfully realistic and quite

revealing with respect to the existence of a heroin junkie) to surrealist and impressionistic

vignettes (the chapter "A.J.'s Annual Party" is an abject impressionist collage of eroticism, and

the final chapters of the novel are increasingly more abstract and non-linear) to fantastical

sequences that approach the synthesis of realism and the fantasy of magical realism (the

sequences describing Mugwumps and the events concerning Interzone). The increasingly

abstract nature of the novel is held together by Burroughs's infamous use of ellipses which help

his seemingly unrelated series of ideas, impressions, fantastic episodes, and philosophical

observations congeal into a moderately coherent piece of work. In his film, Cronenberg creates

no cinematic equivalent for Burroughs's ellipsis and instead favours simple but abrupt transitions

supplied from the realist film form. This is a bold choice because he is able to maintain the

strange combination of structured chaos that Burroughs created in his novel while also forcing it to follow a coherent narrative arc.

Jeanne Delbaere-Garant argued that magical realism is a literary discourse that can be used throughout an entire author's oeuvre, throughout an entire work, or sporadically in either an oeuvre or a work.[126] This is one way of restating Bakhtin's theory of the literary text as a site of competing discourses. Magical realism is itself a synthesis of two distinct discourses, and this synthesis can occur in varying degrees and quantities throughout a work. I propose that this is the case for both the novel and the film adaptation of *Naked Lunch*. The source of the film's magical realism is the fantastic elements of the novel and the reduction of Burroughs's impressionistic sequences. The metafictional aspects of Cronenberg's film at times intersect with the magical realist elements and at other times break with them.

Cronenberg's adaptation is a supreme example of metafiction because the film is almost unintelligible unless the spectator has read the novel *Naked Lunch* and knows some of Burroughs's biography. Cronenberg's film does not follow the trajectory outlined by the novel nor is it structured as a series of vignettes. In fact, because he provides Interzone and Interzone Incorporated (in the novel there is an organization called Islam Incorporated) with such prominent roles in the story, Cronenberg's version has a much more coherent narrative and sense of place than the novel. The movie becomes ostensibly about a secret agent on a mission in a foreign land that resembles Morocco. The first act is set in New York City with a definite time and place given by the inter-title in the first scene, "New York City, 1953," and William Lee's profession as a termite exterminator in the city gives the film the appearance of a naturalist gloss

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[126] JDelbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism," 249-263.

that is lacking in Burroughs's novel. At this time in Burroughs's life he was about to move from New York City to Tangier, Morocco after a failed love affair with his close friend Allen Ginsberg. Tangier became the inspiration for his various writings on the fictional city of Interzone, some of which made it into *Naked Lunch*, and other writings were published in a collection of short stories called *Interzone* in 1989. By this time Burroughs had already become a published writer, having written *Junkie* which was published in 1953 as an Ace paperback pulp novel original under the pseudonym "William Lee," and a quasi-sequel titled *Queer* in 1953 (published eventually in 1985), and, prior to that, a novel with Jack Kerouac called *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks* (written in 1945 and published in 2008), about the murder of David Kammerer, a novel that Burroughs did not think was worth publishing. All of Burroughs's novels before *Naked Lunch* were written in the novel form and without the impressionistic style that Burroughs developed later. Cronenberg's film adaptation creates a different trajectory for the historical Burroughs by showing that the true beginning of Burroughs as a writer is the writing of his novel *Naked Lunch*.

William Lee, called Bill in the movie, is the protagonist of both versions. In the novel he is one character among many and is written like a passive observer of the absurd events that happen around him in the world of Interzone. William Lee is described in the novel as an undercover agent who behaves like one of the "Bad Guys" to expose systems of control. In the film Bill Lee is the protagonist, he has a clearly defined character arc (his transformation into a writer), and he is not a passive observer of the narrative action. In this sense, Cronenberg's film adaptation uses a completely different approach to narrative than the novel. Burroughs claimed *Naked Lunch* is an anti-novel because of its rejection of the basic narrative conventions for the

novel form, whereas Cronenberg did not make an anti-narrative film (Ruiz's rejection of dramatic conflict in his narratives is closer to Burroughs's style). His film style, cinematography, editing, sound design, and production design are completely in service of revealing the story to the audience. This is not to say that the film is a mainstream work but rather that Cronenberg's approach did not duplicate the novel's repudiation of literary narrative principles, and his cinematographic style uses the principles of realist narration.

Cronenberg introduces Bill Lee as a professional bug exterminator that is married to his wife Joan Lee (Burroughs's second wife was Joan Vollmer Adams) and has two close friends Martin (Michael Zelniker) and Hank (Nicholas Campbell). Bill's world as a bug exterminator in New York City in the fifties is presented as a strange and bizarre place where vendors eat the bug powder and people inject it into their bodies like heroin. Throughout the film Cronenberg implies in certain scenes that all of the fantastical events and characters are the product of Bill hallucinating while on drugs. Typewriters become giant insects that can speak and then are magically transformed into typewriters in another shot. However, the insistence that these magical events are the product of imagination (what Todorov called the uncanny explained) is too weak and inconsistent in the movie.[127] Cronenberg does use some elements of surrealism, like associative connections between pieces of dialogue and actors playing multiple roles, but for the most part the film's reality is depicted as a magical one where fantastic events appear to exist on the same level as events that resemble everyday reality. In another sense, Cronenberg's depiction of Interzone (the fictional analogue for Tangier) shows the city like others had

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[127] Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, 41.

observed Tangiers to be in real life, a dreamlike place where everything was permitted.[128] The

dream explanation for the fantastical elements does not account for their frequency and narrative

significance.

The film proceeds according to Bill's adventures in Interzone which correspond to a

series of visual associations that reoccur throughout the movie. Bill begins the film killing

cockroaches, and once he injects himself with roach powder he encounters a giant roach that

recruits him as an agent of Interzone. He is given black powder made from aquatic black

centipedes from Brazil to mix with his bug powder as a treatment to break his addiction to the

yellow bug powder, and then he finds large black centipedes for sale in a market on the way

home. The same centipede is found as a necklace on a character named Kiki (Joseph Scorsiani)

in a queer bar by the waterfront. When Bill is in Interzone, he finds another market that sells

gigantic black centipedes with the vendors carving them up like they were meat in a butcher

shop. When the Belgian businessman Yves Cloquet (Julian Sands) seduces Kiki in his apartment,

Cloquet turns into a human-centipede creature that mounts Kiki from behind in a giant parrot

cage. This scene is also foreshadowed elusively earlier in the film when Bill traded in his gun for

a typewriter at a pawn shop in New York City. When Bill buys the typewriter in the shop window

the shopkeeper replaces it with a small metal sculpture of a Mugwump mounting a lover in a

swing just like the way the "Cloquet-centipede" creature mounts Kiki later in the film. In

Burroughs's biography, Kiki was murdered by a Cuban band leader while Burroughs was away

in the United Kingdom for drug rehabilitation. His death was significant for Burroughs, and he

regretted leaving him, but in the film it becomes a passing moment in the web of Interzone

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[128] Phil Baker, *William S. Burroughs* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 85.

Incorporated conspiracies. The image of the bug, whether in the form of a cockroach or centipede, reappears at important points in the narrative through repeated duplication of itself. The repeated appearance of insects is one of the primary allegorical images that Cronenberg uses to refer to the historical Burroughs and certain sections of the novel he is adapting. The references to the creation of the work are mediated through the mise-en-abyme's framework of insect imagery.

There is only one moment in the movie, however, where Cronenberg breaks the chain of mise-en-abyme within the narrative and directly addresses the actual novel *Naked Lunch*. Martin and Hank visit Bill in Interzone after Tom takes his typewriter as compensation for Bill having destroyed his. Tom tells Bill to give up writing his report and to leave Interzone. Martin and Hank find Bill sleeping on the beach, apparently sleeping off a drug binge. They tell him that the pages he sent from his novel *Naked Lunch* are great and that Martin's publisher is interested in turning them into a book. Martin asks him to also write his philosophy of drug use for the novel as well. This section is taken directly from the historical Burroughs. While in Tangier, he was sending his writing to Ginsberg, and Ginsberg was forwarding his pages to his publisher who was interested in publishing Burroughs's writing as a novel. Cronenberg condenses the professional and artistic relationship between Ginsberg and Burroughs into this scene for his adaptation. This is the only scene in the film that refers to Bill's writing as *Naked Lunch* and not his report for Interzone Incorporated. It is the interpretive key for the entire film and explains Cronenberg's method for adapting the novel. The film *Naked Lunch* is a magical realist dramatization of the process of Burroughs writing his novel *Naked Lunch*. This scene is then also the only opening into the so-called real world behind the various mediations introduced by

Cronenberg. It is at once an interpretive key for the film which explains why *Naked Lunch* is told

as a narrative and not as a series of vignettes. It is also the only moment where the character Bill

is directly connected to William Burroughs and where his report is identified as the novel *Naked*

Lunch, and it is the only moment that is a quasi-break with the magical realism of the narrative

wherein the film's two source texts are directly mentioned without the mediations used in the rest

of the film. The magical realist elements that Cronenberg uses to depict the process of writing

Naked Lunch – the typewriters as talking insects, the report for Interzone Incorporated, the

various agents and double-agents, the Mugwumps, and the giant centipedes – are not used in this

scene. Cronenberg briefly hints that this is a moment of complete lucidity for Bill which implies

that everything before and after is the product of hallucination. But in fact this scene is the

outlier. Bill Lee is a character from Burroughs's work and not the author. To position Bill Lee as

the writer of *Naked Lunch* is another magical realist moment because he is a fictional character.

Regardless of Bill Lee's status as an analogue for Burroughs the writer, this apparently

hallucination-free scene is another metafictional and magical realist layer of the film. It has

interpretive truth for the spectator, but it is not, so to speak, evidence that the fantastic events are

the product of Bill's hallucinations.

This moment of metafictional directness is then abruptly dropped with the immediate

scenes following it. Bill collapses in an alley, and Kiki finds him. The character Kiki in the film

is based off of Burroughs's boyfriend in Tangier named Enrique, or Henrique, with whom he had

an uncomplicated but sexual relationship that helped him get over his romantic rejection from

Ginsberg. Kiki takes the broken parts of the typewriter that he destroyed to a blacksmith who

then melts it down into a new one and creates a typewriter in the shape of a Mugwump head with

the keys in its mouth. The Mugwump-head typewriter presents the final addictive substance in the story, Mugwump "jissom" that comes from the long tubes on the Mugwump's head. The movie progresses from one drug addiction to the next, beginning with the yellow roach powder which Joan Lee uses, then the black powder given to Bill by Dr. Benway (Roy Scheider) as a treatment for Bill's addiction to the yellow powder (this appears to be a reference to Burroughs's rehabilitation program that used apomorphine to change his metabolism so it removed the addictive responses to heroin and morphine use), and then finally the white jissom from the Mugwumps. In the novel Burroughs described the Mugwumps as having erect penises that secreted this addictive fluid. The addicts are called "Reptiles" whereas Cronenberg put phallus like tendrils all over their heads which secreted this addictive substance. Cronenberg does not refer to any drugs directly, a choice that Burroughs applauded, but creates his own substances so that the film can focus on the effects of drug addiction, especially the loss of control and identity of the drug user.

Bill's journey through his addiction to these different substances is mirrored by changes in his sexuality. In the beginning of the film, he is a happily married man and shows no signs of bisexuality or homosexuality like the real Burroughs had early on in his life. There is one scene that hints at Burroughs's failed relationship with Ginsberg in the first act, when the Martin character propositions Bill, but he gives an ambivalent response. As Bill becomes more embroiled in the non-sensical conspiracies that resemble the ones from Pynchon's early novels, and in writing his reports, he becomes more homosexual, forgetting his attraction to Joan Frost (the second Joan in the film, a doppelgänger of his wife that he murdered in New York City), and more involved with his lover Kiki. At one point after injecting black bug powder Bill observes

his typewriter, now a sentient bug-typewriter hybrid, typing pages itself and feeding paper into its slot. It dictates words for Bill to write in his report: "Homosexuality is the best all-around cover an agent ever had." Later Bill meets the Belgian businessman Yves Cloquet at the beach, and Yves admits that he did not know Bill was gay. Bill claims that homosexuality is the curse of all the men of his family. In a later scene Bill finally seduces Joan after writing a piece with her on her husband's other typewriter (Joan prefers to write with pen and paper). They inject black powder and write on the typewriter, which becomes another sentient bug. Joan puts her hand inside the bug's mouth and it heaves in ecstasy while a phallic tendril becomes erect and Joan and Bill finally have sex. Meanwhile a Mugwump-like creature with shapely buttocks joins them in bed, humping Bill, signifying, through the imagery of Cronenberg's version of Interzone, Burroughs's bisexuality. They are interrupted by Joan's housekeeper Fadela (Monique Mercure), a strict, buttoned-up German woman that whips the creature in the ass until it jumps out the window. Upon impact it becomes Tom Frost's other typewriter that they were writing with before having sex. The scene is made even more complicated given that the biographical correlate for Joan Frost's relationship is the time spent by Joan Vollner and Burroughs in Mexico where, after he was clean for a brief period, his libido came back, and he was seeing young men rather than being with his wife. In the film, Joan remarks that her husband Tom Frost is "out with the boys again," and we soon discover that he has sexual affairs with young Latino men in Interzone much like how Burroughs did in Mexico. Cronenberg combines the real Joan Vollner with the fictional Interzone conspiracy story where Bill is ordered by his typewriter to seduce Joan Frost in order to complete his report. The Burroughs analog in this scene then is both the Tom Frost character, representing Burroughs's homosexual relationships in Mexico, and Bill Lee's bizarre threesome

with Joan and a creature that was lazily mounting Bill while he had sex with her. The intrusion of

Fadela refers to Burroughs's representation of systems of control, the real villains of *Naked*

Lunch if we were to assign that narrative role to something – those actors in the world that are

addicted to controlling the population, and are the true enemies of Burroughs's anarchic

libertarian philosophy. Fadela violently whips the Mugwump creature away for interfering in a

heterosexual sexual act, and then, paradoxically, she spends the rest of the film keeping Joan

away from Bill while he pursues Kiki.

If homosexuality in Cronenberg's adaptation is linked with excessive drug abuse,

addiction, and the perfect cover for "agents," it is also associated with abject horror and complete

loss of personal identity. This is a marked difference from Burroughs's own understanding and

experience with homosexuality as someone who admonished social systems of control that tried

to repress homosexual subjectivity. Kiki's fate, foreshadowed by the Mugwump figurine in the

New York City pawnshop after Bill purchases his first typewriter, is to be totally physically

dominated by Yves Cloquet, who transforms himself into the giant centipede that resembles the

ones used for the black powder earlier in the film. Bill recoils in horror and then accuses his

Mugwump-head typewriter of a double-cross. Cronenberg depicts Bill's trajectory of drug

addiction, starting with yellow powder to black meat powder to white Mugwump jissom, as a

gradual descent into a homosexual subjectivity that is explicated as the "perfect cover" for an

agent in Interzone. Cronenberg depicts Burroughs's relationship between sexuality and drug

addiction, as filtered through his analogue Bill Lee, in the opposite way it is represented in

Burroughs's biography. Burroughs's drug addiction resulted in a lack of libido, a reduction of his

identity to a simple addict creature, whereas when he was clean he pursued men (and women)

freely and without any repressive morals on his behaviour. The repression of one's sexuality and identity is one of the major criticisms Burroughs had with American society and why he moved to Mexico and Tangier. Cronenberg replaces this relationship with one that connects homosexual subjectivity with images of abjection because of extreme forms of drug addiction. He associates the pitiful existence of the addict with the life of a homosexual, something that Burroughs did not associate in his novel *Naked Lunch*.

The film's other use of mise-en-abyme is the reinterpretation and rewriting of formal aspects of the source text with the inclusion of significant moments from Burroughs's biography. The novel, scattered and incoherent as it might seem, is structured around a dialectic of addiction and withdrawal, moving from a relatively realist literary form to an extremely abstract and impressionist style in the final sections. Ron Loewinsohn noted that the novel begins in the form of a detective pulp story detailing William Lee's escape from an undercover cop in New York City, an allegory for Lee's descent in the madness of drug addiction, withdrawal, and the fantastic nightmare episodes of Interzone.[129] It becomes increasingly abstract as the characters experience extreme drug addiction and then violent episodes of withdrawal, only to circle back to its original quasi-naturalist form with the vignette "Hauser and O'Brien" until slipping abruptly back into an even more impressionistic final two sections that explain the philosophy of drug addiction presented by the book. The surreal episodes have been interpreted by scholars as the distorted memories of drug withdrawal, but the novel itself presents the surreal events and

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[129] Ron Loewinsohn, "'Gentle Reader, I Fain Would Spare You This, but My Pen Hath Its Will like the Ancient Mariner': Narrator(s) and Audience in William S. Burroughs's 'Naked Lunch,'" *Contemporary Literature* 39, no. 4 (1998): 566. See note in biblio.

characters as existing on the same level as those moments from everyday reality.[130] Cronenberg's

film charts a similar movement that begins in a definite time and place, New York City in 1953,

and then slowly introduces more fantastic and grotesque elements as Bill cycles through different

addictive substances. The character arc that Cronenberg uses is not from the novel *Naked Lunch*

but a (meta)fictionalized account of Burroughs's biography, especially the mythologized moment

when Burroughs murdered his second wife in Mexico. This is one of the more jarring aspects in

the film because it is presented as having serious significance for the plot and the characters but

it has almost no narrative justification from the prior scenes. There is no foreshadowing or

indication that Bill is going to murder his wife nor is it established that this character wants to

become a writer in his own right. Retroactively we can interpret this scene as possibly the result

of his repressed homosexuality manifesting itself as misogynist violence, using the woman figure

as a sacrifice for the male artist's creativity. But that is also not supported by earlier scenes in the

film because Bill does not have any struggle with his sexuality or romantic feelings for his wife.

The "William Tell" routine sequence only makes sense as a metafictional reading, prohibiting

any sort of real enjoyment or comprehension of the scene outside of this type of narrative

interpretation. This primarily why Cronenberg's film has the highest degree of metafictional

aesthetics and intertextuality in magical realist films: because it completely relies on the

knowledge of other texts to comprehend and enjoy the movie. It produces, as Hutcheon argued in

the context of literary metafiction, a more complicated and demanding interpretive response

from the reader/spectator and a mimetic representation of the process of creating the work.

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[130] Jennie Skerl, *William S. Burroughs* (Boston: Twayne; 1985), 36.

The full narrative significance of this scene is underscored in the final scene when Bill repeats the same routine with the "other" Joan he met from Interzone. After he uncovers Dr. Benway's drug operation and secret identity as the dominating housekeeper Fadela, and he is given a new mission to travel to Annexia, Bill is stopped at the border on his way out of Interzone by border patrol. The actors playing detective Hauser and O'Brien are now border agents of Annexia, a country that appears to be modelled after the Soviet Union. They ask him to prove that he is a writer. He shows them his pen but they say that is not enough. He turns around with the pistol that Tom Frost gave him and asks Joan if they can perform their "William Tell" routine for the border patrol. She puts the highball glass on her head again, and he kills her once again, another moment of mise-en-abyme that duplicates the original scene but now with a narrative justification. This is the proof the border patrol wanted, and Bill drives into Annexia having written his report (the analogue for the novel *Naked Lunch*) and having murdered "Joan" a second time with the knowledge that the murder of Joan was the beginning of him as a writer. In the scene with the first murder in the film, Bill's lack of understanding of this action models the same lack of awareness of the spectators. There is no probable or reasonable justification for this action from the narrative. The repetition of this scene indicates that Bill now realizes that the original murder of the first Joan is what motivated him to become a writer, and this second murder is merely the recognition of that awareness. The film presents writing from the point-of-view of men, Lee shedding himself of feminine distractions through violence to become an artist.

In the final analysis, Cronenberg's metafictional and magical realist approach to adapting *Naked Lunch* as a metafictional account of the writing of the novel is a mise-en-abyme of the source material because Burroughs's own work always reflected his biography and included

intertexts from his other writings. His surreal and magical realist depictions of the world are articulations of his life and world as an artist who was constantly moving from periods of severe drug addiction to rehabilitation. To read *Naked Lunch* the novel is to also read Burroughs's biography in the same way that watching the film *Naked Lunch* is also to watch the process of creating the novel *Naked Lunch*. Which brings me to a final observation on the film with respect to magical realism and metafiction: the artistic process that it depicts is not the creation of a film, the medium through which it is depicted, but literature. This is true for nearly all magical realist examples of metafiction. The process that is depicted is not the process of creating a movie but a work in another medium. Magical realist cinema introduces literature or other art forms as mediating analogues for its own creative process. *Naked Lunch*, *Kafka*, and *Stranger Than Fiction* are magical realist metafiction that dramatize the creative process of writing literature. The final film under discussion for this chapter, Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), approaches the construction of film narratives in a different fashion than the literary allegories from the other metafictional films discussed above.

Kaufman's film is an example of what Hutcheon calls overt linguistic metafiction, narratives that use allegories for the creation of the story being told to the reader/spectator. Kaufman does not directly address the spectator/reader in the way that Fowles and Borges did in their work but he dramatizes the breakdown of the lines between art and reality to such a degree that the protagonist's life becomes completely intertwined with his work as an artist. Aside from Woody Allen, Kaufman is the only American director that has consistently used both metafiction and magical realism throughout his career as a screenwriter and director. In *Synecdoche, New York* he takes the concept of the mise-en-abyme to such an extreme degree that by the end

everything is a mirror of itself, a series of performances that are based on performances of performances, creating a spiral between art and life that supplants any foundational space for which term informs the other.

The film is about a hypochondriac, depressive playwright named Caden Cotard (Phillip Seymour Hoffman) who wins a MacArthur Fellowship that allows him to pursue any artistic endeavour for the rest of his life. He decides to stage a play based on the principles of "brutal" realism, where there is no artifice between what happens in the life of the performers and their performance on stage, including the life of Caden the director. Caden purchases a large warehouse in the theatre district of Manhattan to stage his magnum opus. This eventually results in the introduction of a series of doubles being used for each character in the play and the performers' life outside their performance. Caden casts a stranger named Sammy (Tom Noonan) who plays "Caden" in the play, who is then given his own performer that plays "Sammy" in the play performing as "Sammy" playing "Caden." The real Sammy falls in love with Hazel (Samantha Morton), Caden's administrative assistant, which then influences Caden to rekindle his relationship with her in real-life (his life outside the performance of the play) which then causes Sammy to commit suicide while acting in the play. The set inside the warehouse is a copy of the actual warehouse itself, inside itself, and continually incorporates more elements from its real location into the set. As time progresses in the story, the world outside the stage becomes increasingly dilapidated and destroyed, almost like it is a post-apocalyptic space. The deterioration of the world outside the warehouse is mirrored by the deterioration of Caden's body, and both spaces of decay become mise-en-abymes for each other. Caden contracts an unknown virus that begins to shut down his vegetative nervous system. Kaufman also mirrors his

illness with the choice of Caden's last name. Cotard refers to the "Cotard Delusion," Jules Cotard's theory of "The Delirium of Negation," where individuals delude themselves into believing they are dying, they are already dead, their body is slowly decaying, or they have lost all of their organs. From the beginning of the film, Caden is always paranoid about his health, and he eventually contracts this serious condition that eventually kills him.

The correlation between the theatrical space, the deteriorating world outside, and Caden's health is an allegory for Kaufman's indictment on the misguided uses of mimetic artistic practices, where the inspiration for art becomes reality, the artist simply mimics reality rather than pursuing a more reflexive approach like the one initiated by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. Kaufman shows that when art is simply satisfied with imitating reality it loses any sort of creativity and vitality. The world outside the theatrical warehouse is withering away because Caden has exhausted it of any artistic inspiration after years of duplicating it in his play. Eventually the terms of the relationship change once Caden's reality becomes that of the play such that the play now loses any connection with the so-called "real" world. His performance still uses "brutal" realism but, as Hutcheon argued in her analysis on narcissistic narratives, it becomes mimesis of process (the act of creation) and not product (external reality). Once Caden's theatre performance starts to direct itself totally inward it begins to lose the connection with the everyday world at which point the world itself starts to slowly become more destroyed and deserted, looking more like the last building in the world after an apocalypse. The loss of vitality in the world outside the warehouse space is mirrored by Caden's own deteriorating body. His earlier delusions about sickness and death become a reality because everything in his mind is the now made real by the play.

The larger the canvas for Caden's work becomes, the more complex it becomes, the more layers it uses, more people, more sets, more workers, which is contrasted to the artwork of Caden's ex-wife. In the first act of the film, before Caden receives the MacArthur Fellowship, he is unhappily married to an artist named Adele Lack (played Catherine Keener) with whom he has a daughter named Olive (Sadie Goldstein). Adele creates extremely small miniature dioramas that require a large magnifying glass to create and to see once they are exhibited. She leaves Caden, with her daughter, for Berlin, and Caden becomes estranged from them for the rest of his life. He visits one of Adele's art shows only to discover that her works have become so inexplicably small that he can no longer see them, while his magnum opus is taking on comically gigantic proportions. Adele's work and life have become completely inaccessible to him while his work is all that exists in his life, wiping out any boundary between Caden's artistic creation and his life. He becomes so obsessed with his alienated state that he begins to visit an apartment he believes is Adele's in New York City so that he can clean it, doing the work of her housekeeper. He abdicates his role as the theatre director and casts the housekeeper as the director of the play-within-the-play and the director of the play itself (this distinction becomes meaningless at this point) so that he can perform as a housekeeper in a recreation of Adele's apartment in his warehouse set. This final step in the mise-en-abyme ad infinitum turns Caden's life and his art into an interlocked spiral of self-reference to such a high degree that when the director of the play, the housekeeper who is now playing Caden as the director of the play where Caden is now playing the housekeeper, is giving Caden direction through an audio device, her final piece of direction is "Die," and then he dies. At this point in the film the world has become desolate, and some unknown event has wiped out the rest of the performers in the warehouse.

The final scene resembles the ending to Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, quoted earlier

in this section, where the character reads about his own demise while the town of Macondo has

become abandoned. The slow approach to Caden's death is a performance in his play, the final

moments in his real life, and the final moments of the film as Kaufman fades to grey.

Kaufman's film demonstrates how works with extreme degrees of metafiction in the overt

linguistic mode of metafiction necessarily become magical realist when mise-en-abyme is

increasingly intensified and duplicated in the narrative. *Synecdoche, New York* dramatizes the

breakdown between fact and fiction as the dissolution of the world around an artificially

constructed space that eventually can only reference itself in its performance. Kaufman

simultaneously uses the conventions of metafiction and mocks them, confirming that magical

realism is one of the preeminent postmodern modes by using the very codes that it is criticizing

in its construction. Just like the scene when John Malkovich goes into his own "head portal" to

discover that when an artist turns completely inward they run the risk of producing a comically

absurd portrayal of the world, Caden discovers the loss of vitality and real connections with the

world once his art becomes completely self-reflexive. In the final horizon, Kaufman's film uses

and parodies the postmodern form of metafictional narratives, much like how magical realist

literature parodies postmodern fiction with the textualization of the reader. Kaufman does not

address the role of the spectator but the role of the artist, and possibly even himself given his

own forays into metafictional cinema with *Adaptation* (2002), which perhaps explains the

unflinching negative portrayal of the central artist character in the film. He is exposing the

creative dead ends provided by postmodern metafictional strategies whilst producing one of the

most sophisticated works of postmodern cinema. Caden's absurd theatrical performance becomes

an analogy for the filmmaking process by an auteur-director who draws from their life as inspiration for their creation.

Chapter 5. Fantastic Historicity

History and historicity are two of the most persistent themes in the magical realist mode. Nearly all definitions of literary magical realism evoke history as essential to explanations of the genre. History and historical representation are two of the key elements that distinguishes magical realism from surrealism and fantasy. What Faris describes as the second characteristic of the magical, the presence of a detailed phenomenal world, necessarily involves the historical settings of these stories and their importance for the narrative action.[131] One of the most pervasive definitions of magical realism put forward by Kenneth S. Reeds argued that the representation of the historical past is one of its defining characteristics. Reeds defined magical realism as the combination of the neo-fantastic (defined simply as the naturalization of the fantastic in the reality of the narrative) and what he refers to as the "recasting of history," which means the representation of history from perspectives that have been ignored or erased from mainstream historical consciousness.[132] The earliest definitions of magical realism, Carpentier's precursor term *lo real maravilloso*, highlight the uniqueness of the creole history in the Caribbean as a determinate factor in the distinctiveness of the writing style. The source of the importance of history for magical realism as a mode can be found in the early texts which replaced the individualistic and at times solipsistic perspective of surrealism with the collectivist ideology of magical realism. Jean-Pierre Durix noted that early texts in the magical realist genre like *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo, written in response to surrealist literature using unconscious fantasies to explore individualistic desires, uses the creative imagination to explore collective

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[131] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 7.

[132] Reeds, *What is Magical Realism?*, 40.

unconscious fantasies.[133] The collectivist ideology of magical realism necessarily evokes history

because the social collective is a historical process.

Every genre, every text, narrative or otherwise, regardless of its subject matter, evokes

the historical dimension. One of the basic premises for historical materialist interpretation is the

mediated nature of History itself. We can never access History directly because its ontological

status does not allow for direct observation. History, according to Jameson, is like the Lacanian

Real: it is that which escapes all symbolization and imaginary constructions but nevertheless

determines and erupts in those spheres.[134]. Historical materialist interpretation argues that

History is not a text but the ground for all textual creation and interpretation. Magical realism,

more so than other genres, takes this ground as one of its primary raw materials for narrative

creation. In literature, magical realism continues the focus on historicity from so-called

"historical fiction" that was made a popular sub-genre of sorts in European realism. Lukacs

theorized that historical fiction represented a new form of realism in literature that avoided

anachronous representations of the past. Real historical fiction, literature that rendered the past as

radically different from the present with its own structures of feeling and modes of experience,

can be found in the realist fiction of Stendhal, Tolstoy, and Balzac. John Burt Foster Jr. refers to

this as "felt history," the powerful way that literature depicts history as the pressure placed upon

the characters or lyrical personae within the work.[135] Felt history as described by Foster Jr. is

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[133] Jean-Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres, and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 114.

[134] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1981), 35.

[135] John Burt Foster Jr., "Magical Realism, Compensatory Vision, and Felt History: Classical Realism Transformed in *The White Hotel*," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 273.

historical representation that captures the experiential pressures and structures of feeling of a given period. This differs from historical fictions that focus leaders, politicians, general trends, and overviews of important events. Lukacs argued that historical fiction expresses the significant historical dimensions through the representation of so-called "mediocre" characters, the everyday, average people whose personal struggles are written perfectly in such a way that they encapsulate the social problems of the historical setting.[136] European realism of the historical fiction variety combines adept historical awareness with intricate character studies and high drama so that the representation and comprehension of history as a process is an essential part of the reading experience. Magical realist literature continues this emphasis on the historical dimension but in forms that differ from European realist historical fiction. History in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is of central importance to the narrative even though the town of Macondo is not a real historical place. Garcia Márquez created it is an amalgamation of rural spaces in Colombia: it changes according the collective traumas of the citizens and then it eventually disappears in a torrent of winds when the final member of the Buendia family dies. In contrast, *Pedro Páramo* is set in Comala, Mexico, but Rulfo has written it as a real ghost town after the Mexican Revolution occurred and the main character starved the town to death. The emphasis on historicity found in historical fiction is transcoded into magical realist allegories.

Other magical realist novels like Grass's *The Tin Drum* and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* go to great lengths to establish a concrete historical setting even though they respectively include blatantly fantastic events like Oskar's growth paralysis and Saleem's super sense of smell. These magical elements are supplementary dimensions that magical realism

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[136] Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlion Press, 1962), 38.

includes to expand the horizon of experience and historical consciousness and to confront the secular humanist ideologies inherent in realist forms. Secular humanism was an important ideological discourse for European realism and understandings of human history. The belief in empiricist reason as an epistemological method for obtaining knowledge, and a concrete world that can be captured by literature and dissected accurately through cogent historical analysis, are a precondition for historical fiction. The separation of real human history from religious cosmology and eschatological understandings of human history from European Enlightenment made history an object for understanding and literary representation. In general, this separation was tied to the gradual shift from feudalism to capitalism and the changes in the political realm put forward by the bourgeois revolution that instituted democratic norms into Western societies.[137] The creation of markets for labour, commodities, services, and a governable population required the institution of nationalist ideologies that even the members of society with the lowest economic and social capital would adopt. The gradual but widespread incorporation of nationalism into the social collective resulted in the historical process becoming an object of analysis because narratives were constructed about the nation-state for the population. In England and France, this took the form of identifying irrational past social habits, and in Germany, the interest in the past had to do with finding prior national greatness in order to revive this greatness for the future.[138] The French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic wars made the past a collective experience and one that affected all classes of society. European realism

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[137] Ibid., 22.

[138] Ibid., 23.

subsequently assimilated this historical consciousness into its narrative creations according to Lukacs.

The concept of historicity is an essential component for theories of magical realist film as well as literature. Fredric Jameson's essay on the topic, "On Magic Realism in Film," is an important work because it was one of the first texts to write about magical realism in film as a distinct form of the mode from literature. Jameson's description of magical realist film explicitly frames the mode as one that properly registers historical truths in contrast to other narrative modes which do not.[139] Magical realist film, according to Jameson, can register historicity because the setting of the narratives occurs during a time of social upheaval, when one mode of production is disappearing and another one is slowly taking its place. The historical concept of the "mode of production" becomes of central importance to the narrative which emphasizes the primary force of historical change. For example, the Agnieszka Holland film *Fever* (1980) presents the political conflicts around revolutionary activities in Poland when feudalist social structures were slowly becoming obsolete and radical visions of the collective were vying for consensus. This theory of magical realist film and historicity relies on Jameson's idiosyncratic interpretation of postmodernist films. Postmodern films represent the past in superficial, easy to digest images that dilute everything meaningful into styles and fashion trends; the past becomes recognized as such by simply presenting different commodities than are available in the present. The lack of historical consciousness in postmodern films produces nostalgic stories where certain periods of history are constructed as lacking political and social conflict. Nostalgia as an aesthetic device is found in films like *The Conformist* (1970), *American Graffiti* (1973),

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[139] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 188-190.

Chinatown (1974), and *Blue Velvet* (1986). Nostalgia films are postmodernist narrative versions of what Lukacs defined as the historical novel. They are simplified formal compensations for a widespread lack of historical knowledge that permeates postmodern culture.

The other main component of magical realism film that Jameson highlights is the use of expressive and vibrant colour palettes. Jameson criticizes postmodern "historical" films because they present the past with glossy images that are shiny and beautiful and that resemble perfectly manufactured commodities in late-capitalism. The glossy images ignore political and social conflicts of the past and satisfy our desire for images of history with superficial versions of it. In contrast, magical realist films use striking colour palettes that create "epistemological" shocks that pierce through everything else in the film image creating a sense of visual conflict and dissensus which then mirrors the political conflicts that they are representing. Magical realist films use images where one colour is juxtaposed to everything else in the frame, whereas the flattening and unifying effect of glossy images reduces everything to the same level. The theoretical problematic that grounds Jameson's comparison between the glossy images of postmodernist film and the striking colours of magical realist film is the distinction Lacan made between the gaze and the eye.[140] Lacan defines the gaze as that which desires the simulation rather than the referent: the gaze triumphs over the eye when it desires the copy of the real instead of the real thing. According to Jameson, the visual style of postmodernist film is a cinematic articulation of Lacan's description of the gaze: it produces a simulation of the past using "glossy" images which negates the desire for the referent. In contrast, magical realist films are like the "eye" in Lacan's theory, that field of vision which desires the Real and not the

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[140] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 103.

simulation. Magical realism presents historical images with vibrant uses of colour so that the colourful objects pierce through the composition and provide historical images with a libidinal charge. Furthermore, because postmodernist films present the past during times of political and social consensus, and magical realism presents periods of social conflict, the use of graphic violence and sex plays an important role in the distinction between these two narrative modes. All of the films mentioned by Jameson in his essay on magical realism feature brief but graphic scenes of violence or sex that have the same effect as the colourful objects in the image: to produce an epistemological shock and libidinally charge the historical images with urgency and vitality. The violence depicted in the films Jameson labelled as magical realist is similar to the notion of "felt history" mentioned above and certainly is important for any film, magical realist or otherwise, in consideration of the representation of historicity in film. The key underlying concept in Jameson's description of the two narrative modes is the dichotomy between stasis and process. Postmodernist films present static images of the past whereas magical realist films present history as process, a series of conflicts and transformations. The depictions of graphic violence negate the impressions of the past as static or stable.

I explicated Jameson's essay on magical realism in film in detail for several reasons. Given that the topic of this chapter is on magical realism and historicity, and his definition of magical realist film hinges on questions of historical representation, my summary was pertinent for this discussion. Second, his essay is often referenced in later discussions of magical realism and magical realist films without much thought given to the overall distinction he makes between postmodernism and magical realism and also the choice of films he used to develop his theory of

magical realist film. And, finally, I propose a different way to imagine the relationship between magical realism and historicity that corrects the theoretical problems in Jameson's argument.

The first and most obvious problem with Jameson's discussion of magical realist films is that none of the three films he mentions (*Fever* (1981), *A Man of Principle* (1984), and *The House of Water* (1983)) feature a synthesis of the fantastic and the realistic. They do not qualify as magical realist films because they do not feature fantastical supplementary discourses to realism nor do they represent uncanny perspectives that uncover the strange in the everyday. This misappropriation of the term in cinema stems from his deductive methodological approach. Jameson obviously understands magical realism as a literary concept quite well, given that he provided a concise summary of the main theories of magical realism and their culmination in the work of Garcia Márquez. However, in his discussion of magical realist literature he does not contrast it with postmodern literature but does so with magical realist film. He avoids this discussion because much of the writing on postmodern literature includes paradigmatic texts of magical realism in their discussions. The use of postmodern films, primarily chosen from Hollywood, as a reference point for a theory of magical realist film, restricts his choice of films to those which differ from postmodernist films thereby excluding a great number of actual magical realist films. An inductive approach is better in this case because general descriptions of the mode are now based on a wider selection of films. Any sort of generic description is never a stable construct but is always evolving because new texts incorporate the conventions in creative ways or devise new ones that expand the aesthetic boundaries of the genre. This leads to another misunderstanding in his discussion: the films he cites in this essay appear to fit his own theorization of magical realism. *Chinatown* and *The Conformist* are both politically charged

films. The former presents a neo-noir narrative about the subsumption of democracy within

capital and even associates capital with incest. It is set during the Great Depression where radical

political groups were challenging capitalist-democratic norms. The latter is set during the

Mussolini regime and deals with the social-psychology of conformism within bureaucratic and

fascist collectives. Both are hardly examples of history as static moments and neither sanitizes

history by excluding graphic violence and sexuality (*Chinatown* has one of the most disturbing

villains in any Hollywood film ever created). Even a film that is more entrenched in the

postmodern aesthetic of pastiche and intertextuality, *Blue Velvet*, dramatizes the sadistic

underbelly of the prime settings for nostalgic texts by representing the stereotypical American

suburb as a hotbed for psycho-sexual violent crimes. Lynch's film may not contain a Marxian

conception of history but it certainly does not present glossy images that are easy to consume

like the rest of the images at the time of its release in Reagan-era Hollywood.

In contrast to Jameson's theory of postmodern film, I suggest incorporating the

observations found in Linda Hutcheon's discussion of postmodern film and the politics of

parody. Jameson's theory of postmodernist film is based on his dialectical understanding of the

relationship between postmodernism and modernism. The latter is characterized by the use of

parody and the former is defined by pastiche, which Jameson sees as a depoliticized version of

parody. Hutcheon shows that Jameson's understanding of postmodernism is flawed because

parody is one of the main features of postmodernism as well which continues and complicates

this feature from modernism. Furthermore, postmodernist films do not ignore history or present

an enfeebled historical consciousness but engage with history in relation to questions of

representation and ideology. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *Carmen* (1983), and *Zelig*

(1983) engage with history but they do it with irony and comedy.[141] The problem that Hutcheon identified in Jameson's discussion is that postmodern films do not present explicitly Marxian interpretations of history. Postmodernist films critique the very aesthetic forms that they are using, showing how any subject position is implicated within a system of ideological conflict and that these ideological constructions are historical. Postmodern films demonstrate how ideology naturalizes historically constructed systems of meaning and identities. They do not simply construct the past as a series of commodified images and generational trends like Jameson accuses nostalgia films of doing. The one point of criticism that Jameson could make about the aesthetic of postmodernist films from a Marxian perspective is that through their unceasing questioning of historically constructed subject positions and artistic forms, they appear to close off any potential for a genuine utopian vision of the future which imagines a less exploitative social collective. In this sense, even though postmodernist films radically question artistic forms, they end up producing a politically quietist or defeatist ideology that ultimately serves the interests of capital by closing off utopian representations.

Finally, the last problem with Jameson's assessment of historicity and magical realism is the unnecessary distinction he makes between magical realism and postmodernism. These are two categories that differ in levels of generality. Postmodernism is a broad term, related to other categories like modernism and the avant-garde. Magical realism has an intermediate status similar to surrealism and it has been shown that it has tendencies of both modernism and postmodernism.[142] It might be different from the so-called nostalgia films that Jameson uses as

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[141] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 113.

[142] Foster Jr., "Magical Realism, Compensatory Vision, and Felt History," 267.

the paradigmatic texts of postmodern film. My corrective to Jameson's discussion is to apply an inductive approach to generic theory by considering the diverse group of films that we can categorize as magical realist according to their formal properties that come from a wide array of national cinemas, so we can derive tendencies of magical realist cinema by applying immanent criticism. Jameson's own Marxian hermeneutic demonstrates advantages of this methodological approach with his discussion of ideologemes and narrative texts, those formal and semantic ideological discourses found in narratives that contain class ideologies. Jameson did apply this approach to the three films discussed in his essay on magical realist film, but his selection was too small to produce accurate descriptions of the mode, and his intellectual bias against postmodern art led him down an unproductive theoretical path. I intend to supplement his work by examining magical realist films that are historical fictional narratives (they deal with a time of the past earlier than their date of production) and take historical events and their political and social consequences as significant components of their narratives. I will organize this discussion around general thematic and formal trends that magical realist films present with respect to questions of historicity and the representation of history in film.

Magical realist films' most common way of representing history is through stories that depict an anachronous collective space that is out of sync with the dominant culture's historical development. Like Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the literal ghost town in *Pedro Páramo*, and the island filled with human souls in *The Invention of Morel*, this anachronous community is isolated from mainstream society. Characters/inhabitants could be physically/ geographically isolated like in *Underground* (1995)*, Daughters of the Dust* (1992)*, Happy as Lazzaro* (2018)*, Dark at Noon* (1993), and *Nucingen House* (2008)*. They could be isolated

through magical means like the frozen-in-time television world of *Pleasantville* (1998) or the magical kingdom below the surface of the Earth in *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006)*.* They could be socially isolated like the circus group that Oskar joins in *The Tin Drum* (1979)*,* or the foreigner status that Malyanov is given when working on his medical research in Turkmenistan in *Days of Eclipse* (1988). The ideology of the anachronous community is not homogenous across the films because each deals with a particular historical episode.

Happy as Lazzaro is a recent magical realist film from Italian director Alice Rohrwacher. The film is set during an undisclosed time in the past in a rural estate called Inviolata which is stuck in a feudalist mode of production where fifty workers live on a sharecrop farm. The film references the setting of Ermanno Olmi's *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (1978), a film about the pastoral existence of peasants living near the end of the nineteenth century in Italy. The sharecrop arrangement is enforced by the estate's owner Marchesa Alfonsina de Luna (Nicoletta Braschi) who pays each worker a small wage, but the workers are always in debt after each month because the cost of their food and shelter is always more than they make. The community is so isolated from the rest of Italy, which criminalized sharecropping in 1977, that de Luna is able to maintain this outmoded form of exploitation without any intervention from the government. It is not until de Luna's son, Tancredi (Luca Chikovani), conspires with Lazzaro (Adriano Tardiolo) to fake his own kidnapping as a prank on his mother that this community is disturbed. News of the kidnapping reaches the local police, and they investigate de Luna's farm to discover her illegal feudalist operation and the lack of education facilities for the children. De Luna is arrested, and her criminal operation becomes known in Italy as "The Great Swindle." During this conflict Lazzaro accidentally falls off a cliff and knocks himself unconscious. He

wakes up approximately 40 years into the future to find that all of his old friends, with the exception of Tancredi (Tommaso Ragno), are virtually homeless, living on the outskirts of society as beggars and scavengers.

The film uses Biblical imagery to code the settings and characters. Lazzaro is coded as a strange combination between Lazarus of Bethany from the Gospel of John and Jesus the Messiah from the New Testament. Both characters in the Bible die and then come back to life: Lazarus is healed by Jesus after being dead for four days, and Jesus is healed by God the father after being dead for three days. Lazzaro was presumed dead by his friends so when he meets them again they believe he is back from the dead when in fact he traveled through time after he fell off the cliff. The sharecropping farm Inviolata is coded as Eden, an ironic version of the pastoral paradise in Genesis where humans lived in perfect community with nature and God. Inviolata is a demonic version of Edenic paradise, in the sense of Northrop Frye's terminology where demonic means a parody of divine imagery. Every person's connection to nature is mediated through feudalist exploitation, however, compared to the present-day living conditions that the aged versions of the characters have moved into, Inviolata provided shelter and food and a modicum of security whereas their lives in the modernized world offer them nothing. Lazzaro assumes the role of the redemptive saviour in the contemporary period when he tries to rob a bank for his poor friends only to be shot by the police after he fails to escape. The anachronous community living as sharecropper workers and their insertion into the market system provide a dialectical depiction of existence under two modes of production. Neither mode of production is satisfactory, and the religious institution, the impotence of which is embodied by the Lazzaro character, is shown to be a useless force in creating a less exploitative system of relations.

Julie Dash's now famous independent film *Daughters of the Dust* (1992) is a cinematic

example of Carpentier's theory of magical realism, *lo real maravilloso*. Carpentier's theory of

magical realism locates the magic within the anthropological status of the work. The magic that

is combined with the realism stems from the culture itself. Dash's film is set shortly after the turn

of the twentieth century in 1902 on an island off the coast of South Carolina called Saint Helena.

The island is remarkable because of its cultural demographics compared to the rest of the United

States. Most of the residents are descendants of slaves but have been able to maintain a degree of

cultural separation from the rest of the country because of their geographical isolation. Their

ancestors also had immunities to very common illnesses like malaria and yellow fever which

deterred European settlers from taking over this island but rather allowed them to live in relative

peace. The *Gullah* culture on the island has maintained many of the traditions of African culture

that were erased by the forced migration of their ancestors. For example, the hand signals used

by two men in the film reference the nonverbal styles of communication from ancient African

secret societies which were passed down thousands of years.[143] *Gullah* is a *criollo* culture much

like the culture of the Caribbean writers in Central America that Carpentier discussed in his essay

on *lo real maravilloso*. Carpentier argued that in the *criollo* culture, a combination of European

colonialist culture and African culture not fully erased by the former, the *criollo* people have an

awareness of being Other, of being unique, and being symbiotic, which is an essential aspect of

lo real maravilloso.[144] The relative protective separation from European colonialism preserved

the so-called "pagan" spirituality of African cultures which survived in *Gullah*. The emphasis on

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[143] Julie Dash, "Making *Daughters of the Dust*," in *Cinemas of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, and Oppositionality,* ed. Michael T. Martin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 380.

[144] Carpentier, "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," 100.

ghosts and the spiritual realm, totems to fend off evil spirits, alternative forms of medicine, musical traditions that are more rhythmic than melody based and more collective, with the call-and-response song forms that encourage audience participation in the music, are all aspects of *Gullah* culture that stand in opposition to Eurocentric cultural forms.

Dash's film examines this culture through the story of the Peazant family who are deliberating about moving to the urban spaces on mainland United States. She presents the *Gullah* culture as a matriarchal system of relations where the head of the Peazant family is Nana Peazant (Cora Lee Day) who has no interest in moving away from Saint Helena Island, but the younger generation in her town want to modernize. Nana Peazant represents the *Gullah* culture and African ancestry in response to younger generations wanting to forego their cultural heritage because it clashes with modernity. The younger members of the family view Nana Peazant with suspicion and mild contempt because of her adherence to the pagan elements of the *Gullah* culture, which is in conflict with the Christian culture of American society that the young people want to join. Viola (Cheryl Lynn Bruce) is one of the younger family members that wants to migrate everyone to the mainland. She came from Philadelphia with a friend named Mr. Snead (Tommy Redmond Hicks), a photographer and educated American that wants to document the migration, a stand-in for the ethnographic gaze that exploits otherized peoples. There is a side-story involving another character named Eula (Alva Rogers) who is married to Eli (Adisa Anderson) who is Nana Peazant's grandson. Eula is pregnant with a child the family believes to be the product of a rape by an American from the mainland that occurred when Eula was away from the island on vacation. The family refers to the fetus as the Unborn Child (Kai-Lynn Warren), a young girl whose perspective we hear on the voiceover track that alternates with Nana

Peazant's thoughts throughout the film. She occasionally shows up as a ghost to the family as a messenger from the future Peazant family. Another important character from the Peazant family is Iona (Bahni Turpin) who is in love with St. Julien Lastchild (M. Cochise Anderson) a young Cherokee man who lives with them on Saint Helena Island and worries about being left behind when the family leaves for the mainland. The island also has a small Muslim community and their elder is Bilal Muhammad (Umar Abdurrahman). Bilal is the village archive: he remembers the final criminal slave ships off the coast of the island, and when he is interviewed by Snead the photographer he tells a story about African prisoners which is the historical background for a famous local myth.

Daughters of the Dust registers historicity at the crossroads between past and future. The past is embodied in Nana Peazant, and the Unborn Child represents the unknown future of the family. As a ghost from the future she intercedes and disrupts the intrusions on her culture. The Unborn Child doubles the enunciation of Nana Peazant, joining the perspectives of the great-grandmother and great-granddaughter into one voice that fights to preserve their *criollo* culture. Her temporal trajectory is the opposite of a ghost: she haunts the present from the future, signifying both the tradition of her people and where they might arrive once they cross this momentous transitionary moment. For most of the film the Unborn Child is a passive narrator, commenting on events, and at other times, she intervenes in concrete ways. For example, when the photographer Mr. Snead is trying to photograph the Unborn Child, the Unborn Child appears in the frame and disorients him so he cannot properly document the people of the island. In another scene she appears to Eli when he loses faith in the beliefs of ancestral spirits after he finds out that his wife may have been raped. The Unborn Child presents herself but is rejected by

his lack of faith. The ghost from the future creates a doubled voice that only the relatively young and old characters of this culture can hear/register while the others do not engage with her presence because they lack the faith required to take part in *lo real maravilloso*.[145] The circular nature of the narrating presence confronts the simplistic representation of history as a series of self-contained events that always valorizes the present as being superior to the past. *Daughters of the Dust* presents a magical realist conception of history as a loop where the ghosts from the future convene with the harbingers of cultural traditions that are threatened by the narrow-minded reduction of all culture to Western modernity.

Other magical realist films that deal with historicity are not as successful at conceptualizing new ways to present the historical past with magical realism as *Daughters of the Dust* or *Happy as Lazzaro*. Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), a quasi-sequel to *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), which depicts Spain in 1944, is ostensibly about a squadron of Francoist soldiers that are hunting down rebels in the mountains outside a small town. Del Toro constructs two parallel worlds, the world above, of humans during wartime with the laws of nature intact, and a world below that appears to be an amalgamation of various fantasy tropes and characters assembled from myths and old fairy tales. The two worlds intersect through the consciousness and actions of the 11-year old Ofelia (Ivana Baquero) that has been forced to move in with her new stepfather (Sergi López), a sadistic captain of Franco's fascist military. At first the world below made up off fantastic creatures like fauns and fairies and powerful king and queens appears to be a source of escape of Ofelia, del Toro even tricks the audience in the beginning into believing that the world below is the product of Ofelia reading one of her fairy

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[145] Frederick Luis Aldama, *Postethnic Narrative Criticism: Macigorealism in Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, Ana Castillo, Julie Dash, Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 50.

tales. She is told that she is the lost princess Moanna who must complete three tasks before she

can return to her true family in the underworld. The lure of the fantasy world is at first

compelling, but eventually the demands of the supernatural world become as oppressive as the

world above. Ofelia is ordered around by both the faun (Doug Jones) and her stepfather, and her

death is revealed to be the key for her to transform into Moanna which recodes her sacrifice as

part of her journey, when she is not someone who should have been required to sacrifice

anything. The relationship between the underworld, Ofelia as the lost princess Moanna, and the

Francoist regime's battle against the anti-Fascist guerrilla fighters, is somewhat nonsensical,

especially compared to the clever use of the ghost characters in *The Devil's Backbone* which at

least represents a collective return of the repressed by the fascist regime. The film connects

Ofelia's final act of sacrificing herself to save her newborn brother from her vile stepfather to the

rebels finally defeating the fascists in this mountain town. The magical realism in the film almost

adds nothing to the representation of fascism in Franco's Spain. This ineffective use of magical

realism to deal with Spain's history is partly the result of del Toro's inconsistent use of the

generic codes of magical realism. *Pan's Labyrinth* can be seen as a limit case for magical realism

because it does not consistently treat the naturalization of the magic throughout the film. In some

ways, it more closely resembles what Todorov defined as the fantastic, the indeterminate genre

hybrid between the uncanny and the marvelous-explained. The incoherent relationship between

magical realism and historicity in this film is the result of the persistence of the tension between

magic and reality that magical realism typically synthesizes rather than maintains in the narrative

discourse. The two worlds in *Pan's Labyrinth* are always kept at a distance from each other

because del Toro never fully commits to the magical realist convention of naturalizing the magic

into reality. Because of this generic confusion the ideological discourses of the narrative emit existential and ultimately individualistic ideologemes. The crucial dramatic moments of the film are centered around Ofelia's choices, whether they are her choices regarding the faun's instructions or her dealings with the other rebels living in the farm town that are supporting the anti-fascist guerrilla fighters. In the separation of the fantasy world from the so-called real world of Francoist Spain and their lack of connection to each other, neither world signifies anything about the other one. The only connection between the two worlds is the replacement of Ofelia's dead father with her the magical king in the underworld. The anti-fascists adopt Ofelia's younger brother after his father is killed, and they promise to sever all familial ties with his family name, whereas Ofelia is now reintroduced back into her "original," magical family in the world below. Del Toro's separation, rather than synthesis of, the magical and realist discourses excludes the collectivist ideological stance of magical realism as a transgeneric category.

The separation of two worlds, one defined by the rules of the fantastic and the other defined by the laws of the everyday reader, is such a common occurrence in magical realist films that we can describe it as a convention of the mode in film. The creation of two spaces, the staging of their separation and eventual contact, and the resolution of spaces which typically involves one absorbing another, is a narrational technique that allows for the synthesis of the discourses of magical realism to assume dramatic weight in the narrative. In magical realist historical fiction films, the historical past is usually depicted as an anachronous community, and the anachronous status of this separated community or space is what qualifies it as a fantastic discourse that comes into contact with realist ones. *Pan's Labyrinth* in this sense does not fit this description. Its two worlds are separate from one another, and neither informs the other beyond

the absence of the father in the so-called real world and the existence of his correlative figure in the underground fantasy world. *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (1974), Jacques Rivette's magical realist film about female friendship, stages a similar conflict between two periods of time or two worlds more successfully because Rivette stages their confrontation rather than maintaining their separation. This film is not a historical fiction in the sense of the other main films discussed in this chapter (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *Beloved*, *Underground*, *The Tin Drum*, and *Like Water For Chocolate*) but contains a narrative component that dramatizes a historical past within the present. The film is contemporary to its time of production, Paris in 1974, but within the story of Celine and Julie, helping each other escape abusive relationships with men, they discover a "House of Fiction" where the inhabitants are people from the end of the nineteenth century, and they replay the same events every day as if they were in a play that lasts forever. The historical past is presented as a circular loop that exists like a pocket universe within the primary universe that we recognize as our own. However, the depiction of this anachronous space that is perpetually stuck in the 19th century does not present any significant engagement with history from the magical realist perspective but uses it as a way to stage ex-centric subjectivities, a topic that I will discuss in greater detail in chapter six of this text. Rivette does not use this anachronous space to represent historical time, the effect of the past on the present, or historical trauma. The house is an unexplained curiosity whose narrative purpose is to stage a conflict for Celine and Julie to assert themselves as active subjects in a patriarchal social system.

The most sustained engagement with historicity in magical realist cinema can be found in Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (1995). Kusturica presents the creation of an anachronous community, one that exists out of sync with the rest of historical developments, but also as a

product of significant historical events in Eastern European history. Unlike *Pan's Labyrinth*,

Underground is an example of a historical fiction narrative that uses magical realism according

to the naturalization of the fantastic into the reality of the storyworld rather than lapsing back

into older forms like the fantastic genre. Kusturica is one of the few directors that has used

magical realism consistently throughout his oeuvre, so much so that he is regarded as the

"Márquez of the Balkans" and the successor to Vittorio De Sica's use of magical realism in

Miracle in Milan.[146] Kusturica's early magical realist film, *Time Of The Gypsies* (1988), was

heavily influenced by De Sica's film, the first magical realist film that adopted the generic codes

of its literary counterparts for its entire narrative. *Underground* is also influenced by De Sica's

film in addition to the work of fellow Italian director Federico Fellini, whose work is more

surrealist and expressionist than magical realist, but Kusturica's hands transform the *Felliniesque*

into magical realism.

 Underground is a monumental work, a film that approximates the sophistication of

narrative time, characters, and dramatic action of magical realist novels. It is separated into three

chapters: World War II (titled "Part One: The War"), the Cold War era with Tito ruling

Yugoslavia (titled "Part Two: The Cold War"), and the ethnic conflict between the states during

the nationalist reign of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia (titled "Part Three: The War").

Underground begins with the intertitle "To our fathers and children. Once upon a time there was

a country and its capital was Belgrade. April 6, 1941…", grounding the film in a concrete

historical setting. The main characters Blacky (Lazar Ristovski) and Marko (Miki Manojlovic),

are two best friends that are members of the Communist party; Marko has become an arms

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[146] Giorgio Bertellini, *Emir Kusturica* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 104.

dealer, and Blacky actively defies the Nazi occupation of Belgrade with his silly antics. Months after the Nazis have captured Belgrade, local artists and theatre performers are forced into entertaining the German military. Blacky's mistress, Nataljia (Mirjana Jokovic), becomes romantically involved with Lieutenant Franz (Ernst Stötzner) from the Nazi military so her younger, disabled brother Bata (Davor Dujmovic) can receive special treatment from the Nazis during the occupation. During an opera performance for the military, Blacky and Marko interrupt the performance, shoot Franz in the chest, and escape with Nataljia. Blacky and Marko force Nataljia onto a ship and coerce her to marry Blacky. The sham wedding is interrupted by Franz, who survived the gunshot because of his bullet proof vest, and his soldiers. Natalija escapes Blacky, and the Germans capture him. He is tortured endlessly, but he is so magically strong that he burns out the machine used to electrocute prisoners. Kusturica films the torture scene in a magical realist perspective which treats Blacky like he is a character from Looney Tunes cartoons, a magical realist strategy that was made popular by Tashlin and Lewis and a source of inspiration for Kusturica as a director which led Kusturica to cast Jerry Lewis in *Arizona Dream* (1993), Kusturica's English-language film directorial debut. Marko infiltrates the military prison to save Blacky. He strangles Franz to death, and Natalija switches sides again, joining Marko and Blacky as they escape with Marko carrying Blacky in a suitcase.

Kusturica imagines the Serbian community as he depicted the Romani community in *Time of the Gypsies* and in his later film *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998). Marko and Blacky are always partying, with large groups of people of all ages playing music loudly in the streets and dancing with each other; even the animals join in when the zoo is bombed, and they roam free with the people like the geese and turkeys do with the Romani in *Black Cat, White Cat*.

Kusturica portrays Serbian people as a culture of excess, modelled after the Romani people that he loves so much, but his depiction foregoes journalistic and historical realism. Eventually in the film, Blacky and his wife (Mirjana Karanovic), along with a devoted group of anti-fascist rebels, are trapped underneath the house of Marko's grandfather. The underground cellar began as a hideout for Communist fighters to protect themselves and their families from the Nazi occupiers, but Marko quickly turned it into a scheme for his personal profit. The people below continually manufacture bombs and weapons for the wartime efforts above, without knowing that World War II is over, Tito has driven out the Germans, and Blacky's best friend, Marko, has become an important party official. Marko has turned into an opportunist: he married Blacky's mistress, Natalija, and is using his old comrades to mass produce weapons that he sells on the black market. He quickly becomes rich off of the work of his friends and maintains their lowly position below the ground, lying to them about the world. In Blacky's absence from the world above, Marko has turned him into a national war hero. He constructs a statue in his honour, and has turned himself into a hero as well through his association with Blacky.

So much time has passed in the underground cellar that Blacky's son Jovan (Srdjan Todorovic) has only known life underground. Marko and Natalija visit them on Jovan's wedding day, and the wedding reception gets so raucous that Ivan's monkey Soni starts driving the tank and blows apart the cellar freeing everyone from their captivity. Blacky and Jovan discover a series of tunnels connecting all of the European capital cities to Belgrade, and they finally escape the underground world. The depiction of animals is similar to how Kusturica represented the importance of animals in the Romani community from his previous work. Soni is like the magical turkey in *Time of the Gypsies*: he is as smart as the humans around him and plays an

active role in the narrative. Kusturica again characterizes the Serbian community as a Romani

culture, with pagan understandings of the universe where objects and animals are endowed with

supernatural significance, inflecting dramatic scenes like this one with magical realist comedy.

Even though the people in the underground cellar are technically prisoners, Kusturica films their

living conditions like an ongoing carnival, a nonstop party, and not like a drab prison full of

bondage and pain. The Romani mystic beliefs on animals allows for Kusturica to ridicule the

machinations of Marko by having a monkey free the people in the underground through an act of

accidental liberation.

Kusturica's depiction of this anachronous community in the underground cellar is meant

to signify the historical position of Yugoslavia, and the Serbian people in particular, under Tito's

rule. The communist rebels are trapped in the mindset of World War II, falsely believing they are

fighting a war against an enemy that no longer exists. Kusturica dramatizes this historical

ignorance with the repetition of key scenes that stage the interplay between art and political

history. When Blacky and Jovan escape the cellar after Soni blows it up with the tank, they

inadvertently stumble onto a film set. The crew is shooting a film called *Spring Comes on a

White Horse*, an adaptation of Marko's memoirs about his time during the communist resistance

and his work as one of Tito's party officials in the Yugoslavian government. Marko wrote about

the attack by Franz on Blacky and Marko when they were forcing Natalija to marry Blacky on

the boat and turned it into state propaganda. Blacky encounters the scene again, only now it is

being restaged as a film. He emerges on the other end of the battlefield, not trapped on the boat

this time, and not betrayed by his mistress Natalija either, and opens fire on the actors portraying

the Nazi soldiers and, most importantly, the actor playing Franz. Blacky's revenge against the

Nazis for torturing him and taking his mistress is a farce. His perceptual misunderstanding, perpetuated by his profit-driven friend Marko, results in the senseless murder of innocent people. Allegorically, it functions as the conflict between a real radical progressive figure and the ideological machinations of a bureaucratic state that has rejected the progressive ideas of socialism. Blacky literally destroys the fictional construction of his past and the past of his country when he attacks the actors filming the movie adaptation of Marko's book.

The character arc of Blacky represents the historical narrative of the Serbian people during the last century. Blacky began as a sincerely devoted resistance fighter against the occupying fascist forces but was ultimately manipulated by the government officials of his own country, represented by the craven actions of Marko and Natalija, the opportunistic collaborator. Marko manipulated Blacky, the true resistance soldier, while Marko received praise above ground while he continued to profit as an arms dealer long after the Germans were defeated. Marko's fictional heroism, which reached its ultimate deception in a state-sponsored film devoted to his life, is turned into a tragedy when Blacky escapes his historical prison and blasts apart the historical misinformation created by the Yugoslavian government. *Underground* uses this slapstick scene to represent how the Yugoslavian state used restagings of their triumphs in World War II so they could continually exploit the Serbian people. Marko's deception of his old friends becomes so ingrained that the fictional history he has constructed begins to move him emotionally, such that when he erects the statue to his "dead" comrade Blacky he almost cries at the ceremony. Kusturica is mocking the way repressive state apparatuses construct false historical narratives to justify their own self-serving actions and to suppress dissent.[147] Kusturica

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[147] Ibid, 85.

also implicates his own work into this story of state organized mass deception with the obviously fake historical footage scenes in which Marko and Blacky are inserted with special effects reminiscent of Robert Zemeckis's effects in *Forrest Gump* (1994). This recalls Hutcheon's observation regarding the primary strategies that postmodern films, magical realist or otherwise, represent history, by implicating their own artistic forms and truth in the process of representing history. This postmodern meddling with historical archive footage is doubled in one of the final scenes when Kusturica casts himself as an arms dealer that meets with Marko before he is eventually executed for his crimes. Marko is tricked because he has been abroad too long and does not know the rules of war in the post-Tito era, which mocks Kusturica's own position as a director that has left his country to make movies elsewhere.[148]

Kusturica's condemnation of the Yugoslavian state during the Cold War is done by implicating himself and the Serbian ethno-state within the process of dealing with this historical period. The protagonists of the film, Blacky and Marko, lack the traits of romantic heroes who are ostensibly destined to overthrow a corrupt regime. There is not a simple ideology of good versus evil deployed in the film, which places the characters that into rigid ethical binaries. A narrative that is about Yugoslavian history and the history of a nation within the federation cannot be reduced to the ideology of good versus evil. Blacky and Marko, notwithstanding their carnivalesque actions and quirky personalities, are tragic figures that allegorize the tragedy of the Serbian people in the twentieth century. Even the decisive moment of liberation from Marko's deception is achieved by a monkey and not by Blacky the foolhardy partisan soldier or through a moment of conscience from Marko. In fact, Marko immediately crafts another deception which

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[148] Ibid., 89.

allows him and Natalija to escape to Germany and continue their illegal dealings on the arms market. This is another one Kusturica's moments of self-ridicule and mocking of Yugoslavian statesmen where the most heroic character is a monkey. Even his human owner, Ivan, the brother of Marko, lacks the traditional qualities of a hero character, despite the fact that he is one of the most sympathetic characters in the movie. In the first act, when the Nazis bomb Belgrade, Ivan, who works as a zookeeper, is horrified to see innocent animals murdered. He is told to ignore the baby monkey he finds in pain and to save himself, a crass gesture that Ivan ignores. Meanwhile Blacky is eating as much food as he can and Marko is trying to have sex with an escort who eventually leaves him to hide from the bombardment while Marko masturbates during the chaos. In the final act, Ivan finds his brother and Natalija continuing their illegal arms deals and he beats his brother to death in front of an inverted crucifix. Overcome with guilt, he hangs himself, an act which depicts the total loss of innocence and safety experienced by the post-Yugoslav people during the ethno-conflict in the nineties.

The final scene of the film, after Blacky drowns in a well looking for his lost son, is a magical realist appropriation of a surrealist dream. All of the protagonists are now dead so the dream sequence does not correspond to one consciousness but a rather to a multiplicity. Typically surrealism locates dream sequences in an individual psyche whether it is that of a character in the film or the director of the work, whereas magical realism combines the irrational dream logic of surrealism with the notion of the collective, grounding it within a realist context that surrealism totally rejects. Kusturica creates another double by duplicating the wedding scene of Jovan and Jelena that first happened in the underground cellar before Soni the monkey blew a breach in the prison with a tank. We see younger versions of all the characters happily celebrating together,

asking each other for forgiveness, and partying with the Romani band in full force. The piece of

land they are on suddenly breaks off and floats away in the river Drina.[149] After the tragedy of

the people from the underground, Blacky's unsuccessful search for Jovan while he became a

warlord, and Marko's execution for his crimes against the people, Kusturica subverts the tragic

war scenes with a celebration that circles and recaptures the atmosphere of the opening party

scene. Even though he tries to undercut the tragedy of the final act, the dreamlike ending has a

cynical tone to it because he represents the resolution to the conflict of Yugoslavia as an

imaginary solution to real political conflicts. Kusturica dialectically exposes his own historical

magical realist fiction as an ideological construction.[150] The joyous feast at the end dramatizes

the film's representation of historical representation as a constructed fairy tale, acknowledging to

the audience that this is an artistic construction of real history, a tragic undertone to the

reconciliation we see between oppressors and the oppressed in the final scene. The anachronous

community in Kusturica's film, a trope that is common enough for magical realist cinema that we

can categorize it as one of its main topos with respect to historical representation, is a collective

tragedy of a culture that was manipulated by the bureaucratic state, a faux-progressive party that

manipulated its population by manipulated historical representations.

The anachronous community can take more literal and magical formations like in the

American satirical drama *Pleasantville* (1998). In this film, history is depicted through the mass

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[149] Ibid., 90.

[150] This is because of the relative historical amnesia that *Underground* displays regarding the role of the Serbian government and military in the ethnic wars after the republic disbanded. I will not address the enormous controversy that occurred in the French and European press around the 1995 Cannes Film Festival which awarded *Underground* the top prize and Kusturica's own remarks regarding the politics of his film and the ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia. My interest is solely in how his film represents concrete history with magical realism. However, I will note that his magical realist style, while effectively dramatizing the failures and faux-progressivism of the Tito regime, ignored the fascist actions of the Serbian government and military in the former Yugoslavia.

media form of television, and the film covers the period that Jameson argued was one of the most important for the representation of history in postmodern culture: the economically prosperous Eisenhower era of the fifties.[151] *Pleasantville* presents the historical period of the fifties through the narrative about a television show also called *Pleasantville* that the protagonist David (Tobey Maguire) avidly watches while his twin sister Jennifer (Reese Witherspoon) enjoys her time as a popular young woman in high school. David is given a magical remote one day by a television repairman (played by famous sitcom actor Don Knotts in a metafictional cameo) which transports him into the world of *Pleasantville*. This televisual world represents the 1950s America completely in mass media stereotypes: suburban settings, predominantly white communities, middle-class Protestant culture, and rampant sexual repression, and everything appears in black and white. The film presents the fifties in the same way most of our current media presents this era in contemporary works, which is a culture laden with sexual repression. *Pleasantville* dramatizes the construction of nostalgic images, what Jameson correctly identified as *one* postmodernist film trend among a series of many others. Postmodern film nostalgically represents the economically prosperous times in the United States as a "lost object" of near Edenic paradise in American history: pre-civil rights movements and at the naïve beginnings of rock and roll, and before the neo-imperialist dreams of American expansionism crashed and burned in Vietnam. The film is as much about the historical period we understand as "fifties America" as it is about the way media constructs our understanding of this period. The anachronous community that absorbs living people from the present is isolated much like the other communities represented in other magical realist historical films. However, the isolation of

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[151] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late-Capitalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), 19.

this community is totalizing, which becomes an allegory for the exclusive and claustrophobic nature of white suburban spaces that were created in the fifties in the wake of World War II. The world of *Pleasantville* the series is literally closed off from the rest of America: the roads do not lead anyone outside the town of Pleasantville, and there is never any world news on the radio and television sets. This geographic, political, racial, and ideological isolation creates a community of sexually repressed subjects. Jennifer introduces Pleasantville to sex when she has intercourse with the stereotypical high school jock character, and later on she tells another friend about masturbation. Her friend masturbates in the bathtub, which transforms her from a black and white character to a "coloured" person. More people in the town learn about sex, desire, and intimacy which creates an entire community of "coloured" people that now threaten the middle-class values of the suburban space. This leads to widespread conflict for the male husbands and fathers living in the town led by the mayor Big Bob. Eventually the town erupts in riots when the local soda pop shop owner, Bill Johnson (Jeff Daniels), paints a married woman, Betty Parker (Joan Allen), in the nude for all his customers to see, as he is having an affair with her. Bill and David decide to paint another mural which depicts Pleasantville from an honest perspective, rejecting all of the nostalgic stereotypes that we used to make use of when depicting this period, which results in Big Bob bringing a lawsuit against them. They defeat the suit, and the town starts to sell colour television sets, and the highway roads now connect with the rest of the world.

  Pleasantville deals explicitly with the concept of historicity as something that has been fundamentally transformed in late-capitalist culture. The film uses magical realist techniques to dramatize the construction of the historical past and the ideologies of repression that nostalgic images themselves excise from the way they put forward images of the past. *Pleasantville* is also

very much a postmodern film in the sense of Jameson's definition which defines them as pastiche laden texts that do not deal with concrete history as older formal strategies would. It is also postmodern, in the sense of Hutcheon's more expansive definition of postmodernist film, as narratives that parody the texts that they are inscribing. Jameson's description of postmodern films as nostalgic films characterizes Hollywood magical realist films like *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *The Green Mile* (1999), *Field of Dreams* (1989), and *Midnight in Paris* (2011) but not films made outside the Hollywood system that could easily be categorized as postmodernist (films by Peter Greenaway for example). In fact, both Jameson and Hutcheon seem to miss the obvious point of his film theory, which is that nostalgia is a predominantly Hollywood narrative mode that emerged in the 1970s and became increasingly popular in the 1980s and 1990s and that describes both magical realist and postmodern films made in Hollywood. The only example outside of Hollywood that Jameson mentions is Bertolucci's *The Conformist* which, compared to *American Graffiti* and *Body Heat*, does not really represent the same sort of use of pastiche in historical representations. We can correct both Jameson's and Hutcheon's contributions to this debate by recognizing that nostalgia film aesthetics is a Hollywood narrative trend but not necessarily a postmodern one. And if we properly categorize magical realism as a narrative mode within the larger, macro-category of postmodern aesthetics, we no longer need to define magical realist film in contradistinction to postmodernism as Jameson did. *Pleasantville* then is a Hollywood film that defies this trend of Hollywood magical realist films that deal with the past. In the same way that Hutcheon showed how postmodern films represent history by implicating their own formal strategies in their representation of the past, *Pleasantville* questions the ideologeme of nostalgic representations of the past. The magical realist topos of the anachronous

collective in history exists in this film as a literal media text of the past, a fictionalized version of fifties sitcoms for middle-class audiences, that dramatizes the confrontation between past and the present in terms of sexual mores and artistic freedom, bourgeois values that are prevalent throughout late-capitalist media. The racial, class, and gender conflicts of the fifties era are siphoned down to existentialist questions of sexual liberation and human freedom. Issues of anti-Black racism in the US are transformed into media formations that visualize it in terms of black and white cinematography and its distinction from colour television which fails to engage historically with this significant feature of American history. However, the lack of non-radical political ideologemes in *Pleasantville*, or rather their absorption into bourgeois-liberal ideological discourses, does not negate that this postmodern text grapples with the idea of history while not falling back on the use of simplistic nostalgic discourses. The film evokes nostalgia so that it can be interrogated. *Pleasantville* follows Hutcheon in the general conclusion on the nature of postmodern films, magical realist or otherwise, regarding problems of historicity: these films pose questions, disassemble aesthetic forms, and show how media actively construct historical subject positions, but fail to provide any answers because they implicate their own creation in the process.

The other formal topos that we can identify as one that characterizes magical realist films that engage with questions of historicity is the marginalized figure who bears witness to historical trauma. This figure is tethered to significant events in history without staging this context as one for heroic triumphs. These characters occupy subject positions that are excluded from the dominant classes organized within capitalist social formations. Women, children, people of colour, and the disabled all function as these important figures that bear witness to history. The

archetype for this character type in magical realist film is Oskar from Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959) an early, pre-Latin American boom magical realist novel that influenced later canonical works in the genre, most significantly Salmon Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The film adaptation by Volker Schlöndorff closely adapts the novel, albeit omitting the third act where Oskar joins a jazz band and then inadvertently gets thrown into an insane asylum, and the numerous conversations he has with God and Satan throughout his life.

Oskar's fate is inexorably tied to the place of Danzig (now Gdańsk), Poland. This once independent city-state is the site of historical conflicts that long preceded the events of World War II, and each main character in the film represents geopolitical communities in this conflict surrounding this region that was previously known as the Polish Corridor. Oskar (David Bennent) is born of Agnes Bronski (Angela Winkler) and Jan Bronski (Daniel Olbrychski) (her cousin) under the guise of Oskar being the son of Agnes's husband Alfred Matzerath (Mario Adorf). Agnes is of Kashubian heritage, a small ethnic community that originated from a north-central region of modern day Poland. Her cousin Jan is of mostly Polish descent, and Alfred is ethnically German. The film dramatizes the effects of Hitler's Nazi party in Danzig before, during, and after World War II. Alfred represents the German community living in Danzig, a resentful group that wants to join the so-called "motherland" of the German state. Jan represents the Polish community living in Danzig: he works at the infamous Polish post office that was installed in the city, a politically significant building that signified Poland's interest in the region. Agnes represents the region of the Polish Corridor itself, hence her Kashubian ethnicity. Her Kashubian heritage is significant to the film's overall structure, which begins with the chance meeting of her parents (narrated by Oskar). Her father was a criminal fleeing from the police and

he was given shelter under her mother's four skirts in a potato field, the comical act that led to

Agnes's conception. Agnes, her family, and by extension the ethnic group native to the Polish

Corridor are represented as being permanently under the thumb of more powerful external

powers.

Oskar, the de facto main character of the film and the novel, does not represent any

particular political power in this nexus of conflict. He is a witness, a bystander, someone that is

shackled to history like Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, an important magical realist novel

that is as much influenced by Grass's *The Tin Drum* as it is by *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Oskar, and the magical state he finds himself in (he stopped physically growing at age three

while his mind matures at a normal pace), represents not only the irrational and infantile

mentality of National Socialism but also a moment in history that has deviated from the linear

progression of a liberal-capitalist society. This is one of the features of *The Tin Drum* film that

makes it so atypical for historical films about World War II. Oskar, like Blacky and Marko from

Underground, lacks the qualities of a traditional hero. He is ambivalent and at times complicit

with what is happening to his city. Oskar may disrupt the Nazis in certain moments, for example

when he magically forces them to dance around with his tin drum, but he was inadvertently

responsible for the death of his real father Jan (he asked him to return to the post office during

the famous battle of the Danzig Polish Post Office on October 5, 1939). In the final act of the

film when the Red Army has breached the city and defeated the Nazi forces, Oskar accidentally

causes his father to choke on an old Nazi pin that he was trying to hide from the Soviet soldiers.

At times Oskar opposes the regime invading his hometown and at other times he is

completely complicit with the Nazis. He joins the Nazi performance group led by Bebra, the

actual little person he met earlier when Alfred and Agnes brought him to see the circus before

World War II started. Armed with his tin drum and a powerful scream, Oskar becomes an

irrational disruptive force that sidelines any sort of logic, tradition, or authority in Danzig

society. Nearly all of Oskar's life during the time National Socialism emerged until their eventual

dissolution is marked by grotesque episodes, perversions of romantic imagery, and irrational

events. For example, one day on the beach with his mother, Alfred, and Jan, they find a

fisherman pulling in a long line from the ocean. Agnes curiously asks him if he has anything, and

he reels in a decapitated horse head filled with live eels which Alfred, excited by the prospect of

having seafood for dinner, promptly starts collecting in a bag while Agnes vomits in the sand.

Later Agnes refuses to eat the seafood that Alfred prepared from the dead horse's head, and he

eventually forces her to eat it which at first makes her anxious and then physically ill. In the

weeks following this argument, Agnes obsessively eats all the seafood she can find until she kills

herself from overeating. Oskar was privy to his mother's incestuous affair with her cousin,

brought along to trips downtown while his mother met up with Jan in his apartment. He

witnessed them sneaking affectionate physical gestures under dinner tables or when Alfred was

distracted in another room. After his mother and biological father Jan die, Oskar becomes

involved in a perverted love triangle with his father and a young teenage girl that works at

Alfred's grocery store. Oskar is mentally her age but physically still a three-year-old, so the

images of them being intimate are bizarre, and it becomes even more perverted when Oskar

catches his father having sex with the teenager in their apartment. Oskar's existence as man-child

with magical powers is a testament of the perverted forms of radicalism that the National

Socialist regime represented in the Polish Corridor. Schlöndorff treats this moment in German

history with no reverence and mocks the extreme reactionism of the Nazi party in one the final

scenes of the film. Oskar is attending his father's funeral with his old girlfriend and her son who

is now the same age as Oskar's physical body. He decides he will start growing again but not

before his half-brother knocks him in the head with a rock and he falls in the grave along with

his magical drum. In this form of magical realist historical film, the historical past is represented

as an aberration from progress, a demented form of arrested development, and the magical realist

character in the film exists to bear witness to this horror-show of history.

A much more serious example of the magical realist character as witness to historical

atrocities can be found in Jonathan Demme's adaptation of the landmark American magical

realist novel by Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1998). Demme was brought in later to the production of

this film, which was essentially the product of Oprah Winfrey as the producer-auteur when she

purchased the film rights shortly after the novel was published in 1987. Like *The Tin Drum*,

Beloved takes real concrete historical places, events, and structures of domination as its narrative

raw material. The main character of the film, Sethe (Oprah Winfrey), was inspired by the life of

Margaret Garner, a former slave that escaped her plantation in Kentucky, sailed across the Ohio

River to Ohio, a free state, and murdered her child so her child could not be forced into slavery.

The film adaptation of *Beloved* is structured around a series of flashbacks from Sethe's life on

Sweet Home in Kentucky, her escape and journey to Ohio, and her early years in Ohio living

with her mother-in-law Baby Suggs (Beah Richards). Sethe's existence is fundamentally shaped

by her experience as a freed slave. Her vision of the world is focused entirely on protecting

whatever children she has left from becoming a slave like her. Even when an old friend Paul D.

(played by Danny Glover) arrives and presents a her with a potential for happiness,

companionship, and a father figure for her daughter Denver (Kimberly Elise), Sethe is burdened

with the past. In one significant conversation between Sethe and Paul D. she explains how her

experience of oppression is compounded by the fact that she is a woman and Paul D. is a man.

Her historical position as an individual that is oppressed for two dimensions of her subjectivity

makes her doubly aware of the burdens of history that even a fellow slave like Paul D. has

trouble comprehending. Sethe's existence is characterized by "re-memory" which is prompted by

all of the interlocutors in the film that ask about her past or newspapers that have recorded her

life for others to read. She becomes a witness to history, handcuffed to it like Oskar, forcing

herself to experience re-memory, a theme that Morrison dealt with in her prior work *Song of

Solomon* (1977).[152] The experience of re-memory for Sethe involves becoming a storyteller

figure for her two daughters, Denver and the reincarnated Beloved (played by Thandie Newton).

Sethe tells part of her story to Paul D. but he is only interested in hearing it so that she can move

on whereas her two daughters listen to it to hear about their mother and their past and have no

ulterior motives. Sethe's connection to history as its storyteller positions her as a *griot*, the name

for the storyteller in traditional African cultures. The term refers to a social position in

Senegalese society where the griot figure acted as storytellers, clowns, heralds, genealogists, or

reporters for the community.[153] In Sethe's flashbacks, which are framed in the storyworld of the

film as tales she tells to her daughters, she speaks of Baby Suggs and her services that she would

conduct in the forest with the Black community. Baby Suggs would speak about life, philosophy,

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[152] P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 285.

[153] Francoise Pfaff, "Sembene, A Griot of Modern Times," in *Cinemas of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, and Oppositionality,* ed. Michael T. Martin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 118.

and spirituality, lead the people in dance and song, and preach to them about their collective identities as freed slaves. Demme films these scenes with a yellow, blown-out colour palette, making the setting appear as if it is scorched by the sun and almost heavenly compared to the dark tones of Sethe's house and run-down garden. These scenes depict the importance of the oral tradition in African culture that was maintained in the United States partly because black people were not allowed to conduct these sorts of gatherings in the public squares or other urban spaces. Sethe's only found memories of her past that we see are in the forest with Baby Suggs preaching to the collective of liberated slaves. In the present time of the storyworld Sethe adopts the function of the griot, albeit on a much smaller scale, for her children, passing on the lived history of an African American woman to a new generation. The reincarnated Beloved is a physical embodiment of history. She represents history as "felt history," history that hurts, the traumatic events that cannot be repressed but continue to be the subject of re-memory for its victims.

The film's main dramatic moments turn on revelations about the past, foregrounding the active presence that the historical past has on the present. Paul D., paradoxically in the film, represents a new future for Sethe when he arrives in the first act to Sethe's house which is overrun by a poltergeist that Sethe believes is her dead daughter haunting the house. The spirit turns the house red, creates horrific visions for those inside, shakes the walls and furniture, and makes it impossible to live a normal life. Sethe's two young sons left years earlier because they were sick of living in a haunted house, but Denver remained. Paul D. casts out the spirit in the hopes of making space in Sethe's life for him to be her companion and lover. For a time, Paul D. is able to distract Sethe from the past and help her focus on the present and their future together. But this is interrupted by the arrival of Beloved, an invalid black woman that appears from no

place on Sethe's front lawn one afternoon, and they decide to take her in. Denver soon discovers

that Beloved is her dead sister and she keeps this a secret from everyone else. The historical past

makes its way back into their lives through the presence of Beloved in the home, and her

obsession with Sethe competes with Paul D.'s attempts to create a future with Sethe. After Paul

D. and Sethe decide to have a baby together he learns from an older man that knew Baby Suggs

and Sethe since she arrived in Ohio that Sethe killed her daughter Beloved in order to stop the

white slave owners that found her new home from taking Beloved as a slave. This traumatic

moment that Sethe relives when she tells Paul D. scares him away from her and he leaves. Sethe

is so resolved in her belief that this was the right choice that she does not let herself be hurt when

Paul D. leaves her. Soon after (but before she knows it is her dead daughter alive again in a new

body), she hears the reincarnated Beloved sing a song that only Sethe's children would know.

She is overjoyed to discover that Beloved has made her way back to her. Sethe's immersion in

the existence of this new Beloved wreaks havoc on her life in the present. She loses her job and

can no longer provide for herself and her daughters. Denver is forced to find work immediately

so she can support her mother and Beloved. The reincarnated ghost forces Sethe to remain in the

past, locked into an existential state that closes off any attempts to think about the future. The

ghost figure in *Beloved* differs from how Dash used the spectral figure in *Daughters of the Dust*.

In Dash's work, the specter intrudes in the present from the future, buttressing the *criollo* culture

that the matriarchs want to preserve whereas the reincarnated ghost in *Beloved* wrests Sethe from

any attempts to move beyond her past as a slave. The murder of her daughter was the direct

result of her psychological trauma created while she was in bondage, and the reincarnated ghost

closes off any attempts for Sethe to move beyond her past. Demme's adaptation of *Beloved* uses

magical realism to represent historicity as Marx described the way history affects the present when he noted that "the traditions of dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."[154] Paul D. finds Sethe again, this time alone and distraught because Beloved is gone for a second time. He brings her perspective away from her regret toward the present and the future at which point the film ends on another flashback of Baby Suggs in the forest, preaching to the Black community about their Hearts, to "love your heart" more than anything else. The two competing images of the past finally resolve onto this final image of a vibrant community of liberated Black people celebrating their dignity. The community is also what finally saves Sethe from her seizure by the past embodied in the magical being of the reincarnated Beloved. Sethe's insular and individual relationship to the past is removed once Beloved is cast away by the strong women of her community that decide to cast out the spirit once and for all to save Sethe. This collective recuperation of the past, so that a downtrodden member of the community can experience the potential of the present, is the final image of historical re-memory as a vibrant collective that cares for those in danger.

The Tin Drum and Beloved are respective historical narratives that dwell on one particular and significant moment in history. The historical past is sublimated into the tragedy and drama of a family's fate during times of political turmoil and outright oppression. Magical realist historical fiction has another trend which presents history as a protracted narrative that is depicted as such through the life of a magically imbued individual that either does not age or is reincarnated across various periods. The latter is the magical realist premise for Takashi Miike's Izo (2004) a quasi-biographical film about Izo Okada, a member of an actual band of assassins living in

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[154] Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (Moscow: Progress Publisher, 2008), 10.

nineteenth-century Japan. The film begins with his crucifixion and subsequent reincarnation in different periods of time. The film depicts historical time as a flat disc that Izo can slice into at any point. The film is intentionally monotonous in the style made popular by Michael Snow and in the tradition of structural experimental films. Miike downplays any attempt to ground the images within a dramatic arc so that the spectator is not shielded from the laborious experience of watching the repetition of violence. Characters exist to exclaim the philosophical position that the film is presenting on human history: a long, repetitive succession of violent atrocities. Izo enters every new period ready to battle and he slashes everyone he finds to death until he is transported again through time to another place to repeat his actions. Miike uses magical realism to dramatize the experience of looking at history from enough distance to see it as a long story of barbarism and irrationality.

Sally Potter's adaptation in 1992 of Virginia Woolf's modernist novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) presents an even longer period of time than *Izo*, and is told from the perspective of a man that has been transformed into a woman overnight. Woolf's novel is not discussed as being a precursor nor an example of magical realism in literary theory. In the novel, there is no explanation, in the world of the story or otherwise, as to why Orlando (Tilda Swinton) stops aging nor why his sex changes from male to female. In the film, Potter felt that because of the film as medium is by default "less abstract" than literature, in the terminology we used in chapter two, the film is has a higher degree of iconicity than literature, and that spectators do not need a plot justification for Orlando's ability to stop aging.[155] When he befriends Queen Elizabeth I (played by Quentin Crisp) she asks on her deathbed: "do not fade, do not wither,…do

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[155] Samantha Soto, "*Orlando*: Press Kit," (New York: Sony Pictures Classics, 1992), 14-15.

not grow old."[156] He moves through history as man of great wealth and political position which is subsequently taken away when Orlando becomes a woman while conducting government business in the Ottoman Empire. History becomes another protracted story but without the quasi-metaphysical notions that *Izo* depicts regarding human history as one long string of violence against each other and nature. Orlando presents history as decidedly ambivalent toward the plight of women. Men conduct endless wars and create systems of exchange and law that only benefit the male sex, and women are treated as appendages. Orlando's unique perspective comes from his/her status as a his/her subject. His/her subjectivity creates a complete perspective on history that captures both the positions of the master and slave in Hegel's dialectic. Potter's use of magical realism supplements conventional historical discourses with this double-perspective, expanding the way we envision the narrative of human suffering much like how magical realism as a transgeneric category expands our vision of the real by supplementing it with magic.

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[156] *Orlando,* directed by Sally Potter (1992; New York, NY: Sony Pictures Classics, 2010), Blu-ray.

Chapter 6. Oppositional Subjectivities and the Expansion of Reality

One of the most distinctive thematic concerns of magical realism is the exploration of the margins. This concept can be interpreted as marginal subjectivities, classes, spaces, and ways of thinking in relation to dominant centres of power in late-capitalist culture. Magical realism therefore, again, fits well with postmodernist aesthetics because postmodernism intensified this political impulse found originally in modernism, typically exemplified by texts that disrupted dominant rationalist ideologies regarding the centered bourgeois ego, in their paradigmatic texts. Magical realism can therefore be defined as an "ex-centric" aesthetic, where ex-centric means the notion of speaking from the place of the margins. Theo L. D'Haen explicated this concept with respect to magical realist literature and cited *Foe* by J. M. Coetzee, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, and *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter.[157] *Foe* (1986) presents an alternative narrative history for the creation of the novel *Robinson Crusoe* by detailing a realistic account that included a woman stuck on the island with the real "Cruso" and his mute slave. Coetzee presents the marginalized voices of feminine subjectivity and a racialized other in response to their exclusion from the Western literary canon of the novel that subsequently followed from *Robinson Crusoe*. Fowles's work is another example how magical realist novels introduce an oppositional feminine voice from the margins as a counterpoint to male-centric discourses of European realism, and the same is true for Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. Carter reimagines the misogynist narrative events of the Leda and the Swan myth which, as D'Haen contends, symbolically engendered the whole of Western literature. *Nights at the Circus* makes numerous references to this myth and its various

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[157] D'Haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism," 191-208.

incarnations in Western literature. The final act of the novel features a scene where the

protagonist Fevvers, a woman born with large bird wings who is interpreted as representing the

Swan, has consensual and passionate sex with the male journalist that has been covering her

circus act for the press, a moment which is depicted in contradistinction to Zeus's rape of Leda

while he disguised himself as a swan. *Midnight's Children* is ex-centric because it presents a

post-colonial perspective that corrects existing history with magical elements. D'Haen argued

that magical realism produces ex-centric texts by writing from the place of the margins: first

adopting the techniques of the central literary discourses (or parodying them) and then creating

an alternative world, the imaginary world of novelistic creation, that corrects reality by

introducing magical realist events and characters that disrupt dominant centres. D'Haen observed

that to write ex-centrically necessarily involves introducing the utopian dimension into the work.

Magical realist literary texts do so by adjusting reality with magical supplements. The ex-centric

includes the postcolonial politics that magical realist literature has become known for among

literary and cultural theorists. The notion of the ex-centric has been a subtext of the arguments

made thus far on magical realist cinema and their thematic and formal strategies. The

metafictional forms of magical realism and the way the mode represents the historical past are

technically outside dominant aesthetic paradigms, certainly the ones dictated by mainstream

American films that have dominated the international film market for the last 100 years. What

this chapter specifically covers is the way that magical realist films displace, criticize, or reject

ideologies of oppression in their narratives. This not only includes discourses of class conflict,

the object of Marxian cultural analysis, but can be expanded to racial, sexual, and queer

ideologies of oppression that are inherent to the dominant modes of filmmaking.

While magical realist literature has become known for its postcolonial thematics that directly oppose racial ideologies of oppression, in the cinematic terrain magical realism began with directly addressing issues of class conflict. Vittorio De Sica's *Miracle in Milan*, one of the first magical realist films that sustains the synthesis of the magical with the real throughout the course of the narrative, deals explicitly with the lumpenproletariat's living experiences. The film is about a naïve orphan named Totò (Francesco Golisano) who becomes the saviour of a homeless commune that he starts on a patch of undeveloped land on the outskirts of Milan. The poor are able to create a thriving community outside the economic relations of the urban centre until land developers encroach on their space to bid on the land. The highest bidder is a capitalist named Mr. Mobbi (Guglielmo Barnabò) who threatens the livelihood of the community. When the conditions of existence for the community, unclaimed and public land, enter the systems of economic exchange thus threatening their homes, Totò's mother visits him from heaven. She gives him a magical dove that will grant him any wish. He uses his new magical power to save his friends and play silly tricks on the police and business class figures. The use of magical realism in *Miracle in Milan* explicitly dramatizes class conflict in Italian society. The homeless, poor community is represented as a collective that is able to create unalienated forms of existence that only become corrupted once their dwelling space is made into potential land to be commodified. The introduction of magical elements breaks completely with the aesthetic conventions set forth by earlier neo-realist films, of which *Miracle in Milan* is a late entry into the cycle, by correcting actual existing social relations with magical supplements. The contrast of spaces, one the urban centre of Milan which represents legitimate political power and the business class, and the other space, the outskirts of the city, the vacant lots that are ripe for the

creation of suburban spaces, exist in this film to present a space of reprieve from social relations

dictated by the market. The opposite relationship between the urban and non-urban spaces exists

in *Happy as Lazzaro*, where the rural is the site of exploitation and pre-modern forms of

existence that have yet to rid themselves of pre-capitalist forms of class oppression. *Miracle in

Milan* presents the lumpenproletariat population as an excess to the capitalist system that have no

other social potential other than squatting on spaces that have yet to be introduced to the market

system. The magical realist depiction of the lumpenproletariat by De Sica would inspire Emir

Kusturica's depiction of Romani people as a collective of underclass workers that carved out a

space for their unique ways of being in Eastern Europe post-Communist social totalities.

A very different type of narrative apparatus with respect to magical realism and class

conflict is represented by the absurdist cinema developed by Frank Tashlin and Jerry Lewis.

Tashlin was a directorial mentor for Lewis, who was influenced by the comedic routines and

fantastical set pieces that Tashlin created in his comedies starring Lewis. Tashlin, who originally

worked for Warner Brothers directing animated shorts, introduced comedic set pieces that broke

the bounds of filmic realism by manipulating filmic constructions of space, time, and identity

that are commonplace in the genre of animated cartoons but foreign to narrative feature

filmmaking. The rejection of realist filmmaking conventions in these comedic set pieces is

another form of magical realism because rationalist assumptions of space and time are suspended

in a world that resembles everyday reality. The theoretical justification for regarding Lewis and

Tashlin as magical realist directors can be found in Alison Crawford's analysis of animated

sitcoms like *Family Guy* (1999-Present).[158] The main argument put forward by Crawford is that

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[158] Alison Crawford, "Oh Yeah!": Family Guy as Magical Realism?" *Journal of Film and Video* 61, no. 2 (2009): 52-69.

Family Guy breaks with the "realist" norms of the animated sitcom established by *The Simpsons.* The main way *Family Guy* does this is through its use of non-sequitur sequences that feature magical occurrences, like the Kool-Aid Man bursting through a courthouse wall yelling "Oh Yeah!" after the main characters have all screamed "Oh No!" after a verdict has been handed down, or when Peter takes part in the comically long fist fights with an anthropomorphic chicken. Lewis and Tashlin's work does not have much in common with *Family Guy* except for this one shared feature. Both disrupt realist storytelling norms with *non sequitur* comedic set pieces that introduce magical events and characters into the narrative.

It is probably a mischaracterization to label Lewis's small filmography as magical realist especially when compared to filmmakers like Allen, Kusturica, and Jonze/Kaufman. Those directors frequently utilize elements of magic as essential parts of the primary narrative conceit of their films (the movie character leaving the screen, the underground weapons factory, or the magical portal into John Malkovich's head). Lewis's magical realism is a direct, but possibly unintentional, consequence of his particular transformation of the film comedy. His work is an extension of the styles of comedy created by earlier performer/directors like Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Jacques Tati. However, Lewis differs from each: he does not feature extended scenes of action and chases like in Keaton films, he does not make use of classical comic plots with character development and dramatic tension like Chaplin, and he does not rely solely on a physical performances like Tati. His work is more "structural," in the sense of structural cinema from the avant-garde, than all three of these listed directors. Lewis's films feel like a feature-length version of Chaplin's short *One A.M.* (1916) but without the narrative conceit of the main character being severely intoxicated. What he shares with the three great comic directors

mentioned above is his frequent use of the "everyman" character type. However, in Lewis's films this character is explicitly a working-class figure: bellboys, drivers, entry-level positions, and janitors. Lewis's proletarian character is always thrust into mass media corporate spaces that he cannot help but disrupt. In the Lewis films I am classifying as magical realist – *The Bellboy* (1960), *The Errand Boy* (1961), *The Ladies Man* (1961), *The Patsy* (1964), and *The Family Jewels* (1965) – these disruptions take the form of magical intrusions on reality that are the direct result of how Lewis transformed the form of film comedy in narrative cinema. Chris Fujiwara describes Lewis's work as being defined by a "block" aesthetic which segments everything into discrete units that exist almost for the sake of a comedic punchline rather than to develop a narrative in the traditional sense of storytelling.[159] The block aesthetic allows Lewis to introduce magical realist depictions of space, time, and identity that subvert the realist film form. I will delineate how Lewis's idiosyncratic version of magical realism features a modification of these aspects below.

Lewis frequently detaches the spatial logic from the demands of the narrative and character development. Like nearly everything else in his films, the way he constructs space is subservient to delivering a punchline. This results in Lewis's narratives emphasizing diversion and experimentation over spatial and temporal coherence. The Lewis character is able to magically warp the elements of the spatial world according to his comic whims. In certain scenes, this manipulation is used to demonstrate his working-class character's mastery over the corporate world he is disrupting. For example, in *The Bellboy* the Lewis character Stanley mimes taking a photograph of the full moon which then transforms night into day instantly, which

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[159] Chris Fujiwara, *Jerry Lewis* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 15-16.

causes the rich guests of the hotel to wake up from their sleep and complain. In the same film he is ordered to set up hundreds of chairs as a punishment from his immediate superior and completes the task in a matter of seconds. And in other moments, space is manipulated to demonstrate the cultural excess that Lewis ridicules. Lewis appears as a parody of himself in *The Bellboy*, and a doppelgänger of the main character Stanley. His arrival to the resort is staged as a big event, and Lewis mocks his own celebrity image by having an enormous entourage of incompetent handlers come out of a tiny car upon arrival at the hotel.

Because Lewis's narratives are segmented into a series of self-contained blocks of comic action, the spatial coherence of the film is stretched to the limit of the naturalism established by the basic narrative premise of each film. In his first three works for Paramount as director (*The Bellboy*, *The Ladies Man*, and *The Errand Boy*), Lewis constructs the various spaces in the locations (the hotel, the studio backlot, and the all-woman apartment complex) as a complex system of segmented spaces that can at any moment present magical events or recompose themselves into theatrical performances. The creation of a magical theatre performance involves an entire transformation of the space into something new like in the dance with a femme fatale named Miss Cartilage in *The Ladies Man.* In other instances, the Lewis character simply is able to manipulate the soundtrack through a miming performance like the office sequence in *The Errand Boy* when his character Morty S. Tashman (a reference to Frank Tashlin) pretends to be a Hollywood executive ordering subordinates to do his bidding.

These scenes are a film equivalent of the magical realist literary trope when fantasies are given a collective dimension, breaking away from their individualizing nature. An early example of this in literature can be found in the novel *Pedro Páramo* with the ghost town as the collective

representation of personal despair experienced by Juan and Pedro. This magical realist technique is present in Lewis's work when he makes the contents of his characters' private desires an explicit comic set that he shares with the audience and the rest of the reality of the storyworld. Fujiwara notes that Lewis's performances of a character's psychic desire are the result of the dissolution between public and private spaces in his films.[160] The logic of dreams now invades and takes over the rational logic of reality so that the world becomes a space for the performance of the character's psychic content. Lewis makes a point of articulating that these magical sequences as actually happening in the world of the narrative and not simply the product of a character's daydream. For example, when Herbert discovers the black glove in his pocket from the femme fatale sequence *The Ladies Man*, this is plainly indicating to the audience that the musical dance performance we saw in the forbidden room really happened in the reality of the story. The creation of temporary theatrical spaces conforms to the general tendency of Lewis to go against the naturalism of the settings by making the settings resemble the space of a movie set. The most obvious example of this is the apartment building in *The Ladies Man.* The large building is presented for the audience without the fourth wall so the audience can view the entire structure as a cross-section of the space. Godard references the way the house is presented in his own film with Jane Fonda, *Tout Va Bien* (1972), with the shots of the cross-section of the sausage factory. Both films make the borders of the space visible, or rather they present the action happening in a series of constructed frames that copies the way the camera frame segments space.

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[160] Ibid., 74.

If space is detached from narrative continuity and rational logic, so is time in Lewis's films. The principal form of the temporal manipulation schema for Lewis is extended duration from which follows the excessive use of delayed punchlines. Lewis as a comic writer was able to continuously find new ways of producing comedy from extended duration which in some instances resulted in magical realist sequences. One of the most common Lewis jokes is to extend the duration to such a high degree that we witness some form of disintegration of objects, the setting, or a character's physical appearance. When a version of professor Julius Kelp, the famous scientist character from his science-fiction comedy *The Nutty Professor* (1963), returns in *The Family Jewels,* he is depicted as a suave fashion photographer named Julius Peyton. In one scene he is photographing a couple for some generic product and he leaves the lights on too long while he attends to another model shoot in the other part of the room. When he returns to the couple, they have been inexplicably standing with the lights on them for so long that their hair, make-up, and clothes have deteriorated beyond measure. A similar sequence happens in *The Ladies Man* when Herbert greets a man at the front waiting to take out one of the women and Lewis magically unravels his entire suit by pulling on a thread for a long timespan. The other transformation of realist temporal schema is the excessive frequency of events. Lewis goes beyond the conventional amount of comedic references to earlier scenes by reintroducing them in excessive amounts and in illogical ways. The best example of this is the return of Dick Butkus's character – in Lewis's final directorial work *Smorgasbord* (1983) – who is hired by the Lewis character to help him quit smoking by punching him in the face whenever he lights up a cigarette. Just like his experiments with extended duration, Lewis's use of frequency creates

sequences that become magical realist because they stress the bounds of realism to such a degree

that the result is a fantastic event happening in a world that resembles everyday reality.

In terms of conceptions of personal identity, Lewis's block structure aesthetic allows him

to redefine and transform realist conceptions of subjectivity. Lewis's representation of a split

subjectivity that corresponds to the changes in space and time comply with one of the main

features Faris identified for magical realist narratives. Faris stated that magical realism rejects

ideologies of the centered subject organized by structured conditions of time and space under

capitalism that submit everything to instrumental reason. In Lewis's films, personal identity is

never stable. It exists as nothing more than a set of possibilities or a collection of stereotypes.[161]

Identity shifts with the confines established by the scene in question and allows Lewis to express

subjectivity as a multiplicity. There are varying degrees of this trope that move from the

metaphorical to the literal. In *The Ladies Man*, the Lewis character Herbert assumes various

"roles" for the different women in the house, shifting his personal identity with each new set of

expectations presented for him. In a more literal versions of this auteurist convention, Lewis

portrays multiple characters in his films, sometimes doppelgängers of the protagonist and at

other times splitting his celebrity image across multiple characters. The most famous of this type

of self-conscious performance is from his science fiction comedy *The Nutty Professor*. This

thematic principle was extended to a high degree in *The Family Jewels* where Lewis plays seven

characters in the film: Donna Peyton's butler and also her six uncles.

Lewis's spastic representation of subjectivity is depicted as one way for his working-class

characters to disrupt the instrumentalized spaces of corporate America. He confounds and

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[161] Ibid., 27-28.

confuses managers, executives, and other representatives of capitalist order. His characters often

parody what is usually sentimentalized in Hollywood movies: the paternalisms of capital and

nation, the family and the home.[162] His tendency to parody everything in Hollywood cinema and

American culture will typically include himself. The parody is oftentimes so absurd that it

devolves into self-ridicule. Whenever he includes scenes featuring a parent of the main character

he depicts them in a grotesque fashion. In the first act of *The Ladies Man,* Lewis plays Herbert's

mother, crying after her son learns about his college girlfriend's infidelity. Lewis turns a scene

that would normally be treated with some level of seriousness and drama into a joke on his

character and on himself. Once more, the punchline of the scene diverges from the narrative

action itself by making it about seeing Lewis in drag as his character's aged mother rather than

his overreaction to catching his girlfriend in the act of cheating. The narrative conceit for *The

Family Jewels* mocks the sentimentality of family attachments by making every uncle to Donna

Peyton either uninterested in being her guardian or otherwise unfit in some way.

The earlier films in his directorial cycle with Paramount all parodied mass media

institutions like the film industry, television, and the popular music, whereas his later films like

The Family Jewels and *Three on the Couch* (1966) mocked the family and heterosexual romantic

depictions on film which lost the class critique that his earlier films featured. In fact, there is a

noticeable trend in his films when his protagonists are not working-class characters: the stories

feature fewer or no instances of magical realism in the comic set pieces. Whether this is

intentional or not, Lewis seems to associate working-class subject positions with a form of being

that is threatening to corporate social structures. *The Bellboy*, *The Errand Boy*, and *The Patsy* all

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[162] Ibid., 46.

present a working-class character played by Lewis that disrupts corporate environments with magical actions and transformations of space and time. His characters take working positions that involve menial labour and dehumanizing and alienating experiences and transform them into instances of play and creativity. The Lewis working-class figure is like the post-industrial version of the Tramp from *Modern Times* (1935) who jams up the factory with his body. The Lewis version disrupts the structures of capital by introducing magical nonsense into the world and disrupts it to a higher degree than the Tramp was able to do in Chaplin's film. Political critique in Lewis's films continues with the focus on the body as the site of disruption but also incorporates his voice and his misunderstandings. The magical realist mode is perfectly suited for dramatizing these fantastical flights of freedom that the Lewis character performs in the face of a fully administered corporate society.

A very different type of magical realist depiction of class conflict is at work in Mati Diop's recent film *Atlantics* (2019). Diop's film is structured around a revenge narrative rather than the romance plot of *Miracle in Milan* and the romantic comedies of Lewis's films. The film is set in a suburb of Dakar, Senegal and concerns the construction of a modern-looking skyscraper by a development company that has refused to pay their workers, a great many of whom are migrant workers, for several months. The workers decide to find other jobs in Spain to make money for their families, despite being owed a large sum from the construction company, but their boat disappears at sea. Shortly after, their souls possess their wives and lovers at night who then stalk the owner of the construction company. The women move around like zombies, not like the recent Hollywood versions of zombies, but more in line with Jacques Tourneur's horror film about voodoo practices in Haiti, *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943). In the Tourneur

film, the zombie is the result of a curse placed on the main character by her mother-in-law as punishment for having an affair with her husband's brother (both are sons of the mother-in-law). In Diop's film, the zombified stalkers are returning dead workers, ghosts, or something else in the supernatural realm, that harass the capitalist figure that extracted their entire labour power from their work as profit. The film also calls attention to the experience of migrant workers whose very condition of existence is based on not getting paid enough for their work, forcing them to become as mobile as capital in the twenty-first century. In *Atlantics*, the capitalist is forced to pay the owed wages to the possessed wives of the dead workers and dig a grave for every worker lost at sea. Diop's film transforms the conventions of the zombie film into a magical realist revenge fantasy about the extraction of value from the working class.

Lewis's work is a singular use of magical realism whose aesthetic tendencies were only marginally taken up by other directors, most prominently in Kusturica's comedies and Allen's films. His depiction of class conflict is especially singular given that most magical realist directors do not focus on class exclusively, but intertwine it with questions of race, gender difference, and sexual identity. What follows will be a delineation of how magical realism presents other forms of ex-centric social positions that confront other forms of oppressive ideologies. The depiction of racialized figures and their subsequent subjection by dominant centres of power is one of the most common thematic plots of magical realist cinema, a thematic that was obviously carried over from magical realist literature. It is found across national contexts and continuously taken up by this cinematic transgeneric category, from the earliest examples of the mode to the most recent. The depiction of racialized individuals, subjected to asymmetrical relations of power in contemporary society, follows a similar trajectory charted by

Lewis's working class characters wherein individuals from racialized groups disrupt and disintegrate dominant centres of power.

One of the most sustained examples of racialized ex-centric figures can be found in Takashi Miike's yakuza films that have magical realist elements. These include *Dead or Alive, Dead or Alive 2: Birds* (2000), and *Deadly Outlaw: Rekka*. Beginning with *Dead or Alive*, Miike uses magical realism to represent the futility and outmoded aspects of the yakuza genre: the virtues of honour and duty towards fellow yakuza men, hyper-masculinity, and the xenophobic treatment of Korean and Chinese immigrants. In *Dead or Alive*, he combines the gritty realism of post-Fukasaku yakuza movies with a mythological treatment of this community. He represents the Kabukicho district in Tokyo as a mythical space where all of the hedonism of the yakuza is exaggerated to magical degrees. One of the central characters is Ryuuichi (Riki Takeuchi), a Chinese immigrant living in Japan with other fellow immigrants that make up a minor rival gang to the powerful yakuza gang made up of ethnically Japanese gangsters. Ryuuichi is depicted as a stoic hero figure who became involved in organized crime so he can pay for his younger brother's university education in America. The Japanese yakuza members are stylized as hedonistic and immoral in relation to the gang of marginalized Chinese immigrants. During the introductory montage, one yakuza member sniffs a line of cocaine off a ramp that looks to be 30 feet long exemplifying debauched excess. Another yakuza member aggressively consumes six bowls of noodles, and when Ryuuichi's gang assassinates him, green guts and noodles fly out of his body. Ryuuichi represents one of Miike's most consistent thematic tropes: the rootless individual.[163] Miike depicts rootless individuals in a myriad of ways throughout his extensive

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[163] Tom Mes, *Agitator: The Cinema of Takashi Miike* (Guildford: FAB, 2006), 23.

filmography, but in *Dead or Alive* they are represented as outcasts who live on the outskirts of

Tokyo. They feel disconnected from their ethnic place of origin because they grew up in Japan,

but the xenophobic culture caused them to feel equally disconnected from Japan. Ryuuichi and

his gang lack both genealogical and geographical roots, feeling neither Chinese nor Japanese,

which then partly motivates their hostile takeover of the Japanese controlled yakuza in

Kabukicho. The magical realism of Miike's cinema is similar to Lewis's in that both break with

realist film form through the use of exaggeration. Miike establishes both realist and magical

discourses with the introductory montage which features the naturalism of typical yakuza movies

and magical intrusions. The finale of *Dead or Alive* exemplifies this synthesis best, compared to

anything else in the film. Ryuuichi's hostile takeover of the powerful yakuza gang is perpetually

threatened by a lone cop character, Detective Jojima (Shô Aikawa), that will not give up, even

after his superiors tell him to give up, and even after Ryuuichi murdered his family. The finale is

constructed like a clichéd showdown between cop and criminal, a trope that goes back to the

Western genre, even before the yakuza film became a genre in itself. The ending of *Dead or

Alive* also references Miike's earlier movie *Shinjuku Outlaw* (1994), a V-cinema crime video,

which features a finale where the two rivals kill each other in a gun fight. In *Dead or Alive,* the

entire scene is an excessive depiction of this type of showdown. Miike uses an orange filter to

make the scene seem uncanny compared to earlier scenes of violence of the film which used

naturalistic lighting. Miike then completely breaks with the naturalism of the yakuza genre by

staging the rivalry between the law and criminal as a magical battle: the two main characters

destroy each other with a fire ball and a hidden bazooka that the cop was keeping in his suit. The

collision of their firepower destroys themselves and the entire world. This finale is an example of

the way magical realism turns metaphorical content into literal narrative action. In crime films, the death of the main characters is symbolically also the death of the world: when they die the story ends. Here Miike makes this thematic completely literal: the death of Ryuuichi and Jojima is literally the end of the world.

Deriving magical realism from excess and exaggeration can at times give the impression that the synthesis of realism and the magical are accidental and thus perfunctory to film. This most likely is the case for both Lewis and Miike who, as directors, demonstrate no conscious acknowledgement that what they are doing is magical realist, especially in the sense I have been using the term in this work. Both directors are interested in experimenting with narrative forms, genre conventions, and absurdist use of metaphor. Generally speaking, the use of magical realism is simply a result of their formal experiments in film. However, in *Deadly Outlaw: Rekka* (2002), Miike uses a magical framework, one that mythologizes the yakuza character type, as a central part of the narrative. The film begins with a voiceover from mysterious narrator that comments on the protagonist's journey as if he were the main character in an ancient myth. The magical realism and the racial politics are both front and centre in the narrative, which is explicitly about anti-Korean racism depicted in a powerful yakuza gang. *Deadly Outlaw: Rekka* is another film about an immigrant crime figure, Kunisada (Takeuchi), living in Japan, combating the dominant Japanese yakuza organization that assassinated his father Sanada (Yuya Uchida). The yakuza bosses frequently reference Kunisada's Korean heritage, especially when discussing his violent tendencies, ones that are now out of control because they assassinated his equally volatile father, also of Korean descent. The introductory montage which Miike launches into resembles *Dead or Alive* with its kinetic editing, heavy metal soundtrack, and frequent cross-cutting that introduces

nearly all of the main characters of the film. In this scene, the Otaki group have hired a pair of

assassins named Mr. Su and his apprentice Tabata to kill Sanada. During his brutal murder, his

son Kunisada is in a psychiatric ward being lectured about his behaviour. He magically connects

psychically with his father, who, even though he is a geriatric gangster, is so tough that the

assassins have to shoot many times to kill him, and in his dying moments he clutches onto

Tabata's neck so tightly that Mr. Su is forced to slice off the old man's hands in order to save his

apprentice. Tabata sits with Mr. Su after their job with the dead man's hands still stuck around his

neck. The film characterizes those with Korean descent as superhuman and extremely powerful

in contrast to the ineffectual Japanese yakuza members. Kunisada is an unstoppable force,

beating down scores of enemies with a crowbar by himself, demolishing an entire yakuza office

high-rise with a single shot from a rocket launcher, and ultimately existing beyond death. The

finale shows Kunisada survive his own assassination, and the narrator of the film tells us that

death is only a temporary diversion in the journey of the yakuza warrior. Kunisada's magical

powers, seemingly granted to him from his Korean genes, allowed him to avenge his dead father

and punish the dominant racial subjectivities of the Japanese yakuza.

Miike was certainly not the first director to deal with anti-Korean racism in film, and at

times, the sheer absurdity and formal pyrotechnics that he uses distract from the film's criticism

of racism. Nagisa Oshima's *Death by Hanging* (1968) is an earlier exploration of anti-Korean

racism and how it intersects with the ethics of the juridical system in Japan, a country that has

yet to abolish the death penalty. *Death by Hanging* is typically understood as one of the

paradigmatic examples of modernist cinema. It was somewhat late in the cycle of the Japanese

New Wave and it was explicitly a political film that addressed a particular issue. Like Oshima's

earlier films that were radical experiments in film form – *Violence at Noon* (1966), which

utilized the principles of Soviet montage to great effect, and *The Catch* (1961), which featured

long takes found in American action-adventure films but here were used for brief reframings and

delicate recompositions, *Death by Hanging* interrogated the documentary form. He transformed

the setting of the film, an execution chamber, into theatrical space which recalled the Brechtian

emphasis on the constructed nature of narrative works.[164] This is not the first time Oshima

utilized Brecht's aesthetics. In *Night and Fog in Japan* (1960), his film about the failure of the

Communist Party in Japan to effect any real change, Oshima depicts the space of confrontation

between the wedding party and the uninvited guests as a theatrical space which foregrounds the

construction of itself as a representation and performance. Dana Polan argues that Oshima

presents everything in *Night and Fog in Japan* in "quotation" marks and that historical

knowledge is passed through the dialogue of the characters.[165] In *Death by Hanging*, Oshima

initially constructs the film as a documentary, conveying a wealth of much information regarding

Japanese society, the death penalty, and the logistics of an execution by hanging. The

documentary style, which Oshima cleverly exposes in this brief scene as being as constructed as

the fiction film form, is completely challenged with the introduction of the magical realist

conceit of the story: the man supposed to be executed, R (Do-yun Yu), refuses to die. The

documentary style is also a reference to the real journalistic account of a Korean man named Ri

Chin'u (the basis for the R character) who in 1958 murdered two Japanese schoolgirls. He

subsequently published an account of his crimes and his correspondence with a Korean

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[164] Noel Burch, "Nagisa Oshima and Japanese Cinema in the 60s," in *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Richard Roud (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1980), 738-739.

[165] Dana Polan, "Politics as Process in Three Films by Nagisa Oshima," *Film Criticism* 8, no. 1 (1983): 36.

journalist, Boku Junan in a book called *Punishment, Death, and Love*. Oshima uses his own voice for the narration, situating himself, as the director, as the purveyor of truth only to have his own constructed authority diminished once the subject of the film defies reason, and his voiceover is not heard again. As a macro-genre, the documentary film seems to always position the voiceover in a much more authoritative position than we observe in fiction feature films. The film noir tradition supplanted the plausibility of the human voice by showing how much it can misrepresent reality, and subsequent films noirs did not rely on voiceover for exposition. In this film, Oshima does not expose the voiceover as intentionally mystifying but rather as incapable of narrating what is happening on the image track. Now that his voice can no longer narrate a fantasy through the documentary form, the voice has to be removed. Polan observes that this abrupt rejection of the documentary form allows Oshima to position the audience in relation to discourses of truth (he calls it a "zero point") in cinema away from the documentary solutions to the epistemological problems of cinema's relation to knowledge.[166]

Now that the sanctioned execution has been thwarted, the government officers are forced to improvise. The government officials represent the legal, political, education, and religious institutions of Japan. They must now devise a way to re-execute R for the crime of killing two women. The main problem that R's refusal to die presents to them is that the R that magically avoided his own death is no longer the same R as before. He has lost his memories – his understanding of himself and his place in the world – and most importantly he longer recognizes himself as the same individual that committed the murders. The Education Officer (Fumio Watanabe) rehearses the facts of the crime: the stalking, the lusting, the sexual assault, and the

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[166] Ibid., 34-35.

eventual stabbing. This performance does nothing for R so the officials try to reach him by interrogating his biography. They explain to him that R was born in Japan but his parents were of Korean descent, implying that he was positioned from birth to be a marginalized figure in Japanese society. R questions them about the ontological status of a "Korean" which puzzles them because they cannot rely on skin colour to differentiate the supposed "inferior" Koreans to the "superior" Japanese. They acknowledge that R was born in Japan, making him a Japanese citizen, but he cannot be counted amongst the dominant racial class of Japanese people in their eyes: the Education Officer tells him, "But for the Japanese, you still belong to the old inferior Korean race." The Education Officer complains that it would be much easier if Koreans were African-Americans, a comment that references the phantasmic structures of racism which rely on redefining basic elements of our reality such as skin colour and bodies into systems of oppression.

In a later section of the film titled "R is Proven to Be Korean," the government officials recount how R's original Japanese name was Shizuo but he adopted the name R once he became interested in Korean nationalism. At this point, an imaginary version of R's sister (Akiko Koyama) materializes, visible to R and some of the officials, but not to others. The sister attempts to position R as a radical Korean nationalist and his crimes against the Japanese women as payback for Japan's historical oppression of the Korean people. The sister espouses a politics of the body, explaining how the Korean skin of R contains all of the pain and suffering caused by the Japanese state. She desperately wants to position her brother as a political radical whose crimes were political rather than psycho-sexual crimes against women. The sister explains further that R's parents came to Japan under economic coercion: they immigrated as "serfs" and

were never able to improve their economic or social position because of their status as Koreans. The Education Officer interrupts the sister because she is covering family history which they had already covered prior to her "arrival" and disapproves of her interpretation R's past. She rebuffs the Education Officer by saying that their explanation of R's Korean background is tainted by racist mystifications because they do not understand the experience of living in Japan as a Korean. However, her attempts to understand R become frustrated by the post-execution R who no longer identifies with the ideals of Korean reunification and nationalism. He rejects her explanation of his crimes as revenge for all Korean people against the Japanese.

Death by Hanging is most effective at interrogating the ideology of racism when R poses questions to the governmental officers. He asks them what is a "Korean," what is a "nation," and how can a nation execute someone if it is ultimately an abstract entity. The officials can never answer his questions in a way that does not fall back on arbitrary constructions or circular explanations. Oshima exposes many of the essentialist ideological notions that modern capitalist states require for social consensus and the construction of subject positions. R's transformation into a post-execution R exposes how the legal sphere can become entangled with racist ideologies, positioning certain individuals with stigmas that come to define their existence. R's rejection of his Japanese name and his interest in Korean nationalism positioned him as a criminal in the eyes of the legal entities even before he committed the two crimes. Oshima's use of magical realism does not ultimately free R from his fate because he did commit those crimes and on some level they were not political. But he also demonstrates that the determination of who is chosen for a human sacrifice is the result of a corrupt society. For example, hanging by execution is always an abstraction much like the film's construction of R as an "inferior Korean"

in relation to the "superior Japanese." Oshima's use of magical realism deals with the ideology of racism on the epistemological terrain, critiquing the way dominant centres of power use constructions of racial positions to discipline certain groups of the population. The constructions of race are exposed as such through the focus on the body as a site for political struggle. Oshima anticipates future magical realist works like *Macunaíma* (1969), made shortly after *Death by Hanging*, which examines the ideology of racism in Brazil through magical realist transformations of the body.

    Macunaíma followed a similar trajectory in the country of its production that *Death by Hanging* did in Japan. Both films were produced near the end of national "new waves" in their countries (Japanese New Wave and Cinema Novo in Brazil). They were both adaptations of literary works. *Macunaíma* is based off of one of the most famous novels in Brazilian literary history whereas *Death by Hanging* is based off of a work of incendiary literature that would never attain the status of the literary canon in Japan. *Death by Hanging* is also firmly entrenched in modernist forms of art, whereas *Macunaíma* is a bricolage of various popular and artistic trends, taking part in the postmodernist pop movement *Tropicalia* from Brazil, the modernist filmmaking aesthetics of the Cinema Novo, and the radical politics of transnational movements in peripheral nations in the sixties.[167]

    Macunaíma takes the form of an adventure narrative where a magical baby, the titular character, is born a full-sized man in the jungle. He is prophesied to be the "hero" of his people, the poor underclass that makes up the majority of the Brazilian population. Macunaíma is originally born Black (played by Grande Otelo) but magically turns White. The first time this

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[167] Stam, *Literature Through Film*, 329.

happens is when he tries his first cigarette. The second is when, after his mother dies,

Macunaíma and his two brothers Maanape (Roldolfo Arena) and Jiguê (Milton Goncalves) travel

to São Paulo and the water from a magic spring transforms him into an ethnically European

person (the White version of Macunaíma is played by Paulo José). The magical shifting of

ethnicities of the film is also foregrounded by the magical internationality of Macunaíma's

family. His name and that of his brothers is Brazilian but he and his brothers look ethnically

European, Indigenous, and African. Furthermore, the actor that plays the European version of

Macunaíma also performs as Macunaíma's mother.

     After arriving in São Paulo, Macunaima falls in love with a revolutionary fighter named

Ci (Dina Sfat). They have a son together, a magical child that is born as an adult and Black even

though Macunaíma is now European and so is Ci (Grande Otelo also plays Macunaíma's son).

The magical depiction of families of different races brings attention to racial conflict and

subjugation of Indigenous people versus those of Portuguese descent in Brazilian society. Jiguê

and Maanape are forced to live on the street while Macunaíma moves in with Ci, and he does not

help them after he becomes White. In a later scene, Macunaíma uses a racial slur, and his brother

comments that he has really become White, now that he parrots racist discourses. The

representation of racism is also foregrounded with the repeated use of cannibalism as a defining

image for the film. The director, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, uses the imagery of cannibalism to

express the extreme degree of poverty in Brazil where people are so poor they are depicted as

eating each other. Depicting already disadvantaged people through the imagery of cannibalism

also represents the depravity of the upper classes. The chief antagonist of the film is a rich

industrialist figure named Venceslau Pietro Pietra (Jardel Filho), who becomes rich after finding

Ci's magical stone, the Muiraquita, in the belly of a dead catfish. Pietro is a grotesque looking

figure, and the actor wears a lumpy bodysuit and pounds of makeup to make him look extremely

unhealthy and disgusting. In the final scene when Macunaíma attends a wedding party for

Pietro's daughter, the wedding guests are celebrating around a large swimming pool full of

chewed up bodies. Macunaíma finally defeats his rival by shooting him in the rear with an arrow,

referencing the act of hunting. The depravity and strangeness of the wedding scene recalls the

ludicrous scene at the end of Pasolini's *The Canterbury Tales* (1972) where the priests are getting

shot like projectiles out of the rears of giant demons. In *Macunaíma*, the rich have turned on each

other, and are now cannibalizing themselves for their own amusement. After the wedding scene,

the film ends with Macunaíma destitute and bored, living again in the forest, but now his family

have abandoned him because he is too lazy to work. De Andrade codes the ethnically European

people in his film as lazy and hedonistic while the Indigenous and Black figures are resourceful

and hardworking people. Macunaíma becomes transfixed with a beautiful woman in a lake, and

the scene recalls the magical spring of water in the first scene of the film that transformed him

into a white European. However, this time, the water is a scene of danger, and the woman is

actually a man-eater creature that devours Macunaíma. The end credits rolls as a song about the

great men of Brazil plays on the soundtrack. In this ending, De Andrade self-consciously mocks

the original prophecy of Macunaíma as the hero of people who was devoured because of

hedonistic tendencies ascribed to him once he became White.

If *Death by Hanging* is a magical realist film that uses Brechtian formal experiments,

Macunaíma can be traced back to the grotesque satirical form used by François Rabelais.

Bakhtin described the main features of the grotesque as exaggeration, hyperbole, and

excessiveness which overlap with some forms for magical realism that introduce fantasy into the realist conception world by exaggerating something in reality itself.[168] The grotesque conception of the body depicts the body as always in the act of becoming, hence the significance of the racial transformations experienced by Macunaíma. The body always begets another body as well: Macunaíma and his son are born as a fully grown men. The grotesque body is also characterized by the bodily functions of the bowels and phallus: Macunaíma is always eating food and having sex with every woman he encounters. He also is the subject of cannibalistic desire when Pietro's wife and two obese daughters try to cook him in a soup, and his eventual end is to be eaten by a magical man-eater creature. The body becomes the site of political struggle in the grotesque, and that is certainly the case for the film *Macunaíma*. The mistreatment of anyone not ethnically of European culture plays out through the transformations of the body that Macunaíma experiences, the threat of cannibalism, and his eventual demise.

Like Bakhtin observed with respect to the grotesque genre which according to him is always a satirical genre, *Macunaíma* creates a grotesque picture of Brazilian race relations as satire of the adventure film. Macunaíma as a heroic character lacks all of the qualities of the hero. His quest to capture the Muiraquita is for selfish reasons and not to be the hero of his people, according to the prophecy declared in the first act of the film. His transformation into an ethnically European person does not motivate him to use his newfound privilege to help his family and village but only to enrich himself. He begins to fetishize money (Ci brings him paper money to play with when she comes home from work) and he buys from a stranger a duck that supposedly defecates pure gold, only to discover it was a ruse. After he defeats Pietro, he steals

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[168] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 303.

all of his American-made consumer products, like televisions and radios, and takes them to the

jungle with his brothers even though they do not have any way to power the objects. *Macunaíma*

criticizes the racism of Brazilian society in the late-sixties around the site of the body and its

grotesque attributes of eating, eliminating, and inseminating. This is why the image of

cannibalism is so central to the film: the director is utilizing the satiric undertones of grotesque

bodies devouring each other as a representation of race relations in Brazil.

Another way that magical realist texts depict the ex-centric is by featuring stories that are

unique to these communities. Two examples from very different contexts can be used to illustrate

this aesthetic strategy. The first is one we have alluded to in earlier chapters, Kusturica's

depiction of the Romani people of Serbia in *Time of the Gypsies* and *Black Cat, White Cat*.

Kusturica was born in Sarajevo and has no familial connection to Romani people (his family

were secular Muslims), but he became fascinated with the Romani culture he observed in Bosnia

and Serbia. *Time of the Gypsies* depicts the Romani people as living in a culture somewhat

sheltered from the travesties of European modernity. The Romani in his films are not wealthy or

powerful but they have a vibrant community full of love, friendship, and fanciful beliefs in

mysticism which incorporates myths about animals and psychic powers. In *Black Cat, White Cat*,

the Romani community is even more isolated than the one shown in *Time of the Gypsies*. The

space they occupy is almost entirely defined by excess. Kusturica, whether intentionally or

otherwise, depicts the setting in a similar manner to Jerry Lewis's films, where the laws of nature

and rational logic are constantly suspended. In *Time of the Gypsies*, Kusturica includes magical

animals and people with supernatural powers, and in *Black Cat, White Cat*, he features paternal

figures rising from the dead to correct the current generation of their selfishness. Another

example of ex-centric representations of marginalized groups can be found in Charles Burnett's *To Sleep With Anger* (1990), a film that draws from African-American mysticism that was ex-centric to Protestant dominated culture of American society. The film is about a lower middle-class family living in Los Angeles that is visited by an old friend from the South. The visitor is Harry (played by Danny Glover), and when he arrives he casts a devilish spell on the entire family. The family, led by the patriarch Gideon (Paul Butler) and his wife Suzie (Mary Alice), have mostly adjusted to living in an urban metropolis but retained some of their rural practices, like raising chickens in their backyard, even though they live in South Central Los Angeles. When Harry arrives, he seems to bring a whole host of unsavoury figures that the family used to know out of the woodwork, and Gideon's house becomes a constant party with men playing cards all night and drinking corn whiskey. Harry corrupts Gideon's adult son Samuel (Richard Brooks) who begins to resent his wife and older brother and becomes more selfish and stubborn. The evil atmosphere that Harry brings ultimately puts Gideon in a coma, represented as though he is stuck in a state of purgatory, while tensions rise between Samuel and the rest of his family. Samuel has now adopted Harry's physical affectations, especially his fascination with knives, and becomes overly confrontational with his older brother and ignores his wife and child. When Suzie intervenes during a fight between her sons and she grips the knife, cutting her hand deeply, the blood stops Samuel and his older brother, snapping Samuel out of his spell and with it the mysterious hold that Harry has had on their home. After the family returns from the hospital, Harry returns for his things and he falls on a pack of marbles on the kitchen floor causing him to have a heart attack. The body remains in the kitchen for a long time, and once it is removed Gideon wakes up from his mysterious coma. *To Sleep With Anger* is indebted to the literary

works of Toni Morrison who invented an American version of magical realism by including

mystical notions of reality from African-American culture. Burnett's representation of Black

lives told in ways that reference their history and culture anticipates Dash's work discussed in the

previous chapter and remains to be one of the most important and forgotten works of American

cinema. In this film, as in Kusturica's depiction of the Romani culture, magical realism is used to

narrate ex-centric perspectives on the world and communities that have been traditionally left out

of dominant cinematic discourses.

The ex-centric position of feminine subjectivity has always been a central component of

magical realist literature. In film, the representation of an alternative voice to patriarchal film

discourses is a central aspect to magical realism in this medium as well. Magical realism is in

some ways perfectly suited for depicting the ex-centric subjectivities of feminist discourses

because so much of conventional cinematic codes are situated within a perspective that

privileges the male perspective. The introduction of a fantastical perspective dampens the male-

centric dominance in narrative cinema by questioning realist ideologies which always inflected

reality through a masculine perspective. Reconfiguring notions of time, space, and identity has

the consequence of changing character archetypes, plot structures, and thematic concerns that

have allowed for feminist discourses, ones that are not wholly determined by the precepts of

male-centric cinema, to take shape. The most basic form of this ex-centric aesthetic in cinema

follows its literary counterpart by focusing on spaces and themes that have been traditionally

been our images of femininity from a masculine viewpoint, but which are now being

reappropriated for a feminist perspective. Alfonso Arau's 1992 film adaptation of Laura

Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989) recaptures feminine spaces like the kitchen

and the home and imbues with them with a positive narrative power through the discourses of magical realism. The protagonist, Tita (Lumi Cavazos), is able to enchant the food she creates with powerful emotions that affect anyone who eats her work. She perfects cooking to an art form, having been forced to work in the kitchen and serve her mother without any chance of having a life of her own. Tita's magical use of the kitchen and her emotions empowers her to push back against oppressive traditions that have been forced on her from the institution of the nuclear family. Another example of magical realist works that reappropriate traditional images of femininity is Pascale Ferran's *Bird People* (2014). The film is composed of two sections. The first focuses on an American businessman named Gary Newman (Josh Charles) who is staying at an airport hotel in Paris. He undergoes an existential crisis after having panic attack and immediately quits his job, divorces his wife, cancels his trip to Dubai, and decides to stay in the hotel indefinitely. The second story focuses on Audrey Camuzet (Anaïs Demoustier), a maid in the hotel, introduced as a supporting character in the first section. When the hotel goes through an electrical blackout, she goes to the roof to investigate and magically turns into a sparrow. In the earlier section of the film, she was innocently surveilling the guests of the hotel by virtue of cleaning their rooms, and became somewhat personally invested in Gary's life. Now that she is in the form of a bird she can freely traverse the hotel and surveil the guests like never before. The film's ex-centric perspective comes from transforming the work life of a hotel maid into a fantastical diversion.

One of the consistent conventions found in narrative cinema, especially in films made before the mid-nineties, is that the relationships between women are ordered, and mediated through men. Hollywood cinema and its influence on mainstream film across the world restricted

the depiction of genuine female friendship and femininity. Douglas Sirk's melodrama *The Imitation of Life* (1959) attempts to undo this cinematic structuration by focusing the narrative on the relationships between four women in a household. Agnès Varda's *Cléo From 5 to 7* (1962) is an example of another departure from convention by making a film centered around a female character and her perspective on reality. Laura Mulvey's radical films did away with narrative entirely because the narrative form itself seemingly could not be extracted from patriarchal discourses. Yvonne Rainer recouped a form of narrative cinema while still maintaining the radical politics of Mulvey's films. Other filmmakers like Bette Gordon in *Variety* (1983) attempted to deconstruct supremely patriarchal forms like the private detective/femme fatale dynamic by constructing a film around the female gaze. More recently there was Anna Biller's *The Love Witch* (2016) which utilized misogynist images like the "witch" and articulated feminist ideologemes through the aesthetics of kitschy Hollywood B-movies and Italian *giallo* films. However, in the mode of magical realist film, one of the first attempts to incorporate an oppositional, feminist perspective to narrative cinema came from Jacques Rivette. In his fifth feature, *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (1974), Rivette uses magical realism to overturn the gendered ideological assumptions used in Western narrative cinema. The main ideological concept that he is targeting is the "Name of the father" and specifically the way that concept structures relationships between women. In general, this ideology has structured Western institutions and aesthetic practices so that our culture has always been dominated by artistic father figures: male artists, authors, and film directors. In the aesthetic realm, men represent reality and women are represented. It is somewhat up for debate whether Rivette's work is part of the nouvelle vague because it was made nearly seven years after Godard's *Weekend* (1967),

however, Rivette's film is self-conscious about its status as emerging at the end of a film cycle in

his country. He is subtly addresses the way nouvelle vague directors failed to incorporate an

oppositional feminine voice in their films (with the exception of Agnès Vardas's films). *Celine*

and Julie Go Boating differs from previous New Wave films because it represents what has been

excluded from Western cinema: female subjectivity, friendship, and sexuality.

The film is also self-aware of itself as a "Jacques Rivette" film. By this I mean that it

presents and transforms many of the narrative conventions and thematic concerns that Rivette

developed in his earlier films. The first of these is the thematic concern of theatrical performance

and the narrative emphasis on a group of artists preparing for a theatre performance. In each of

his earlier films, Rivette depicts a group of theatre performers preparing for a production of a

classical stage play. *Paris Belongs to Us* (1961) has *Pericles*, *L'Amour fou* (1969) has Racine's

version of *Andromaque*, and *Out 1:* (*Spectre* and *Don't Touch Me*) (1971) has *Prometheus Bound*

and *Seven Against Thebes*. What is most peculiar about this auteurist convention, noted by Peter

Harcourt, is that all of the plays are completely irrelevant to characters in the films' respective

stories.[169] The classical status of these plays is juxtaposed to the supremely modern world

settings established by Rivette. His films always take place in Paris, an urban metropolis, and the

atmosphere of conspiracy and paranoia recalls Fritz Lang's thrillers like *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*

(1922), Louis Feuillade's crime serials, and strange film noirs like Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me*

Deadly (1955). They also recall the conspiracy plots of Thomas Pynchon's early novels like *V.*

(1963) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) which present conspiracies so complicated that the

protagonists are never able to decipher them or even determine if they actually exist. The

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[169] Peter Harcourt, "On Jacques Rivette (The Early Films)", *Cine-Tracts* 1, no. 3 (1977-78): 41-52.

conspiracies in Rivette's films are so elusive that we never really are given a clear picture of them; we only see their effects in the psyche of the films' characters which take the form of deeply felt paranoia and melancholia. Rivette interjects a sense of crushing doom above the head of the protagonist (true for *Spectre* but not for the longer cut, *Don't Touch Me*), and the fact that the characters always fail miserably to stage the theatre performance only compounds this atmosphere of doom. The thematic concerns are modified in each subsequent film (not including *The Nun* (1966), although that film has its fair share of secrets and anxiety), and Rivette modifies the narrative formula slightly as well, making the films longer, more complex, and features more instances of complicating the conventions of cinematic storytelling.

Celine and Julie Go Boating is a magical transformation of the themes introduced in Rivette's earlier films. The notion of another narrative work being presented as a central piece of narrative, the staging of a play, is repurposed as a literal "house of fiction," Jonathan Rosenbaum's apt term for Rivette's creation of a fictional world-within-a-world.[170] The film is based around the contact of two spaces: one is real, denoted as Paris in the 1970s, where the titular characters, Celine (Juliet Berto) and Julie (Dominique Labourier), both exist, and eventually find each other, and the other is a mysterious magical world that appears to exist as a pocket universe inside a large house that Celine accidentally discovers halfway through the movie. Rather than reference an ancient play like in his earlier films, Rivette now uses a form of narrative that is both closer to the period that his characters live in and he refers to the norms of storytelling found in narrative cinema: Henry James's "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" (1885) and "The Other House" (1896). In this film, the intertextual reference to another

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[170] Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Placing Movies: The Practice of Film Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 142-152.

work no longer is used to create a scenario around failure or the non-achievement of the quest

but the work is used to thematically articulate the experience of female friendship. The story of

the fantasy house is loosely based on the two works by James mentioned above. Rivette modified

and combined the plots of both stories, so in his version it is about a man named Olivier (Barbet

Schroeder) who had promised his wife before she died that he will not remarry for the sake of

their daughter, a sickly child named Madlyn (Nathalie Asnar). Two women live in the house with

him, Camille (Bulle Ogier) and Sophie (Marie-France Pisier), who are both vying for the

affections of Olivier, and the story ends with the murder of Madlyn. The story in the house of

fiction is a masochistic female fantasy, a drama of dominance that comes from the nuclear family

where everything revolves around male power and female submission. Thematically, the story of

the house of fiction represents a vision of female relationships that is diametrically opposed to

the one presented with Celine and Julie's relationship.

The depiction of female friendship is the main way that Rivette produces an ex-centric

film in contrast to patriarchal cinema. *Celine and Julie Go Boating* was a collaborative effort

with Rivette and the four lead actresses — Dominique Labourier, Juliet Berto, Bulle Ogier,

Marie-France Pisier — who all contributed to the dialogue and story. They then workshopped the

film in rehearsals before finally settling on a shooting script.[171] Already, at the level of

production, Rivette included female discourses in the artistic process. Both of the realities of the

film present different ways for Rivette and his collaborators to present a narrative about female

friendship, sexuality, and autonomy that is ex-centric to Western cinema. For example, after

Celine and Julie become friends they mutually liberate each other from domineering male

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[171] Robin Wood, "Narrative Pleasure: Two Films of Jacques Rivette," *Film Quarterly* 35, no.1 (1981): 7.

relationships in their lives: Celine impersonates Julie on a date with her boyfriend only to scare him off, and later Julie impersonates Celine at her job as a cabaret magician and mocks the men who are trying to option Celine off for a tour across Europe. Rivette introduces another transformation of his auteurist narrative conventions by providing a face for the antagonists of the film. In his earlier films, the sense of doom caused by the hints of a widespread conspiracy never resulted in the characters discovering the culprits, and in some sense there is even doubt as to whether the conspiratorial network even exists. In *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, the female characters are able to confront the antagonists directly (both villains are male ignoramuses). Rivette and his collaborators even demonstrate how foolish the men are in the scenes where Celine and Julie impersonate each other. They both have extremely unconvincing disguises of each other, but they are successful because the men they are rejecting are not perceptive enough to know they are dealing with imposters. Celine and Julie look nothing like each other yet they fool Julie's boyfriend and Celine's bosses, presenting them as both incompetent and the misrepresentation created by male vision. The mutual acts of liberation bring them closer together. Eventually Celine and Julie are filmed as if they are psychically united, and they grow in mutual support; from their first meeting each woman was always sensitive to the other's body cues but eventually they move in magical unison.[172] Unlike the male characters in Rivette's earlier films, Celine and Julie do not fail but succeed in their small quests to liberate each other from their respective male antagonists.

The success in the so-called real world of Paris is doubled with Celine and Julie's eventual intervention in the story of the house of fiction. The fantasy house sequences are coded

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[172] Julia Lesage, "Celine and Julie Go Boating: Subversive Fantasy," *Jump Cut* 24-25 (1981): 36-43.

as patriarchal realist cinema through the filmmaking techniques which emulate classical Hollywood and the masochistic female melodrama plot. Rivette represents the women in the fantasy house as cold, overdetermined, and trapped in their upper-class, heterosexual familial roles, living without spontaneity and authenticity in contrast to the playful and free existence of Celine and Julie. After the friendship of Celine and Julie is established, they both eventually visit the house of fiction separately. After they visit the house, they can only recall what happens after eating the green candy that magically appears in their pockets when they leave. Rivette films the remembrance sequences as if the women are two spectators in a film, and the actors are blocked sitting on a box, staring just above the camera. The act of remembering the events in the magical house is likened to the act going to the movies. Therefore, the fantasy melodrama that repeats itself everyday represents the cinema itself, and the repetition of its story can be interpreted as the reproduction of patriarchal discourses film history. By extension, the decision by Celine and Julie to save Madlyn from the house of fiction represents the transition from passive to active spectator positions. They duplicate the autonomy they have created for each other in the so-called real world and are now going to liberate another female character in the magical world of the house of fiction. Unlike the two women in the fantasy house who are forced to repeat themselves every day, Celine and Julie are contrasted as spontaneous and courageous subjects that intervene in the narrative rather than blindly follow the roles given to them which they actualize in the real-world and the roles they assume in the house of fiction.

Rivette ends the film with another subversion of patriarchal film form by refusing to provide a closed ending. Commercial cinema in the West usually ends with narrative closure where the action of the plot is brought back to equilibrium, so a primary feature of patriarchal

film narratives is the closed ending, wherein the male author delivers all of the narrative knowledge to a passive spectator. Even though *Celine and Julie Go Boating* is structured like a romance quest narrative where all of the conflict is resolved in the end (except in this story, female, not male, heroes save the woman in distress), Rivette and his female collaborators refuse narrative closure in the final act. The epilogue of the film circles back to the beginning, and the characters end the film where it began, in the park at the beginning of the flirtatious pursuit, but this time Celine pursues Julie. The circular nature of the story allows for the characters to spiral out into a multitude of possible stories and conclusions. Rivette is suggesting with Celine waking up suddenly from a midday nap on the park bench that we just watched one possibility for these characters, and another one is suggested with the reversal of the roles observed in the beginning of the film. The stories of female liberation depicted in the film, first in the lives of Celine and Julie, then Madlyn from the house of fiction, are now transferred to the level of narrative structure where the closed end of patriarchal cinema is exchanged for a radically open one.

The final form of ex-centric magical realism cinema is the depiction of alternative forms of sexuality and sexual orientation. These ex-centric ideologies are a direct consequence of patriarchal discourses in cinema which structure plots around the heterosexual couple and the nuclear family. Homosexual positions and transgender figures were always treated in suspect ways, either depicting them as deviants, or as outright villains in crime and horror films, and eventually as replacements for supporting female characters. I will discuss each ex-centric discourse separately below.

The primary way magical realist cinema depicts homosexual desire and relationships in film is typically between two men and in the form of a journey that references myth. Three

magical realist films exemplify this trend: *Gozu* (2003), *Tropical Malady* (2004), and The

Ornithologist (2016). The term 'myth' in these cases means something like an allegorical

structure within the story itself which uses older forms of storytelling from secular and sacred

texts. In each film the so-called real world that resembles our own is established from the outset

and then the realism, defined as plausibility and semblance to everyday reality, is systematically

warped and punctured with strange events and inexplicable occurrences. The notion of descent is

common to all films, usually involving a journey from a place of familiarity to one of mystery

and danger where the protagonist is given an outsider status. Frye noted that at a certain point in

literary history, explained as a history of modes, literature tended toward irony, and irony

included more thematics from mythologies, like ritual sacrifices and dying gods, but also

religious ones that reference the lives of patron saints, miracles, and the war between heaven and

hell. Without the recognition of this dimension in literature, that has now become classical for

the postmodern period (naturalism, modernism, and early texts of postmodern literature), certain

texts and authors would be incomprehensible (Frye cites the work of Joyce and Henry James).[173]

The same interpretive concern exists in cinema where certain films would be nonsensical without

recognizing their use of mythical narrative forms, characters, and symbols. Acid westerns like

The Shooting (1966) and *El Topo* (1970) would be even more incomprehensible than they are

already, and postmodern films like *O Brother Where Are Thou?* (2000), *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995),

and *The House That Jack Built* invoke mythological narratives and rely on the audience (even if

the directors are not familiar with the original texts in the case of the Coen brothers) to know the

mythological reference points to comprehend the story.

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[173] Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, 42.

In Miike's *Gozu*, the protagonists' journey into suburbia is modelled after Japanese myths about accompanying someone to the land of the dead. *Gozu* is also a queer love story disguised as a yakuza thriller that transforms the trope of fraternity between brothers-in-arms of the yakuza gang. Minami (Hideki Sone) is a virginal, low-level yakuza whose professional mentor and dear friend, Ozaki (Shô Aikawa), has become mentally unstable. In the first act, Ozaki suspects that a fluffy white dog is an assassin specifically trained to dispatch yakuza, which gives him cause to brutally kill the dog in front of a restaurant. Minami is ordered by the top boss to escort Ozaki to the yakuza dump disposal site, a car scrap lot in a suburb called Nagoya. Minami is tortured over the prospect of having to kill his closest friend. He accidentally kills Ozaki while driving, when Minami abruptly breaks, causing Ozaki to smash his head on the dashboard and break his neck. The body of his dead friend disappears when Ozaki leaves the car for a few minutes, and now the entire gang is paranoid because they believe Ozaki is going to assassinate the head boss. Meanwhile Minami encounters a series of strange characters and occurrences in Nagoya which is visualized like a mythological space with ghosts, devils in the form of a man with the head of a cow, and a mature woman with constantly lactating breasts which she uses to supply all the milk for her hotel guests. As Minami's journey into suburbia gets stranger and increasingly resembles the fantastical nature of myths, we also learn more about his sexual identity. The flashback scene involving Minami and Ozaki shows us that Minami is a virgin man in his twenties. Ozaki brazenly talks about Minami's large penis (he refers to it as "enchanting"), encourages him to start having sex with women, and gives him a pair of crotchless women's underwear as a good luck charm. The film directly refers to male organs again when Minami must look through the yakuza dump lot-keeper's collection of dead yakuza skins, that hang like pressed suits at the dry-

cleaners (the image of pressed human skins recalls underworld imagery), and identifies Ozaki's body, not by his tattoos, but by his penis. Minami's sexual identity is initially disconnected from the narrative action until we meet a beautiful and mysterious woman that appears in the back of Minami's car, the same place where Ozaki disappeared earlier. She is Ozaki reincarnated as a woman which she proves to Minami by recalling the conversation we saw in the flashback regarding Minami's large penis (this is not enough evidence so the female Ozaki also tells him other secrets that he discussed with Ozaki like how he has frequent urges to shave his pubic hair). Minami informs his boss that he has disposed of Ozaki and now the narrative focuses on the relationship between Minami and the female Ozaki.

Gozu creates a literal depiction of a common discursive concept used in narrative cinema, the hom(m)o-sexual structures of patriarchal relations. This term originally came from Luce Irigaray's feminist social theory, and she used the term to define the way men structure society around the exchange of women, the first exploited class of human history.[174] The incest taboo dictates which women can be exchanged between each group of males, and all human culture refers in some form back to male desire. The hom(m)o-sexual dimension to patriarchal structures is found in the systematic ignorance of feminine subjectivity and sexuality so that relations between men and women are in truth a disguise for relations between men and men. Women are simply a mediator, or, rather, heterosexual relations are an alibi for hom(m)o-sexual relations. Homosexuality in immediate terms (love between two people of the same gender identity) has been prohibited in practice in patriarchal societies until very recently but occurs at the level of social organization so that men can have "relations" among themselves. Irigaray's notion of

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[174] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 170-173.

hom(m)o-sexual (a pun on the French word for "man") can be extrapolated to explain basic character tropes and narratological conventions in Western cinema. In certain subgenres like the crime and gangster film – but also common in adventure and "buddy-cop" films, or any subgenre intended for male audiences – the most important relationships in the plot are between the male characters. Female characters, usually a love-interest or wife, are utilized in two ways: they die, which gives motivation for the male characters to defeat the villains, or as an interpersonal mediator that facilitates the relationship between two men, usually strengthening their emotional bond in some way. The description of patriarchal structures as containing a hom(m)o-sexual dynamic in a socially mediated form explains in part why action movies or crime or adventure films, contain such overt homoerotic subtexts. In Hollywood, the zenith of homoeroticism in action and crime films was in the late eighties, and in Hong Kong and Japan it was in the mid-nineties. Miike is directly addressing the hom(m)o-sexual nature of yakuza films which place a strong emphasis on fraternal loyalty between male yakuza members. In *Gozu*, the ethical turmoil that Minami experiences after he is ordered to kill his mentor is transcoded in the plot as sexual anxiety. The appearance of Ozaki in female form allows their relationship to emerge beyond the level of subtext, perfectly encapsulating the metaphor of hom(m)o-sexual relations: heterosexuality (in *Gozu*, represented as the romance between Minami and the female Ozaki) is simply an alibi for relations between men.

The reincarnation of Ozaki, along with all of the other uncanny characters and events, would be enough absurdity for most directors, but Miike's tendencies toward excess and a post-logic world allow the magical transformations to continue. Minami and female Ozaki finally decide to have sex after he prevents the yakuza boss from having sex with her. Ozaki wears the

crotchless underwear that the male version of Ozaki gave to Minami as a good luck charm to celebrate their first time together. They have sex, but then Minami's large penis gets stuck inside the female Ozaki. They squirm around the room until Minami discovers that the male Ozaki's hand is inside the female version and clutching on his organ. The male Ozaki emerges head first out of his female version as if he is being born. The scene when the male Ozaki emerges is grotesque and unsettling, especially because Miike uses screeching violins on the soundtrack and a hyper-realistic sound scape for the sounds of Ozaki leaving the birth canal. After Minami inseminates the female Ozaki, his return allows Ozaki to now exist as two individuals, male and female, without any references to Jung's theory of male and female psychic manifestations. The film ends with the three of them in a loving relationship, signified by the quick insert of their three toothbrushes on the bathroom counter.

Miike takes the metaphor of heterosexuality as an alibi for homosexual relationships and makes it even more literal. Minami can now be with the male version of Ozaki within a polygamous three-way relationship. The film's finale presents the completion of the quest as the discovery and actualization of Minami's homosexual identity. This theme is foregrounded when we compare the sexuality of Minami's boss (Renji Ishibashi) with that of Minami. The boss is shown as someone who can only have sex with a woman if he shoves a large cooking ladle up his rear. He even has a monument to his sex ladles that we see when he tries to have sex with the female Ozaki. The boss character and his desperate acts of sexual relief are another image of heterosexual relations as an alibi for homosexuality in a literal sense. Minami's gradual recognition of being in love with his mentor and expressing it through the female version is contrasted with the corrupted version of closeted homosexual desire exemplified when the boss

has sex with women which seems to imply grief more than pleasure. In general, the use of magical realism in this film establishes a world that resembles the world of myth where Minami must accompany his friend to the lower world (in the film's plot, escort him to the dump site for yakuza assassinations), encounter the evil spirits and villains, and emerge to the world above. In this case, he begins as a virginal heterosexual man, discovers the romantic truth of his relationship with his mentor, and emerges as a homosexual after defeating the villainous yakuza boss who demanded he kill his lover in the first place. The ex-centric dimension of is precisely related to the way Miike transforms the subtextual homoeroticism of yakuza films into a queer love story.

Tropical Malady presents a queer love story in two parts where both involve a homosexual coupling but use vastly different film forms to present the plots. The film proceeds from a place of naturalism only to reconfigure the entire story elements as a mythical hunting quest using the same actors in both sections. The first part is a quiet and touching love story between a soldier, Keng (Banlop Monloi) and a local ice factory worker, Tong (Sakda Kaewbuadee). Their love story is modelled after older melodrama romance films that are popular in Thailand which the director Apichatpong Weerasethakul references by having his leads whisper cheesy lines to each other ("When I gave you The Clash tape, I forgot to give you my heart. You can have it today"). The first section ends with Keng sitting in bed, looking at photos of Tong, and dialogue from outside his room speaks about another cow that has gone missing and a large paw print (hinting at possibly a tiger attack). The voices say how the villagers are "scared shitless" of this big tiger hunting their livestock.

Keng continues to look at the photos which begin to flicker like a film projection until we switch to the second section which begins with a brief interlude called "A Spirit's Path," inspired by the works of Noi Inthanon and starring the same actors as the first section. Noi Inthanon is the pen name for the Thai writer Malai Chuphinit, who wrote jungle-adventure novels in the 1950s collected under the title *Long Phrai* (his other pen name was Mai Anong for his novel about rural life called *Thung Maharat*). The brief story is about a powerful Khmer shaman that played tricks on villagers in the jungle. Weerasethakul briefly visualizes the content of the story by showing a hunter being tricked by a woman with a tiger tail poking out from under her skirt. We learn that the hunter killed the tiger and trapped the shaman into the spirit of the tiger. Thai myth evokes a spirituality that brushes against our conceptions of the physical world. We do not usually think of spirits as being able to be trapped inside another spirit but typically inside of bodies. We are then told that the corpse of the tiger can be viewed at the Kanchanaburi Museum which is a specific phenomenal detail that Weerasethakul interjects here which helps establish the magical realist atmosphere of the film. The intertitles continue and inform us that the every night the shaman's spirit turns into a tiger to haunt travelers and it is here where Weerasethakul reintroduces Keng, who walks into the frame wearing his army gear and armed with a shotgun. In North American and European film criticism, it is often repeated that the film's two sections are ambiguous in their connection to each other but that is simply not true. Other reviewers, possibly misguided by the two-part structure of the movie, looked to divide the film into three structures by interpreting the second section's opening as a short film placed in between two features.[175] The brief use of intertitles and the visualization of the hunter is simply the first act of the second half and not a

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[175] S.F. Said, "Tales From the River," *Sight and Sound* 14, no.11 (2004): 27.

separate film. *Tropical Malady* is one of those rare films where its thematics are easy to decipher, but at the most basic level of recounting the story, there is so much discrepancy as to what is actually happening to the characters amongst the critical community. In any case, Weerasethakul references the *Long Phrai* and mythology from Thai folklore, most likely a reference to a Suea Saming, a male or female ghost that has transformed into a tiger as a result of black magic, a being that is similar to a skin-walker in Navajo culture, as a new setting to depict the queer romance between Keng and Tong.

The ending of the first section mentions a tiger terrorizing the villagers which not only anticipates the tiger spirit in the second half but recalls the opening quote of the movie attributed to Ton Nakajima. The quote reads: "[a]ll of us are by nature wild beasts. Our duty as humans is to become like trainers who keep their animals in check, and even teach them to perform tasks alien to their bestiality." Keng remains as a soldier in this story, but Tong is now the shaman whose spirit has been trapped in the spirit of the tiger. The villagers are terrified of the tiger, and it is Keng's mission to hunt him down. The setting has been transformed as well because it appears to be neither rural nor urban but rather decidedly the wildness, a jungle where the sounds of nature are pushed to the front of the mix. As Keng continues to track the tiger spirit he sheds more of his army gear and weapons so that finally he is only armed with a knife. He catches fish in mud puddles and becomes dirtier and more animal like as he journeys deeper in the jungle. Weerasethakul uses film techniques from silent film, utilizing intertitles to convey dialogue and exposition along with inserts of primitive paintings of the spirits and the action of the story. The monkeys in the jungle speak to Keng and give him advice on how to end the battle with the tiger: "kill him to free him from the ghost world. Or let him devour you and enter his world." Finally

Keng and Tong have a standoff, with Tong now transformed into the tiger form standing on a high tree branch staring down at Keng on the ground. Both are looking intensely at each other, their eyes filled with desire and fear. The tiger spirit speaks to Keng, telling him that he misses the soldier, he wants to devour him, and he can have his memories. The opening section is repeated again but this time the inter-title tells us that the shaman is "[a] creature whose life exists only by memories of another," possibly referencing the earlier section of the film which has now become the memories of other characters that give these versions of Keng and Tong existence. Whatever the relationship between the characters of the two sections, Weerasethakul presents the final scenes with the romantic pair in similar ways: Tong and Keng stare at each other with desire, and they symbolically surrender themselves to be devoured by each other. In the first section, they do it metaphorically by licking each other's hands, and in the second section they imply, off-camera, that they do it literally when the tiger consumes the soldier.

Tropical Malady is an ex-centric work in the magical realist mode because it depicts a queer love story in a film form that is completely alien to both mainstream filmmaking in the Global North and the way Thai films represent queerness. The first wave of queer cinema in Thailand is called the "bad karma" period which are films concerned with the struggles of being queer where the character becomes depressed and the film often ends in their suicide (the most popular of these films is *The Last Song* (1985)). The second wave occurred in the late-nineties when the film industry in Thailand expanded and films like *The Iron Ladies* (2000) appeared. *The Iron Ladies* is a sports drama featuring queer and transgender characters. This period moved away from the "bad karma" plots and celebrated queer identities in the context of sports. Other types include melodramas, specifically ones with teenage characters that are queer or

transgender. Weerasethakul's film is unique in Thailand because he uses magical realism by to visualize queer subjectivity. But it also stands out because *Tropical Malady* distills the most essential part of a love story, the act of losing your identity in another, and creates a mythological journey into the heart of darkness out of a queer romance.

The most recent magical realist film that depicts ex-centric discourses concerned with queer subjectivity is João Pedro Rodrigues's *The Ornithologist*. The film is a profane depiction of the life of Saint Anthony of Lisbon, known as the patron saint of lost objects. Rodrigues reworks several of the legends regarding the life of Saint Anthony including like the story about him preaching to a large school of fish and the test of the eucharist with a dumb mule. In this film, the titular character is Fernando (Paul Hamy), an ornithologist studying black storks in Portugal. He is so enamoured with birdwatching that he loses his kayak in the river rapids and all of his supplies along with it. Two women discover Fernando and quote Saint Anthony as motivation for helping him. They are afraid of the evil spirits in the forest and blame Fernando for causing them to stray from their path, so they tie him up to a tree. They mistrust him because he does not believe in the spirits and represents a scientific rational position in contrast to a religious one. Fernando manages to escape the binds and shortly after he encounters a deaf goat herder named Jesus. They distrust each other at first but eventually go swimming together naked and then have sex. Later, they fight over a sweater that Jesus stole from Fernando, and he kills Jesus with the goat herder's knife. Fernanda then encounters three Amazonian women hunters, riding topless on horseback, hunting deer with their dogs, and who speak to each other in Latin. They shoot a deer, and Fernando is simultaneously shot, joining his existence with the deer in some magical connection. They check on Fernando and offer to bring him to their community,

but he refuses. They refer to him as Anthony and tell him a white dove is waiting for him. The dove surveils him after the Amazons leave. The film ends with Fernando finding a dead body that he breathes life into (a reference to the gifted tongue of Saint Anthony who was regarded as a great preacher) who says he is Jesus's twin brother Thomas. He avenges his dead brother and slits Fernando's neck. At this point, Rodrigues is now playing Fernando who refers to himself as Anthony, and he quotes religious dogma about rising from the dead. Fernando says a metafictional line to Thomas: "I am no longer the man I used to be. I came here to right this wrong." The blood from his neck sprays the white dove, and Fernando changes back and forth from Hamy to the director Rodrigues in the role of this character. We are now in Padua, the city where Saint Anthony resided after he was appointed to the position of Northern Superior of Italy. Fernando, now being fully performed by Rodrigues, walks with Thomas into Padua. Upon arrival they are greeted by the two women that tied Fernando up in the bushes for his lack of faith. They congratulate him on finding his "path."

Rodrigues connects a man finding his faith with a queer romantic coupling. It is unclear whether the character of Fernando is depicted as straight or queer in the earlier section of the film; he is simply depicted as a scientist completely lost in his research, hence he accidentally loses all of his camping gear in the rapids. As he journeys further into the jungle, becoming more geographically "lost" while finding his identity (which turns out to be a contemporary version of Saint Anthony) he becomes more queer. He sleeps with Jesus, refuses to accompany the beautiful Amazonian women that ask him many times to join them, and in the final scene, he is shown holding hands with Thomas as they enter Padua. Their romantic coupling is depicted in the story world of the film as coterminous with Fernando discovering that he is the patron saint of lost

things. *The Ornithologist* is both similar to *Tropical Malady*, which features a journey into a mysterious jungle full of spirits and strange beings, and *Naked Lunch*, which presents Bill's quest to become a writer as a quest to rid himself of his heterosexual identity. The construction of the protagonists' identities in all of these films is intimately tied to their expression as queer. In magical realist cinema, the images and thematics of myth are evoked to reference a pre-modern world, one that is alien to heteronormative cultural formations that marginalize queer subject positions. Ancient myths and folklore images are used and rewritten by magical realist cinema to begin a new narrative trajectory that includes this ex-centric subject position.

In terms of transgender representation, magical realist cinema uses mythological narratives as thematic reference points and narrative structure as well. The one major difference is that magical realist films take the transgender subject as an imagery for contesting rational assumptions about personal identity. Magical realist films frequently use beings that contain two genders, or individuals that contain two identities in one, which is one of the main ways magical realism in general questions Western rationality's depiction of the centered ego. *Orlando* and *Dark at Noon* (1992) feature characters that magically contain either two gender identities (Orlando) or two beings in one – in *Dark at Noon* Anthony (John Hurt) and his wife Ines (Lorraine Evanoff) occupy the body of Le Marquis (also John Hurt). We can also include the female and male versions of Ozaki that reside in the female version of Ozaki temporarily as another metaphor for transgender identity but in that film the status as being a third-gender character is narratively changed once Minami learns to engage with both versions in a triangular relationship. A similar love-triangle is created through the body of John Malkovich in *Being John Malkovich* with Lotte and Maxine. Lotte can only express herself sexually when in the

body of Malkovich which is where she realizes her homosexual identity. The two-in-one being

found in these magical realist films is like an inverted doppelgänger figure. However, the ethical

dimension of the doppelgänger is removed for one of sexual difference: a being that contains

both female and male versions of the same person or the body as a site of play and desire. When

actual dopplegängers are used in magical realism they do not contain this sexual dimension: both

Enemy (2013) and *The Double* (2013) follow the traditional plot of the dopplegänger as the

"evil" version of the protagonist. All of this is to acknowledge that with respect to transgender

representation, magical realism typically associates it with alternative versions of personal

identity but without probing any further into the experience of transgender subjectivity.

The one exception to this trend is an early film by Bertrand Bonello, *Tiresia* (2003). Like

the queer films discussed above, *Tiresia* follows the trend of magical realist films depicting queer

subjectivities by referencing myth. This film adapts a specific mythical character, one that

figures prominently in Book 3 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid's work, Tiresias was asked by

Juno and Jove to judge whether men or women have more fun during sex. Tiresias stabbed two

snakes that were having sex which turned him into a woman. He/she lived for seven autumns as

a woman and then stabbed the same pair of snakes having sex again which turned him back into

a man. With this experience behind him, Tiresias concluded that women enjoy sex more,

therefore siding with Jove. This angered Juno so she damned Tiresias to eternal blindness, but

Jove pitied him and granted him the gift of prophecy. Bonello's film begins with a transwoman

named Tiresia (Clara Choveaux), an immigrant from Brazil working as an escort on the outskirts

of Paris. She is kidnapped by a transphobic man, known as Terranova (Laurent Lucas) that we

discover later is a Catholic priest known as Brother François to his church. He keeps her locked

up for so long that she begins to lose her femininity because he does not supply her with her medication. He fantasizes about having sex with her but in reality can never go through with it. Finally, when her body changes too much, he decides to get rid of her. He stabs her eyes out and leaves her for dead. A young girl named Anna (Celia Catalefo) finds Tiresia and nurses her back to health. At this point in the film, Bonello visualizes Tiresia's body transformation from the lack of hormones by having a male actor (Thiago Thelès) perform as her. Tiresia has shaved her head, she wears loose brown clothing, evoking a monastic figure, and she can now predict the future. The townspeople get word of her power and they visit her in Anna's home. The local church discusses the disruption to collective dogmatism and fear that Tiresia is an actual miracle worker that will draw people away from the church. In a sick twist of fate, Brother François, who is revealed to the audience as Tiresia's abuser, questions Tiresia on many occasions without letting her know that he is her kidnapper. Brother François and his transphobia are revealed yet again when he speaks about the evil inherent in the rose. He believes that humans intervened in the growth of roses and therefore they must be corrupt. He likens the corrupted nature of the rose with transgender subjectivity, completely unable to comprehend the reality of gender dysphoria of transgender people because of his dogmatic logic. Tiresia becomes a real miracle worker for the townspeople, replacing their need for the Catholic church in this community. Brother Francois retaliates by running Tiresia over with his car right before she predicts that Anna will be the virgin mother of Christ.

Bonello's film makes the body the site for social conflict, having Tiresia, a transwoman in an extremely vulnerable social position, become the battleground for reactionary ideological struggles with alternative forms of sexuality. The wager element of the original story between

Jove and Juno is transformed into the personal and psycho-sexual drama of the Catholic priest battling his own repressed trans-amorous feelings. The momentary redemption that Tiresia experiences is tainted because her body has reverted back to something that traumatizes her. Her newfound magical gifts are her only defense against an institution that wants to erase her and ultimately succeeds. The ex-centric dimension of this film is to position a transwoman as a figure of wisdom and grace in contrast to the cruel nature of religious institutions. Magical realism in this film repurposes Ovid's mythology to code a transwoman as a powerful martyr figure. Her story of torture and redemption through magic is used in this film to depict the very real experiences of being the most marginalized subject position in the Global North.

Chapter 7. The Utopian Dimension in Magical Realist Cinema

The first instance of magical realism in the cinema is the ending to *Arsenal* by Alexander Dovzhenko which also presents a utopian image. The film is about the Kiev Arsenal January Uprising in 1918 where a group of workers helped the Bolshevik army against the Ukrainian National Parliament Central Rada. The final scene involves a lone worker that identifies himself as "A Ukrainian worker!" when three soldiers confront him as he is about to start firing a machine gun. He beckons the nationalists to fire at him, and when they do the bullets bounce off his chest. They accuse him of wearing body armour, but he rips open his shirt to expose his unharmed, bare chest. The soldiers flee in terror. This scene encapsulates what is germane to both utopianism and magical realism: the synthesis of realism and magic and an imaginary vision that presents an alternative to the present conditions of existence which here takes the form of a member of the oppressed class defeating the oppressors through a magical intrusion in reality. The worker's magical defiance of the historical continuum is a positive utopian image of the oppressed who are rejecting the victors of history. It is a powerful image and would influence numerous future films that injected a magical realist scene at the climax while excluding politically utopian discourses. Films such as *Ordet* (1955), *The Virgin Spring* (1960), and *Silent Light* (2007) would use the emotional intention and structure of this magical realist climax but recalibrate it for sacred depictions of cosmological intervention in human affairs. *Magnolia* (1999), in particular its scene with the falling frogs, is a magical realist allegory for a collective damn bursting of all the painful emotions bursting into reality. *Dead or Alive*, discussed in the previous chapter, uses the magical realist ending in a similar way to *Magnolia* but also employs

the sacred gestures of the mode mentioned above, by expanding the dramatic tensions of the rivals into a world-ending collision of violence.

By utopia and magical realism, I do not simply mean to discuss utopias imagined in magical realist works, although those could be included in this discussion as well. The term utopia refers to a literary genre whose form was created by Thomas More in 1516. Utopia is a neologism that More punned on the word "eutopia" (meaning "Good Place") and utopia or "outopia" meaning "No-place" or "Not-place," indicating a more perfect vision of a hypothetical human society.[176] The primary characteristic of utopian literature is concerned with questions that resemble Plato's discussion in *The Laws* which deals with questions surrounding the best form to be devised for human societies.[177] Utopia is a literary form that has now become a sub-genre of science fiction in contemporary literature, but in fact it was present and was a genre in its own right before science fiction emerged. There are numerous definitions of utopia in literature but Darko Suvin's is the most useful. Suvin defines utopia as a literary description of an imaginary community that is more perfect than the empirical world of the author and reader.[178] Utopias typically involve descriptions and discussions of human communities, sociopolitical institutions, tradition, culture, and individual relationships that are depicted as being better than contemporary reality. They project an alternative historical trajectory where humankind created a better system of relationships than the one real history. Utopias are not meant to be ahistorical visions of the human collective but completely relative to their historical

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[176] Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," *Utopian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 6.

[177] Darko Suvin, *Defined By A Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 17-18.

[178] Ibid., 30.

moment of creation. The utopias created 300 years ago might have been more perfect versions when they were written but they might present a social collective that is inferior to ours in the present. And the obverse is true: a literary utopia created today might horrify readers 300 years ago. I cannot think of any magical realist films that would qualify as utopian in the sense defined by Suvin and other theorists of utopia. Magical realist films might contain elements of utopian narratives but they never take the form of the utopian genre given that most magical realist films work within the ironic/satiric mode (the combination of extreme mimesis with romance) as Frye would define the term, and irony is the obverse of the utopian.[179] The utopian dimensions in magical realist films refer to a tradition of human thought that predates the utopian literary genre. Lyman Tower Sargent distinguishes between "utopianism" and utopia. Sargent's definition of utopia overlaps with Suvin's theory, defining utopia as a non-existent society explicated with a high degree of phenomenal description, located in a particular time and space, and a positive utopia is a non-existent society that the reader is intended to view as considerably better than empirical society.[180] Utopianism is the more general activity that refers to "social dreaming" and has three distinct types: utopias of sensual gratification ("body" utopias) and utopias of human intention ("city" utopias); communitarianism; and utopian social theory. Utopianism therefore did not begin with More's work but has existed throughout human history, beginning with our mythologies of various forms of paradise. Modern versions of utopia are essentially descriptions of the imaginary community as being realizable through human action and the creation of a community that is superior to the empirical society of the author and reader.

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[179] Ibid., 36.

[180] Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 9.

The closest magical realist films have come to the utopian narrative mode is in films like *Miracle in Milan* and *Black Cat, White Cat.* In these films, there are communities that are separated from mainstream society, usually because they are defined as an excess group to that society. They are marginalized either ethnically in the case of *Black Cat, White Cat*, or economically and socially in the case of *Miracle in Milan*. In *Miracle in Milan* we see the intentional creation of a community of lumpen figures who created a collective outside the relations of capitalism and politics of Italian society with the literal pieces of excess: a vacant lot and pieces of garbage. This social collective is more collective-minded than individualistic and De Sica depicts it as a better version, in terms of interpersonal relationships and labour relations, than capitalist society. Kusturica goes even further than De Sica by showing the Romani people as having already created their enclave despite appearing archaic compared to late-capitalism. Theirs is a thriving community where labour is presented as not exploitative or alienating, and there exists a more direct relationship between humans and nature. Another film that might qualify as utopian, but which does not have the necessary thematic content of characters intentionally creating a better society than the empirical society of its production, is Raúl Ruiz's *Dark at Noon* (1992). The film follows a government scientist, Felicien Pascal (Didier Bourdon), who works in an imaginary department called the Ministry of Miracles. After his father's death, he investigates a villa in Portugal that his father had bought. The utopian aspect of the community is the post-religious framework that marks the space. There are so many miracles and magical events that people have taken them for granted and have stopped attending church. The priest who ministers to an empty parish curses all of the miracles and is upset with the fact that his institution has become obsolete. Religion, in many ways, despite its uses of the Edenic

Paradise and Heaven, is a counter-utopian mythology based on the way it directs existence and thought away from the empirical world and towards some form of transcendental realm. Utopia, even though it imagines a community that does not exist, is firmly grounded in the empirical world: it is a method for overcoming the exploitative relations of the material world, a heuristic device for devising a more perfect society. Utopia is epistemological and not ontological.[181] This is why I am interpreting this aspect of *Dark at Noon* as potentially a utopian magical realist film: it imagines a social collective where by virtue of the magic intrusions of reality, a social institution that has been historically oppressive (contra Émile Durkheim's formulation of religion) has become obsolete.

There are other methodological tools to use to decipher the relationship between utopia and magical realism. One such way would be to think about the term "utopianism" (the act of social dreaming) rather than utopia, which is a specific literary form that has since become a sub-genre of science fiction literature. This would mean studying the utopianism or utopian dimension of magical realist films. I am following Jameson's theory of utopia in narrative analysis which was developed in the conclusion to *The Political Unconscious* entitled "The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology" and in his article "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture."[182] Utopia in Jameson's theoretical discussions means a dimension of the text that references or uses social anxieties as raw material for the narrative. Furthermore, it refers to how narratives project a vision of the social collective, unconsciously or not, and one of the main methodological purposes of explicating a text's political unconscious is to expose this utopian dimension buried

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[181] Suvin, *Defined By A Hollow*, 33.

[182] Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*, no.1 (1979): 130-148.

in narratives. However, the notion of utopia can never be separated from the concept of ideology, an insight that Jameson borrows from Benjamin ("[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism") and also Adorno (art can never escape the ideological realm entirely because it projects an idealist realm outside of material relations).[183] Jameson sees the relationship between ideology (or reification) and utopia as a dialectic, where one cannot exist without the other, much like how content cannot exist without expressive form and vice versa. All texts therefore have an ideological and utopian dimension which, in cases where the utopian dimension envisions the state of things as they are, that is, capitalism, or as something worse, such as fascism and totalitarianism, the concept "utopian" seems to be nonsensical or could be replaced with the terms the social and historical raw material. The ideological dimension only works because it taps into social desires and anxieties that are represented by the text. The Marxian tradition of referencing Freud and Lacan makes sense in this context because their work explains a dimension of libidinal attachment that is implied by Jameson's theory of utopia and ideology. The success of interpellation in cinematic discourses depends first on the presentation of social anxieties that we can identify with and invest in psychically. This is essentially the argument that Jameson puts forward in "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture": the ideological presentation of reality would not work (successful interpellation) if the narrative work had not first used real social and historical content.[184] This is another way of saying that the ideological dimension has to manipulate something in order it for it to actually transform anything, much like we cannot have expressive form without content. I

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[183] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essay and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 256; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 227.

[184] Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture", 144.

cannot imagine a text that would not have social and historical content, regardless of how superficial the material it represents or how idiotic the content is. Jameson is identifying the basic dimensions of how narratives work and is articulating it within Marxian theory.

The major advancement that he presents in his theory of the dialectic of ideology and utopia in narrative works is the rejection of simplistic definitions of ideology as false consciousness. Jameson demonstrated that ideology works not by simply telling lies but by taking historical realities and presenting solutions that valorize one class position over another. This aesthetic operation can be extended to any ideology of oppression. The utopian dimension of the text explains that for mystification to occur there has to be some genuine social and historical truth at play. In this sense, Jameson still retains some form of the definition of ideology as "lies," but his explanation as to how it functions in mass culture and art is much more sophisticated than anything that came before his work.

Another way Jameson conceptualizes the relationship between utopia and ideology explains the particular way he defines utopia: the symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class of society.[185] This is why Jameson refers to the utopian dimension as "positive," as it affirms a vision of society. The dimension is positive even if the way that vision is formulated is ultimately ideological, as in resolving historical conflicts by reconceptualizing them in ahistorical terms. Or, in postmodern works, defusing the historical conflicts as the status quo under late-capitalism, depicted as being the only social collective that actually "works," and hence closing off the entire historical dimension entirely, and with it utopianism.

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[185] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 281-282.

The ideological dimension of the text is defined according to Marxian theory: ideology naturalizes what is historically contingent and arbitrary. Jameson's formulation elaborates on this by explaining multiple ideological strategies found in narratives, and the chief strategy is the resolution of social contradictions. The ideological dimension of narrative pertains to the component of narrative works that resolves the social anxieties that the texts are using as raw material through the development of the plot of the work. In *The Political Unconscious*, one of the most common ideological strategies appears to be equivalent to the way the narrative text is construed within the political horizon of interpretation. That level of interpretation conceptualizes the works as symbolic resolutions of real contradictions. Within this interpretive horizon, the ideological dimension refers to the resolution, and the utopian dimension refers to the real contradictions that are being resolved in the imaginary construction of the text. The same formulation of ideology appears in Jameson's article "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture." However, the utopian dimension in the political horizon of interpretation does not simply refer to the genuine social and historical content of the work or the political problems it references, but it could also refer to works that do not resolve the real social contradictions with an imaginary resolution.

In another article, Jameson discusses works that do resolve contradictions in textual and figural works as ideological and those which do not resolve them as utopian, but he uses the term discourse instead of dimension.[186] The reason is twofold: to avoid theories of utopia that were formulated before the post-structuralist critique of representation and to connect the notion of

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[186] Fredric Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse," in *Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986, Volume 2: The Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 75-102.

utopianism with a process rather than product which gives it a more radical connotation, invoking a process, theories of enunciation and production, active terms rather than concepts that imply stasis. Jameson uses Lévi-Strauss's definition of myth (the symbolic resolutions of real contradictions) but includes A.J. Greimas's structural semantics to explain how utopian discourses work. In the Lévi-Strauss formulation of symbolic resolution, the text invokes two semantic terms that are in conflict with each other: they are symbolic representations of two aspects of social relations that the text is staging as a conflict in some way, social content mediated as conceptual antinomies. Lévi-Strauss theorized only one way that these terms can be related: they join together, resolving the conflict between them, producing an ideological discourse, that is, one that resolves the social problem in an imaginary construction, and thus generating a false solution to the conflict. A more complicated analysis of the conceptual antinomies involves Greimas's theory of meaning.[187] Any set of opposed terms actually generates another set of terms on a vertical rather than horizontal plane of analysis. Those other terms are called contradictory, that is, exact opposites of the original terms. The joining of the two contradictory terms is utopian because they represent a new combination of the conceptual realities that implies a new social framework has been enabled bringing them into existence. This formulation of the utopian and the ideological allows for a narrative analysis that can determine whether texts are ideological – overcoming conceptual antinomies which implies the same social collective – or utopian – neutralizing by replacing the antinomy with a synthesis of terms that is a hypothetical improvement on the social collective.

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[187] Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Algirdas Julien Greimas and Françoise Rastier, "The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints," *Yale French Studies*, 41 (1968): 86-105.

An example of how Jameson's theory of utopian discourse analysis would work in relation to a magical realist film would be to examine how *Death by Hanging* depicts the character of R by the end of the film. Two concepts are juxtaposed in the film, Justice and Racism, which generates their contradictory terms Not-Justice and Not-Racism. An ideological narrative would superficially address the history of Japanese racism against Koreans but eventually show that the execution of R is justified because he committed a crime, concluding with defining him as a "political criminal" (the conceptual combination of Justice and Racism). The conceptual antinomy between Justice and Racism is then resolved because the racism of society is acknowledged but the practice of human sacrifice is left unexamined along with the subjugation of the racialized group.

Each semantic term forms a combination that represents the way the narrative could hypothetically conclude with its depiction of R. The ideological discourse (as defined as the complex term by Greimas) would combine the terms Justice and Racism by depicting R as a "political criminal," one that committed criminal acts because of the racism he was subjected to in Japanese society but still defined as guilty. A utopian discourse would be to combine the terms Not-Justice and Not-Racism, which can contain other semantic terms that we can map onto the contradictory terms like "Corruption" for Not-Justice and "Understanding" for Not-Racism ("Understanding" is not entirely satisfactory because it excludes the material component of racism, but it will suffice for this analysis which is primarily about how individuals are labelled). The combination of those terms (called the neutral term by Greimas) could be called a "social martyr" or a *pharmakos*, which translates roughly to scapegoat. The term *pharmakos* is more suitable because it implies that the community is to blame, not simply the person being executed,

however, their execution is a collective form of communal purification where the *pharmakos* bears the weight of society's guilt on its shoulders (hence why R says that he will die for the sake of all Rs). A martyr's sacrifice differs from a "lynching victim," which in this semiotic square would represent the combination of the terms "Racism" and "Not-Justice" (called the negative deixis by Greimas). Furthermore, he is not a "guilty criminal" which would be the combination of Justice with Not-Racism (the positive deixis).

In the end R submits to be sacrificed for the sake of all R's in Japanese society. The film does not excuse his behaviour, as he did murder two women, but it expands the notion of justice to include the collective that is submitting R to human sacrifice in the first place. R's execution not only condemns himself but also condemns the Japanese social collective. The utopian discourse neutralizes the original conceptual antinomy proposed by the film which juxtaposed Justice with Racism. R's execution is not an example of Justice because he was a marginalized figure condemned as a person of Korean descent from the start of his life. His crime was not simply the product of racism either because he did accept that he murdered the two women. But the concept of justice must be expanded once the nation condemning R is demonstrated as unjust itself. R does not arrive at the end as a "political criminal" (the resolution of Justice and Racism) but as *pharmakos* that is expunged from the collective because his presence highlights the injustice of Japanese society towards Koreans. The choice of execution is important as punishment because of the grotesque corporeal dimension that it implies. His body is the very site of anti-Korean racism, a tragic figure that does villainous acts in a society that is villainous itself. The film demonstrates the lack of necessity for execution in the pursuit of Justice and highlights the social construction of identity and asymmetrical social relations as the true target

of Justice rather than the body of the condemned individual. The complex term is ideological in a Marxian sense because it suppresses the political dimension of that term into that of ethics. The dichotomy of good of evil, implying an individualizing discourse, one that appeals to the contradictory political nature of the middle-class ideologies, situated between labour and capital in the capitalist social formation. We know that the displacement of conflict into the ethical realm is the basic ideological strategy of capital which shifts attention away from social structure and onto "bad actors." Defining R as a political criminal interprets the political nature of his situation into a simplistic judgment of good and evil which abstracts from the social situation but projects all human action into the ethical realm Therefore, according to Jameson's theory of utopian discourse, *Death by Hanging* is an example of utopianism, the projection of a social dream that excludes execution from its practices and expands the concept of Justice to include the social collective.

The ideological dimension also exists in the second interpretive horizon, the social, which conceptualizes the text as a contested battleground of ideologemes, those class discourses in the form of aesthetic strategies and thematic content. This category could refer to anything from film conventions with respect to setting, the entire catalogue of character types, conceptions of good and evil, epistemological operations, construction of atmosphere and tone, iconography, and the list goes on. This form of interpretation is found in nearly any other methodology of film analysis that attempts to interpret the ideological discourses of a narrative work. The utopian dimension within this horizon appears to be coterminous with the ideological because ideologemes are aesthetic strategies or thematic content that correspond to class positions or to other social positions that cannot be completely defined by class. The previous chapter on the ex-

centric in magical realism catalogues a good number of the ideologemes in magical realist

cinema. In terms of class positions, magical realism tends to position lower-class figures as more

creative and powerful than their upper-class antagonists. Lewis, Kusturica, De Sica, and Miike

all depict lower-class figures in this way, and they tend to stylize the upper-class figures as

impotent, hedonistic, and sterile. Mati Diop in *Atlantics* repurposes the image of the zombie

monster which tended to always have proletarian overtones into a political force that reverses the

exploitative relations of capital, especially the ones that take advantage of migrant workers. The

zombified widows force the capitalist figure to pay all the value back that he extracted from their

dead husbands and dig all of their husbands' graves as penance. Magical realist films use similar

types of ideologemes found in their treatment of class conflict with racialized groups. In his

yakuza films, Miike depicts immigrants in Japanese society as being stronger and more cunning

than the Japanese yakuza figures, and Kusturica presents the Romani people as part of an archaic

community that is more cohesive and cooperative than individuals in late-capitalist relations.

Both include characterizations that recall mythological stories, with characters that have psychic

powers, superhuman strength and stamina, and the ability to live beyond death. In relation to

depictions of femininity and feminist politics, magical realist films use ideologemes that

reappropriate dominant cinema's characterizations of female characters. Films such as *Beloved*,

Like Water for Chocolate, and *Orlando* transform traditional settings and practices of femininity

into magical spaces: the home, the kitchen, and work in magical inversions that turn them into

sources of power. *Celine and Julie Go Boating* completely abolishes the narrative tropes of

dominant cinema that put male figures at the centre of relationships between women so that

"female friendship" becomes an ideologeme for a form of female collective power that corrects

the existing wrongs of reality structured around the Name-of-the-father. Queer magical realist films use a similar strategy by taking sacred images and stories and revising them as stories about a queer romantic couple. In terms of ideologemes, magical realist cinema is carnivalesque: films invert the images and conventions of dominant culture to valorize the marginalized, ex-centric, subjectivities. In some sense, this complies with what Jameson has referred to as the demystification element of utopian discourses: that "negative" dimension of utopian discourses (in terms of negation, not in terms of dystopia) which criticizes existing reality, and is an essential aspect of any form of utopianism. The social horizon of interpretation emphasizes that element of utopia (a literary form and political notion) which negates the present. Utopia is not simply a positive operation, because presenting a more perfect society necessarily involves showing why the present is lacking. In this sense, the critical representation of the social collective in magical realist cinema represents the demystifying aspect of utopianism by identifying the instances of social malaise and irrationality. The analysis of ideologemes therefore involves cataloging the often contradictory relationship that the narrative text has with the social collective.

The historical horizon conceptualizes the narrative work as a formal system that has ideological content in its own right. This horizon of interpretation divides the ideological and the utopian into two categories: a formal aesthetic system that invokes the present or other exploitative modes of production (i.e., ideological) or a sign system that invokes a hypothetical social collective that is less exploitative (i.e., more perfect than the present, thus utopian). Jameson differs from other theorists of utopia by connecting the formal apparatus with utopia itself. Most theories of utopia exclusively discuss thematic content whereas this theory involves

interpreting the form of the work as a symbolic system that implies a particular mode of production, possibly a future one that contains less exploitation and oppression. The term of analysis in this interpretation is the "ideology of form," an adaptation of the concept "content of form" from Hjelmslev's semiotic theory.

In Hjelmslev's theory of the sign-function, he notes that both the "expression" and the "content" contain a substance or "purport" which Jameson extends to the theory of the analysis of aesthetic forms. The importance for Jameson's theory is that Hjelmslev demonstrated that "expression" in the sign-function (what we think of as the formal system of anything meaningful) has a meaning in itself that is not determined by the content it is expressing. Therefore, the sign-function can be divided into four parts: content-form and expression-form and content-substance and expression-substance.[188] Jameson takes this four-part structure of the sign-function and maps it onto the analysis of aesthetic forms. For genre analysis, the four-part structure becomes: Expression-form (the narrative structure of a genre), Content-form (the semantic meaning of a generic mode), Expression-substance (ideologemes, narrative paradigms), and Content-substance (social and historical raw material).[189] The second term in the list is how Jameson formulated his theory for the "ideology of form," and the entire schema that Jameson adapted from Hjelmslev's theory of the sign-function anticipates (by only a few years) Rick Altman's syntactic/semantic theory of film genre.[190] In any case, the utopian dimension is comprised by the "ideology of form" or the "Content-form" term at this horizon of interpretation.

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[188] Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 57.

[189] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 134.

[190] Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Genre," *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 6-18.

Attaching the political subversive element in a narrative work to the formal dimension is not necessarily a novel idea. In fact, Jameson appears to be utilizing the aesthetic theory from the Frankfurt School. The "ideology of form" adapts ideas from both Adorno's and Benjamin's aesthetic theory. From Adorno, we have the focus on the form of a work containing the political content. The form of the work is "sedimented content," a historical repository of aesthetic artefacts from the past that exist for us in the present in the form of the work itself.[191] An example of this from magical realism would be the pre-Enlightenment forms of reason that included expanded notions of reality such as magic, superstition, and supernatural elements, and, as well, the originary impulse of Cervantes's novel form which is based on reflexivity and not mimesis. The form of magical realism, the synthesis of the fantastic and realism/naturalism, is a sediment of that historical content from pre-Enlightenment social collectives but updated to present sophisticated transformations of modernist and post-modernist aesthetic forms. Adorno also criticized the aesthetic of naturalism for being the aesthetic equivalent of capitalist industrial practices by reducing nature to mere raw material. The distance that art creates between itself and the empirical world is where the political nature of art resides. The separation is utopian by default because art's separation from the world is a rejection of the current social conditions of reality (in Adorno's theory art is inherently radical, and "the idea of conservative artwork is absurd"), whereas ideology is defined as "socially necessary semblance."[192] The label "autonomous" is attached to art, which signifies its separation from the empirical world and the utopian space that it creates by virtue of this separation and for Adorno implies a heavy

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[191] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 5.

[192] Ibid., 177.

normative dimension (for example, anything in mass culture is not autonomous). The work of art

is autonomous because it conceives a formal apparatus that resists capital subsumption, and

therefore the work of art creates a "functionless" object in the society of capitalism. The formal

politics of autonomous art is completely historical much like how Suvin and Sargent described

utopian works: the ability for them to be radical depends on the social conflict and contradictions

therein. Therefore, art is a unique form of praxis that exists in its own realm distant from political

movements and social life. This conception of political art it is not entirely formalist (or idealist)

because Adorno recognizes the unique form of praxis at the level of the aesthetic sphere as it

corresponds to a future political praxis that has yet to take shape but is implied by the formal

dimension of the art work.[193] The "ideology of form" concept in Jameson's hermeneutic is an

adaptation of Adorno's formalist theory of political art.

In fact, Adorno's theory of the politics of art forms (although he did not have cinema in

mind given his remarks on the medium in other writings) suggests that one way to conceive of

the utopian dimension in magical realist films according to the level of form. This is not to

suggest a purely formal aesthetic analysis for utopianism but is meant to complement the

analysis of thematics described in the previous chapters. Aesthetic form, according to the schema

Jameson uses for genre analysis, distinguishes between Expression-form (narrative structure) and

Expression-content (semantic meaning of the genre) to which we could add the hopelessly

ambiguous term "style" for film analysis to designate the systematic use of cinematic devices

(cinematography, sound, blocking, editing, colour, music, performance, composition), or rather a

term that would invest both of the above terms. We cannot simply create an abstraction,

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[193] Ibid., 83.

"narrative," for films because of the strong iconic dimension that is inherent to the form (recall the theories of iconicity in Chapter 2). For Expression-form (narrative structure) we could also subdivide it according to actual story itself and the way the story is arranged in the film (the "plot"). This addition simply includes Bordwell's adaptation of Russian formalism methodology for film analysis with respect to the concept Expression-form and another formal aspect of the work that Jameson's schema does not account for in his discussion of genre theory.

Given that magical realism as a category has not codified into a narrative structure but rather is defined by semantic investments that can be found in a diverse group of narrative structures, we will have to analyze the formal aspect of the mode as it interacts with particular auteurs and the film apparatus itself. The methodological framework for the analysis of the tripartite relationship of auteur-genre-ideology can be found in Robin Wood's analysis of *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943).[194] We can begin by considering one of the most idiosyncratic of magical realist directors: Raúl Ruiz. Ruiz's films, if we can "bracket" as much as possible from the narrative content, represent a stylistic apparatus that are opposed not only to mainstream filmmaking conventions in the Global North but to the general industrial facet of films as commodities. Ruiz attempts to discard a narrative film that is based around dramatic conflict and which then has the consequence of disposing with the film style that supports the delivery of that narrative form. His first book on cinema details the "central conflict" paradigm that he finds reigns supreme in narrative cinema in the Global North.[195] The removal of dramatic

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[194] Robin Wood, "Ideology, Genre, Auteur," in *Film Genre Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 59-73.

[195] Raúl Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema 1: Miscellanies* (Paris: Editions dis Voires, 1995).

conflict results in the removal of continuity in terms of cinematography, editing, sound, and the use of colour.

Throughout his work, Ruiz uses the rhetorics of surrealism and magical realism which involve the manipulation of colours in the image, sometimes using filters, other times combining black and white with colour cinematography. Changing these elements is not necessarily motivated by the story, but the cumulative effect of these continuity gaps often references past styles of cinema in genres and auteurs, and serves as an example of Ruiz's cinema of piracy.[196] According to what Ruiz called centrifugal movements, his compositions function so that images are not constrained by the plot, but rather suggest memories, dreams, images from other films, painting, and so on.[197] The polysemous intention of his images also corresponds to the way he positions the camera and frames the human subject in the image. The camera positions frequently de-compose the shots around human figures so that inanimate objects take prominence or at the very least become equivalent. He often finds new ways to visualize points of view, similar to how Luis Buñuel did in his Mexican films like *Susana* (1951) with the camera shooting from the perspective of inside a shelf, which in turn anticipates the point-of-view shot from inside an old man's mouth in Ruiz's *City of Pirates*. The rejection of dramatic conflict and continuity principles has the effect of dethroning the primacy of the human figure in the film. Ruiz's work uses a formal ideology that positions the rest of reality on equal ground to the human. The camera eye is expanded beyond the psychic reality of the human characters and attempts to grasp

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[196] Michael Goddard, *The Cinema of Raúl Ruiz: Impossible Cartographies* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2013), 72

[197] Ibid., 108.

the mystery behind reality, much like how the original conception of "magic realism" was formulated by Franz Roh.

This cinematographic magical realist form devised by Ruiz can be found in more recent films like Weerasethakul's *Syndromes and a Century* (2006) with the slow steady-cam shot that approaches the "ghostly vent" in the hospital. Weerasethakul's camera completely detaches from the human action of the story to depict the reality existing around and beyond the human characters. The camera's detachment from the dramatic action of the human characters accentuates the non-anthropomorphic reality of the world, a magical realist implication of the expansion of reality towards magical entities and events. This imbues the world with more power, mystery, and dominance against an increasingly administered society that commodifies nature, space, and time ruthlessly. In other instances, the detached-from-the-human cinematography can imply an alien or spectral presence like in *Days of Eclipse* or *Last Year at Marienbad*.

Rivette is, in a similar way, formally oppositional to dominant paradigms, especially with respect to narrative structure. *Celine and Julie Go Boating* use two cinematographic styles for the two realities: Paris is depicted as magical, uncanny, and strange whereas the "house of fiction" is filmed according to the realist film principles of continuity and the removal of "stylistic" obstacles to reveal the story to an audience, the standard form of dominant films. The beginning and ending sequences are filmed in a style that emphasizes magical coincidences and fantastic journeys whose uncanny nature are again foregrounded by the circular nature of the film: for example, Julie chases after Celine to return her scarf, and the reverse happens in the epilogue. The circular structure of a narrative implies an interpretive obstacle which defies the

easy consumption of images of the commodity form which conceptualize film as disposable works. Rivette's formal apparatus requires repeat viewings and extended attention because of the length and complexity of the images and the decoupage, and refuses complete absorption into the market.

The magical realist style of performance is another noteworthy formal aspect. The propensity for exaggeration in performance (found in Lewis, Miike, and Kusturica) is matched by an equal tendency towards deadpan (found in Cronenberg, Ruiz, Rivette), and some films combine the performance styles (*Death by Hanging* and *Being John Malkovich*). The extreme forms of performances in magical realism imply a subject position that disassembles the centered, bourgeois ego of dominant cinema (a rational, motivated protagonist with a clear sense of their identity and goals). Lewis's performance style specifically presents subjectivity as a series of extreme shards of a whole, and Ruiz's deadpan performances project an image of disaffected spectators of the world. In films that utilize the exaggerated performance style, the absurd actions of the characters create magical intrusions in reality, while the deadpan style normalizes or naturalizes the magical events by regarding them as commonplace and represents them as just as real as those elements that reproduce everyday reality. Both formal tendencies use a performance style that falls outside the dominant conventions of realist cinema and that tends toward psychological realism.

All of these disparate formal revisions of dominant narrative forms demonstrate that magical realist cinema as a formal category displaces the primacy of humans in reality, specifically, the type of human subject produced within late-capitalist societies. Adorno's aesthetic theory anticipates the post-Althusserian philosophy of Jacques Rancière regarding the

notion of dissensus in art: that interruption into the construction of the sensible that introduces

new ways of seeing, speaking, and being.[198] Althusser's aleatory materialist philosophy,

developed in his later writings, suggests a concept of political resistance based on the idea of the

"void," a gap in the works of the ideological and repressive state apparatuses that creates a space

for an alternative form of subject formation. This "utopian subject" implies an alternative set of

social conditions of another mode of production that is less unjust and irrational compared to that

of capitalism.[199] Rancière adapts aleatory materialism by interpreting the politics of the void as

the introduction of a gap in the distribution of the sensible. Much like the void breaks the process

of interpellation, politics breaks with what Adorno defined as socially necessary semblance, that

is, ideology and what Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible. Politics (a term meaning

radical politics much like art for Adorno signifies radical art) is now the introduction of

something into the sensible that breaks the connection between meaning and sense, failed

interpellation in Althusser's philosophy, where the subject is not hailed as a subject of the

discourse, and a formal work that cannot be commodified in Adorno's aesthetic theory.

The political unconscious of magical realist form in cinema is then the recuperation of a

way of seeing, speaking, and being that supplants the dominance of the human figure in reality.

Magical intrusions into the everyday which expand notions of the reasonable and possible,

individuals that contain two people in one, the understanding of subject construction as the

performance of social determinants and historical trauma, and a circular rather than linear,

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[198] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 139.

[199] These ideas are formulated in two later works: Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* (London and New York: Verso, 1999); Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 163-207. These ideas were anticipated by "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in *For Marx* (London and New York: 2005), 87-128.

evolutionary view of human movement through the world and history are all forms of dissensus produced by the magical realist cinematic transgeneric category. If we can attribute any semantic meaning to the mode of magical realism, a category that is as formally diverse and as it is politically ambiguous, it is the demotion of the anthropocentric perspective produced by late-stage capitalism that simultaneously reduces everything to the will of the human and narrowly defines the human subject itself into particular ideologies of space, time, and identity. Magical realist form (and its thematic content) rejects the schemas of time and space dictated by late-stage capitalism which the excessive performance style found in Lewis, Miike, and Kusturica rightly condemns. The detachment of the camera from human figures in Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* and in the films of Ruiz and Weerasethakul, and the depiction of the non-human as magical and autonomous, rejects the absorption of everything in our reality into the market system only to produce a narrowly defined version of human subjects and nature.

Jameson defined magical realist cinema (incorrectly) in contradistinction to postmodernism. I would like to make another amendment to his formulation: magical realism is antithetical to our current distribution of the sensible, a supersession of the cultural logic of postmodernism, as defined by Mark Fisher, of "capitalist realism."[200] A cultural logic that superseded the postmodern logic described by Jameson and which characterizes our current global social system as an exaggerated form of post-utopian society where no other social collective is imagined as a possibility. According to our current cultural logic, radical politics has turned into nationalist revivals supposedly defying the global elites, a political climate that Immanuel Wallerstein foresaw nearly 30 years ago when he noted that when structural

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[200] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010).

contradictions of capitalism become more severe so do the tendencies toward democratic freedom and fascism.[201] Capitalist realism designates our current ideological framework, an extreme form of postmodern cultural logic, which metabolizes everything in the present, and the past, radical, reactionary, liberal images all become equivalent through the market system. Fisher uses the image of the shape-shifter from *The Thing* (1982) to describe this ideological strategy of absorbing everything while simultaneously projecting only its own image for the future and no alternative. It reduces reality to forms that only comport with the market function and discard everything else as excess. Fisher uses the term "realism" in this context to refer to the way Lacan designates the difference between reality and the Real: reality is a symbolic construct, and capitalist realism is an intensified form of the postmodernist enclosure of politics that Jameson theorized. Capitalist realism presents the opposite operation of magical realism which attempts to expand the horizon of what counts as reality. Capitalist realism is a distribution of the sensible that removes utopian thinking. The utopianism of the magical realist form projects a subject position that blocks that equivalency by introducing a spastic, uncontrollable vision of reality that requires a new distribution of the sensible, and with it a radically different social formation, a political praxis that, according to Adorno, has yet to take shape.

This type of utopian image, extracted from the formal dimension of a generic mode, recalls not only Adorno and Rancière but also Benjamin's analysis of radical images from the tradition of the oppressed. In Benjamin's theory of historical analysis, the tradition of the oppressed contains images that could be reappropriated for political struggles of the present, but there is never a figuration given to these images, and they are always simultaneously negative

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[201] Immanuel Wallerstein and Etienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 36.

indictments of the state of things rather than positive utopian visions of the future, a present

moment charged with all of the oppression of the past, and a future radically different from the

present. Like Adorno, Benjamin theorizes a "negative" utopian dimension: not a dystopia, for

that term already exists to describe the present conditions of existence, but a projection of a new

social collective. Benjamin notes that this utopia is never filled with positive contents because, as

Adorno would also theorize, once it gives positive figuration it then becomes an image that can

be subsumed by capitalism, commodified rather than resisting commodification. While that

might be true in a general sense, the various other forms of utopianism outlined above, and the

ex-centric ideologies of oppressed groups, are important political images that perform a similar

utopian function that Adorno theorized, namely the negation of present empirical reality at the

aesthetic level of social conflict. But the analysis of the politics of form allows for the dimension

of utopianism to become visible, and it is a viable method for the political analysis of generic

modes. Producing a gap in the sensible, seizing an image buried within dominant historical

narratives, and resisting the commodified form are all ways of articulating the utopian dimension

from which we can extract from the "ideology of form."

The utopian dimension explicated from the magical realist form in cinema displaces the

prominence of the human figure and dominant forms of constructing the subject in contemporary

society. This is an intentionally "open" prescription, in accordance with the dialectical materialist

theory mentioned above, and projects any number of alternative visions of the social collective,

rather than simply one vision found in a utopian literary text. A social formation that would

produce the subject position implied by magical realist form would remove our fascination with

a narrow view of progress and human excellence, defined by the demands of the market, and

reintroduce everything that has been commodified back into reality without the commodity form. This might involve the forgetting about economic growth as the primary way in which we measure a healthy society, or replacing exchange-value entirely by use-value, or reorganizing every corporation into co-operative frameworks and allowing only investment into a company that you work for rather than investing in public companies, representing a societal move toward dismantling the entire system of finance capitalism (which is based on one class having excess wealth compared to another). However, I do not believe that the analysis of a genre's "ideology of form" necessarily provides a utopian disruptive gesture, like utopian literature, for a more perfect society. Rather, framing the utopian as utopianism or the utopian dimension allows us to perceive how the politics of aesthetic form works in more indirect ways, such as those suggested by Adorno, Rancière, and Benjamin. Art with a political formal apparatus introduces a gap in the sensible framework. It is an ideological operation, the class struggle at the level of art to adapt a phrase from Althusser regarding the politics of philosophy, which gives indirect figuration to new ways of seeing, speaking, and being, and it is the work of political philosophy or political utopian thinkers to devise a social totality that would produce those kinds of subject positions.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

The trajectory of this project outlined the fundamental thematic and formal characteristics of magical realist cinema. However, the observations and arguments made in the preceding chapters will need to be revised when more magical realist films emerge in the global cinema, and given that in the last three decades filmmakers are increasingly drawn toward this film mode, future work will inevitably have to adapt the framework laid out here for new entries into the category. Before the 1970s, films that we could classify as magical realist could also be classified as low-fantasy because of the tension created in the narrative, and film form, between magical and realist sequences was still presents, but disappears with the cycles of modernist and postmodernist films. The genre of low-fantasy is the most similar to magical realism, but the former seems to have disappeared entirely from narrative filmmaking, or rather, it has been relegated to the amorphous category of "children's films" and other fantastic modes like high-fantasy, horror, science fiction (including "superhero movies"), and magical realist have taken its place. In any case, definitions of magical realism, and the observations made in this project, will necessarily have to account for new entries into the category. As Weerasethakul and Kaufman, and new voices like Diop and Rohrwacher haven shown, magical realism is still a viable aesthetic strategy for transnational cinema.

This leads me to some comments that will pre-emptively address an obvious criticism of the method I used for including so many films in the magical realist category. Many of the films, especially those directed by Lewis and Miike, would not be included in most discussions of magical realist cinema. There are a couple of reasons for possible disagreements about my

choices and operationalization of the generic definition which I have addressed multiple times in conference presentations when I have presented on Lewis and Miike on separate occasions.

The first point has to do with the nature of genres themselves. I do not believe that they are as stable as genre theory suggests nor do they exist in practice as discrete categories. Bakhtin, Barthes, Frye, and Jameson have all argued for a conceptualization of narratives as a site of competing discourses. The same is true for a broader concept like genre which are multi-modal. Take for example, the classical film noir genre, which is more of a film cycle than a genre because its modern version, neo-noir or simply called noir, is very different from the classical style. For that genre, we cannot identify a single narrative structure that could define all of the works we consider film noir nor a consistent visual structure nor even a consistent tone or atmosphere. The private detective films had radically different narratives and characterizations than the bourgeois melodramas (compare the way *The Big Sleep* (1946) to *Double Indemnity* (1944) treat the male protagonist).

Magical realism in film has a heterogenous set of narrative structures that combine comic, romance, and ironic plots in various ways. In fact, many of the films that others would contest as magical realist are films that use a recognizable genre or subgenre (the comedy and the yakuza film) and introduce magical realist elements. It is not so much a generalized form of realism that magical realist cinema supplements with the fantastic but various formulations of realism dictated by genres that tend toward mimesis rather than estrangement and reflexivity. This points towards the general misstep of defining film genres solely according to their narrative structure. Its iconic dimension includes more than narrative from the outset and to reduce a film or a film genre to narrative structure is to create an abstraction that is too far

removed from its phenomenal experience. If we were to categorize films into genres simply by appealing to their narrative that would mean episodes of *Scooby Doo* should be categorized as *giallo* films because they follow the same story structure. This abstraction does not account for everything else that defines a *giallo* film (its use of colour, cinematography, depiction of violence, and soundtrack) and demonstrates why sophisticated genre analysis needs to include more than attention to narrative plots.

My theoretical justification for the tendency to include rather than exclude films comes from Jeanne Delbaere-Garant's work which argued that magical realism could be used sparingly in author's work or within the text itself, meaning that the synthesis of realism and the fantastic only occurs at certain moments within the story, and is not part of the main narrative premise.[202] This type of genre analysis allows one to include films where magical realism is the central conceit of the story (*Underground*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, *Death By Hanging*) and ones that do not (Lewis's films and Miike's yakuza films). Technically I should consider Lewis and Miike as using magical realism in key moments but classify their films as comedies and crime films. For the purpose of this project I wanted to cast a wide net and include as many texts as possible so as to account for as many trends, conventions, and aesthetic strategies that I could discover in magical realist films or films that use magical realism in certain moments.

This approach implies a quantification of magical realism, alluding to a threshold where enough magical moments have to occur in a film to define as a magical realist film first and

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[202]Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 249.

foremost rather than some other genre category. This relates back to the multi-modal approach to genre theory where we conceive of a genre as a combination of other genres. Magical realist cinema is defined by its, for lack of a better term, transgeneric status: it includes comedies, tragedies, ironic plots (Frye's mythic plots) but also crime films, action films, romantic-comedies (industrial, Hollywood genre labels). Because its essential characteristic (the synthesis of realism and magic) happens at such a fundamental of narrative its aesthetic can be "grafted" onto so many other types of genres and narratives types. Unlike the Western, which has a very specific essential characteristic (the setting and period of the Western frontier before the 20th century) it cannot be mixed so easily with other genres, otherwise *City Slickers* (1991) and *Wyatt Earp* (1994) would be in the same genre, magical realism can occur in wide variety of narrative settings and with a diverse group of character types. In this sense, magical realism is similar to another fantastic genre, science fiction, which is defined by its semantic properties: a film is science fiction if it includes a plot element that explains a fantastic moment according to scientific rationality. Much like magical realist films, science fiction films can have an element of science fiction that describes the primary narrative conceit of the movie (for example, *Solaris* (1972)) or the science fiction is there in the plot but it does not describe the primary narrative conceit (for example, *The Prestige* (2006) introduces the concept of cloning in a story that takes place at the end of the 19th century).

This application of magical realism to films that are primarily defined by other genres also conflicts with the general system of Hollywood marketing and the importances of genres for marketing films to audiences and this would explain some hypothetical confusion with respect to the film choices in this project. There are almost no mention of magical realism as marketing

term for films, rather films that I classify as magical realist are called "fantasy" whereas I would argue fantasy refers to a specific type of novel and film mode: low-fantasy (fantastical element is discovered in the real world but not naturalized) and high-fantasy (another reality defined by fantastic logic like those created by Tolkien). Magical realism as a concept and aesthetic strategy is poison for the Hollywood marketing machine because is primarily a critical category used in academia, film criticism, and discussions of literature. When I discuss magical realism with friends they know what I mean when we are talking about literature but very few know what it means in film. I assume that the lack of identifiable iconic symbols (like those in film noir, westerns, and science fiction) and absence in film marketing is responsible for its restriction to academic discourses. Magical realism certainly does use semantic elements from fantasy but their existence within the storyworld is naturalized, the characters accept its existence unlike low-fantasy where the intrusion of the magical element causes tension and conflict. Todorov defined low-fantasy as simply the "marvellous" meaning that the laws of reality are suspended. In magical realism, the laws of reality remain intact and there is no tension between the fantastic elements and the everyday reality presented in the storyworld.

The other dimension related to possible criticisms of my use of the term magical realism have to do with the interaction between film auteurs, genre conventions, and ideological discourses. I implied throughout this project that particular films and their status as magical realist were the result of directors either exhausting genre conventions from the comedy film or the yakuza crime film, or with directors rejecting the politics of mainstream of filmmaking and with it the discourses of film realism, or some combination of these scenarios. If we take both Lewis and Miike (and include Seijun Suzuki as a forbearer to Miike's experimental aesthetics

with B-films in the Japanese context) the first scenario makes perfect sense. By the time Lewis

directed *The Bellboy*, the most structural and non-narrative of his films, he had performed in 24

comedies in a period of just under ten years. He most likely exhausted all of the creativity from

the Hollywood comedy formula and created a new form by combining realist and fantasy,

without the tension between them, which I am defining as magical realism. The same scenario is

true for Miike who had began his career in the V-cinema industry of Japan, averaging about five

to six films a year as a director, making numerous yakuza crime films and other films defined as

B-films in the Japanese context. Like Suzuki before him, whose *Tokyo Drifter* (1965) is a

blueprint in terms of experimental aesthetics and magical realism for Miike, he exhausted the

creative possibilities of the yakuza film and introduced magical realism into the genre to find

new ways of telling these stories. Oshima falls into the latter scenario given that he was not a

director that specialized in B-films but an arthouse, radical sixties filmmaker that was always

finding new ways to politicize film form and film narratives. Oshima's *Death By Hanging* is

typically described as a "Brechtian" film, meaning a film that uses Brecht's aesthetic techniques

which is an accurate description of this work. However, I proposed that it should also be

regarded as magical realist because its central premise is the synthesis of reality and fantasy.

Oshima's introduction of the magical realist premise is the result of wanting to introduce a highly

politicized topic (anti-Korean racism) whilst showing the banal evil of human sacrifice. Both

subject matter would typically necessitate a highly mimetic approach but Oshima wanted to

create a scenario that would demonstrate the contradictions inherent in the legal system and

Japanese society in a way that was modelled after the performance of identity. Hence the

combination of the documentary aesthetics with a magical intrusion in reality. The realist film is

contested on both ends: the documentary-esque introduction is more naturalist and less theatrical than the conventional Japanese mainstream film and R's refusal die by hanging is a magical intrusion in the assumptions of reality from film realism.

Magical realist cinema is therefore defined by the irreducible element of the fantastic that is integrated into the reality of the storyworld without tension or astonishment from the characters. Unlike the supernatural or science fiction horror film which includes a depiction of everyday reality being confronted by a fantastic intrusion, magical realism presents these two discourses as equivalent at the level of narrative plausibility. It is a transgeneric phenomenon, not bounded by a periodic cycle in film history, or specific to a geographical context. The mythic plot structure is primarily ironic but it can use comic and romance plots, while almost never using a tragic structure. Its heterogenous manifestations are the result of the various national contexts that it has emerged within transnational cinema and the peculiar ways that film auteurs like Ruiz, Kusturica, Weerasethakul, Kaufman, Cronenberg, Miike, Oshima, and Resnais have used it either intentionally or not. In this project, I have argued that magical realist cinema is defined primarily as practicing highly literal forms of metafiction, an attention to historicity, ex-centric subject positions, and utopian alternatives to capitalist realism.

Magical realist cinema uses metafictional devices to dramatize the act of the artistic creation which also has the effect of highlighting its connection to its literary form. Nearly all of the magical realist films that use metafictional devices and plots refer to the act of writing a novel or performing a stage play but not the act of creating a film. Unlike other formally experimental works that take the process of cinematic creation as its narrative content, magical realist metafiction mediate between its own aesthetic medium by substituting an artistic analogue

that dramatizes the process of other media. This is especially true for works that dramatize the

life of real literary figures, for example Kafka and Burroughs, but supplement their biographical

content with magical realist events and characters. The other common forms of metafiction in

magical realist cinema have to do with incorporating fictional characters into the so-called real

world presented by the film and magical versions of historical people like John Malkovich and

Peter Faulk. However, the two most extended and sophisticated metafictional magical realist

films, *Naked Lunch* and *Synecdoche, New York*, use two radically different approaches to

depicting the process of artistic creation. *Naked Lunch* presents a fictionalized account of the

creation of the novel *Naked Lunch* by placing an analogue for Burroughs, Bill Lee, into the

events of the novel and Burroughs' biography. The film depicts his trajectory as an artist as a

discovery of his queer identity and the vicious sacrifice of female figures. *Synecdoche, New York*

uses the thematic analogue of staging a play as a magical realist depiction of art that is narrowly

confined to brutal realism which transform the world outside the stage in a performance space.

The more the work mirrors everyday reality the more magical it becomes so that the reference

point for inspiration of the work becomes entirely embroiled with the work itself. Even though

the tendency of magical realist works is to literalize metaphorical and allegorical content,

metafictional magical realist films create mediations between their own narcissistic narratives

and the medium of film itself.

Historicity is one of the most important thematic concepts for both magical realist

literature and cinema. The two primary ways that magical realist cinema deals with historicity is

to present the narrative of history from a female perspective (*Orlando*, *Beloved*, *Pan's Labyrinth*,

The Purple Rose of Cairo, *Daughters of the Dust*, and *Like Water for Chocolate*) and to show the

historical past from the viewpoint of an anachronous community (*Underground*, *Days of Eclipse*, *Happy as Lazzaro*, and *Daughters of the Dust*). The outlier to this schematic is *The Tin Drum*, one of the most successful adaptations of a magical realist novel, and along with *Underground* and *Daughters of the Dust*, the most sophisticated treatments of historicity. The presentations of both a female perspective and of a community that is separated in some form from mainstream society is in keeping with the politics of the oppressed perspective that colours much of magical realism in film and literature. Those who have been left out of the discourses of modernity, equality, democracy, and freedom are best able to diagnose the failings of our historical narrative. Again, *The Tin Drum* is an outlier from the general perspective of magical realism because the magical realism is used to depict the abject and perverse nature of Germany's Nazi period rather than show a community of people that have been disenfranchised by history.

The ex-centric is the most common thematic content for most of magical realist cinema and spans nearly all of the ideologies of oppression. The first magical realist film where the synthesis of the two discourses informed the central conceit of the narrative is *Miracle in Milan* which presented reality from the perspective of working class and lumpen figures. Representation of gender difference in magical realist films involves shifting the narrative focus to female figures and giving them an active role in the world but also transforming domestic and female spaces into magical environments. The most unique forms of ex-centric cinema can be found in the magical realist films that depict queer subjectivities by using narrative frameworks and character types from mythology and folklore traditions. These films present queer subjectivity as related to a form of being that was historically oppressed and use the tropes of myth to signify unalienated forms of being emerging in contemporary contexts.

The political unconscious of magical realism as a cinematic transgeneric category and its utopian dimensions can be found by examining all of the thematic discussions summarized above. Once more, taking the formal aesthetic of the mode as a whole presents a utopian dimension that presents new forms of subjectivity and alternative conceptions of space and time that confront the narrow confines of reality dictated by late-capitalism which we identified in the final chapter as capitalist realism, a term from Mark Fisher's analysis of late-stage capitalist culture. If the logic of capital is take everything from history and introduce into the market system, the utopian dimension of magical realist cinema resists that tendency by expanding the notion of reality beyond capitalist reason. The logic of the sensible is disrupted by the magical realist category which introduces new ways of being in the world through its depiction of ex-centric subjectivities, new ways of seeing the work itself as a process of creation and not simply a mimesis of product, alternative forms of historiography which present the underbelly of capitalist progress and modernity, and an aesthetic logic that implies more expanded forms of subject positions which would require fundamental changes in the social collective to accommodate these gaps in the sensible created by the aesthetic form of magical realism.

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