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Introduction

Nicole Cloarec et Elizabeth Mullen

TEXTE

1 It is a truth universally acknowledged that film and television productions allow people to escape their everyday troubles. And yet, from their inception, these media have been a locus of trouble on all sides of the screen, from production and aesthetics to reception.

2 From the outset, screen representations in the English-speaking world have walked a fine line between simple entertainment for the masses — as in the early silent-era "cinema of attractions" (Gunning, 384) — and catalyzer of troubling undercurrents within society (D.W. Griffith's stunning, racist epic *Birth of a Nation* [1915] and Tod Browning's magnificent *Freaks* [1932] come to mind). Equally though differently disturbing, on the small screen (and in living rooms everywhere), broadcast television in the past century hammered notions of conformity into the general public in sitcoms like *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963) and *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960), and subverted those very norms in series like *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964) and *Star Trek* (1966-1969).This interplay between onscreen representation and public reaction has fueled every major attempt by English-speaking studio systems and governments to regulate, channel and control the film and television industry, in an effort to enforce a universal, heteronormative, capitalistic vision of society. Nevertheless, in every era (including our own), trouble on screen has persisted.

3 While the notion of "trouble" has not been explicitly theorized in film and television studies, art criticism specialists have long recognized its worth. The French art critic Guy Scarpetta uses the term "trouble" to describe a trend in contemporary art that navigates between the artistic avant-garde (art explicitly conceived as combat, commitment, a means of fighting against the dominant social order, of subverting mainstream aesthetics, even of transforming individuals and society) and post-modernism (seen as an aesthetic of acceptance): "Trouble is neither subversion [...] nor resignation [...] It is what introduces into

the very field of art (and its perception) a coefficient of impurity or destabilization, that which cheats with codes, which disrupts orthodoxies, which cracks conformism"(134). Scarpetta's comments bring to mind how, following industry controversy surrounding Martin Scorsese's decision in 2019 to make a movie for Netflix, the filmmaker highlighted his vision of cinema as a destabilizing agent, arguing that films should be more than "perfect products manufactured for immediate consumption" (*Landmark Cinemas*). Cinema, Scorsese contends, "is an art form that brings you the unexpected." As viewers, we can all attest that some of the most powerful experiences of film spectatorship involve being shocked, agitated, or driven out of our comfort zones: in a word, troubled.

4 Following Scarpetta's definition, this volume aims to apply to film and television studies the notion of trouble as a critical tool to analyze "that which cheats with codes, which disrupts orthodoxies, which cracks conformism" (Scarpetta) on screen. *Trouble on Screen* thus encapsulates the ambivalence of films and television series that explore troubling themes and issues either to exploit or to transcend them, as a source of dismay or excitement, or even of comfort, relief or vindication when overcome, paradoxically turning trouble into a source of pleasure. Our aim is to broaden critical understanding of this ambivalence beyond what is most frequently referenced in film and media studies (studies focusing on pornography and the representation of extreme violence, for example)[1].

5 Indeed, from this perspective, trouble encompasses seemingly opposite trends of cinema and television: on the one hand, representing trouble on screen can help document the complexities of a troubled world, strive for psychological authenticity, and convey characters' physical or moral states; on the other hand, tapping into disturbing themes and devices can provide a framework for film and television to depart from drab realism, plunging viewers into generic and spectacular formulae.

6 Thus, exploring onscreen narratives through the prism of trouble raises questions about the powers and limits of representation. Trouble on screen can both strengthen film and television's power of immersion and call into question the onscreen medium itself: can we trust what we see on screen? — a question we ask ourselves more and

more as technology races forward. Accordingly, approaching these narratives through the prism of trouble questions audiences' reception of disturbing themes and effects, not to mention the troubled (and troubling) reception of controversial or marginal works.

7 Our contention here is that the notion of trouble proves to be a particularly fruitful critical tool in film and television studies insofar as it is at the crossroads of three major recent trends of film theory.

8 The first reflects a turn towards embodied theory that has recently been emerging across the humanities. After a long period of critical perspectives dominated by structuralist theories and analyses, this trend has endeavored to consider feeling as a valuable critical concept. This innovative approach of film history can be found in Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener's *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (2012) which claims to reconsider cinema, its technological and aesthetic dimensions, as "an affective and affecting aesthetic experience" (172), involving both the material body of the film and the sensory body of the spectator. Another telling example is the work of French critic Antoine Gaudin about filmic space. Referencing Deleuzian terminology, Gaudin uses the notion of "space-image" to think of space in films not as a given environment, setting or landscape that becomes a representation but as a dynamic phenomenon produced by the film's intrinsic operations and aesthetic choices. In other words, the perception of filmic space is not only an optical and intellectual operation but also involves a genuinely phenomenological and affective experience.

9 Within the scope of affects and their effects, it is worth noting that so far one feeling has overwhelmingly dominated the literature. Since watching a film is, for most, synonymous with entertainment, it is not surprising that pleasure was the notion that first came to the fore. It is significantly used in the title of Graham Greene's collection of film criticism (*Pleasure Dome: The Collected Film Criticism*, 1935-1940, 1980), books about the history of film theatres and their audience (Brian Murphy's *The Pleasure Palace: A History of Wigan Cinemas*, 1999) or in relation to Hollywood (Todd Berliner's *Hollywood Aesthetic: Pleasure in American Cinema*, 2017). However, the main reference remains Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", written in 1973 and published in 1975 in the influ-

ential British film journal *Screen*, which inaugurated the intersection of film theory, psychoanalysis and feminism. Mulvey's contention has since been much discussed and contested but this seminal essay highlights the often troubled — and troubling— experience of film reception.

10 This critical turn is closely related to another key area for film scholarship which also focuses on film as an experience, but within a social or historical context. In this relatively recent perspective of reception studies, film is no longer a mere text to interpret but the site of an encounter, whereby meaning is coproduced by the viewers. Janet Staiger, whose chapter opens this issue, has been one of the pioneers of works in this broader trend which participates in what can be called a "historical turn"[2]. While audiences have long been taken for granted or theorized as an abstract entity (when they have not been ignored altogether), many recent studies have shown an expansion of their objects of study beyond the films themselves, shifting emphasis from textual analysis to evidence-based investigations into film production and consumption[3].

11 Considering viewer experience leads to a third interconnected trend of recent critical perspectives characterized by what has been termed the "turn to ethics". In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1992), Wayne C. Booth thus "argues for the relocation of ethics to the center of our engagement with literature" (cover note). Since the late 1980s, major critical works in art and literature have thus engaged with ethical issues that bring to the fore notions of values, responsibility, and engagement with otherness, building on the work of ethical philosophers such as Levinas, postcolonial studies, feminist critical theory and gender studies.

12 As Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton have noted in *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters* (2009), compared to literary theory and cultural studies, film studies have been slower to embrace this "turn to ethics". While historical debates about the morality of cinema and the regulations of film content (in particular recurrent concern about the representation of violence, sex and other taboo subjects) have long been the objects of sustained research, most of the properly ethical issues in films have focused on the documentary genre, in particular the filmmakers' positioning as regards the subjects they are

filming. However, according to Downing and Saxton, this "has perpetuated the misleading assumption that ethical issues are somehow less important or urgent in narrative cinema" (12).

13 Indeed, ethical issues in film and television cannot be reduced to philosophical dilemmas embedded in narratives but arise directly from the film apparatus. They not only involve questions related to the "politics of representation", investigating how filmmakers respond to the challenges of representing identity, difference, the relationship between self and otherness, but also how films ascribe a position to their viewers, thus questioning the viewers' agency and responsibility. In other words, ethical issues in film are bound with experiential phenomenology and film aesthetics.

14 As Downing and Saxton aptly encapsulate:

> … in order to think through these questions of identity and representation, it is essential to take account of the registers into which cinema translates power relations. This is to avoid the pitfalls of reflection theory and its assumption of the possibility of straightforward mimetic replication of social reality. These registers include the manipulation of generic and narrative codes, the organization of cinematic space […], the ascription of optical and figural point of view to a given character, and the means of spectatorial position. More generally, we argue that any formal decision (e.g. a fixed camera, a tracking shot, or a cut) functions as an imprint of the film's ethical valances (18).

15 The notion of trouble thus questions the epistemological dimension of film and television – offering to witness troubling phenomena, characters or events, while raising ethical issues about the processes through which agency and responsibility are ascribed to spectators. It also delves into ontological investigations, questioning the basis of gendered, racialized or sexual identities. As such, analyzing trouble calls for both textual-based and contextual based approaches.

16 The present issue focuses on how films and television series can create multitudes of troubled spectatorship and reception. The articles in this issue delve into the recurring moot question of the potential impact of films and television series on viewers, how they

play with viewers' engagement with their fictional worlds, and how they may affect controversial social issues beyond the screen.

17 Part I, entitled "Troubled Spectatorship and Reception," examines questions of reception in 20th and 21st-century film and television through a variety of perspectives. **Janet Staiger**, who was among the first media scholars to explore reception studies, starts by recalling the terms of the debate that has characterized the question of the possible effects on the audience of troubling scenes on screen. Her contention is that there is no "linear consequence of representations to people with pure mimicry as an outcome." Rather, reception is determined by the audience's social context and pre-exiting knowledge which lead them to "make use" of the films in a way that may seem problematic. Such was the case of Stanley Kubrick's groundbreaking science-fiction film *2001 A Space Odyssey* (1968) which Staiger uses as an emblematic case study since it was associated with drug use by its early spectatorship.

18 Focusing on early spectatorship, specifically the silent era, **Patrick Adamson** discusses Will Rogers's *Two Wagons-Both Covered* (1924) which, long before the first revisionist westerns, debunks the official historical myth of the Frontier. Adamson analyses how the film uses parody as a source of troubling reception, mainly thanks to the persona of its director and star, Will Rogers, a.k.a. "the Cherokee Kid." "At once a member of a marginalized group and a widely idolized media personality", Will Rogers was able to "[poke] fun at the excesses of his mainstream audiences and drew attention to his own complicated positionality with rare liberty."

19 Significantly the next two articles deal with films directed by Stanley Kubrick, which have often broken new ground and attracted controversy. **Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris**'s article deals with *The Shining* (1980) and how Kubrick's adaptation provides "a corrective dimension" of Stephen King's novel, which in return was "corrected" by Mick Garris's 1997 mini-series. Paquet-Deyris argues that these "palimpsestuous" corrections account for the wide divergence of strategies as regards the inscription of trouble and abnormality in the film and mini-series. While both foreground psychological and historical troubles, they also inscribe formal crises through

generic hybridity and "transformative levels of manipulation" of the viewer.

20 For his part, **Vincent Jaunas** focuses on Kubrick's last film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). As Jaunas recalls, the film caused much disappointment upon its release, as many expected a highly provocative exploration of eroticism. This very disappointment, Jaunas argues, stems from the film's purposeful frustration of viewers' scopophilia, leading them instead into a state of trouble and hermeneutic bewilderment that ultimately allows the film to develop "an ethics of unrest". For Jaunas, the film's "strategy of generic troubling, far from the playfulness which characterizes the mixing of film genres in the postmodern era, asks the audience to accept misdirection and even frustration as a necessary part of their cinematic experience"; in other words, there can be no cinephile paradise without trouble on screen.

21 **Chris Horn** turns to another American film director who seems to have had an "unerring ability to attract trouble". While William Friedkin's career was defined by the momentous success of the films he made in the early 1970s, both *Cruising* (1980) and *Rampage* (1987) throw significant light on the way public objections were mobilized against films in the 1980s, a decade which American film historians define in terms of blockbusters and right-wing ideology. To better understand the controversies that surrounded these two films, Horn interrogates the filmmaker's intentionality in tackling sensitive subject matter through an examination of archival material garnered from Friedkin's papers. While offering a reappraisal of both films, Horn contends that the use of archival material can provide an alternative perspective on troubling works and document "how media accounts can sometimes distort our understanding, in retrospect, of contemporary attitudes."

22 In the next chapter, **Sébastien Lefait** focuses on theoretical considerations about troubling reception. Drawing from Stuart Hall's seminal concepts of encoding/decoding, Lefait argues that Hall's theoretical model bears updating to consider recent trends of communication strategies whereby the very possibility for an oppositional stance by the decoding party are encoded by the producers of the text. Lefait's main argument is that this ever more sophisticated interplay with reception patterns comes from the palimpsestic over-

lapping of three culturally dominant notions: surveillance, reality TV, and intermediality. To illustrate his point, Lefait analyses three instances of media transfer and interference that induce the viewers to relate to real-life political issues in the United States.

23 **Emilie Cheyroux** also investigates the troubling line between fiction and reality, this time turning to the documentary genre or, more precisely, the liminal space of hybrid documentary. *The Infiltrators*, directed in 2019 by Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera, is a docu-thriller that combines documentary filming and staged re-enactments to relate the story of two undocumented activists who purposefully got arrested to infiltrate a detention center in Florida. Cheyroux highlights how the film's use of a troubling hybrid form is part and parcel of its purport to trigger troubling responses in viewers since "the performance portrayed in their film mirrors their own". Indeed, the filmmakers not only used media coverage but also participated in the infiltration to partake in the debate about immigration and security enforcement that divides American society.

24 Concluding this first part, **David Roche** examines the troubled characters of Lynne Ramsey's films, with an aim "to determine to what extent Ramsay's project can be seen as an attempt to develop a poetics of troubled subjectivities that operates on the levels of both cognition and sensation." He deconstructs the opposition between objective and expressive realism initially posited by Bordwell, proposing instead the notion that the difference between the two cinematic tradition is, in the works of Ramsey, largely a question of emphasis: "ultimately both traditions aim to capture human experience: expressive realism by objectifying the subjective, objective realism by subjectifying the objective, which, in our post-modern, post-structural world, is already subjective in the first place."

25 In Part 2, "Troubling the status quo: interrogating race, class and gender on screen," the authors examine the power and limits of film and television and investigate social issues related to the ideological constructions of either a nation, in this case the (dis)United States, or the patriarchal order.

26 **Claire Dutriaux** explores how some "professional Southerners" were hired by the Production Code Administration as mediators between the Southern states and Hollywood. As Dutriaux demonstrates, these

"professional Southerners" had to walk a tight line to champion the specificity of the South while acknowledging its troubled history. In this regard, as Dutriaux puts it, "they were all, in various ways, most concerned with the notion of 'trouble' and its paradoxes, as movies about the South could not completely ignore the region's troublesome past and present. Concomitantly, these Southerners needed motion pictures to be not 'troubling' or 'troublesome' for the South's audiences, because the industry needed exhibitors to pick up the movies and show them in the South.

27 After recalling the notorious impact of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), **Delphine Letort** focuses on films that investigate the workings of the Ku Klux Klan, from Walter Colmes's *The Burning Cross* in 1947 to Spike Lee's *BlacKkKlansman* in 2018. While adopting different narrative and representational strategies, the films all endeavor to show the inner workings of the organization and how its members negotiate their identity as white supremacists. Letort shows how each film thus challenges the nativist rhetoric of the Klan, and provoked some trouble on the level of reception, either raising concerns about the possible impact of the film, lest it might stir racial violence, or creating discomfort as regards the tone and provocative style the film adopts. For Letort, these controversies both show how the terms of the debate have evolved and persisted at the same time, and may very well account for the fact few directors have been inclined to portray the KKK.

28 By examining the *topos* of intoxication on screen in three different films from the silent era to the mid-1960s, and how it directly troubles the protagonists' – and the viewers' – apprehension of reality, **Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard** argues that this figural representation of trouble conveys the male protagonists' transgressive behavior and inadequacies as regards the idealized figure of the hero. For Costa de Beauregard, the insertion of the troubling *topos* of intoxication underscores a critique of modernity in general and of the American Dream of wealth and glory in particular.

29 Turning her attention to gendered representations of women, **Marguerite Chabrol** turns to one emblematic trope of the musical genre that showcases the female body as performative. She retraces the ambivalent relationships between Hollywood and burlesque

theatre that provided a stock element in Pre-Code musicals and reappeared in the 1950s with stylized mock striptease acts but remained a highly sensitive subject, strictly regulated both by the PCA and local censorship boards. Delving into the PCA archives, Chabrol purports to "analyze the ideology at stake behind the moral condemnation of burlesque in films." Chabrol's main contention is that even if the burlesque was turned into safe comedy acts through distancing and "decoding", this transformation did not preclude some sort of trouble to emerge. But this trouble was not so much due to moral consideration as for being "provocative in the way they empowered some female performers."

30 Female empowerment and sexuality are also at the center of **Anne Sweet's** essay that focuses on the figure of the witch in the recent television series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020). Sweet recalls that the witch is a key figure in feminist movements and discourse, used as a symbol of empowerment and defiance to the patriarchal order. Like former TV programs, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* appeared at a significant cultural moment for feminist consciousness, namely in the wake of #MeToo. It was also conceived by the streaming platform Netflix as part of a marketing strategy that was termed "young-adult push", aiming at exploring teen sexuality in a more explicit way than what has prevailed so far and including a number of non-heteronormative gender roles, presenting itself as a "woke," inclusive series. In this respect, Sweet also points out that the series adopts a somehow ambivalent narrative strategy as it resolutely focuses on the issues of a white privilege heroine, which led some critics to argue that its position about "wokeness" and intersectionality was hollowed out. Still, Sweet argues that the series is significant in the overall TV series landscape evolving "to feature representations of women that are increasingly subversive and transgressive, even if imperfectly progressive."

31 **Anaïs Le Fèvre-Berthelot** carries on investigating female stereotypes, this time through gendered representations of mental health issues. Her study is based on two television series that feature young female professionals who have trouble controlling their emotional lives. Studying the two series that were produced some twenty years apart allows for an appraisal of how representations of psychologically unstable female characters have evolved on screen. For Le Fèvre-

Berthelot, *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) can thus be read as "typical of the post-feminist perspective that tends to dismiss political readings of the main character's situation." On the other hand, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-2019) attests to the re-emergence of a feminist outlook along with intersectional concerns, allowing for marginalized groups to be better represented on screen. What *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* ultimately demonstrates, Le Fèvre-Berthelot argues, is that "far and inclusive representation should not be put in opposition with creativity and that humor does not have to rely on oppressive tropes."

32 In conclusion, we cannot help but remark on the fact that this issue was conceived and at long last birthed during what can only be seen as troubled and troubling times. In September 2019, when the SERCIA [4] conference which served as inspiration for this volume took place, the United States was in the final throes of a fractured presidency and the United Kingdom was on the brink of officially leaving the EU. Five years later, US democracy has undergone repeated attacks (including an insurrection and the reversal of Roe v Wade), the world experienced a global pandemic, and the terms "Film" and "Television" refer to materials now largely extinct in the digital age. And yet, if this foray into the implications of trouble on screen has taught us anything, it is that trouble begets art. As Harry Lime famously says in Carol Reid's 1949 film, *The Third Man*:

> Don't be so gloomy. After all, it's not that awful. Like the fella says, in Italy for 30 years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love - they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock [5].

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NOTES

1 See, for example, the works of Linda Williams (*Porn Studies*, 2004; *Screening Sex*, 2008) or James Potter's *Media Violence* (1999).

2 See Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*, 1992; *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, 2000.

3 See, for example, Christophe Gelly and David Roche (dir.), *Cinéma et théories de la réception - Études et panorama critique.* Presses Universitaires de Clermont-Ferrand, coll. "Littératures", 2012.

4 Société pour l'Enseignement et la Recherche du Cinéma Anglophone, http://www.sercia.net/index.php/fr/ ; *Trouble on Screen* conference, https://sercia2019.wixsite.com/troubleonscreen?lang=en

5 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0041959/quotes/?ref_=tt_dyk_qu (Accessed in October 2024).

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Mullen's research concerns the intersections of gender, race, adaptation and reception in North American film and television, especially as they relate to the monstrous, the abject, and the grotesque. A member of SERCIA and a founding member of the Society for the Study of the American Gothic, she has recently published work on *Deliverance*, *The Haunting*, *Westworld*, *The Shining*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Walking Dead*.

I - Troubled Spectatorship and Reception

Under the Influence: Trouble in the Audience

Janet Staiger

PLAN

The Case of 2001
The Scene, Part 1
The Scene, Part 2
Rated S—Lessons

TEXTE

1 In a weekend in early August, 2019, U.S. citizens witnessed horrific mass shootings of at least twenty-two people killed and twenty-nine wounded in the border city of El Paso, Texas, and at least nine killed and twenty-seven wounded in Dayton, Ohio. President Donald Trump promptly tweeted that the causes for these tragedies included "the glorification of violence in our society" in video games and elsewhere (Wagner), urging mostly a mental health response to the problem. Another Republican claimed the massacres occurred because the news media was spreading information about same-sex marriages, football player Colin Kaepernick's refusal to respect the American flag, and former President Barack Obama's and other Democrats' rejection of Trump as duly elected. Eventually, by mid-Monday morning, Trump did move to a primary argument that hatred was the cause for the shootings, with a few words condemning white supremacy ideologies.

2 Still, Trump's and others' initial configuration of explanations reran the classic and decades—even centuries—old theses about ideas, images, and sounds directly affecting their audiences, warning about audiences being under the influence of wrong and dangerous representations. And based on that presumption of more-or-less direct causality, they proposed the suppression and repression of some ideas, images, and sounds, propositions that have occurred from the

earliest religious strictures to the present-day under the supposition of causal impact.

3 However, contemporary research into representations of violence as they occur in violent video games and movies indicates no causal linkages with acts of hostility. As scholar Chris Ferguson indicates about a recent summary of the research in relation to Trump's and others' claims, "the evidence [of the review of the literature] was clear that violent video games are not a risk factor for serious acts of aggression. Neither are violent movies, nor other forms of media. [As Ferguson said], 'the data on bananas causing suicide is about as conclusive [...] Literally. The numbers work out about the same'" (Draper A13).

4 One of the concerns to be raised about "trouble on screen" is: does it have anything to say about "trouble in the audience"? Obviously, we do want to consider possible causality from representations, but I would argue that we need to hypothesize so-called potential effects with much more sophistication than a linear consequence of representations to people with pure mimicry as an outcome. Mitigating factors are always operating when discussing "trouble on screen."

5 One factor, in particular, includes social context and pre-existing audience knowledge. Recently, several other scholars and I were asked to comment on a series of questions about the history of the Hollywood Production Code and its impact on classical Hollywood cinema ("(Dis)agreements"). The project was useful, but at times the questions seemed to imply that the Production Code only operated significantly from about 1934 until the mid-1960s. It was as if the Production Code existed within its own filmic world, and a larger nexus of pre-movie views about improper or dangerous representations did not tacitly or explicitly affect filmmakers or as if community sentiments and local public laws were inconsequential[1]. As one individual addressing in 1928 the Fourth Annual Motion Picture Conference stated, "everybody knows there is nothing novel in censorship, nor anything untraditional in the warfare which men and women of free minds and hearts wage against it" (Kallen 20).

6 The project's questions also led one to think that nothing replaced the Production Code, which simply permitted or denied screening rights within industry-controlled theaters (a "yes" or a "no"), when it

ceased in 1967. Thus, the questions ignored the legal restrictions on U.S. network television as a public utility or the new 1968 Film Ratings System of various categories linked to age-levels, ratings around which producers often work in order to secure the sort of rating they favor. Cutting or adding, going to a broader or more specialized audience is common. And, for instance, producers sometimes create "directors' cuts" for a later supplemental audience and more profits. These ratings are mostly advisory codes based on assumptions about appropriate representations for particular ages, but they do provide more audience flexibility in representational choice while they affect representations. As I concluded for the project's group discussion on the Production Code: "regulation still happens, now by *both* the industry and the audience members" ("(Dis)agreements" 166).

7 Moreover, even with censorship, audiences are not ignorant about what has or might have been omitted or revised in a representation. Questions about effects of representation must also tackle the situation that people know representations are manipulated. As in the case of the 1932 film *Blonde Venus*, newspaper and fan magazines detailed some of the behind-the-scenes struggles over representation and provided both true-life and fictional alternative stories through which to read (or, at least, to contrast) the events represented in the screen version. As Michel Foucault has emphasized, repression might actually produce *more* expressions of the forbidden (Staiger, *Perverse* 77-8).

8 These expressions of the forbidden are productive but not always in ways most obvious. S. Elizabeth Bird has studied how audiences "interpret and use [real-life] scandals in their everyday lives," concluding that one theory argues for "an effect of neuroticizing the audience, suggesting there is something sick or abnormal about being attracted to unwholesome news" (100). Another approach focuses on an "'active' audience," assuming that people use this information to criticize their everyday experiences. Yet she offers a third hypothesis that many of these stories follow melodramatic or carnivalistic emotional trajectories that "tend usually toward the maintenance of the status quo" (117), so the stories can be effective *personally* for emotional as well as intellectual purposes and *socially* for interpersonal communication with friends—the "water-cooler" effect.

9 The question of effects of movie representations had its social science investigators early on. In the U.S., the Payne Fund studies of the 1930s is a major initial instance [2]. However, the literature is filled with studies of this question. One rather prominent case begins in the late 1940s when Fredric Wertham starts claiming that "comics are an important fact in causing juvenile delinquency" (83). Wertham's assertions influenced U.S. congressional hearings in the mid-1950s with an outcome of a tacit self-regulation agreement with comic book producers to avoid racist and sexist imagery (Staiger, "Wertham Case"). But other social scientists at the time strongly criticized his linear causal claims. Frederic M. Thrasher, in the *Journal of Educational Sociology* in 1949, notes that Wertham's "extreme position which is not substantiated by any valid research, is not only contrary to considerable current psychiatric thinking, but also disregards tested research procedures" (195). Thrasher particularly points to studies by Paul G. Cressey which indicate that people already with a propensity to crime may pick up methods of violence from representations, but the representations themselves are not causal. Many of the children Cressey studied knew movies were representations. Moreover, real-life violence was "so familiar to the children [...] that movies seemed rather tame by comparison" (199). Thrasher concludes by quoting the editors of *Collier's* magazine, which had published Wertham's original essay:

> Juvenile delinquency is the product of pent-up frustrations, stored up resentments and bottled up fears. [...] But the comics are a handy, obvious uncomplicated scapegoat. If the adults who crusade against them would only get as steamed up over such basic causes of delinquency as parental ignorance, indifference and cruelty, they might discover that the comics are no more a menace than *Treasure Island* or *Jack the Giant Killer*. ("Old Folks")

10 By the early 1960s, social science research into effects of representation had produced many useful studies pointing out the extremely complicated issues in describing or determining effects of representations. As one study examining whether movies might enhance or reduce ethnic prejudices notes:

> […] People do not attribute accuracy or seriousness of purpose to commercial films which are meant to entertain. […] People may evade propaganda with which they disagree: rather than accepting or refusing the message, they may fail to understand it or they may twist and misinterpret it. Finally, the point is sometimes made that because ethnic prejudices are deeply ingrained, brief exposure […] to a message of tolerance is hardly sufficient to bring about changes in attitudes deriving from the personality systems of individuals. There may even by [sic] a "boomerang effect," with prejudices being strengthened in the face of attack. (Middleton 680).

11 The research on this has continued over the past sixty years with much more sophistication and penetration of variables, but the basic conclusions remain. In fact, the contemporary problem of conspiracy thinking—in the U.S., for example, theses about the "deep state" and "QAnon" narratives—and the refusal to believe in news stories that contradict the beliefs of their audiences—the "fake news" argument—provides an extremely difficult situation in which representations, while at the heart of the matter, can hardly be the source of, or cure for, the illness.

12 On the one hand, this rather pessimistic situation surrounding thinking about whether one might fix troubles in the audience through the "right" representations on the screen (or at least not contribute to making things worse), however, still requires some "on the other hand" thinking. If representations on the screen cannot be argued to affect the audience except perhaps very temporarily as a stimulant or as a reinforcement of already held beliefs, that does not mean that it is unwise to consider causes for "trouble in the audience."

13 Here I want to shift focus from the screen to the audience—those social contexts and pre-existing audience knowledge as causal agents for what happens while watching the movies and afterwards for spectators. I do not want to pretend—to take a very easy instance—that "adult" (sex) movies have no consequences for audiences who attend them in order to become aroused. Or that movies with political messages do not reinforce beliefs, either to the better or worse. And I particularly want to emphasize that audience members' pre-existing notions about representations and specific social contexts

will influence what they perceive and retain from a cinematic experience. As someone whose research has emphasized historical materialist analysis of interpretation, I want to contribute to producing more subtle investigations of the relations between representations and audiences. I also wish to turn to a happier example than that which initiated this chapter. My case will be the earliest audiences for Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and the audience "troubles" that became public soon after its release. This example is part of several scholars' attention to audiences' behavior as part of the filmgoing experience: drinking alcohol, binge watching, using home-viewing as cover for sex, and so forth (Benson-Allott, Church "Altered States, Altered Temporalities," and Szczepaniak-Gillece). This case study is about the audience's use of a film for taking drugs [3].

The Case of *2001*

14 In his study of fan mail written to Kubrick at the time of the initial release of *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 1968, Peter Krämer notes that the film originally received a mixed critical response but that a large contingency of youth in the audience, probably fueled by a revised advertising campaign using the slogan, "the ultimate trip," produced a critical re-evaluation of the movie and acknowledgement of the film's possible "psychedelic" features. Krämer also writes: "we can only find traces of this [drug use] in the letters sent to Kubrick. […] So far I have not seen a single letter from 1968 or 1969 mentioning the correspondent's drug use during the viewings of *2001*, or the fact that substances were being smoked or ingested by other people in the auditorium" ("Dear Mr. Kubrick"), although Krämer is not asserting this is not going on.

15 R. Barton Palmer in his essay, "2001: The Critical Reception and Generation Gap," does note that one or two contemporaneous critics do mention the use of marijuana or drugs by audience members and points to the generation gap between older, established critics who were initially more skeptical about the film than younger people. Palmer focuses on the themes and structures in *2001*, which might explain this disparity of response. Moreover, he includes in a footnote that critic John Russell Taylor noticed about a year after the film's release that the attention of an "enthusiastic young viewer" was

different from that of his parents: “he was . . . not in the slightest worried by a nagging need to make connections. […] He was accepting it like […] an LSD trip […] as a ‘succession of vivid moments’” (note 3, quoting Taylor).

16 Considering “how 2001 bec[a]me associated with drug use by its initial audiences,” I want to emphasize three elaborations of Krämer’s and Palmer’s original forays into detailing the history of the early altered-state, “under-the-influence” spectatorship of 2001. First, using a bit of auto-ethnography, I would stress that many youths of the late 1960s would have been smoking marijuana or ingesting more complex drugs before seeing *any* film. They would not have needed public suggestions that watching a film that way might be great. Everything was susceptible to “inebriated” viewing—although some movies were much better for this than others [4]. An extension of this project might be to consider what people think produces “better” experiences; among these might be striking visual displays, more intense emotional responses, and intellectual insights [5].

17 Second, unusual aesthetic features of 2001 appear to have facilitated the linkages between the movie and a drug trip. Amongst these features are the minimal dialogue, an oddly mixed sound track, the “slow” pace, and visual novelties. Hence, aesthetics mattered.

18 Third, and a primary focus in this essay, is that early mainstream reviews *did* use language which might have primed the pump (or stoked the pipe) to encourage that spectatorship-state to a *knowledgeable* person. Hence, not everyone would have had the information necessary to appreciate the possibilities of combining the movie with drug use, but many people would.

19 To pursue this investigation, I will set the scene for the premiere of 2001 on April 3, 1968, then I will examine the early reviews of the film, and, finally, I will sketch out very briefly several highlights of public discourse about 2001 in its first couple of years. This history will indicate that, to a knowledgeable viewer, the clues about how to “dig” the most out of watching 2001 are evident in the very first reviews if one needed such hints to choose the state—altered or not—in which to watch. I will also comment very briefly about fine-tuning the method of using of reviews to appreciate audiences.

The Scene, Part 1

20 First, a setting of the "scene." In 1968 people used many drugs that had variable effects; *2001* had a particular connection with lysergic acid diethylamide, LSD. Although marijuana had been illegal since the mid-1930s in the U.S., possession of LSD was not declared against the law until October 1968, half a year after the release of *2001*. LSD was synthesized in 1938 in Switzerland, with medical and psychological doctors exploring its use for mental and emotional therapies and the military investigating its applications for warfare during and after World War II. In 1953, the U.S.'s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) authorized the famous MK-ULTRA program to experiment with altering behavior with LSD; also, medical clinics using it as therapy opened that year in England and then across Europe, Canada, and the United States. In the late 1950s, actor Cary Grant praised its values (Lee and Shlain xiii-xiv, xviii, 3, 27, 56-7). In 1954 British author Aldous Huxley published his experiences with mescaline, recounting his experiences and pleasures, particularly the intense colors, and connecting it to "being" and Buddhism: "Place and distance cease to be of much interest […] And along with indifference to space there went an even more complete indifference to time" (331).

21 In 1957 Huxley and Humphrey Osmona introduced the term "psychedelic" in association with LSD since "hallucination" and "psychosis" had negative connotations (Lee and Shalain 54-5). By the 1960s, the term "psychedelic" was in widespread use to imply finding "a more universal 'cosmic consciousness'" (Berlatsky 609) through such drugs. Art, underground and experimental films, and light shows flourished. And people smoked and ingested drugs to accompany and enhance experiences. Filmmaker and critic Jonas Mekas reported, in 1964 in the journal *Film Culture*, that he found a magic lantern show so boring he had a drink and came back: "the show became much more interesting that way." He then reports, "I remember another time when I watched *Marienbad* [1961] and *L'Avventura* [1960] doped on pot. There, just the opposite occurred. My perception increased. I could see more than usually. The movie became tedious. A shot of ten seconds seemed to last ten minutes" (157) [6].

22 In his excellent article on U.S. fictional narrative drug and LSD films, Harry Benshoff focuses on the cinematic representation of taking LSD. This subgenre of these so-called "head" movies begins in 1959 with *The Tingler* and runs through the 1960s with the several well-known examples of *The Trip* (1967), *Psych-Out* (1968), *Skidoo* (1968), and *Easy Rider* (1969)[7]. Of course, representing an LSD trip could be awfully different from experiencing LSD while watching a film. Benshoff concludes that, according to discussion in the late 1960s, a film good for watching while stoned or tripping is one which "regularly eschews or modifies classical Hollywood narrative form" and has a "focus on spectacular aural and visual effects"; it is "often episodic or nonnarrative" or is an "anthology concert film" (31)[8]. David Church concurs, the "*psychedelic film* proper devotes extended sequences to dazzling effects which audiovisually recall hallucinogenic experiences, often through avant-garde (or avant-garde-inspired) techniques" ("Doors of Reception").

The Scene, Part 2

23 *2001: A Space Odyssey* was initially released on April 3, 1968, in New York City in Cinerama. I am not going to recapitulate information about Kubrick's stated intentions or his narrative and stylistic choices for the film, his cutting out of seventeen minutes of the film between the first and third screening (LoBruto 310), or the early contradictory and often negative reviews of the film before its slow roll-out as a MGM roadshow film over the summer[9]. What I want to do, to consider how the social context and pre-existing knowledge of audiences matter when thinking about trouble on screen and trouble in the audience, and as to how *knowledgeable* audiences may have learned to associate the film with possible drug use while viewing it, is to consider the first two weeks' worth of public reviews[10]. Here is part of what these initial reviews said:

> "Robe," *Variety*, 3 April 1968: "Big, beautiful but plodding sci-fi epic. […] Dullea, after being subjected to a wild celestial ride through a series of galaxies that create a psychedelic effort [sic] on both him and the audience, finds himself in a room decorated in a style familiar to earth…"

> Renata Adler, *The New York Times*, 4 April 1968: “The movie is so completely absorbed in its use of color and space, its fanatic devotion to science-fiction detail, that it is somewhere between hypnotic and immensely boring. […] The special effects […] are the best I have ever seen” (58).

> Joseph Gelmis, *Newsday*, 4 April 1968: “Although it is dramatically disjointed and pretentious, its special effects create their own other-worldly reality. […] It exists on its own terms as a unique experience, […] an unparalleled movie spectacle. […] Dullea […] passes through a mind-expanding psychedelic experience . . . ”

> Andrew Sarris, *The Village Voice*, 11 April 1968: “The ending is a mishmosh of psychedelic self-indulgence for the special effects people and an exercise in mystifying abstract fantasy in the open temple of High Art” (45).

> Penelope Gilliatt, *The New Yorker*, 13 April 1968: “[…] uniquely poetic piece of sci-fi […] The film is hypnotically entertaining” (150-51).

> William Wolf, *Cue* [New York City Weekly], 13 April 1968: “[…] in total it is a brilliantly conceived cosmic adventure, exciting for the look of it alone. […] Unable to get the film out of my mind, I wanted a second look and found both experiences spellbinding” (57).

> William Kloman, *The New York Times*, 14 April 1968: The special effects include a “psychedelic apocalypse” (15).

> Gene Youngblood, *The Los Angeles Free Press*, 19 April 1968, reprinted in The Village Voice, 2 May 1968: 2001 “is a masterpiece, […] unspeakably beautiful. […] It belongs in the same league with Antonioni’s ‘Red Desert,’ Godard’s ‘Alphaville’ and Emshwiller’s ‘Relativity.’ That’s what I mean by masterpiece. […] Expanded Cinema no longer is restricted to the underground. […] You sit there completely overwhelmed, numbed, staggered by what you're seeing. […] [It is okay to label the film] psychedelic. […] And then comes the incredible denouement, the wordless final half-hour of the film which becomes a tour-de-force display of abstract cinema and surrealistic imagery as powerful and inventive as any I've seen in the so-called 'underground' or anywhere else” (44).

> Anonymous, *Time*, 19 April 1968: "An avalanche of eerie, kinetic effects attacks the eye and bends the mind. Kubrick turns the screen into a planetarium gone mad and provides the viewer with the closest equivalent to psychedelic experience this side of hallucinogens" ("2001" 92).

> Hollis Alpert, *Saturday Review*, 20 April 1968: "What happens next might cause some moviegoers to wonder if a solution of LSD had been wafted through the air conditioning system" (48).

24 It should be obvious where I am going. While many of the reviews were critical about the film as plotless and with lifeless characters, they also gave information that might indicate something particularly worth seeing for reasons other than those that draw many people to the cinema. Of the twenty-one reviews that I could find from April 3, 1968, through May 3, 1968 (the first month of limited release), nine of them use the word "psychedelic," and others use terms such as "trip," "LSD," and "surreal." Even in this first month, three of the critics mention seeing the film a second time and revisionist assessments begin to appear.

25 In mid-May (six weeks into the limited roadshow release), *Variety* provided an analysis of *2001*'s weaker advance sales compared with *Dr. Zhivago*'s, with a headline of "'2001' Draws Repeat and Recant Notices, Also a Quasi-Hippie Public," while noting, "This may be a meaningless statistic, since '2001' seems to be attracting a young, quasi-'hippie' audience which plunks down its money at the box office but is unlikely to buy ducats three or six weeks in advance" (20).

26 While not in the most visible venue, Larry Lee in *Rat Subterranean News* (New York City) reports at this same time: "Granted: *2001* is the head flick of all time. Note the faintly resinous spoor of the audience, the people fighting at intermission to get those 50-cent chocolate bars, the spaced-out few who contemplate the curtain for long minutes after the movie ends" (247).

27 Also by mid-May and through the summer while *2001* was roadshowing in sixty-one theaters ("'2001' Draws Repeat" 20), more "studied" analyses appear in film journals and periodicals of review. Many of these organize the film into themes and messages, compare

it to Kubrick's other work, and may complain about the length, lack of action, and opaque conclusion while praising the technology. Others extol the film as a new kind of cinema. Debates occur about whether or not films should have "meanings," whether the ending of the film is "worth the deadly boredom of the rest of film" (Spinrad 58), whether this is a step forward in science fiction, and whether the reason youth like this film so much is because they have grown up in the visual environment of television.

28 By January 1969, when the film begins its broad release in "inferior" 35mm, summaries and thought-pieces take stock of where everything is. While implicit suggestions about watching the film tripping or stoned had appeared in the first two weeks of its release, the discussion becomes quite explicit. *Variety* reports that people want to sit in the front area of theaters "to be 'enveloped' by the psychedelic special effects." In fact, during the "light show," people in the balconies and back rows move up to the front and lay on their backs. "The Fume of Poppies" exists; managers report "the smoking of marijuana in the balconies" (Byron 19)[11]. By January 1970, in discussing the recent re-release of Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) and its stoned audiences, Cambridge, Massachusetts's weekly journal, *Phoenix*, recalls: "Last year, the same was true of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Yellow Submarine*, and currently the second-most popular drug flick in town is *Easy Rider*, which is billed on the Abbey [theater] marquee under the phrase 'Oh, You Mean Marijuana,' a quote from the film." The theater manager said, "I'd estimate that our audience for *2001* was 75% stoned.'" He apparently advertised *2001* as "'Rated S, for Stoned Audiences'" until MGM objected. Still, "Audiences betrayed their blithe condition in other ways. Everyone sat as close to the screen as possible, giggled constantly, and ate popcorn ravenously" (C. Kramer 14). The theater manager's concessions income doubled. Even Vincent Canby knew about this trait of the audiences of *2001* by Spring 1970. Upon seeing the film a second time, he reports that *2001* "went on to become a cult film, a head film, a film to recant by, and a smashing commercial success. […] The ultimate irony of '2001' is that it became known as the film to turn on by" (1, 21).

Rated S—Lessons

29 I must admit to enjoying thoroughly this excursion into the public notices about 2001. It provides three lessons. A minor one is that 2001 has some historical linkages to the late 1960s cult movie scene. In those years, repeat viewings of movies were occurring among two types of audiences: the "art-house devotees" who sought "to find authorial signatures, to seek hidden messages, and to participate in a group audience experience." This group could overlap with "underground audiences" who, because of the locations of the screenings "(run-down, large-city theaters; midnight screenings) [...] were very much an urban, mostly male, and gay or gay friendly audience" (Staiger, "Cultural Productions" 54-5). Particularly the descriptions of people moving about in the theater to maximize an experience forecast the dynamics for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) phenomenon, which begins in 1976 in New York City (Hoberman and Rosenbaum). Lots of trouble in the audience here!

30 However, an even more significant lesson concerns using reviews to learn about audiences. While I have, since 1985, been studying reviews of and discourse about films to gage political, social, emotional, and personal interpretations of films, I have tried not to make claims about specific effects of those appraisals. In this instance, however, I am considering what results the reviews might have on audience behavior. And I have begun to think about how I use reviews for my personal movie-going choices.

31 While I know that some critics have an engagement with a film much as I do, and while I know what other reviewers say, I often do *not* follow the writers' general guidance about whether or not to spend my time in the theater with the movie. Instead, I look somewhat piecemeal for information that tells me aspects of the film that might connect for me. For instance, I have favorite (and non-favorite) genres. Some directors and actors will pull me in to a theatrical showing no matter what the film. Less for me, but greater for many others, music matters: see the widespread box office appeal of *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018) versus its initial critical response. Thus, I am fairly confident in concluding that the use of certain words like "psychedelic," a "trip," and "surreal" said something very particular to

the potential audiences of 2001. Word of mouth invariably also mattered, especially from people who saw the film stoned and had a great time. So even a negative review might provoke the hopes for a particular use of a film for a knowledgeable audience member.

32 It seems easy to see how 2001: A *Space Odyssey* immediately became "the ultimate trip," encouraging an "altered" spectatorship. This matters not only for historical reasons, however, but also for scholarly ones. Yes, critics and researchers may rightfully produce exceptionally valuable analyses of films to share among themselves and with amateur connoisseurs of films. Still, I would wager that the average audience member is doing many other things with the movies and their reviews, and this is worth recognizing as scholars study the place of media in culture and society.

33 This brings me to my third lesson and back to the beginning of my essay: social context and pre-existing audience knowledges matter in considering audiences and representations. Part of what produced the actual audience effects for 2001 of choosing to watch the film stoned or tripping included the difference of, not the representations per se (in terms of plot, 2001 is somewhat a traditional science fiction story) but, the non-standard aesthetics that I described earlier: the minimal dialogue—in a 141-minute-long movie "only about 40 of those minutes include scenes where language has any importance" (Nelson 112); an oddly mixed soundtrack; the "slow" pace; and the visual novelties: characteristics that are not standard classical Hollywood cinema but more aligned with European art cinemas. Consequently, reviewers rated well for altered-state viewing other films perceived as similar in their aesthetics such as *Zabriskie Point* (1970), *Performance* (1970), *El Topo* (1970), *Walkabout* (1971), and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), fashioning even a subgenre of film known as the "acid Western" (Gallagher 163; "Acid Western"; Palmer.)

34 These comparable aesthetics in 2001 also produced one of the valuable contrasts in film analysis between Pauline Kael and Annette Michelson. In Febuary1969, Kael pointed out that critics were praising one of the head movies, *Wild in the Streets* (1968), as though it was "art." She did not consider it that but rather "trash." Sure, it was entertaining and someone could have fun watching it, but just do not

treat it as if it were "art" (67-74). The same for some of the recent European art films. She writes,

> A few years ago the new "tribalists" here responded to the gaudy fantasies of Juliet of the Spirits [1965] by using the movie to turn on. A few had already made a trip of 8 1/2 [1963], but Juliet, which was conveniently and perhaps not entirely accidentally, in electric, psychedelic color, caught on because of it.

> Using movies to go on a trip has about as much connection with the art of film as using one of those Doris Day-Rock Hudson jobs for ideas on how to redecorate your home—an earlier way of stoning yourself (74).

35 In contrast about art cinema aesthetics, Michelson, in her essay, "Bodies in Space: Film as Carnal Knowledge," published in the same month, saw similar personal experiences of the cinema differently. Using 2001 for her case, she considers it a "breakthrough" in cinema; it is a film "whose substance and function fuse in the synthetic radicalization of its metaphors"; "its ontogeny recapitulates a phylogeny" (55-6).

36 I am not sure I fully understand Michelson, but her appreciation of the bodily experience permitted while watching 2001, perhaps enhanced by the audience's personal choices of being "under the influence," marks a rupture in critical analysis as she employs Bergsonian and subjective aesthetic criteria for appreciating the movie. It is not so much that the representations or their aesthetics cause the effects in the audience, but that an audience in a particular social context and with particular pre-existing knowledges and propensities might *make use* of the film in a specific way.

37 I am personally concerned about wishing to eliminate hostile images of racism, gender-phobia, misogyny, and so forth from public and private representations because I think people *can make use* of these images. However, I do not believe that the representations themselves are the *first* line of attack. Rather, in a small re-write of the *Collier*'s magazine editors in 1949, I think we need to consider that inter-personal violence "is the product of pent-up frustrations, stored up resentments and bottled up fears. […] If the adults who

crusade against [violent and racist images] would only get as steamed up over such basic causes of [violence] as parental ignorance, indifference and cruelty" we might make inroads into creating a better world [12].

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NOTES

1 For a history and discussion of this for the first two decades of cinema in the United States, see Staiger, *Bad Women.*

2 For a more contemporary summary of these studies, see Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, 165-85.

3 This case is not unique. The recent release of the film *Cats* (2019) has provoked a similar pattern of behavior and word-of-mouth about using drugs to view the film. See Hayes and Judkis.

4 For instance Hulme and Wesler in 1996 do not rate *2001* very highly in this regard, stating that it has "great color and visuals, [and] a few geometric patterns if you look at it right" (154).

5 See the below discussion for what seems to be the consensus about this in the 1960s.

6 This reference owes thanks to Church's research in his "The Doors of Reception."

7 Other films discuss the use of LSD and portray its effects; these films actually try to represent the experience. Also see Starks and DeAngelis134-51. Church ("Doors of Reception") argues that Kenneth Anger's "'Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome' (1954/1966) is arguably the first film to implicitly depict a psychedelic trip," and the 1966 re-release included directions about when to take which drugs.

8 Also see Gallagher 163.

9 For discussions of some of this, see Palmer; Krämer "'Dear Mr. Kubrick'"; Krämer "A Film Specially Suitable" 48; Sperb 18-83; Hall and Neale 191; Banerjee 37 and Friedman "Beyond the Infinite Interpretations".

10 This is somewhat difficult to do precisely accurately since publication dates do not always match with availability on the newsstand.

11 A story also repeated is that *Rolling Stone* reported that someone ran down a theater aisle and into the screen, shouting, “It’s God! It’s God!” (Williams 278).

12 My deepest thanks to Caetlin Benson-Allott, David Church, and Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece for inviting me to join their 2019 Society for Cinema and Media Studies Panel on “Intoxicated Spectatorship” which provided the initial opportunity to consider these questions. I also appreciate the lively responses from the members of the 25th Sercia Conference in Fall 2019.

RÉSUMÉS

English
One of the concerns to be raised about “trouble on screen” is, does that mean anything about “trouble in the audience”? Obviously, we do want to consider possible causality from representations, but I argue that we need to hypothesize so-called potential effects with much more sophistication than a linear consequence of representations to people with pure mimicry as an outcome. Mitigating factors are always operating when discussing “trouble on screen.” I will particularly stress the importance of social contexts and features of pre-existing audiences.

Français
Dans l’analyse des « troubles à l’écran », s’agit-il de troubles parmi les spectateurs ? Une analyse « cause à effet », même valide, doit être nuancée, prenant en compte de façon plus sophistiquée multiples éléments réceptionnels, notamment les questions de contexte(s) sociaux et les connaissances préexistantes des spectateurs.

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Trouble on the Historical Frontier: Will Rogers' *Two Wagons—Both Covered* (1924)

Patrick Adamson

PLAN

Comedy, History, Counter-History
Re-presenting the Frontier
The West, Inside/Out
Conclusion

TEXTE

1 The concluding sequence of *Two Wagons—Both Covered* (Rob Wagner, 1924), co-written by and starring Will Rogers, sees a pioneer party newly arrived on Californian soil ambushed by a band of "Escrow Indians." At first, they circle their victims, encroaching behind a camouflage of leaves and branches (Fig. 1), before they lower their disguises to reveal white faces and tailored suits. The attackers are not Native Americans, protective of a land invaded, but real estate agents determined to profit off one. In return for their wagons, possessions, and livestock, the settlers receive scraps of paper, deeds for unseen properties that even the realtors' boosterist rhetoric can scarcely redeem: "between the mountains and the sea—swept by ocean breezes—hot an' cold folding doors—gas, sewers an' 5 cent carfare" (Fig. 2). The nation's imagined forefathers have arrived in the West expecting an untamed land of promise, only to find that it is not merely barren but already taken. And in an ironic turn, its reputed tamers, emboldened by unchecked individualism, beget a new chaos.

Fig. 1 "Escrow Indians" in…


Fig. 1 "Escrow Indians" in…

Fig. 2. … and out of camouflage in *Two Wagons—Both Covered*.


Fig. 2. … and out of camouflage in Two Wagons—Both Covered.

2 Deployed here is an Indian ambush trope closely associated with both cinematic Western narratives and the era's dominant ideas about American historical progress. At its heart is a conflict foundational to genre and nation alike, between expansionist pioneers and the forces of indigenous resistance. But here, with its traditional racial dynamic reversed—white landholders advancing *as*, rather than being menaced *by*, the encircling "Indians"—the connection between this familiar iconographic shape and the course of history it implies comes into question. Racing across the continent to the Promised Land, reaching the end of the trail, the heroes find a West "civilized" only in the sense that it is now a site for exploitation and capitalist greed.

3 Above all else, however, the incident at hand is most obviously, and quite simply, a dramatic situation made funny. It is an assault treated with neither the solemnity of traditional historical discourse nor the sincerity of the typical sagebrush melodrama.[1] With risible pioneers and incongruous white "Indians," its re-enactment of the westering experience is an eminently flawed, inauthentic one. And yet, it is because of these flaws—its inability to sincerely recreate a convincing past, or at least, treat it with the reverence traditionally accorded history—that this comedy of frontier life works as a parody. Through its absurd, yet tellingly familiar, gesture at the most orthodox of American stories, it reflects upon, self-consciously invites comparison with, and ultimately troubles a far more assured set of "truth" claims—those of the object of its ridicule: the historical Western film.

4 *Two Wagons* is not concerned with just any Western. In fact, it is a parody of the most celebrated historical film of its day. Released the previous year, Paramount's landmark epic of the Oregon Trail pioneers *The Covered Wagon* (James Cruze, 1923) was then ranked by many as the most admirable thing to have come out of Hollywood in its short history — "the picture event of a decade," according to *Variety*: "Not since *The Birth of a Nation* has there been

a screen offering so universally heralded by press and public" (27). Among reviewers, it was declared "the first great picture to bring home to us the history of our own country" (Alison Smith 54) and "the great American picture," a "screen history" that marked "a tremendous leap forward in the progress of this art and this industry" ("Illustrated" 913).

5 An archetype for a new kind of large-form historical film, endorsed by Hollywood's advocates and critics alike, *The Covered Wagon* inaugurated a series of prestige Westerns that, cumulatively speaking, proposed to use cinema, a medium celebrated for its privileged bond to reality, to tell the foundational story of the United States—that of the nineteenth-century frontier. In line with the dominant historiographical tendency of the era, they presented it as the site in which a nation and its people had been made (Etulain 42). Titles such as *North of 36* (Irvin Willat, 1924), *The Iron Horse* (John Ford, 1924), *The Pony Express* (James Cruze, 1925), and *The Vanishing American* (George B. Seitz, 1925) were hailed for the rare "authenticity" they brought to interpreting the United States' constructive Old West period—a heritage of westbound pioneers and doomed Indians, transcontinental railroads and new trails of human commerce.

6 In the years to come, James Cruze's dramatic recreation of life on the Oregon Trail would assume a central role in most genealogies of not only its genre, but American cinema as a whole, as evidence of a scandal-beset Hollywood moving in a promising new direction: one of popular edification through legitimate historical representation, and *American* historical representation in particular (Hampton 338-340, Messel 222-223). "To Utopia in the Covered Wagon," declared noted pioneer of English-language film theory Vachel Lindsay, arguing that only through cinema could the diverse, multilingual populace of the present hope to witness and learn from its forebears' most admirable collective accomplishments (336, 363-364). The epic Western's moving "truths," written in a visual language *all* could apparently understand, were to elevate, unify, and Americanise. During a period in which immigration, urbanisation, and industrialisation called for modern, affirmative forms of social cohesion, *The Covered Wagon*'s screen history of the pioneers offered a singularly timely, persuasive, and wide-reaching delineation of America's collective identity.

7 By comparison, the frontier spectacle of *Two Wagons* is neither persuasive nor momentous. It is "bad" history, and yet, in its being so, it is a noteworthy challenge to not only the era's dominant idealisms about historical practice and Western cinema, but also the national story they together served. Transposed into the comic mode, it offers something less *historical* than *counter-historical*. This study examines the silent-era epic Western parody on the basis that it *does not* propose to capture "authentic" frontier scenes nor to present an alternative account of westward migration. It aspires to be implausible and disorderly, yet for it, a tacit reminder of the past's ultimate unknowability. Adopting a style laced with irony, it casts the epic Western's new approach to screen history as one unduly sanitized and self-satisfied: overblown tributes to pioneer heroism are exaggerated to the point of ridicule; majestic restagings of documented scenes are belittled; and prideful national teleologies are upended. At bottom, the film unsettles the epic Western's most fundamental premises and assumptions: it highlights the dangers of making rigid assertions about history's meaning and direction by ridiculing a film that, for doing just that, was consistently cited as the foremost evidence of Hollywood taking on a new, prosocial role in American society.

8 For all that inflated, self-congratulatory visions of national-historical process brought middlebrow legitimacy to the Western, they also evidently made it ripe for deflation. By the end of 1923 alone, the short comedies *The Uncovered Wagon* (J.A. Howe, 1923), *The Covered Push-Cart* (Paul Terry, 1923), and *The Covered Schooner* (Harry Edwards, 1923) were all in distribution (though the latter sends up Paramount's then-most-acclaimed landmark in name only). Then, in 1924, came *Two Wagons*. A two-reeler from Hal Roach Studios, co-written by and starring the "all-American" political humorist Rogers, it proved a hit of unexpected scale. Trade papers reported "house record" multi-week screening runs, accompanied by promotional campaigns of "feature proportions" ("Tried" 37). Declared to be "an unprecedented occurrence in the realm of short subjects" and "a two-mile advance in short comedies," its popular success—which included a seven week stay as the feature presentation at the Miller Theatre, Los Angeles—drew notice even from writers who typically overlooked short subjects (Agnes Smith 55).

9 As with any parody, *Two Wagons*'s success clearly depended upon the cultural knowledge of its audience. It demanded what might be thought of as a double vision—a recognition of simultaneous familiarity and difference, of operating both inside and outside—one that is fundamental to the appeal of *Two Wagons*, and not simply on account of its being a parody. Enormously popular as the "serious" historical epic burlesqued by it was, its star and co-writer was, in fact, even more of a household name in 1920s America. And when he came to opine on his nation's Western heritage, he did so on terms akin to those of his chosen form: as an embodiment of both familiarity and difference, an insider and outsider.

10 As Daniel Heath Justice writes in his literary history of the Cherokee Nation, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*: "There has been no single Cherokee who influenced the world like Will Rogers, 'The Cherokee Kid.' He was the unofficial voice of the idealized United States, a man who gently but firmly held a mirror up to the American public and teased its excesses and failings while celebrating its virtues" (119). Belying the dominant perception of his homespun public persona, Rogers was a cowboy *and* an Indian—and one of the most influential voices in the United States of the 1920s and 30s. Born in Indian Territory in 1879 to prominent members of the Cherokee Nation, he became a naturalized American via the Curtis Act in 1898. By the 1920s, Rogers was, at once, recognized as an authority on all things Western, and a proud, vocal Cherokee with a unique platform for sending them up. Despite coming from a marginalized community, his commentary not only *spoke to* but was *heard in* the very heart of American political life. As a friend to presidents and a patriotic "unofficial ambassador" for the nation, he was unusually well placed to ridicule a power in which he was, in no small way, embedded—and he did so though an unassuming "All-American" brand of humor, targeting the beneficiaries of wealth and privilege in a manner that saw him embraced as a voice of the people (Justice 124). The folksy populist humor and common-sense philosophizing of this rope-twirler turned actor, writer, and radio commentator found an estimated audience of forty million by the time of his death in 1935 (Velikova 83).

11 Accordingly, rather than using traditional realist strategies to critique the nostalgic "content" of the myth, *Two Wagons* finds Rogers

adopting, while crucially problematizing, the appearance of a notedly "American" form of historicizing. As a quintessentially mainstream public figure whose satirical commentary on the day's events found favor across the political divisions of the United States, he revises and critiques the national orthodoxy *from within*, by advancing the alternative, ironic type of historical representation seen in the opening example—disjunctive and unreliable, not natural, inevitable, or truthful. The trappings of the "serious" historical Western appear, but through a lens of scrutiny that exposes the incongruities and hypocrisies of "civilizing" rhetoric and action, along with the privileged claims to "authenticity" so often ascribed to the film medium. Troubled under the guise of humor, common settings and conventions become a site for their own negation. And disorder, reflexivity, and slapstick violence—not destiny—are identified as the forces impelling the pioneers and their nation westward.

Comedy, History, Counter-History

12 If the Western's epic incarnation represents a *historical* turn for its genre, its parodies offer a *counter-historical* alternative. *Two Wagons* is no rival account of frontier life, told via the unproblematic linkage of Western form and content that saw films like *The Covered Wagon* deemed so self-evidently "authentic." Instead, in the name of comedy, it exaggerates and inverts the powerful rhetorical maneuvers of screen "truth," denaturalizing the work of representing history in the epic's sweeping, totalizing terms. Drawing popular attention to the fallibility, mutability, and, above all, textuality of conventional narratives, it separates past and presentation—providing no answers, but problematizing, and thus inviting inquiry into, historical representation itself.

13 Nevertheless, avowedly non-realist histories have not always been valued by scholars. For all that postmodernism has, in the past half-century, challenged the dominant idealisms of the historical profession—emphasizing the subjective, constructed nature of all narratives about the past—historical films in the comic key have generally received little attention. Their extravagances are scarcely considered

to be in accord with the rational asceticism of legitimate historiography.

14 Only in the twenty-first century, and under an expanded sense of what constitutes historical thinking, has there been substantial recognition of their potential. In the introduction to his 2011 edited collection *Historical Comedy on Screen*, Hannu Salmi notes that even the thriving, often innovative field of historical film research remains "generally humorless": "It is assumed that one must reverentially bow down one's head before history, be serious and defer to the past, allowing it to speak with a voice of its own" (14)—something he links to the empiricist's intended elision of their own involvement in meaning production. To warrant "serious study," historical films should avoid reflecting on the surface of their primary illusion: a coherent, veracious, unified past (14). Comic counter-histories like *Two Wagons* tend to do the very opposite, reflexively placing acknowledgement of their subjective narrative processes at the center of their text.

15 Oppositions between "serious" and "comic" are not entirely unhelpful, however. The rupture between the hegemonic frontier thesis and its relatively minor humorous antithesis can point to fissures in the consensus, even where that consensus has been potently articulated. With filmgoers' responses rarely finding their way into written record, it is appealing to assume that the descendants of the lionized pioneers did not critically engage with their day's dominant narratives as we do today. Such complexities and discrepancies in reception *can* be traced to some degree is in the parody, which exploits the familiar and mobilizes an awareness of both text and hypotext at once. Recognizing this intertextual play is particularly significant where history is involved, for it creates a sense of interpretive provisionality. Traditional screen histories are closed stories that aim for an impression of fidelity to historical reality, clearly defined in spatio-temporal terms and illusory in their avoidance of anachronism or reference to cinematic apparatus. Historical comedies emphasize these same elements to hyper-visible and disruptive effect, revealing their narrative processes to the spectator in the expectation that they will take pleasure in seeing these alternative "truths" exposed and the text's illusion of a past reality undone.

16 Perhaps the most pertinent articulation of this idea, at least where *Two Wagons* is concerned, is one little discussed in the nascent scholarship on historical comedy films. In her 1991 collection *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, Carolyn Walker Bynum calls for historians to adopt a "comic" mode when writing and acknowledge "history's artifice, risks, and incompletion":

> A comic stance knows there is, in actuality, no ending (happy or otherwise)—that doing history is, for the historian, telling a story that could be told in another way. For this reason, a comic stance welcomes voices hithertofore left outside, not to absorb or mute them but allow them to object and contradict. Its goal is the pluralist, not the total. It embraces the partial as partial. And, in such historical writing as in the best comedy, the author is also a character. Authorial presence and authorial asides are therefore welcome; methodological musing—even polemic—is a part of, not substitute, for doing history. (23-25)

17 Comic stances, by Bynum's reading, present an antidote to prescriptive interpretations and determinism. Rigid connections between retrospective depictions and the "real" past are dissolved by a mode of address which confounds claims to authority and neutrality. Assertions of closure are tempered by the very uncertainty that empirical methods look to remove.

18 As illustrated by the opening example, the "Escrow Indian" attack, Rogers adopts a comic stance in parodying *The Covered Wagon*. Operating without recourse to scholarly standards, his images of the ridiculous evoke the dominant practices of the frontier filmmaker and historian, but are characterized by narration that is candid about its attendant relativity, subjectivity, and epistemological limitations. The result is firmly in line with Marcia Landy's definition of *counter-history*: "an escape from formal history to a world of affect, invention, memory, art, reflection, and action" that confounds established ideas about history's proper form to, instead, caricature and puncture dominant representations (xi). Assuming an "active and irreverent position for the reader and viewer," it poses a self-conscious challenge to its "serious" counterpart's cogent, self-contained narratives and grand epochal "truths" (x).

19 By re-presenting familiar situations for incongruous and humorous effect, *Two Wagons* undermines the confident assertions of "authenticity" that had seen *The Covered Wagon* acclaimed as an exemplar for Hollywood historical filmmaking, opening the decisive conclusions of the US foundation myth to multiplicity and alternative perspectives. Through laughter and critical reflection, it highlights something that the majority of treatments of the Western past overlooked: that it was far from linear, often chaotic, and ultimately unknowable.

Re-presenting the Frontier

20 Released half a decade before its star's talkie heyday, *Two Wagons—Both Covered* represents a relative footnote in Will Rogers' film career, the two-reel product of a brief and comparatively unremarkable collaboration with Hal Roach Studios. Oklahoma-born Rogers was synonymous with the West from the early 1910s, thanks to appearances as an expert rope-twirler and rider in Wild West shows, vaudeville, and, most famously, the Ziegfeld Follies of 1917. That said, by the time of his Ziegfeld appearance, he had become as known for his humorous dialogue and homespun "everyman" philosophy as he was for his roping skills. Delivered on stage, screen, and radio, Rogers' amusing anecdotes and commentaries made a strong appeal to what was regarded as a distinctly American brand of "common sense" and saw him quickly elevated in the popular consciousness to the position of a national sage-humorist: "the court jester of the United States" (O'Brien 91). While a friend to the powerful, even those in the nation's highest office, his privileges as such a "court jester" emboldened him to ridicule them freely and often.

21 After making his debut in the 1918 Northwest drama *Laughing Bill Hyde* (Hobart Henley, 1918), Rogers would become a regular screen presence. In 1923, he embarked on a series of two-reelers at Roach's studio, in which he routinely sent up aspects of popular culture: cowboys William S. Hart and Tom Mix, along with Rudolph Valentino in *Uncensored Movies* (Roy Clements, 1923); and Valentino, Douglas Fairbanks, and the Keystone Cops in *Big Moments from Little Pictures* (Roy Clements, 1924). The series was to prove short lived, however, with the lengthy intertitles required to convey

Rogers' wit proving a particular issue. Walter Kerr's seminal *Silent Clowns* offers a typical summation: "The credits read 'Titles by Will Rogers,' as indeed they should; whatever humor is in these films is both interpolated and verbal" (114).

22 On a basic level, the idea of a Western comedy would hardly have seemed novel to 1920s audiences, given the steady supply of such titles produced by the likes of Roach and Mack Sennett over the course of the preceding decade. Indeed, distinctions between the Western genre and the comic mode were arguably looser in Hollywood's silent era than any other time. Cowboy stars from the early Broncho Billy (Gilbert M. Anderson) through Tom Mix regularly starred in humorous productions. Moving in the opposite direction, Fairbanks, too, brought his exuberant athleticism and breezy light comedy to the frontier on several occasions, via titles such as *The Good Bad Man* (Allan Dwan, 1916), *The Half-Breed* (Allan Dwan, 1916), and *Wild and Woolly* (John Emerson, 1917).

23 But *Two Wagons* does not fit quite so comfortably within the silent-era comic Western corpus. Jean-Louis Leutrat, who has written extensively about the "alliance" between early frontier pictures and the comic tradition, divides 1920s Westerns into two types of work: the comedy-adjacent variety, of action, laughter, and "pure gestural expense," such as Mix's cowboy films; and the "realistic Western" that helped to sever the comedy–Western alliance—about past journeys over vast landscapes and masses "reaching a goal" (405). This latter variety, he notes, always advanced an "implicit discourse on the meaning of history" (405). As a topical parody short on slapstick and directly responsive to a pioneering epic that helped break this "alliance," Rogers' film instantiates a broader shift in frontier production.

24 Certainly, according to biographer Ben Yagoda, *Two Wagons* represents Rogers' conscious effort to move away from Roach's "knockabout" house style (206). Co-writer and director Robert Wagner's claim that theirs was the first complete script ever seen on the studio lot is almost certainly apocryphal, but this parody does adhere to the stylings of its hypotext in a pointedly meticulous fashion. It is this close resemblance, mobilizing the historical consciousness of its audience through recognition, that allows Rogers to develop perhaps his film's most striking counter-historical strategy: an ironic and

candid mode of narration, used here by a popular authority on the West to comment on and, so doing, unsettle its most elevated episodes, heroes, and chroniclers.

25 For its part, *The Covered Wagon* is a film that approaches the prevailing national mythology with an almost hagiographic reverence. The triumphalist rhetoric featured from the outset represents the germ of the period's dominant understanding of American development: that the modern nation and its people were direct products of the nineteenth-century frontier experience. Florid as it is in extending the 1840s Westport–Oregon trek into a transcontinental one in its opening intertitles—a journey that "bounded the United States of America with two Oceans"—*The Covered Wagon* sets out firmly in line with its era's frontier-historical orthodoxy: "The blood of America is the blood of pioneers—the blood of lion-hearted men and women who carved a splendid civilization out of an uncharted wilderness."

26 Rogers offers an imitation of this in accord with his cracker-barrel sense of humour. His *Two Wagons* invokes and adapts the same tenets of "serious" Hollywood historiography but pushes them yet further, making them hyper-visible. It, too, opens with teleological assertions about a nation in progress, made with the usual bombastic excess—only in this case, the hyperbole serves less to do a stirring theme justice than it does to draw attention to its conventionally vainglorious construction:

> Seventy-five years before wood alcohol and Fords civilized this country, pioneering was the chief industry. A little band of hardy pioneers (All pioneers were hardy) set out from what is now humorously called Hoboken, New Jersey.

27 By opening with a recognizable, yet atypically reflexive, preface, Rogers' vehicle fosters a critical response to the manner in which silent epic Westerns were generally historicized—defined not only by the scale of their vistas, but by their deliberate positioning as veraciously historiographical through textual inserts and, sometimes, quotations from known authorities. When adapted to introduce the dubious screen West of *Two Wagons*, these same elements appear laced with irony.

28 In a move that recalls Bynum's call for the author to be a character in their own history, Rogers himself is implicated in this early commentary on the rhetoric of frontier-historical representation, as the unreliable "expert" behind it. And from the film's opening, he constructs a mode of historicizing pointedly lacking in one of the most basic fundamentals of empirical practice: the historian's authority to determine the past's meaning. By affecting ignorance, he embraces, instead, partiality and incompleteness. With titles recalling the textual humour and parenthetical asides for which he was famous, Rogers is both *of* the diegesis and reflexively positioned as a commentator *on* it, as in the parenthetical aside: "(All pioneers were hardy)."

29 In applying his characteristic observational humor to the products of present-day capitalism, Rogers queries the very civility of modern civilization. The mention of Ford motor cars is noteworthy, and not only because it recalls the punchline of many a gag: the notoriously unreliable "flivver" or Model T. Celebrated for his self-made wealth, ruggedly individualistic disdain for inherited privilege, and professed commitment to social improvement, Henry Ford was considered a thoroughly modern throwback to a more virtuous era—a modern-day pioneer, characterized by intellectuals including Walter Lippmann as a prescient captain of industry capable of inspiring democracy's continued advancement (Lewis 115-116). Here was a visionary able to commune with the masses and direct them towards greater, thoroughly American ideals—a purpose that resonated with Hollywood's advocates. To quote Gerald Stanley Lee, a key influence on Lindsay: "Mr. Ford is making the world a university. Ten thousand factories have gone to school and the streets are full of people learning. He has arrested the attention of us all" (120).

30 Much like *The Covered Wagon* itself, Ford's successes were recognized as modern but redolent in America's timeless pioneer values. Via this early-twentieth-century icon, *Two Wagons* opens with a rote summary of the nation's development, linking the vaunted individualists of two eras. But the chronology leading from pioneers to Fords appears as dubious as the very idea of a "wood alcohol"-made civilization—a clear jibe at another recent form of "progress": Prohibition. Risible as these suggestions are, they recall one of the era's most pervasive presentist tendencies: the commonplace idea that certain

prevailing values constituted the permanent moral and cultural code of the United States. What the simultaneous hardiness and civility of past American heroes and the achievements of a modern capitalist hero have in common is not immediately clear. In fact, surrounded by nonsense and "wood alcohol," it is made strikingly unclear.

31 Rogers goes on to further ridicule the teleological impulses of Paramount's epic by consistently drawing tenuous connections to contemporary American society in both its temporal and its spatial dimensions. The host film's heroic cavalcade departs from "Westport Landing, now Kansas City," an identification that implicates both the trail that extends westward and the future that arises from it. The comic train begins its trek in, to return to the opening titles, "what is now humorously called Hoboken." Immediately following this statement, a single wagon is introduced—dirty and framed against unremarkable, flat terrain: "Just across the river, behind that spotted oxen is the Woolworth Building and Grant's Tomb—What later disastrously turned out to be New York City." Extending the existing preoccupation with symbols of modern America, it is expressly stated that the heights of US civilization might be read, instead, as "humorous" or "disastrous" extensions of the prelapsarian frontier. Upon the party's later arrival in Nebraska, the teleological essentialism of pioneer narratives is taken to its thoroughly illogical conclusion: "Seven years before the birth of Bryan"—referring to the influential orator, Prohibition advocate, and three-time Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan, born in 1860.

32 As Simon Dentith observes: "One of the typical ways in which parody works is to seize on particular aspects of a manner or a style and exaggerate it to ludicrous effect" (32). Rogers does precisely this when approaching the deterministic doctrines of frontier historiography. Just as wood alcohol did not civilize the continent, pioneering was neither the nation's "chief industry" nor a precursor to Fordist mass production. Yet, the practice of hyperbolically imitating these characteristic stylings draws attention to the inflated place it holds in conventional narratives of the United States. *Two Wagons*' early intertitles delegitimize narration through adaptation. In their descriptions and depictions, playful hyperbole is combined with a critical interest in contemporary historiography's unexamined valorization of the pioneers as the basis for the achievements of the

present day. The canonizing modes of expression which give progressive understandings of American development their deterministic shape are brought forth, to be made blatantly and comically visible, transferring emphasis onto the oft-hidden imaginative figuration involved in giving the meaning.

33 Despite sharing many of its inspiration's basic semantic elements, *Two Wagons* differentiates itself via deficiency and discontinuity, eschewing authority in favor of critical distance. This can be seen in its treatment of *The Covered Wagon*'s most commented-upon motif – the eponymous wagon train's continual movement across the landscape, right to left (Fig. 3) – a spectacle of mass migration and expansion that some observers felt best demonstrated the inherent affinity between American history and the motion picture: the progress of the nation could be graphically figured, as a dynamic of geographical penetration and character-building negotiation, East to West (*Best* 75). For Lindsay, the basic west-going migration of *The Covered Wagon*'s pioneers represented the "hieroglyphics" of a cinematic United States, "a land of action, and a land of light": "All American history, past, present and to come, is a gigantic movie" (187). Lindsay's ideas were shared by many in Hollywood, who likewise claimed a significant, even singular, capacity for representing the progress of this New World civilization in its totality (Friedman 20). Here was a purportedly American historical idiom, untethered from linguistic divisions and vitalized by the ubiquity and reproducibility of the filmgoing experience.

34 When parodied in *Two Wagons*, this perspective reveals neither a wilderness untouched nor a train endless. They appear barren and insubstantial, respectively. Rogers essentializes and miniaturizes the epic Western's tumescent representation of imperial process and progress to the point of ridicule. *The Covered Wagon*'s "mightiest caravan that was ever to crawl across the Valley of the Platte" is downsized to "a little band," with the opening shots justifying the parody's title: this is an epic of two wagons and a few cows.

Fig. 3. Westward migration as depicted in *The Covered Wagon*.


Fig. 3. Westward migration as depicted in The Covered Wagon.

Fig. 4. Westward migration as depicted in Two Wagons—Both Covered.


Fig. 4. Westward migration as depicted in Two Wagons—Both Covered.

35 Later, an intertitle announces that the caravan is now "[t]rudging over the Allegheny Mountains." It is not. Instead, it is shown crossing a flat prairie. "Two monotonous weeks later—Climbing Pikes Peak," then flashes across the screen to introduce an extreme long shot of more horizontal progress (Fig. 4). The juxtaposition between inflated rhetoric and action, effected by an overt reduction in scale and cost, is a primary strategy for generating laughter here, one that also highlights the power of nonsense for counter-historical expression. The contrast between what is seen and how it is described draws graphic attention to the mundanity of the past, onto which frontier historians and filmmakers have since retrospectively imposed an epic scale and sweeping order.

36 This is particularly significant where *Two Wagons* is concerned, in that writer-star Rogers consistently looks to move beyond merely exposing Western formula. Indeed, by stressing the limitations of its historical-representational strategies, he offers not only one of his day's most revealing critiques of the epic Western's venerated prosocial appeal, but a deflation of its sanitized and prideful arrogance. The narrator responsible for *Two Wagons* does so by being present within his own history, and not merely in terms of the titling. When Rogers interprets the frontier hero, his star persona is active in terms of both his script and his on-screen antics.

37 At the start of *The Covered Wagon*, the film's Missourian ex-army Major protagonist, Will Banion (J. Warren Kerrigan), is tasked with tending to "the loose stock in the rear" of the train. Before long, he makes a rightful ascent to lead the cavalcade in all but name. Yet, rather than the individual hero before a community, he remains always a benevolent deliverer amongst them. From within the train, he supports the national mission by assisting its germinal society through the perils of the wilderness. Even in the final scenes, when the hero is at the mercy of the villain's gun, it is only through the necessarily violent intervention of another—grizzled scout and comedy relief Bill Jackson (Ernest Torrence)—that he is spared and

left able to settle down with fellow romantic lead Molly Wingate (Lois Wilson) in Oregon, cradle of future democracy.

38 In *Two Wagons*, Rogers essays *both* Banion and Jackson. But he does so in a mock-heroic fashion, satirizing Cruze's wily pairing at their most sententious. Jackson is shown to be able to identify the Mississippi by smell alone, extending the cliché of the all-knowing scout beyond any reasonable credulity. For his part, "Will Bunian" appears as an Eastern dandy touristically living out his pioneering fantasies, akin to the cowboy-obsessed "dude" of earlier Western comedies, including Fairbanks' *Wild and Woolly*. The overall impression throughout the short is that of men indulging in a fantasy, of frontier grandstanding detached from the tenacity and reality of the living West. The chivalric constancy and lack of imposing physiognomy offered by Kerrigan's Banion—compared to most Western heroes, at least—is translated into effeminacy and ineptitude. Rogers' portrayal appropriates the ex-army major's dimensions and maps them onto the head of the "Palm Beach boys."

39 One of the most celebrated sequences of *The Covered Wagon* involves Banion leading a river crossing—a vital opportunity for the protagonist to demonstrate his mastery of the wilderness and his capacities as a natural leader. First, downriver at the North Fork of the Platte, he tests the water by leaping in on horseback. Upon their dependable guide finding it too deep to traverse, the party moves substantially upstream, and only then do they caulk their wagons for the famous crossing. In Rogers' film, the water likewise proves too deep, and Bunian's horse is drowned. He then declares: "It's all right boys. Caulk up the wagons and make ready. We'll cross at daybreak." They do, Bunian leading in his Yale swimsuit, in an act which, on one hand, confounds conventional cause-and-effect narration, but on the other, embodies the juxtapositional logic so central to Rogers' own ironic narration.

40 Throughout, Bunian and Jackson display little of the foresight of their inspirations, with their heroic qualities registering as distinctly affected. In anticipation of the "little band" beginning its trek, the tenderfoot is assigned a charge that reads near-identically to that of his "serious" counterpart: "Bunian, you will tend the loose stock in the rear." Only in this instance, the "loose stock" consists of a single cow—

and even this menial task requires more diligence than the comic cowboy can muster: a running gag across the film's prairie long shots sees Bunian racing between his cow and his love interest.

41 For her part, the analogue for Molly, played by Marie Mosquini, extends the symbolism associated with her character in *The Covered Wagon* to its heavy-handed conclusion. Knitting on the buckboard of her prairie schooner, framed halo-like by its canopy (Fig. 5), the hypotext's female lead is introduced in a well-known mid shot modelled on a 1921 painting by W. H. D. Koerner, *Madonna of the Prairie*—itself widely associated with Cruze's film and the Emerson Hough story on which it was based. Such an introduction posits Molly as a self-reliant Madonna, the matriarch of the westering civilisation. With the surroundings masked by the white schooner canopy, the pioneers' mission appears unchallenged. In *Two Wagons*, Mosquini remains positioned, *Madonna of the Prairie*-esque on the wagon for the entire first reel, as "proof that you can be a pioneer and still look like something" (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5. Lois Wilson Prairie Madonna.


Fig. 5. Lois Wilson Prairie Madonna.

Fig. 6. Marie Mosquini, Prairie Madonna.


Fig. 6. Marie Mosquini, Prairie Madonna.

42 Mosquini aside, most of the party are filthy and ill-mannered. They neither possess the high-minded infallibility of Cruze's heroes, nor warrant the sententiousness of his narrative. Masculine posturing reigns over sense: "All roosters! That's my idea of a good empire—no females," remarks Rogers' Jackson when called to intervene in a domestic dispute. The magnificent is reduced to the vulgar and misogynistic, in a transposition that accompanies the shift from ostentatious spectacle of epic cinema to the small form of the burlesque. Even the basic vocabulary used to justify the pioneer's pious moral drives is made hollow through nonsense: "I want to plow up California and sow it in something," reads one intertitle.

The West, Inside/Out

43 Though the invoked images and narratives of Western settlement are shifted into an alternative register, it remains the overwhelming *familiarity* of these elements that gives them their power. Rogers both accentuates and undermines familiar representations of the nation's white heritage. His two wagons inhabit a recognizable West, supported by heroic rhetoric and a visual impression of the era, but simultaneously unsettle it, grounding the conventionally elevated. As Linda Hutcheon writes of parody: "it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (11). In "getting" the references necessary for this type of humor, the movie-made historical consciousness of 1920s audiences was mobilized to subversive ends. To quote an exhibitor, A.D Brawner, of The Jewel theatre in Hooker, Oklahoma: "If you have run *The [Covered] Wagon*, this comedy will get extra business, but if you have not run *The Wagon* it will look like a piece of cheese. A good burlesque on *The Wagon*." ("What" 52).

44 At bottom, the film's reliance on intertextual comparisons with its hypotext granted it its appeal for those who acclaimed it while making it perplexing for those who did not.

45 In calling for this sort of double vision from its audience, the humor mirrors the identity of the humorist responsible for it. He is inside and out, marginal and central: *of* the diegesis and a commentator *on* it, a voice of the people *and* a renowned political player, an Indian *and* a cowboy. Though Rogers' acculturation to and association with white culture may have eased his acceptance as a popular hero, as a social commentator, his ties to Cherokee culture remained fundamental to how he presented himself (Ware 1). Brought together, these qualities gave rise to an uncontroversial brand of "everyman" humor that, at the same time, could be used to trouble the dominant way in which Americans saw themselves and their past.

46 Not simply antagonistic, Rogers' "All-American" Indian persona put him, to quote Justice, "in the ideal place to speak to" issues around identity and land: "as a light-skinned Cherokee well-loved in the United States, he was a stealth minority with access to a forum and a platform inaccessible to other Indians of his day" (124). Roumiana Velikova describes him working from a "position inherently antagon-

istic" to the nationwide and "predominantly non-Native audience that grew to love him": "He played on his audience's nativist prejudices and used American patriotic rhetoric successfully to reassert its very negation" (86). Joanna Hearne remarks similarly of his film work, that this Native American interloper "appropriated the conventions of mainstream Hollywood cinematic forms, subtly revising the genre (and the industry) from within" (124).

47 Next to his Irish and Scottish lines of descent, the acculturated, mixed-blood Rogers' Indian side—stereotypically associated with solemn, stoic restraint—has received scant attention (Velikova 83). That Cherokees were noted for their assimilation, and often regarded as less "Indian" than other Native Americans, certainly played a part (Justice 122). Yagoda, however, supposes that this, in fact, aided Rogers:

> Cherokees valued literacy, took 'white' names, owned slaves; they were widely considered the most 'civilized' of the Civilized Tribes. As such they—especially the mixed-bloods among them—had one foot each camp, the white and the red. They were mediators. In Rogers case, this revealed itself in a kind of dual consciousness he displayed all his life: the way he could be a hero to the forces of 'decency' and yet be a headliner in the all-but-pornographic *Ziegfeld Follies*, the way he could present himself as a mere comedian and yet be an extremely influential political voice in the country, the way he could take strong stands without, usually, offending those on the opposite side of the issue. (xii-xiii)

48 While, according to Jack and Anna Kilpatrick, "the whole world had [Cherokee humor] in the most characteristic form, and for many years, in Will Rogers" (123), the general obliviousness to its tribal specificity looks to have aided his mainstreaming. Delivered by an understated and endearingly unassuming character, beloved across the political spectrum, his commentary proved far less polarizing than might be expected given his subject matter. So it was that such contentious issues as Indian citizenship, the integration of Indian Territory into the state of Oklahoma, and the dissolution of tribal governments were all routinely addressed before his nationwide following (Velikova 86).

49 As, at once, a member of a marginalized group and a widely idolized media personality, Rogers poked fun at the excesses of his mainstream audiences and drew attention to his own complicated positionality with rare liberty. And for all that he was popularly associated with it, the West of history and legend was something he could present as an unattainable fiction, its rhetoric at odds with reality. Certainly, *Two Wagons* transforms the most established of American stories into one ripe for ridicule and, even, challenge. Via its nonsensical stylings, shaped by Rogers' patented combination of "common sense" philosophy and comedy, he makes laughable the self-seriousness with which historians and other cultural producers feted the nineteenth-century frontier past. In a notably irony-laden scene, one of the "stout-hearted" pioneers attempts to focus on a stereoscopic image of a mountainous Western idyll. He cannot, his inability to really "see" the full dimensions of the land of promise speaking to how the parody at hand took the aesthetic appeal of the frontier film—its rugged, expansive veneer—and made it appear fundamentally hollow, rupturing the past from the mediated modern-day illusion behind it.

50 With this in mind, it is worth revisiting the "Escrow Indian" attack with which this article opened. While its basic situation—arrival in the free land of the West—recalls the end of any number of pioneer narratives, the frontier of *Two Wagons* is shown to be distinctly unfree. Neither, however, is it "settled." The conventional culmination of Anglo-Saxon expansion over the landscape does not mark the birth of an exceptional society, but opens the region to corruption by white business and feverish, profoundly uncivilized land trading.

51 Writing as a naturalized American citizen—one whose native heritage long predated that which was centered by Anglo-American nativism—Rogers commented in an article published within three weeks of the film's release:

> There is a good deal in the papers of giving my native state of Oklahoma back to the Indians. Now I am a Cherokee Indian and very proud of it, but I doubt if you can get them to accept it—not in its present state.

> When the white folks come in and took Oklahoma from us, they spoiled a mighty happy hunting ground, just to give Sinclair a racing ground, and Walton a barbecue (15).

52 *Two Wagons*' parodic juxtaposition of the lionized pioneer of myth and its laughable comic counterpart brings into focus their complicity in the ills of the society they created. It is specifically *through them* that the corrupt East they abandon and deride arrives in the West. Rogers seems to ask: is a "civilization" ushered in by "wood alcohol and Fords" truly one to be celebrated? Pressed to the Atlantic, the pioneers of *Two Wagons* can no longer look towards the prairies and forests to escape the discontent and competition of Eastern civilization. Instead, they are confronted with a chaos for which they themselves are responsible.

53 None of this is to say that thinking counter-historically necessarily means being wholly disabused of some misconception about the past. Given that its star's capacity for critical commentary owes to his uncontentious mainstream persona, it would be remiss to regard Rogers' parody as serving only to undermine. Presented is a version of the West strange and disturbing in its disorder and, still, always familiar. In adopting the trappings of America's frontier orthodoxy—the westering canopies, the causal connections, the rhetorical strategies—it might equally be read as extending, even de-alienating, them, bringing closer a history elsewhere monumental and antiquated.

Conclusion

54 A Hollywood comedy, *Two Wagons* promotes critical reflection on the processes and poetics of Hollywood histories, but through a mutually beneficial intertextual relationship. They share a common business interest, after all—that of a burgeoning, oft-challenged film industry. When Agnes Smith declared it a "covered masterpiece" in *Picture-Play Magazine*, she tellingly afforded credit to both creator *and* inspiration: "the burlesque of *The Covered Wagon* is a remarkable tribute to the Cruze film because only good things inspire good burlesques" (55). This simultaneous desire for independence and recognizability constitutes parody's greatest paradox. The very need

for a "knowing" viewership perversely extends the host film's reach. But this does not preclude critical inquiry, just as parody does not necessarily serve to destroy its host. In testifying to the presence of competing interests alongside, and even within, a text that promotes a dominant ideology, parody engenders a complication and expansion of its signifying field, and a productive one at that: it belies the concept of a definitive history and creates a space for multiplicity, unshackled from the single perspective of its host product.

55 The American counter-history of *Two Wagons* exemplifies this by troubling the nation's foundational story in what was seen to be its most authoritative screen telling, at once recalling and undermining familiar treatments of this heritage. Rogers' pioneers inhabit a recognizable West, an epochal illusion supported by visual and textual standards that they simultaneously unsettle, destabilizing the truth claims of cinematic medium and epic Western product alike. Irreverent and unreliable, it implicates its own representational failures within its critique. *Its* lack of mastery, *its* inability to represent a coherent model of historical process, problematizes easy explanation of the past.

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NOTES

1 The wagon train besieged by Indians was a common Western trope from the genre's earliest years, with the dramatic cavalry-led rescue in D.

W. Griffith's *The Last Drop of Water* (1911) being a famous early example.

RÉSUMÉS

English

When Paramount's *The Covered Wagon* was released in 1923, it inaugurated Hollywood's first significant cycle of epic Westerns. Moreover, for many observers, it heralded arguably *the* most decisive intervention yet in what was already a long-running debate about the film capital and its social influence. Against a backdrop of mainstream nativism and concerns about the perceived moral slippage of the Jazz Age, these prestige treatments of the nation's "defining" frontier history were not only credited with helping to revitalise a stagnant national genre but widely cited as singular evidence of cinema's exceptional Americanising potential. Yet, the inflated vision of national-historical process that brought middlebrow legitimacy to the Western also proved ripe for deflation. This paper examines how the era's dominant ideas about history and its direction were interrogated through cinema using the example of *Two Wagons—Both Covered* (1924), an epic Western parody by one of the most influential Native Americans of the day, Will Rogers, whose Cherokee identity is often overshadowed by his "All-American" screen persona. Made by a popular authority on all things "Western" and set within a recognisable screen West, this two-reel comedy appropriated Hollywood conventions to critique the genre and its worldview from within. At once an insider and an outsider, a cowboy and an Indian, Rogers uses humour to construct a *counter-history* that invites critical reflection on the basic racial and temporal assumptions of American nationalism.

Français

À sa sortie en 1923, *The Covered Wagon*, issu des studios Paramount, a inauguré le premier véritable cycle de Westerns hollywoodiens. Par ailleurs, pour de nombreux observateurs ce film catalysera le débat autour de l'influence sociale des films hollywoodiens. Dans un contexte de « nativisme » et de panique morale face aux excès du *Jazz Age*, ce genre de film prestige, qui met en scène l'histoire d'une Amérique qui se définit par sa conquête de la Frontière, servira non seulement à revigorer un genre flétrissant mais également à mettre en lumière la capacité du cinéma à « américaniser » son public. Mais cette vision légitimante (et boursouflée) du Western comme représentant l'histoire nationale (iste ?) sera vite mise en question. Dans son Western parodique, *Two Wagons — Both Covered* (1924) Will Rogers, acteur *all-American* par excellence aux origines Cherokee, s'approprie les conventions du genre afin de semer le trouble dans cette représentation exceptionnaliste de l'histoire états-unisienne par le biais de l'humour.

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Correcting the problem: genre trouble and manipulation in *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick's film, 1980; Mick Garris's miniseries, 1997)

Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris

PLAN

The troubles
Lost
The Second Coming

TEXTE

1 In Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, the celebrated introductory aerial shots of the little Torrance Volkswagen winding up the road to the remote Overlook Hotel foreshadow Jack's tortuous and torturous journey through the hotel's and America's history. As many critics have repeatedly pointed out, the meandering trajectory of the whole family driving up to the Wild West Rockies also inscribes on screen the characters' twisted mindscapes – and first and foremost Jack's growing mental disorder (Jack Nicholson). The opening extreme wide and high angle shots are already indicative of some higher force, some all-seeing, ubiquitous predatory eye seemingly monitoring Jack and his family from above.

Fig. 1. The tiny Torrance Bug winding its way up the Rockies in Kubrick's film



Fig. 1. The tiny Torrance Bug winding its way up the Rockies in Kubrick's film

2 The scene has since become a mainstay of American cinematography and popular culture forever announcing some seminal moments in the protagonists' lives. In the finale episode "Everyone is Waiting" of Alan Ball's 2005 TV series *Six Feet Under*, the camera's tilt-up from Claire's car leaving Los Angeles for New York and a new life as a

photographer to a white sky/frame resembles a fade-in and inscribes absolute finality in a simple, irreversible way. Although much less ominous, the heroine's itinerary chronicles the sum of human crises and deaths of the family members the serial format lends itself to so well. Just like in the ending of Kubrick's *Shining* where Jack is framed in the 4th of July photo, Ball's celebrated show similarly ends with a set of photos hanging on the wall and showcasing the present moment which is already gone but somehow, forever dormant. In a clear metafilmic allusion to the photographer-director's work, the showrunner's cycles of aerial shots and photographs seize the attention of the viewers. The latter can thus launch into their own constructive editing which, in turn, underscores the notion of eternal recurrence and temporal trap.

3 In Kubrick's cult movie, the early traces of disturbance emanate from the first sequence as unsettling images of unknown events well up uninvited and inscribe themselves into the frame. In both the filmic and serial formats, Kubrick's 1980 film and Garris's 1997 three-part miniseries, the dividing line between realistic family drama and horror genre dissolves and is somehow uneasily blurred from the outset. The inscription of trouble and abnormality however diverges widely in the two versions. Much more straightforward, showrunner Mick Garris's representational strategy resolutely foregrounds the conventions of horror. For Garris, working on the miniseries meant acknowledging Stephen King's dissatisfaction with Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of the source novel and hence correcting yet another type of "problem" – Kubrick's now legendary circumventing of King's primary interest in the conventions of supernatural horror. The first corrections were then applied by King himself as he wrote what he thought to be the "correct" television script.

4 The echo of some past murder immediately showcased in the first scene of the 1997 miniseries deliberately steers the rest of the storyline in the horror category direction. Still, the generic ID cards of the two opuses can be confusing as their codes are often diverted from their original functions and remain unstable. Poised between horror and comedy, they both defy categorization. To what extent do they truly fit the horror genre as the storyline highlights alcohol addiction, destructive madness and various forms of personal and historical "haunting"? And when much of the performance of

Kubrick's Jack relies on humor and comedy and when Garris' series oscillates between a chronicle of resident evil and an exploration of human beings' "dark sides"?

5 In this study, I will examine how the two works' very diverse strategies foreground the psychological but also historical and formal crises at the heart of the narrative and the types of odd forms of generic hybridity and transformative levels of manipulation they display – including manipulation of the viewers. The palimpsestic work of adaptation links up with the notion of corrections, the screenwriters' as the intradiegetic caretakers', in as much as it induces various forms of trouble. The uneasy relation of the two screenplays to the original text and to each other allows for haunting variations and echoes turning the works into the very source of creating trouble.

The troubles

6 The term refers to the supernatural and paranormal abilities and afflictions that often run in the bloodlines of the characters in the TV series *Haven* (2010-15) created by Sam Ernst and Jim Dunn on Syfy and Showcase and which was freely adapted from Stephen King's novel *The Colorado Kid* (2005).

7 In Kubrick's version, the superimposition of the wild surroundings onto the family members' faces and bodies is the first sign of dysfunction. As they progress upward, the dissolves operate some sort of visual graft signifying the danger of displacement and potential disintegration of the characters' selves as they get closer to the haunted space of the Overlook hotel. The dissolve technique and the wide shots of the wild landscape forcefully underline the disturbing status of space and its intricate relation to people's lives – and deaths. Thus, the very notion of "trouble" is first visually inscribed on screen before the unfolding of the narrative.

Fig. 2. First signs of dysfunction in the opening of Kubrick's film: blurred images and superimposed subjective and objective worlds



Fig. 2. First signs of dysfunction in the opening of Kubrick's film: blurred images and superimposed subjective and objective worlds

8 Functioning like a full-fledged character, space becomes all the more parasitic and pregnant as the Rockies' high-key chromatic range is deceptively welcoming. The shot actually looks like a ghost photograph and materializes early on in the frame the toxic and oppressive grip the environment starts gaining on the protagonists from the onset. Even though its encroaching presence is first visually underlined before it can be directly narratively addressed, the story Jack tells about the Donner party already functions as one of the spectral traces the representational strategy relies on. The fact that the party's members had to resort to cannibalism in order to survive while crossing the Sierra Nevada in 1846-47 foreshadows Ullman's story about the caretaker Charles Grady. In a bout of "cabin fever" in wintertime, the latter butchered his entire family. The way in which the odd parallel is drawn ushers in the first instance of unnatural connection between the surroundings and the hotel's living memory. From the start, the viewer is clearly made aware of the eerie contiguity between spaces and layers of time allowing major traumas to resurface cyclically. The ghostly superimposition of shots also highlights the characters' own dysfunctional relation to a type of space providing in a somewhat devious way what Eudora Welty calls a fundamental sense of place. It shows space being irretrievably connected to Time, or rather the hold of a peculiar but still imprecise time dimension over space and eventually a specific kind of place. In her 1997 essay *Place and time: The southern writer's inheritance*, Welty discusses Time's hold in these terms: "[…] farther back than history, there is the Place. Place is seen with Time walking on it—dramatically, portentously, mourningly, in ravishment, in remembrance […]" (Welty).

9 Instead of feeling rooted in the new western territory they are given to discover and finding an empowering sense of belonging, the protagonists start questioning its impact: Jack by eagerly embracing the dark side of its history and focusing on the hotel's grisly scrapbook and Wendy (Shelley Duvall) and Danny (Danny Boyd) by instinctively refusing to become integral part of it.

10 The reference to the ill-fated Donner party is the first in a list of historical events which all link the hotel premises to tragedy, from the desecrated Indian burial ground it has been forcefully built on, to the various deaths of famous and unknown people that took place in it

over the decades. The aerial shots of the car's second ascent redouble the first when Jack left for his interview. This time, the entire Torrance family is on board. They foreshadow the way in which time suddenly expands in the Overlook realm and narrative levels eventually start interfering with each other. The past contaminates the present to such an extent that past stories keep reincarnating themselves: already as we saw an iteration of the Donner party story, the Charles Grady story Ullman reluctantly tells prefigures Jack's own redoubling efforts to fit in the original narrative pattern.

Fig. 3-5. Kubrick toying with the horror genre's conventions and mocking the viewer as "a horror film addict": Danny's first horrific visions of the Overlook



Fig. 3-5. Kubrick toying with the horror genre's conventions and mocking the viewer as "a horror film addict": Danny's first horrific visions of the Overlook

Fig. 4



Fig. 4

Fig. 5



Fig. 5

11 Jack's candid reply that there is no chance such a traumatic past could affect him or his family and his mocking remark about his wife being "a horror film addict" ironically contrasts with his son's first traumatic experience of the Overlook's evil. Irony here is applied as a corrective factor which mitigates the troubling impact of the horrific images. This moment of generic uncertainty in between family drama, comedy and horror materializes a locus of conflict between competing generic identities which, as Rick Altman says in *Film/Genre*, activates "both cultural and generic standards" (Altman 152). Thanks to parallel editing, the scenes with Danny in the Denver bathroom reinsert the codes and conventions of horror into the narrative. Danny's hallucinogenic flashes of a blood-soaked elevator and of the two enigmatic sisters in blue are meant to be perceived as

simultaneous and illustrates the way the director is also manipulating, and mocking, the spectators who are eager viewers/detectives loving to be manipulated and to embark on hermeneutical quests. Their intrusion into the frame also demonstrates how Kubrick makes the notion of crisis available to the viewer. The contiguity of the visual and narrative-within-the-narrative dimensions magnifies the incremental logic of each particular genre, horror and the supernatural as well as drama.

12 If Kubrick seems to be mainly interested in the banality of human evil, Garris and his teleplay writer King choose to focus from the outset on a kind of dormant evil turning viral when reignited by Jack's personal demons. The film's opening is intensely visual and the hauntingly ponderous notes of Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind's score "Dies Irae" and the subsequent electronic and orchestral piece "Rocky Mountains" prove to be chilling companion pieces to the sublime landscape. The series' first sequence however consists in another kind of hauntological sonic landscape testifying to the absent-present traces of ghosts that Jacques Derrida discusses in his 1993 *Spectres of Marx*. The opening features no image track at first and the impact on the viewers is instantaneous. The disjunction of time and space is made manifest by a score seemingly disconnected from Jack's visit of the hotel basement. It instantly immerses the spectators in a murder scene they know nothing about. The dark screen denies them the possibility of being rooted in any kind of realistic space but still, provides a fertile environment for the fragments of some malignant past that survived to resurface. As Stephen King underlines in his book on the anatomy of horror, *Danse Macabre*, it's a form of evil which is "simply there" (King 214). It precipitates the resurgence of ghosts lost in a time Derrida also identifies as being "out of joint" after the scene when Hamlet talks to his dead father in act I, scene 5. These spectral aural fragments of the buried past immediately provide what the source novel author calls "the basis for our most primordial fears" (King, *Danse Macabre* 182). The sonic hauntology technique introduces the viewer to some unseen *locus horribilis* the voices of the undead rise from and which will grow like cancer within and around the main protagonists. Such dislocation of time and place at the Overlook seems to be foregrounded in a much more direct way than in Kubrick's version. The

notion of trouble irradiates straight from the hotel, whose heart is the unruly boiler room. From the outset, it is framed as a huge antiquated time machine functioning as a central backdrop; its malignant heart is immediately made visible by the use of parallel editing forcibly linking the hotel's troubled past to Jack Torrance's present.

Fig. 6. The boiler room in the hotel's bowels: parallel editing forcibly yoking past and present



Fig. 6. The boiler room in the hotel's bowels: parallel editing forcibly yoking past and present

13 While the haunted pictures are first mediated by the boy in the film, they simply rise to the surface of the screen in the miniseries. The intercutting of the murder and suicide scenes with the realistic shots of the basement materializes the first departure from a rational reference frame which merely exacerbates the stock-in-trade coding of some demonic force welling up to take control of the lives of human protagonists. It somehow "corrects the problem" of Kubrick's and Johnson's revised storyline as the former caretaker Delbert Grady would say, by flatly adhering to King's original plotline. When Jack asks the handyman whether there are ghosts, besides scandals and deaths at the Overlook, the latter denies it, providing the necessary tension between the surface story and what's left untold to move the narrative forward. In both mediums, the ghosts' emergence is then inscribed on screen very early on but the nature and representational strategies of the haunting are rooted in fundamentally different conceptions of the origin of what King calls "those deep-seated personal fears —those pressure points —we all must cope with" (King, Danse Macabre 131).

Lost

14 Differing methodologies of inscription of the types of connection between reality and imagination and space and Evil are at work in the two opuses. In Signatures of the Visible, Fredric Jameson underlines the power of the filmic form as a medium for the critique of culture and the diagnosis of social life. Undoubtedly, the long-form retelling

also fulfills a similar function, especially as it gives more leeway for character development. Jack more particularly becomes the choice repository of what King calls "those things which trouble the night thoughts of a whole society," "More often the horror movie points even further inward, looking for those deep-seated personal fears — those pressure points we all must cope with. This adds an element of universality to the proceedings, and may produce an even truer sort of art" (King 131). His increasingly distorted grasp of reality becomes the focus of conflicting representational modes in the two versions. In Kubrick's adaptation, Jack is from the start a profoundly unhinged character – one, we quickly learn, who has broken his son's arm in a drunken bout and whose aspiring writer's block fuels his social and personal frustration and inbred violent streak. The director's disjunctive, cryptic visual grammar provides a mostly hermetic assemblage which only captures stations in the itinerary of a protagonist displaying signs of madness already there, just like the evil force in the miniseries is already there. The Steadicam's gliding effect and the treatment of close-ups bring vividly to life the full force of this mental deterioration. Jack, at work or having a nightmare in his bedroom for instance is framed from a variety of angles and often captured from behind–as if to render palpable the materiality of the other world he's slowly being drawn into. But how to represent this parallel universe and its fundamentally other nature was one of the greatest areas of disagreement between the two creators as King made abundantly clear:

> Parts of the film are chilling, charged with a relentlessly claustrophobic terror, but others fall flat. […] Not that religion has to be involved in horror, but a visceral skeptic such as Kubrick just couldn't grasp the sheer inhuman evil of the Overlook Hotel. So he looked, instead, for evil in the characters and made the film into a domestic tragedy with only vaguely supernatural overtones. That was the basic flaw: Because he couldn't believe, he couldn't make the film believable to others (Norden).

15 Throughout the movie, the camera inscribes on screen diverse variations on the already much commented-on maze motif. However the "labyrinth of words" is possibly the most literally mindbending version of it. The endless replication of the written words on the page

is first merely hinted at: Jack is at his desk obsessively writing his alleged play–but Wendy and the viewer don't know yet that he's rewriting the same words over and over again. The unbroken word chain materializes on the page the inescapable entanglement of time and space at the Overlook and Jack's loss of bearings.

Fig. 7. Double-framing the characters: the encroaching Overlook environment reflected in the pages of Jack's manuscript



Fig. 7. Double-framing the characters: the encroaching Overlook environment reflected in the pages of Jack's manuscript

16 Even though the viewer expects some form of supernatural component in the scene of the row between Jack and Wendy who keeps interrupting him in his work, the entire exchange is played against the codes of the horror genre: Kubrick's "exquisite sensitivity to the nuances of light and shadow" (King, *Danse Macabre* 115) merely foregrounds the incipient mental derangement in a blocked writer who feels despised and unappreciated. No dark atmosphere provides "the basis for our most primordial fears" (King 182). A low-key style of lighting steers the viewer's interpretative quest in the family and psycho drama direction. But the fact that Jack tears up the pages he was writing surreptitiously reinstates the figure of sterile reiteration and the central motif of the maze with its (literal) dead ends. The scene with Wendy discovering the nearly identical pages comes later, toward the end of the Wednesday section of the movie: their grisly nature and the slight variations on the form and spacing of the words on the page, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy", operate as some perverted parody of autobiography in part masquerading as a grotesque biopic. The *haiku* format of the one-line text ironically condenses a twisted imaginary "biophoty", a term French critic Joanny Moulin derives from Hayden White's "historiophoty." In his 1988 article "Historiography and Historiophoty" in *The American Historical Review*, the latter defines "the representation of lives and our thoughts about them in visual images and filmic discourse" (*Ibid.*). It reflects Jack's complete disorientation but also the viewers' general confusion before this semantic maze which is both an icon--it's tech-

nically a photogram or series of photograms--and an emblem, a totally hermetic representative symbol of some alternate reality.

Fig. 8. The nonsensical infra maze-like universe of a sick "autobiography" in the Wednesday section



Fig. 8. The nonsensical infra maze-like universe of a sick "autobiography" in the Wednesday section

17 The same (extreme) close-up technique allows the viewer to delve into Jack's nightmarish mindscape and his literally mind-bending tale within the story. Such an exploration of the mind's camera obscura finds its source in the short story collection *Nightmares and Dreamscapes* published by Stephen King in 1993 and released on TNT as an eight-episode miniseries in 2006. The zoom-in on this miniaturized universe paradoxically magnifies the scale of the Overlook's hold. The shot of the scrapbook containing newspaper articles on the portentous history of the Overlook and sitting prominently on Jack's desk in the lower left side of the frame brings an additional layer which further encloses the protagonist in a dangerously destabilizing story still unfolding and a murderous history foregrounding the notions of historic recurrence and repetitive patterns in the history of a given space. Both King and Kubrick toy with the operative notion of repeat occurrence as theorized by Mark Twain:

> NOTE. November, 1903. When I became convinced that the "Jumping Frog" was a Greek story two or three thousand years old, I was sincerely happy, for apparently here was a most striking and satisfactory justification of a favorite theory of mine—to wit, that no occurrence is sole and solitary, but is merely a repetition of a thing which has happened before, and perhaps often [1].

18 What happens at the Overlook is a ripple effect from the past which keeps echoing and resurfacing under various guises on the hotel grounds. The camera brilliantly registers on screen the contiguity of a number of very diverse types of space: Jack's realistic environment as he is writing his play, the encroaching evil world of the Overlook as Jack and Wendy are framed by dwarfing open doors and panels and the actual boundaries of the product of his deranged mind, the page

framed in extreme close-up. Ultimately however, what the camera emphasizes is the total spatiotemporal disorientation exacerbated by the current family crisis of a character trapped in some kind of inner mental loop. The latter reflects all of the hotel's timelines at once – the 1920s, the 1970-71 Delbert Grady murders', and the present with the Torrance family members. Kubrick's Jack is lost in the meanders of his own liquor-addled brain early on while in Garris and King's miniseries, character is rather a function of the demonic agents which control the Overlook so that Jack's itinerary is mostly shaped by the codes and conventions of the horror genre. Most of the serial narrative tracks the transformations and "corrections" the protagonist undergoes but also imposes on his wife and son during his horrifying "descent into madness through the malign influence of the Overlook" (Norden Ibid.). The term "corrected" is a seminal one as the previous caretaker Grady uses it to tell Jack how he forever disciplined his wife and daughters. In the same way, the narrative applies its own corrections to the original storyline of the source novel and the intradiegetic one. In the series, the inscriptions of Jack's increasingly distorted face on screen not only connote altered states of consciousness (daydreams and nightmares, abject cruelty, fanaticism, madness, dread…), but also mostly contribute to exposing the unshakable sway the dark forces have over the character. For Stephen King and showrunner Mick Garris, the radical otherness of Jack's masks signals the deconstruction of his core identity and mostly the rise of what King calls "the sheer inhuman evil […], the malign influence of the Overlook, which is like a huge storage battery charged with an evil powerful enough to corrupt all those who come into contact with it" (Norden Ibid.).

Fig. 9-11. The many facets of Jack's reality: variations on possession and indeterminacy



Fig. 9-11. The many facets of Jack's reality: variations on possession and indeterminacy

Fig. 10.



Fig. 10.

Fig. 11.


Fig. 11.

19 The character's itinerary and the director's postures dictate what the camera captures in the frame – which brings the viewer back to the use of horror codes: Garris inscribes the progress and regress of the hotel's evil entity in a very literal way, just as he films ghosts incarnate literally taking (over) human flesh. Ghosts no longer function as mere cryptic signs of some alternate reality forever eluding the spectator: they become a reality, the actual precondition for comprehending (and enjoying) the Overlook's tragedy. One of the most eloquent scenes in an otherwise longish and often unintentionally amusing series (the moving hedge animals are probably the funniest) happens during the final showdown between the possessed father and his resisting son. The camera materializes the perennial fight between Good and Evil by showing actor Steven Weber alternate between the part of the loving father and his evil personas. Like the eerie characters from the masked ball who haunt the hotel space, Jack himself becomes a variation on a series of masks which can't ever be fully deciphered, including by himself.

> Jack becomes an aberration, a necessarily ungraspable representation, just like the ghosts he did not perceive as such. The hermetic viewer who would follow on Jack's footsteps is therefore warned: Jack's incapacity to accept the complex nature of the signs surrounding him has condemned him to be locked in a system of self-referential signs, seemingly disconnected from any reality. (Jaunas 88).

20 As he faces his son in a devastating standoff at the end of the show, Jack ejaculates, "What's happening to me?" Ontological uncertainty is at the heart of the TV series in much more graphic and highly codified terms than in Kubrick's movie. The Oscar-winning makeup supervisor Bill Corso applied gory special effects and prosthetics to Steven Weber's face and body, rendering Evil's trajectory all the more visible. To a certain extent, the technique materializes in a highly specific way what Mario Falsetto calls the "process of spatialization"

(Falsetto 79) in his narrative and stylistic analysis of Kubrick's films. As locations function metaphorically for the characters in the movie, so is Evil materialized as being relentlessly at work in the miniseries. The degradation of Jack's mental space Kubrick was so intent on inscribing in the movie, actually becomes seared into the serial character's flesh. In this classic representational strategy of demonic invasion, the individual turns into both tormentor and victim. Just like preordained Fate for tragedy, the responsibility lies with the supernatural forces which trigger the character's eventual disintegration in the show – and not so much with the character and his own choices. By deliberately transferring the reality of Evil back to some non-human power, Garris and King leave the door open for some potential redemption, a dimension Kubrick never contemplated in the film.

The Second Coming[2]

21 Jack's entire being becomes the battleground of the fight between Good and Evil. Garris and Corso turn him into an entity visually and gradually cracking up under the demonic assault but fighting back for his own repossession in the final moments of his transformation. The type of visual pleasure formatted for the male gaze Laura Mulvey referred to in her famed 1975 essay "V*isual pleasure* and narrative cinema" is now geared toward horror film spectators and tailored for their normative expectations. Jack's virtually tangible metamorphosis into a decomposing body and mind matches the recurring incursions of gory ghosts into the realistic diegesis. His encounter and wrestling with the dark side are spurred by the visions of long-deceased hotel employees and guests and have all the trappings of conventional horror. But by playing with textures and a chromatic range alternating between black and white and garish colors, cinematographer Shelly Johnson captures the characters' fundamental displacement. Horror and more specifically fascination with body horror, whether intradiegetic or extradiegetic, takes center stage as the various planes of reality start intermingling and overflowing. Jack gets to witness his own horrific transformation experiencing firsthand the spectacle of horror. Turning into the monstrous object of his own scopic impulse adds yet another dimension to the central notion of trouble as he literally becomes a figure of the Other.

Fig. 12. Garris's miniseries: Jack's intense pain when undergoing his horrific transformation.



Fig. 12. Garris's miniseries: Jack's intense pain when undergoing his horrific transformation.

22 The experience of horror as spectacle is therefore mediated through his own eyes as well as the spectator's. The act of violence on the audience witnessing such torture is hence first experienced at the intradiegetic level. In the vastly different context of the Vietnam War movie *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino 1978), critic Vincent Canby comments on the hyperrealism of exploding brains or guts being turned into a highly theatrical spectacle by slow motion and garish colors. According to Canby, such "a spectacle [is meant] to elicit strong emotional responses" (Canby D23) and makes the viewer complicit. The very same tenet seems to apply in the miniseries. As "the archetype of the Bad Place [...] which demands a historical context" (King, *Danse Macabre* 266-67), the hotel literally cannibalizes Jack who is in turn captured, being reincarnated into one of the hotel ghosts until his body eventually merges with the Overlook. The intense pleasure he feels at somehow becoming the *locus horribilis* is only mitigated by his own deep loathing of the Evil taking him over. Garris's visual cues of his metamorphosis (greenish, decaying flesh, bloody eyes etc.) match the horror genre's clichés, such monstrous rebirth and reincarnation materialize visual and mental distortion. But they also vicariously provide an in-depth exploration of the viewer's sinister fascination with the contamination process at work.

23 Italian psychologist Franco De Masi points out that:

> [the almost orgasmic-like pleasure of evil] involves an insatiable desire from which any respect for, or understanding of, the other's need and existence is banished... The fascination of absolute, destructive domination of the helpless victim gives rise to a pleasure as stimulating and devastating as a drug. For this reason, the link between cruelty and mental ecstasy proves to be particularly dangerous. (De Masi 144-45).

24 In this anatomy of horror, Jack's increasing signs of unease about his altered state are inversely proportional to the spectator's pleasure. As he is both perpetrator and victim, he seesaws between embodiment of Evil and wounded victim so that his body bears the stigmata of this physical and psychological warfare. Such an alternation is congruent with the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' treatment of the horrific. As Rick Altman underlines in *Film/Genre*, "With the horror film, a different syntax rapidly equates monstrosity not with the over-active nineteenth-century mind, but with an equally over-active twentieth-century body". (Altman 224).

Fig. 13-14. The ghostly master of ceremonies trapped in the Overlook space-time: playing on the chromatic range and the time dimensions



Fig. 13-14. The ghostly master of ceremonies trapped in the Overlook spacetime: playing on the chromatic range and the time dimensions

Fig. 14.

25

26 The miniseries' alternation between black and white and color helps better expose the various layers of the characters' eerie metamorphoses maximizing their impact on the viewer. The show's spectacular pictorialization and play on textures, the materiality of decaying flesh and the framing of rotting faces for instance turn it into a kind of cinematic television. The black and white shot of the master of ceremonies ordering Jack and the guests to "unmask" artfully echoes Kubrick's own black and white photographs of Jack and the hotel guests at the 4th of July ball at the end of the movie. The gap between what they were and what they are forever in the process of becoming is at the heart of Mick Garris's *mise-en-scene*. He captures them in the course of turning into someone or something else, literally beside themselves. But if the disturbing revival of the various horrific figures contributes to showcasing their shifting natures, it's also crudely exposed as an arrested development. Besides winning an Emmy for Outstanding Makeup, Garris' show also garnered a Primetime Emmy Award for the Outstanding Limited Series category. In a famous 1983 *Playboy* interview, Stephen King kept insisting on the fact that

The Shining was "about Jack Torrance's gradual descent into madness through the malign influence of the Overlook. If the guy is nuts to begin with, then the entire tragedy of his downfall is wasted" (King in Norden, *Playboy*). The process of transformation successively captures the endless versions of Jack as obsession and loss of control take over. And Steven Weber's "vaguely reptilian quality lurking in the contours of his face" (Meyer) further accentuates the scope of the mutation. The nightmarish images of the ghoulish masks simply render more palpable the characters' shift to another plane of existence. Ironically, the original title of King's *horror novel Salem's Lot*, *The Second Coming*, functions as an inverted

27 reference to this new lease of demonic life and hellish reincarnation. Such an inversion of the Biblical motif of the Second Coming mimics and subverts the belief in the return of the Chosen One. W. B. Yeats's 1919 poem of the same title also focuses on the end of an era after the first World War and the advent of world destruction. If Stephen King's *The Shining* similarly chronicles the end and the horrific beginnings, it focuses on one individual rather than mankind at large and its collective rebirth. By inscribing the new excruciating reality of the main figure's monstrous second awakening, Mick Garris delineates the contours of possession in a figure for whom "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (Yeats). The character's progress toward the frozen center of the maze in Kubrick's film morphs into a descending spiral in the series. The final parable of Jack allowing the boiler to explode in the hotel's basement is a transparent metaphor for the Christian concept of the Harrowing of Hell and man's descent into the Inferno. Stephen King's use of Christian symbolism resurfaces even as it is reformatted for the singular purpose of exposing the downward trajectory of one single doomed individual. As Meyer also highlights:

> It is interesting to note how Kubrick's film ends with Jack Torrance lying dead in the snow, whereas Stephen King's *The Shining* climaxes with Jack Torrance allowing the hotel's boiler to overheat and explode. As King himself put it, 'The book is hot, and the movie is cold. The book ends in fire, and the movie in ice.' (Meyer).

28 So that just like the troubled hero's, the characters' journeys inside the hotel-world are all centred on the main themes of death and

gruesome rebirth in both mediums. But King and Garris conjointly chose to reinstate the prevalence of space as a unique type of over-powering time-space unit. The ghostly hotel diversely materializes it, especially in the end sequence.

Fig. 15-16. Open ending: resurgence of the whole & recurrence in the miniseries. The ghostly Overlook rising from its (narrative) ashes (part 3)

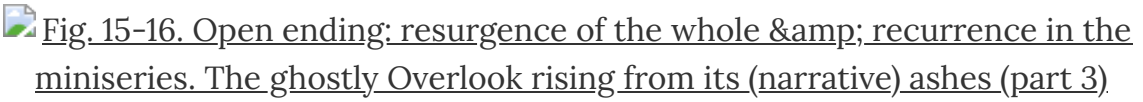

Fig. 15-16. Open ending: resurgence of the whole & recurrence in the miniseries. The ghostly Overlook rising from its (narrative) ashes (part 3)

Fig. 16.


Fig. 16.

29 The final shots of part 3 operate as a literal open ending. They inscribe on screen phantom images of the Overlook even though it has burned down. They also toy with the central notion of recurrence as the ghostly image of the burnt-down hotel magically rises once again. The essence of the specific Evil permeating the place is thus visually and narratively recycled thanks to the computer-generated optical illusion of the reconstruction. The contrast between the vivid colors of the park around the hotel in the foreground and on the sides and its faint, overexposed outline in the background seems to once again corroborate Mark Twain's vision of History as a never-ending recurrence and offers yet another troubling visual clue of the persistence of Evil.

30 In a sense however, the same idea of endless cycle also inhabits Kubrick's movie. The final close-up and photo inscribe two versions of a "frozen Jack."

Fig. 17-18. The ironic twist on the Hollywood ending before the fade-out in Kubrick's finale: Jack frozen in space and time


Fig. 17-18. The ironic twist on the Hollywood ending before the fade-out in Kubrick's finale: Jack frozen in space and time

Fig. 18.


Fig. 18.

31 In the photograph at the end, as the reincarnation of a 1921 reveler, Jack smiles on forever in a continuum which at once erases the previous troubles and irretrievably harks back to them. The surreal depth of the picture frame substitutes for the horrific danse macabre of the maze but it also traps it in a timeless, always-there dimension which will forever tell the same past horror tale. The same principle as Roland Barthes' photographic time and space paradox is at work here. As the frame eventually vanishes with the smooth zoom-in of John Alcott and Garrett Brown's Steadicam, Jack is finally framed as the central piece in the entire ensemble, yet another displaced avatar mimicking the original and fitting in the hellish puzzle of the Overlook. The photographs on the Gold Room wall in the movie and the computerized generation of the Overlook silhouette in the teleplay are both there and not there, definitely breaking away from any previous sense of reality and narrative logic. They paradoxically foreground the notion of disturbance at play in the narrative and Jack's irreducible otherness. Thus, in some perverse movement of recreation, the "troubles" are both immortalized and aesthetically smoothed over. What used to be there is shown forever reemerging amended through the filmmaker's remedial lens. The final treatment of these images mirrors the corrective dimension of Stanley Kubrick's overflowing notes in the margins of Stephen King's copy of *The Shining*. The monstrous grafts not only reshape the palimpsest, they actually create a new authoritative one.

Fig. 19. Kubrick's own version of creative work. Correcting the problems: overflowing notes in the margins of Kubrick's copy of King's The Shining.


Fig. 19. Kubrick's own version of creative work. Correcting the problems: overflowing notes in the margins of Kubrick's copy of King's The Shining.

32 In a matching counter effort, King in turn corrected Kubrick's version in the 1997 teleplay and later his 2013 sequel *Doctor Sleep*, which Mike Flanagan adapted for the screen in 2019. Each new variation on the

forms of horror further intensifies the sense of displacement and fundamental instability affecting beings, things but also viewers in the two mediums. The successive versions are all palimpsestic variations on the core horror of the source novel and the uncertainty born of their discrepancies compounds the deep sense of unease. Somehow, this series of derivatives and avatars enhances the intradiegetic clearance between the different adaptive realities of the filmic and serial narratives thus giving substance to what Linda Hutcheon calls "palimpsestuousness" in her 2006 book A *Theory of Adaptation*, "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative–a work that is second without being secondary. It's its own palimpsestic thing" (Hutcheon, 9). And in such an iconic context, "palimpsestic" very much rhymes with endlessly "haunting." In this sense, Mike Garris' TV series bears the mark of the haunting of Kubrick's own disruptive and unsettling version of the Overlook storyworld. The shift in paradigms has also been a shift in palimpsests which has radically displaced, and to some extent replaced, Stephen King's source text and subsequent teleplay, partly preventing the series from existing on its own.

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2 The Second Coming is the original title of Stephen King's 1975 horror novel Salem's Lot.

RÉSUMÉS

English

Stephen King's 1977 horror bestseller *The Shining* has been notoriously adapted on screen by Stanley Kubrick in 1980. Seventeen years later, greatly dissatisfied with Kubrick's version, King was to write a teleplay adapted for TV by Mick Garris, aptly called *Stephen King's The Shining* (1997), to "correct" the first iconic adaptation. Materializing on screen the notion of "corrections" is also at the heart of both the film and its long-form retelling as the potent horror and madness the hotel exudes contaminate its guests and employees. As normalcy and regular family life are slowly being fully distorted and redefined, the inscription of "trouble" and abnormality diverges widely in the two versions. Alternating between a harrowing story of alcohol addiction and destructive madness, and a tale of the supernatural and resident evil, the filmic narrative changes forms and genres in a sometimes problematic way.

Français

Dans *Shining* de Stanley Kubrick, les légendaires prises de vue aériennes de la petite Volkswagen grimpant dans la montagne jusqu'à l'hôtel Overlook annoncent déjà la progression tortueuse et retorse de Jack dans l'histoire de l'hôtel et de l'Amérique . La trajectoire sinueuse de la famille dans les Rocheuses matérialise à l'écran les paysages mentaux torturés des personnages, et principalement les désordres mentaux grandissants de Jack (Nicholson). Un œil omniscient, omniprésent et prédateur semble déjà surveiller la famille Torrance. Dans le film culte de Kubrick, les premières touches de dérèglement s'invitent ainsi dans le cadre dès la séquence d'ouverture alors que des images dérangeantes d'origine inconnue s'imposent hors de toute logique narrative. Dans les deux médiums de 1980 et 1997, la ligne qui sépare le drame familial réaliste du récit horrifique se révèle dangereusement trouble dès l'ouverture. L'inscription du trouble et

de l'anormalité diverge cependant sensiblement dans les deux versions. La stratégie de représentation du créateur Mick Garris s'appuie résolument sur les codes de l'horreur. Partant de l'insatisfaction de King par rapport à l'adaptation du roman source par Kubrick, il tente donc de corriger le contournement désormais légendaire de Kubrick de l'intérêt de King pour les conventions de l'horreur surnaturelle. Alors qu'ils recréent ce qu'ils jugeaient être le "bon" scénario pour la télévision, King et Garris s'éloignent donc de l'alternance du film entre histoire poignante d'alcoolisme et folie destructrice et conte surnaturel de résurgence du Mal qui avait conduit Kubrick à jouer avec la forme filmique et les catégories génériques de façon parfois problématique.

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Trouble in Paradise: Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), from Generic Instability to an Ethics of Trouble

Vincent Jaunas

PLAN

A Romantic Comedy / A Comedy of Remarriage
The Erotic Thriller
The Paranoid Thriller
An Ethics of Trouble

TEXTE

1 Upon its release in 1999, *Eyes Wide Shut* baffled and frustrated quite a few critics and scholars who expected Stanley Kubrick's last work to be a daring exploration of eroticism, only to discover a film they considered a disappointingly prudish and conservative Erotic Thriller[1]. Others noted how the film evades any easy generic affiliation, like Peter Bradshaw, who writes in his review published in *The Guardian* that the film cannot be considered an Erotic Thriller, as it is "*sui generis* in modern Anglophone cinema: in a genre, if not a League, of its own, this genre being best described as Manhattan Porn Gothic"[2] – Bradshaw nonetheless argues the film's exploration of eroticism is disappointing. Tellingly, even Roger Ebert, who praises the film, notes that it feels like a patchwork of various film genres bound together[3]. In other words, the problematic initial reception of the film owes much to its troubling departure from the codes of the Erotic Thriller.

2 In this article, I would like to argue that *Eyes Wide Shut* constantly alternates between genres, builds up several layers of generic conventions only to deconstruct them all, in order to foster a troubled viewing experience. This generic superimposition constantly frustrates the viewer's horizon of expectation, therefore inducing a spectatorial feeling of loss which parallels the emotional state of the protagonist, Bill Hasford, who, following an initial ques-

tioning of his marital bliss, is confronted to the disruption of the foundations of his entire existence. This generic instability thus enables *Eyes Wide Shut* to question the moral and philosophical need for clarity that most narrative films rest upon, and to ultimately advocate an ethics of trouble.

A Romantic Comedy / A Comedy of Remarriage

3 The first sequence of *Eyes Wide Shut* suggests the film to be a quintessential Romantic Comedy, one that harks back to the heyday of Classical Hollywood and unmistakably evokes the works of Howard Hawks, Preston Sturges or Ernst Lubitsch. Indeed, the title of the latter's 1922 comedy, *Trouble in Paradise*, seems exceptionally well fitted to evoke *Eyes Wide Shut*[4]. As in many such comedies, the film displays a highly glamorous couple – played by the equally glamorous real-life star couple, Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise – living in a lavish Manhattan apartment and enjoying a life of upper-class socialites. As they attend a party given by a millionaire, Victor Ziegler (Sidney Pollack), the Lubitschian dimension of the film becomes explicit through the narrative and the visuals. The music and the champagne imbue the scenes with a slightly intoxicating quality, magnified by the warm hues and the glittering of the numerous Christmas lights, and emphasized both by the filming – the camera spins around the dancers – and the editing, as various long dissolves suggest the dreamlike quality of a party whose magnificence evokes the sophistication of Lubitsch's world. The narrative itself even echoes the Lubitschian trope of the European playboy, through the character of Victor Szavost, a cliché seducer from Hungary who flirts with Alice, while two models simultaneously flirt with her husband.

4 This double flirtation specifically connects *Eyes Wide Shut* to the subgenre of the Romantic Comedy famously analysed by Stanley Cavell, the Comedy of Remarriage.[5] As the couple begins to drift apart in the party, the viewer may expect the film to adopt the genre's typical narrative structure, a couple splitting up and then getting reunited, their love for each other reignited. In many regards, this generic pattern is indeed respected throughout the film, to the point that Sam Azulys even ventures to describe *Eyes Wide Shut* as the "latest

instance of a Comedy of Remarriage"[6]. However, from the very beginning of the film, several elements suggest that this initial generic pattern is but a superficial layer of the film, one bound to break open and lead the narrative astray.

5 Indeed, the very opening shot breaks one of the main conventions of the Comedies of Remarriage, a genre shaped by the censorship of the Hayes Code, as Alice undresses and Kidman's naked body is fully revealed. This shot imbues the first sequence with a promise of explicit sexuality that troubles the light, casual erotic tension that came to be associated with Comedies of Remarriage. Moreover, the film was openly advertised as an Erotic Thriller which would explore the sex life of its main characters – and of their actors – in a highly provocative way[7] so that the initial scenes may be viewed as nothing more than a façade that should soon give way to a more troubling – and perhaps also to a more enticing – exploration of eroticism. Moreover, sexuality is also announced as a latent source of anxiety during Ziegler's party, as Dr Hasford is asked by Ziegler to go up to a bathroom and help a prostitute who passed out from an overdose. Several shots displaying the woman's naked body slouched on a chair associate sex with death.

6 This troubling amount of explicit nudity thus goes against the conventions of the Comedies of Remarriage, by showing what is generically expected to remain off screen. Beyond nudity, *Eyes Wide Shut* also emphasises another aspect of marital relationships usually left off screen in Romantic Comedies: the mundane. Indeed, instead of cutting right to the party after Alice's undressing, the opening scene of the film lingers on the characters getting ready. In Alice's second scene, the woman is seen urinating as her husband enters the bathroom, so that in her first two scenes, the character becomes associated with both sexuality and triviality, two subjects generically expected to be left out.

7 By explicitly associating her with two offscreen, latent elements of Comedies of Remarriage, the film suggests Alice to be ill fitted for this Lubitschian façade. This implication is reinforced during the party: as she flirts with Szavost, the playboy cliché, the character appears aware of the illusory quality of the world she evolves in, thanks to Kidman's subtle Brechtian acting. Dennis Bingham argues that in this

scene, "even Alice's emotional responses are presented as signs, not as experiences for the audience to 'share' unproblematically"[8]. Through such a distancing performance, Kidman suggests her character can see through the façade of a world shaped by the restricting generic patterns of the Comedies of Remarriage, and offers a theatrical, slightly ironic rendition of the role expected from her, as if aware that such an act may not hold for long.

8 Bill, on the other hand, is initially characterized by his blindness: whereas most of the film is seen through the character's eyes, Bill's point of view is conspicuously absent in Alice's initial nude scene, suggesting the husband fails to see his wife. As the couple is getting ready, the character then fails to find his wallet, and in the bathroom Alice, shortly after urinating next to her husband, blames him for not looking at her after she asked him about her hair. Bill's eyes remain shifty throughout the whole apartment scene. Once in Ziegler's party, on the other hand, he fixes his eyes and stares intensely at all the people he talks to. Cruise's performance thus suggests the character's eyes are only able to see in an environment as surreally magnificent as this one – the very environment Alice treats as fake and superficial. When alone with Alice in their apartment, Bill fails to see his wife precisely as she becomes associated with the coarse and realistic elements left offscreen in Romantic Comedies – nudity, bodily needs and triviality are not part of Bill's perceptive world.

9 As a result, the glamorous Lubitschian setting becomes associated with an idealised surface world, a world hiding more troublesome depths. The film's generic affiliation with the Romantic Comedy appears to translate Bill's idealised representation of himself, of his marriage and of his reality[9]; but while the character's tendency to blind himself by looking only at a Hollywood-like reality is firmly established, his viewpoint contrasts with the many jarring elements the viewers are invited to see.

10 Unsurprisingly, therefore, it is Alice who initiates the film's first generic shift that leads *Eyes Wide Shut* to lean towards the genre of the Erotic Thriller. As the couple is in bed discussing Ziegler's party, an argument breaks out while they evoke their parallel flirtations with other guests. Though its premises of jealousy may be expected from a Comedy of Remarriage, this argument then leads Alice to tell

Bill about a former fantasy of hers: years ago, Alice saw a Navy officer to whom she was so attracted that she fantasized about leaving her husband and her kid for him. This revelation leads Bill to a series of nocturnal flirtations with other women.

The Erotic Thriller

11 Although the Erotic Thriller represents the film's most explicit generic affiliation, it is a highly problematic one, notably due to a lack of sex scenes: Bill never ends up cheating on his wife. Sexuality is almost absent from a film which aims at exploring frustration rather than excitement. Whereas *Eyes Wide Shut* was advertised as a daring exploration of Cruise and Kidman's love life, the only time the couple has an intercourse occurs at the beginning of the film (between Ziegler's party and Alice's confession) and, following a teasing gaze of Alice breaking the fourth wall through a mirror shot, it is left off screen, as an abrupt cut to black invites the viewers to reflect on what they have been forbidden to see. In addition, Alice is shown naked in two brief scenes. The first one occurs when she undresses in the very first shot of the film, only to be abruptly hidden by a title card which prevents the viewer's scopophilia – especially the male viewer's scopophilia – from being satisfied. Soon after, Alice is briefly seen dressing up during a rapid montage comparing her day to day routine with Bill's: once again, the brevity of the shot, unannounced by any narrative clue, tends to take the viewers by surprise as one barely has time to notice Kidman's body. Alice dressing answers the first shot of her undressing, as a way to playfully signal the audience that from now on, they will not be allowed to see her naked anymore, thus frustrating their expectations. Ironically, therefore, erotic images only appear at the very beginning of the film and Bill's wanderings, though closely associated with the genre of the Erotic Thriller through the character's many flirtations and apparent quest for an extramarital affair – may be felt as a frustrating let-down.

12 In her study of the Erotic Thriller, Linda Williams views these frustrations as "generic failures":

> *Eyes Wide Shut* promises treats in its marketing which it fails to deliver through its diegesis [...] the film itself stops short in its

> presentation of sex [...] *Eyes Wide Shut*, as its title suggests, presents its voyeurism [and] its sexual quest [...] in a way that is indistinguishable from lower-end softcore, and marries them to a narrative of intrigue, murder and sexual power which has been more extensively handled in much cheaper films [10].

13 Whereas Williams tends to echo the film's early critics who blamed *Eyes Wide Shut* as a failed occurrence of the genre, one might argue that the film's relationship with the Erotic Thriller is best understood by comparing its plot to the prototypical generic narrative that the scholar herself summarizes in her study. According to her, "the classic opening narrative [of Erotic Thrillers] runs thus: a neglected wife, some years into her lousy marriage, is advised by her female friend to find satisfaction with some new blood. Early scenes in which wives fail to get their husbands to come to bed are legion". In many regards, *Eyes Wide Shut* echoes this prototypical narrative: Bill's lack of attention to his wife is suggested by his incapacity to truly look at her. If the couple does go to bed together, Alice's lingering look in the mirror suggests a lack of emotional investment, or at least a dissatisfaction, with her love life. However, this proximity only stresses the film's specificity: had it sought to be a traditional Erotic Thriller, it would have followed Alice's adventure with the Navy officer, with Bill's desire for revenge looming in the horizon. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, this plot is both virtual and belonging to the distant past. Instead of focusing on Alice's lustful desires, the film centres on the failing husband, Bill, now haunted by this Erotic-Thriller-that-could-have-been.

14 The haunting dimension of this virtual potentiality is expressed through a recurring mental image displaying Bill's way of imagining his wife having sex with an officer – an image which first appears right after Alice's confession and therefore initiates Bill's sexual quest and the film's shift towards the Erotic Thriller. With the *cliché* representation of the Navy man dressed in his white uniform, the blue hue of the image and its slight slow motion, these shots bear all the narrative and aesthetic characteristics of a cheap softcore Erotic Thriller, thus underlining the fact that the genre lies dormant in *Eyes Wide Shut*, as a troubling, underlying presence shaping Bill's imagination and destroying his paradisiacal self-representation of himself and of his marriage, thus triggering a highly disquieting sexual quest.

The generic conventions of the Erotic Thriller seem to emanate from Bill's mind[11] – the character can only understand his wife's story by invoking such generic tropes – but they end up shaping his reality (and, consequently, the film itself) as Bill now appears to perceive his surrounding as the setting of an Erotic Thriller and acts out accordingly. Bill's nightly wanderings depict the character's attempt to come to terms with the troubling incursion of a fantasy reminding him his life might have resembled that of the secondary character of some Erotic Thriller, an incursion that disrupts his previous self-representation as the star of a glamorous Comedy.

15 Unsurprisingly, therefore, his adventures betray a heightened anxiety regarding sex. All the women Bill encounters appear desperately eager to sleep with him, but each attempt is cut short by an exterior event – a phone call from Alice, the intervention of a third party – so that the narrative itself, through a mixture of enticement followed by repression, seems to reflect Bill's sexual anxiety. Whereas, as Williams explains, Erotic Thrillers all associate sex with some external danger, the first half of *Eyes Wide Shut* internalises such associations[12] as a sense of foreboding pervades the film while the protagonist faces no exterior threat, so that it is the possibility of an extramarital sexual encounter that becomes an ontologically violent element, an element that threatens Bill's entire worldview. Although the film leaves various interpretative paths open as to the reasons leading Bill to enter upon a sexual quest of his own, it may thus notably be understood as an attempt by the character to gain control over the existential threat posed by extramarital affairs. In addition, Bill's now anxious relation to sexuality opens up a subtext of gender troubles: his sexual orientations are questioned several times, notably when the character is harassed in the street by a group of young students calling him a 'faggot', so that Bill's previously assertive mode of phallic masculinity appears to have been threatened by the realisation that his wife had fantasies for another man. Tom Cruise's introverted, withdrawn interpretation evokes the anxieties of a character unaware of how to act now that his belief in his dominant position has been questioned; a fact all the more apparent as Bill constantly faces older, more assertive characters who embody a more powerful kind of phallic masculinity.[13] Both these aspects thus reveal how, by displacing the generic expectations of the Erotic Thriller onto the adven-

tures of a side character – the discarded husband – whose own evolving perception of reality seems to be at the core of the film's generic affiliation, the strategy of generic troubling developed in *Eyes Wide Shut* fosters a viewing experience which echoes the character's own troubled state.

16 As the film sets out to explore the impact of this fantasy perceived as an Erotic Thriller in Bill's psyche, the *mise en scène* becomes fully subjective. As Mario Falsetto points out, everything one sees and hears following Alice's revelation may be thought to be filtered by Bill's point of view, or may even translate a dream of the character[14]. The dreamlike quality of the filming and of the narrative, full of strange symbolisms, surprising twists and confusing coincidences, thus creates a state of uncertainty (is it a dream or objective reality?) which, in itself, reflects Bill's troubled state, as the virtuality represented by the Erotic Thriller narrative has collapsed upon his previously idealized perception of reality. Even though they have been spurred by jealousy, Bill's uncertainties therefore spill beyond the realms of sexual and gender identities, and lead the character to enter a world of absolute epistemological uncertainty, as underlined by the orgy scene.

17 In many regards, the orgy acts as the epitome of the film's problematic generic association with the Erotic Thriller. After several encounters with women which failed to lead to adultery, Bill goes to see Nick, an old friend of his whom he had chanced upon during Ziegler's party. Nick, a pianist, tells him about mysterious orgies full of secretive men in disguise and stunningly beautiful prostitutes, at which he plays the piano blindfolded. Bill manages to obtain the password for this night's orgy, rents a mask and a costume and blends in as one of the guests. He attends to a ritual ceremony during which prostitutes get undressed and pick a guest as their partner for the night. The protagonist eventually gets picked by a woman who advises him to flee as he has been recognised as an intruder. This woman is eventually taken away by another guest, and Bill freely explores the mansion, watching various sexual acts being performed for the benefits of the guests. Eventually, Bill is recognised as an intruder, cornered by the members of this mysterious group, and is only allowed to escape thanks to the intervention of the prostitute, apparently willing to sacrifice herself so he can live.

18 Even though Bill himself still does not manage to commit adultery, the two core elements of the Erotic Thriller previously missing are finally included. First, Bill now appears to face actual dangers, as he seems to risk his life by intruding upon this mysterious sect. In addition, the nudity and softcore pornography, so frustratingly absent until then, are now overabundant, and the viewers are free to gorge their eyes on a seemingly unlimited amount of naked body parts and sexual performances. However, such an overabundance of obviously staged acts destroys all the erotic potential of the scene, and turns the orgy into the nightmarish climax of an anxious relation to sexuality. The frightening masked watchers act as deeply unsettling mirror images of both Bill and the viewers, thus preventing "the denegation of the presence of the viewer's gaze" which Christian Metz argues to be essential for filmic scopophilia to function properly[15].

19 During the orgy, the excess of visibility of nude bodies goes hand in hand with a dissimulation of the characters' faces, which seems to turn Bill's focus away from sexuality and towards the desire to find out the identity of everyone involved: the character's stare rests as much on the mysterious masked watchers as on the naked women. The viewers' own hermeneutic curiosity may certainly be excited by the watchers' secret identities, all the more so as the expected eroticism fails to deliver any satisfaction, thus enabling our focus to shift elsewhere. The mysterious sect appears incredibly rich and powerful, yet the identity of its members remains unknown, while even the identity of the woman sacrificing herself for Bill is a mystery, so that one may wonder why this woman was so intent on helping the protagonist. Alongside these identity-related mysteries, the very meaning of each and everyone's action becomes excessively opaque: the sect's esoteric rituals and the characters' behaviours seem to withhold a mysterious signification that both Bill and the viewers cannot grasp. After Bill leaves the orgy, most of the narrative focuses on the character's attempt to shed light on these various mysteries, thus confirming that the orgy itself has marked a generic shift towards the Paranoid Thriller[16].

The Paranoid Thriller

20 In his book *Projecting Paranoia*, Ray Pratt argues that Paranoid Thrillers, films in which a protagonist believes that obscure forces are acting against him, reflect "the emergence of the postmodern situation, with its loss of sense of what is 'true' and 'real', as well as the erosion of traditional liberal notions of citizenship, individuality and agency. Conspiracy theory is often symptomatic of a more pervasive anxiety among individuals concerning their ability to control their lives".[17] In *Eyes Wide Shut*, the generic shift towards the Paranoid Thriller reflects two main anxieties which, although they may symbolically relate to Alice's revelation, are narratively distant from it, so that the story seems to have drifted far away from its starting point.

21 First, the world now seems to be controlled by mysterious forces out of the character's reach. After the orgy, Bill investigates on the sect. All along his way, however, the latter appears one step ahead of him, aware of all his actions and capable of stopping him at every turn. Not only does Bill appear spied on, the sect seems to be endowed with a superhuman capacity to predict his decisions: indeed, as soon as the character returns to the mansion where the orgy had taken place, a threatening messenger appears and gives him a letter demanding him to stop his investigation. Since the messenger brings the letter mere seconds after Bill's arrival, one may wonder how the sect managed to guess his coming. The reach of the sect seems beyond human limits, so that everything surrounding Bill potentially becomes part of a superhuman conspiracy to stop him. Bill's loss of agency is therefore absolute, the source of both a hermeneutic and a metaphysical anxiety, as the world now seems secretly ruled by forces that go not only beyond an individual's reach, but even beyond reason.

22 Such an anxiety is correlated to a second one, more closely centred on troubled intersubjectivity. Every character now seems potentially connected to the sect, so that one's true identity appears ontologically mysterious. Upon Bill's quest to discover the identity of the woman who saved him, the protagonist reads a press article relating the death of a model from a drug overdose. Suspecting she may be his saviour from the orgy, Bill goes to see her body at the morgue.

There, an attentive viewer may recognize the woman who initially overdosed in Ziegler's bathroom, but could not know whether this woman was indeed Bill's saviour. As Bill slowly bends towards the corpse, a slow zoom brings the viewer closer as well. This shot epitomizes how the Other's face has become an impenetrable mask, one whose opacity may, beyond the mere issue of recognition, initiate a deep metaphysical anxiety as to the insurmountable distance separating an individual from anyone else.

23 If the representation of such deep metaphysical doubt fits with the generic shift leading the narrative towards the Paranoid Thriller (similar anxieties are to be found in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* by Don Siegel (1953) for instance), the sequence weaves a strong symbolic connection with the troubles that originated with Alice's revelation, as it becomes apparent that due to this revelation, Bill cannot recognize his wife anymore – in the midst of his paranoid adventure, he comes home and sees Alice acting as an ideal mother, while the character's fantasy of adultery is played out in the soundtrack. This "audiovisual dissonance", to use Michel Chion's terminology [18], underlines the fact that Bill cannot recognize Alice as two different women now seem to coexist within the same body. In other words, the narrative arc connected to the Paranoid Thriller (Bill's confrontation to the sect) somehow echoes the film's other narrative arc initially developed as a Comedy of Remarriage and then turned into an Erotic Thriller (Bill's marital troubles), even though those two parts are narratively distant [19].

24 The generic confusion entailed by this conflation of two distinct narrative arcs is enhanced by the fact that the viewer is drawn to experience a metaphysical doubt similar to Bill's, as the protagonist himself appears more and more enigmatic, thus preventing any unproblematic identification: Cruise's underplayed performance underlines the opacity of a character who, even though he is the clear focaliser of the film, never reveals his own subjectivity. As Michel Chion summarizes, Bill wears a mask during the orgy, but once he takes it off, the viewer cannot see anything more. [20] The character's opacity adds an extra layer of generic instability, as some of his actions jar with the expected behaviour of a character fighting against an obscure conspiracy. For instance, whereas the protagonists of such archetypal Paranoid Thrillers as John Frankenheimer's

The Mandchurian Candidate (1962) or Alan Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1975) do not rest until they have either defeated the conspiracy or have been defeated by it, Bill, in the midst of his investigation, takes the time to visit Domino, a prostitute he had almost slept with during one of his early frustrated attempts, and even brings her cakes, as though utterly oblivious of the mystery he is facing. Upon finding out she is absent, he then flirts with her roommate in a surprisingly aggressive fashion for a man who had thus far been a very passive character.

25 Bill's unpredictability, combined with the permanence of a highly eroticized atmosphere – as though the Erotic Thriller subpart still permeated through Bill's paranoid investigation – breaks away from the conventions of the Paranoid Thriller by merging together unconnected narrative threads which further trouble the film's own identity. In the midst of these unstable grounds, the film reaches an abrupt ending, as all these various episodes are brought to an end within the space of about fifteen minutes. Let us now envision how this ending enables Kubrick to develop an ethics of trouble, while providing a metafilmic reflection on cinema's tendency for narrative and semantic clarity and closure.

An Ethics of Trouble

26 While still at the morgue, Bill is summoned by Ziegler, who then reveals he is part of the sect, and was asked by the other members to convince Bill to stop his investigation. Ziegler then provides Bill with a reassuring narrative which depicts the sect as a less frightening group than it may have seemed: he argues that the entire ritual was staged so as to scare Bill into a submissive silence. As for Bill's savior, she was not harmed. The dead prostitute Bill went to see was unconnected to these events, and just happened to overdose at the same time. Far from a superhuman evil society, the members of this group may, after all, be nothing more than powerful lewd men intent on protecting their anonymity. Ziegler's explanation thus acts as a *Deus Ex Machina* supposedly bringing the many mysteries of the plot to a close. Ziegler seems to self-consciously act the part when claiming the death of the overdosed prostitute was an accident, as he playfully quotes a stereotypical statement liable to provide closure in a

detective story: “Her door was locked from the inside. The police are happy. End of story”. However, it is a highly unsatisfying closure. Bill himself clearly does not believe him. Even if one decides to trust Ziegler’s version, this narrative does not explain the many mysterious coincidences, echoes and digressions that were part of the paranoid atmosphere.

27 Unsatisfying as it may be, this mock conclusion does put an end to the film’s digression towards the Paranoid Thriller, as Bill then comes home and the conspiracy is utterly discarded. The narrative centers back on the couple’s marriage. Bill sees his orgy mask lying by Alice’s side on the bed, which leads him to burst into tears and to tell Alice the whole story. From then on, the threat of adultery which animated the Erotic Thriller narrative arc is completely left aside as well. [21] The last scene shows the couple Christmas shopping for their daughter, a familial setting which jars with the exploration of the shady New York night life that had encapsulated the film’s flirtation with the Erotic Thriller. The well-lit department store, filled with warm colors and toys, unmistakably evokes the original setting of Ziegler’s party, so that the viewer may expect the ending to echo the beginning and at least provide a closure adapted to the tropes of Comedies of Remarriage. Just as in George Cukor’s *Philadelphia Story* (1940) for instance, the discarded husband does manage to patch things up with his wife. However, the circular structure of the film does not imply that the couple will now go back to a self-blinding retreat in an idealized façade world: as Bill promises to love Alice “forever”, thus paving the way for a fairytale narrative closure, his wife stops him and argues she is afraid of that word. Instead, in the film’s final line, she urges the couple to “fuck” as soon as possible.

28 In so doing, Alice points at the way *Eyes Wide Shut* offers a happy ending paradoxically devoid of all closure. Even though it ends with a situation typical of Comedies of Remarriage (the spouses are ready for a new start), the various layers of uncertainty opened up by the various generic shifts remain wide open. As Laura Mulvey suggests, “there are two grand conventions of narrative closure, devices that allow the drive of a story to return to a stasis: death or marriage” [22]. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, the expected Remarriage does not provide an “ever after” kind of stability, while the death of the prostitute, far from providing closure, looms large as a narrative opening, the kind of

deaths that would rather initiate an investigation than close a narrative.

29 The couple must find a way to remain united in spite of the epistemologically unstable world they now evolve in, and even thanks to it, as self-awareness may prevent them from falling back into a world of certainties they now know to be illusions. Likewise, the viewer must strive to find satisfaction in a happy ending that does not solve the film's generic troubles, and even provides an ultimate reminder of its attempt at generic disorientation, since Alice's word "fuck", just before the end credit, reminds us that the expected Erotic Thriller didn't take place, as the hope of seeing an explicit intercourse involving the two stars – a hope so actively fanned by the film's promotion – will now be frustrated forever. Three consecutive unsatisfying conclusions reflexively indicate that *Eyes Wide Shut* explicitly avoids wrapping up its narrative in a neat ending providing both narrative and semantic closure, in order for the film to point at the epistemological uncertainty which one is invited to consider as inherent to the human condition, in spite of one's tendency to blind oneself from this fact, as epitomized by Bill. By failing to provide closure to the three generic structures developed throughout the film, the ending thus points at the frustratingly limited scope of a worldview – Bill's – which, by seeing the world through the prism of generic patterns, fails to embrace its complexity[23]. Only by being kept away from the temptation to view his life through an artificially simplistic narrative prism, thanks to his wife's watchfulness, can Bill hope to save his marriage. Bill's situation therefore sheds light on the film's metafilmic reflection: by problematically merging together three distinct generic patterns, *Eyes Wide Shut* fosters a troubling viewing experience which reflexively indicates films' tendency to simplify a complex reality by subsuming it into an artificially coherent set of generic conventions.

30 The visuals of the last scene beautifully convey the film's reflection, as it introduces the first shallow focus of the entire film. Everything around the characters looks like a blurry shimmering of lights and colors, whereas the photography of *Eyes Wide Shut* is, in every other scene, characterized by constant depth of field and total image sharpness. As the characters attempt to reunite within a world that now appears blurry, *Eyes Wide Shut* suggests one should open one's

eyes to the troubled depths our existence rests upon, and that – consequently – films ought not to offer an illusory sense of clarity by inscribing life within a clear-cut narrative, ending in a reassuring closure. Therefore, the film's strategy of generic troubling, far from the playfulness which characterizes the mixing of film genres in the postmodern era, asks the audience to accept misdirection and even frustration as a necessary part of their cinematic experience – implying semantic closure to be just another attempt at using fiction to hide the ontologically troubled condition of mankind behind the veneer of an artificially ordered paradise.

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— “Acting Out of the World: The Distancing Underplaying of the Main Actors in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Eyes Wide Shut*”, *Cinergie: Il Cinema et le altre Arti*, n° 12, 2017, pp. 73-82.

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Paul Tatara, “*Eyes Wide Shut*: all undressed with no place to go”, 15 July 2019, http://edition.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9907/15/review.eyeswideshut/ (last accessed 30 December 2019).

Linda Ruth Williams, *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary America*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 398.

NOTES

1 For instance, Paul Tatara writes for CNN that “Kubrick took so long to make his films, and re-shot individual scenes so many times, that a spontaneous erection would seem beyond the realm of his imagination. Unfortunately for "Eyes Wide Shut" (and for the few critical audience members the film will actually draw), Kubrick never really loosened up.” Paul Tatara, “*Eyes Wide Shut*: all undressed with no place to go”. CNN, 15 July 2019. http://edition.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9907/15/review.eyeswideshut/ (last accessed 30 December 2019).

In his review for *Libération*, Philippe Garnier – who nonetheless recognizes the fact that Kubrick’s films tend to be reevaluated over time – writes that “the issue [with *Eyes Wide Shut*] is that Kubrick’s idea of debauchery and depravation evokes a softcore Andrew Blake flick”. Garnier, Philippe. « Le dernier Kubrick. Le chef-d’oeuvre Hard attendu *Eyes Wide Shut* laisse un

on.fr/culture/1999/07/12/le-dernier-kubrick-a-premiere-vue-vu-a-los-angeles-avant-sa-sortie-americaine-le-16-juillet-le-chef-_277862 (last accessed 30 December 2019).

2 Peter Bradshaw, "*Eyes Wide Shut*". *The Guardian*, 10 September 1999. https://www.theguardian.com/film/1999/sep/10/3 (last accessed 31 December 2019).

3 Roger Ebert writes that the film is "like an erotic daydream [which also] has the structure of a thriller, with the possibility that conspiracies and murders have taken place. It also resembles a nightmare [...] The reconciliation at the end of the film is the one scene that doesn't work [...] its loose ends shouldn't try to tidy up". Ebert, Roger. "*Eyes Wide Shut*". *RogerEbert.com*, 16 July 1999. https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/eyes-wide-shut-1999 (last accessed 30 December 2019).

4 Various scholars have noted that Bill's exploration of the mysterious orgy evokes a journey through hell. In a 2018 article, Dijana Metlić elaborates on executive producer Jan Harlan's assertion that the orgy was meant to evoke a "Hieronymus Bosch type of Hell" and compares *Eyes Wide Shut* with Bosch's famous triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510). She argues that the paradisiacal first sequence evokes Bosch's panel depicting the garden of Eden, while the other two panels (*Humankind Before the Flood* and *Hell*) echo the film's ulterior events. Therefore, the couple's troubles come to evoke the biblical Fall of Man. Dijana Metlić, "Stanley Kubrick and Hieronymus Bosch: *In the Garden of Earthly Delights*". *Stanley Kubrick : Nouveaux Horizons*, edited by Jean-François Baillon and Vincent Jaunas, *Essais*, hors-série n° 4, 2018, pp. 105-123. https://journals.openedition.org/essais/633 (last accessed 01/01/2020). In this article, I will argue that such an interpretation is pertinent insofar as one recognizes the initial heavenliness of the couple's situation to be illusory, since the disruption of this initial illusion is necessary for the film to develop an ethics of trouble.

5 Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Harvard University Press, 1981.

6 Sam Azulys, *Stanley Kubrick: une Odyssée Philosophique*. Editions de la Transparence, 2011, pp. 321-322. Azulys argues that *Eyes Wide Shut* not only follows the genre's narrative structure, it is also in tune with its philosophical content, as analyzed by Stanley Cavell. Indeed, Kubrick's film may also be seen as fostering an "acknowledgement of the skeptical condition of mankind" (*Ibid.*).

7 For an analysis of the way the film's advertisement campaign led the viewers to expect a highly erotic film, see Lucy Scholes and Richard Martin, "Archived Desires: *Eyes Wide Shut*". *Stanley Kubrick: New Perspectives*, edited by Tatjana Ljujic, Peter Krämer and Richard Daniels. Black Dog Publishing, 2015, pp. 342-355. The authors argue that the film's publicity team misled the public, and is ultimately responsible for its poor reception, even though Warner Bros. stated its team followed the advertisement campaign that Kubrick himself had planned.

8 Dennis Bingham, "Kidman, Cruise and Kubrick". *More than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*, edited by Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank Tomasulon. Wayne State University Press, 2004, p. 261.

9 Many of Kubrick's films similarly rely on generic conventions in order to depict the subjectivity of characters whose perception of reality appears to be shaped by Hollywood tropes. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the character of Alex is seen imagining biblical episodes in a mental image which shows his imagination to have been shaped by American biblical movies. "I thought Alex would have imagined it that way", Kubrick told Michel Ciment. Michel Ciment, "Kubrick on *A Clockwork Orange*", 1971. http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/interview.aco.html (last accessed 15/11/2020). In *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), the soldiers fighting in Vietnam turn the country into a Hollywood set as they project their Western-filled worldview onto their reality. Cf. Vincent Jaunas, "We'll let the Gooks Play the Indians: The Endurance of the Frontier Myth in the Hyperreality of *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987)", in *Miranda, vol.* 18, 2019. https://journals.openedition.org/miranda/18912 (last accessed 15/11/2020).

10 Linda Ruth Williams, *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary America.* Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 398.

11 One should note that although the film's association with the Erotic Thriller stems from a mental image, the earlier presence of a passed-out prostitute in Ziegler's bathroom, as well as the two scenes showing Nicole Kidman undressing, prevent the film from easily dismissing the following Erotic Thriller-like events as mere figments of Bill's fantasies, disconnected from all diegetic reality. The prostitute was objectively at Ziegler's, thus implying that the world is indeed filled with sordid lustful affairs – but Bill did not see it that way then, as he still viewed himself as part of a Glamorous comedy; indeed, Bill only looked at the naked, overdosed character with a detached, oblivious medical stare. Likewise, the early representation

of Alice's nude body suffuses eroticism into the diegesis from the start, but such eroticism initially does not determine the filmic structure as it is disregarded by the protagonist, who fails to look at his wife. It takes Alice's revelation for Bill to start focusing on such elements and viewing the world through the prism of the Erotic Thriller, thus turning the film – shaped by the protagonist's viewpoint – into a problematic occurrence of this genre. Rather than a fully subjective fantasy, the film's shift towards the Erotic Thriller thus seems to translate an evolution in the protagonist's viewpoint. Such a use of generic tropes seemingly arising from the character's own viewpoint participates in the film's discourse on the way narratives may shape one's perception of reality, as analyzed further at the end of this article.

12 The second half of the film – following the orgy – does display an exterior element of danger which may seem to fit the generic expectations of the Erotic Thriller more faithfully. However, we shall see that at this point, the film strays away from this generic pattern to explore another one.

13 For an analysis of Tom Cruise's acting in *Eyes Wide Shut*, see Vincent Jaunas, "Acting Out of the World: The Distancing Underplaying of the Main Actors in 2001: A *Space Odyssey* and *Eyes Wide Shut*". *Cinergie: Il Cinema et le altre Arti*, n° 12, 2017, pp. 73-82. For an analysis of sexuality in *Eyes Wide Shut*, see Celestino Deleyto, "1999. A Closet Odyssey: Sexual Discourses in *Eyes Wide Shut*". *Atlantis vol.* 28, n° 01, 2006, pp. 29-43.

14 Mario Falsetto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Narrative and Stylistic Analysis*. Praeger, 2001, pp. 130-141.

15 Christian Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginaire : psychanalyse et cinéma*. 10/18, 1977, p. 82 (my translation).

16 Once again, this new generic shift seems to emanate from a change in Bill's subjective perception, which reroutes the film's whole generic structure. The objectively enigmatic nature of the orgy is already established prior to Bill's visit – notably by Nick – but it is Bill's shifting interest, from sex to the resolution of this mystery, which connects the subsequent filmic events to the genre of the Paranoid Thriller. The fact that this new generic affiliation stems from Bill's new perception of reality is emphasized by the film's circular structure. Various scenes parallel earlier ones – Bill revisits the costume shop and Domino's apartment; he wanders through the streets and looks for Nick. These familiar settings, which in the first part were filled with the promise of sexual encounters, now exude a sense of dread and ontological uncertainty that translates Bill's altered viewpoint. Here, too,

one may wonder whether it is Bill who perceives his situation through the prism of filmic conventions, in this case through the tropes of Paranoid Thrillers, thus turning his life – and the film – into one.

17 Ray Pratt, *Projecting Paranoia: Conspiratorial Visions in American Film.* University Press of Kansas, 2001, p. 1.

18 Chion defines audiovisual dissonances as « an effect of diegetic contradiction between a specific sound and a specific image ». Michel Chion, *Un art sonore, le cinéma : histoire, esthétique, poétique*. Cahiers du cinéma, 2003, p. 419 (my translation).

19 One might argue that from this point onwards, *Eyes Wide Shut* explores the skeptical condition of mankind, in the sense developed by Stanley Cavell: Bill is indeed confronted to the distance separating two human beings. The philosophical foundations of the Comedy of Remarriage, according to Cavell, therefore become manifest in Kubrick's film, but only through the detour of the generic conventions of the Paranoid Thriller, following a previous detour towards the Erotic Thriller.

20 Michel Chion, *Stanley Kubrick : L'humain, ni plus ni moins.* Cahiers du cinéma, 2005, p. 506.

21 Celestino Deleyto notes how many critics felt dissatisfied with a "happy ending in which the couple get back together for no apparent reason". Celestino Deleyto, *Op. cit.*, 2006, p. 31.

22 Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image.* Reaktion Books, 2006, p. 71.

23 In so doing, *Eyes Wide Shut* sheds light on Stanley Kubrick's (known to inscribe all his films within specific generic traditions) relation to film genres: the aesthetic and narrative conventions provided by film genres risk fostering a simplistic framework through which to comprehend the world, but dialoging with such conventions enables films to effectively reflect upon mankind's difficulty to face the complexity of the human condition.

RÉSUMÉS

English

More than twenty-five years after its release, Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* remains one of the least acclaimed films of the director, despite his own assertion that it was his finest film ever. Advertised as an erotic thriller, *Eyes Wide Shut* has tended to be seen as a let-down, a

strangely puritan reflection on sexual anxiety from the director of the much more explicit A *Clockwork Orange*. I will argue that this dissatisfaction arises from the gap between some viewers' expectation of a highly provocative, sex-filled work, and the frustration of all viewers' expectations sought by Kubrick. Indeed, though Bill Harford's journey stems from a marital crisis which ignites psychosexual anxieties, such a premise leads him to experience a global state of unrest which evolves beyond marriage and sex: sexual and gender anxieties bring forth a cognitive and a metaphysical crisis. Given the highly subjective quality of the film, which brings the viewer to experience the world as filtered by the main character's consciousness, *Eyes Wide Shut* thus becomes a highly troubling viewing experience indeed. Whereas many expected erotic thrills, the film frustrates the spectator's scopophilia, as the expected pleasure derived from watching Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman's love life is thwarted, and instead seeks to produce hermeneutic and sensory bewilderment. I argue that the film explores the various modalities of trouble to ultimately develop an ethics of unrest.

Français

Plus de vingt-cinq ans après sa sortie, *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999) demeure l'un des films les moins acclamés du cinéaste, en dépit du fait que Kubrick lui-même le considérait comme son chef d'œuvre. Promu comme un thriller érotique, le film en a déçu plus d'un, qui y ont vu une réflexion sur l'anxiété sexuelle étonnamment puritaine de la part du réalisateur à l'origine du très explicite *Orange Mécanique* (1971). Cet article suggère que la médiocre réception du film résulte d'un décalage entre les attentes d'une part du public, et le projet filmique de troubler les spectateurs. En effet, bien que les tribulations du protagoniste Bill Harford résultent d'une crise maritale provoquant des troubles psycho-sexuels, le film développe, à partir de ces prémisses, une exploration plus radicale du trouble. Celui-ci dépasse le cadre des anxiétés sexuelles et se transforme en crise cognitive et métaphysique. Au vu de la qualité hautement subjective du film, qui montre le monde diégétique tel que perçu et déformé par les perceptions de Bill, *Eyes Wide Shut* devient, de fait, une expérience filmique troublante. Là où nombre de spectateurs et spectatrices souhaitaient se délecter d'un spectacle érotique, le film frustre toute satisfaction voyeuriste et cherche à susciter un état de confusion herméneutique et sensorielle. Cet article suggère qu'explorer les diverses modalités de cette confusion permet *in fine* à *Eyes Wide Shut* de développer une véritable éthique du trouble.

INDEX

Mots-clés

Eyes Wide Shut, Kubrick (Stanley), thriller érotique, comédie de remariage, thriller paranoïaque

Keywords
Eyes Wide Shut, Kubrick (Stanley), erotic thriller, comedy of remarriage, paranoid thriller

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Provocateur or Documentarian? Revisiting William Friedkin's Troublesome 1980s in *Cruising* and *Rampage*

Chris Horn

PLAN

Protests against *Cruising*
Support for *Cruising*
Cruising and the Censors
Researching *Rampage*
Protests against *Rampage*
Conclusion

TEXTE

1 The study of American film history has tended to characterise the 1980s according to a narrow, singular model that foregrounds the importance of White House occupancy and box-office hits[1]. Such an emphasis has meant that it is often missed that, as Stephen Prince observed about the decade, "Hollywood *itself* was attacked for films that were unacceptably lewd, bigoted or sacrilegious" (emphasis in original) (xvi). *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Martin Scorsese, 1988) was the most notorious example of the latter and *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma, 1980) was subjected to protests against its misogynistic violence; but an especially infamous example that was attacked in public and in the press for its bigotry was William Friedkin's *Cruising* (1980). The film, set in New York's gay leather scene, managed to upset not only gay activists and homophobes alike, but also the censors and theatre owners as well. This article concentrates on *Cruising*'s director because he seems particularly emblematic of the tensions in the 1980s between the personal approach of auteur filmmakers and the decade's prevailing populism and conformity. Friedkin's career had been (and continues to be) defined by the extraordinary fame and influence of two films he made consecutively in 1971 and 1973: *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist*. As Larry Gross put it in 1995 when he considered the

director's steep career decline: "it's tough now even to grasp how completely Friedkin's two early successes helped create the idiom of serious/popular Hollywood filmmaking over the last twenty-five years" (14). As with a number of the other filmmakers associated with the "Hollywood Renaissance" of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Friedkin's reputation, and subsequent ability to get films made in Hollywood, was fatally undermined by one specific catastrophic failure. The financial disaster of *Sorcerer* (1977), a remake of Henri Clouzot's *The Wages of Fear* (1953), preceded the more notorious examples of both *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Coppola, 1979) and *Heaven's Gate* (Michael Cimino, 1980). Indeed, the difficulty in the marketplace of the late 1970s of making the sort of cinema associated with the Hollywood Renaissance was brought into sharp relief when *Sorcerer*'s release date in May 1977 fell on exactly the same day as the first *Star Wars* film (Segaloff 170).

2 By the end of the 1970s, Friedkin was already no stranger to controversy, having received well-publicised criticism for the perceived blasphemy in *The Exorcist* as well as for the extravagant overspend of *Sorcerer* (Segaloff 147-149, 155-172). This article examines Friedkin's seemingly unerring ability to attract trouble by interrogating the motivations that governed his actions. This is achieved through the examination of some of the difficulties that plagued two 1980s films: *Cruising*, that was more controversial than successful on its initial release, and Friedkin's most obscure and least seen film, *Rampage*, which was only shown twice in the United States (in Boston and Los Angeles) when completed in 1987, before a fuller but still limited, and entirely unsuccessful, domestic release in 1992 (Clagett 311). One of the principal ways that I am able to offer a fresh perspective on these matters is through the use of archival material from Friedkin's papers lodged at the Margaret Herrick library in Los Angeles.

3 Friedkin began his career working in documentaries and one of the most consistent aspects of his directing career is his determined approach to research and authenticity. In this regard, he has often been drawn to narratives that are based on the real-life experiences of those who fulfilled roles depicted in the fictional narratives. This resolve to achieve a high degree of verisimilitude has led Friedkin towards controversy on a number of occasions. At the same time, his troubles also resulted from his notoriously combative personality.

Walon Green, who wrote *Sorcerer* and *The Brink's Job* (1978) for Friedkin, observed about the major Hollywood studios: "They hated Billy [Friedkin]. They were thrilled when he started bombing" (Biskind 413). It is therefore unsurprising that Friedkin mostly found employment in the independent sector in the 1980s.

4 This article continues the critical reappraisal of *Cruising* that followed a brief re-run in 1998 and then a DVD release in 2007[2]. In 1980, however, the negative publicity that dogged the film's route to market had both the effect of overwhelming much consideration of the film's intrinsic qualities, and of setting in stone its problematic subsequent reputation resulting from the perception that its portrayal of an alternative sub-culture is characterised by violence and sexual debauchery. The result has been that it has been rarely noticed that, even at the time of its making and release, the film had its supporters, both from within and outside of the gay community. Correspondence from the archives allows a more balanced understanding of the film's public and institutional reception and complicates notions of Friedkin's responsibility. *Cruising*'s troubles continued after its release as well and the public and protracted row between the censors and the filmmakers is also considered, particularly because it is illustrative of the types of censorship issues that at this particular point in history was of concern for the various interested parties: the public, filmmakers and the appointed guardians of moral standards. At the same time, the largely unknown difficulties that Friedkin endured, in the form of a letter writing campaign when he was making *Rampage*, are yet another example of what seems an uncanny aptitude for attracting trouble. On that occasion, at least, it does seem that the director was not as blameworthy.

5 Both *Cruising* and *Rampage* (and also 1985's *To Live and Die in L.A.*) are linked by the nature of the source materials on which they were based, and by the insider knowledge upon which they all relied. Friedkin's choices relate to his background in documentaries with his approach to authenticity underpinning his explorations of contemporary American society. *Cruising* was based on a dubious 1970 novel of the same name by Gerald Walker that has been vilified for its homophobic undertones (Simon 69). Friedkin used the novel's basic narrative but altered it completely by refashioning it to incorporate ideas drawn from recent real-life events, and from the experiences of

an undercover policeman, Randy Jurgensen (who advised Friedkin on *The French Connection*). *To Live and Die*, a high-energy thriller, was based on a novel written by Gerald Petievich that fictionalised his own experiences as a Secret Service agent, like the films' protagonists. *Rampage* was a similar situation, with the source novel by William Wood also based on his former profession as a Deputy District Attorney — again like the film's leading character. Even another 1980s Friedkin film, *Deal of the Century* (1983) — a lame star vehicle for Chevy Chase, Friedkin's only studio production in the decade and the only time he did not write the screenplay — was initially meant to maintain his insistence on an authentic *mise-en-scène*. This was effectively scuppered when a loan of aircraft from the armed forces failed to materialise. An internal memo reveals that the production had proceeded under a false impression because of "a misquote about approval by Department of Defence and Department of Navy. Neither did in fact" (Yorkin). Even when he used a screenplay by someone else, in this case by Paul Brickman, Friedkin was not satisfied with relying on others. When he was solely responsible for the writing (as on *Cruising* and *Rampage*), he used the source novels as a point of departure for the undertaking of extensive research. While not operating at a Kubrickian level of deep research, the archives do show that Friedkin read up and consulted widely on the sort of procedural matters and real-life events that might inform his scripts. He always strove to depict realistic representations of the subject matter under consideration.

Protests against *Cruising*

6 Some years before *Cruising* was actually made, Friedkin had been approached by *French Connection* producer, Philip D'Antoni about making a film from Walker's novel, the rights of which he had just purchased. The story, inspired by a series of unsolved murders in 1969, was about a policeman going undercover in New York's affluent gay community to investigate a serial killer and becoming a murderer himself as he becomes overwhelmed by his homosexual urges. Its essentially homophobic nature was of little interest for Friedkin: "I didn't think much of it [and] I wasn't compelled to make it into a film at that time" (Simon 69). D'Antoni then managed to briefly pique the interest of Steven Spielberg before selling the property to the inde-

pendent producer Jerry Weintraub (who had made his name with Robert Altman's acclaimed 1975 film, *Nashville*). In 1979, Weintraub once again approached Friedkin about making a film from Walker's book (ibid). After working on *The Brink's Job* essentially as a hired hand, Friedkin was keen to apply himself to a project over which he had creative control. He now had some ideas to combine Walker's book with a number of other sources. Firstly, there were the fascinating tales Jurgensen had told him about going undercover in the early 1960s to apprehend uniformed men, possibly police officers, who were blackmailing, and potentially murdering, homosexuals (Clagett 238-239). He had also just read a January 1979 piece by Arthur Bell in *Village Voice*, "Another Murder at the Anvil", which described two murders in four months at a gay club in New York's meat-packing district (Bell). Another factor was that Friedkin had heard rumours of a series of unexplained deaths in the gay community that would later turn out to be the start of the AIDS epidemic (Simon 69). All this now prompted Friedkin to accept the offer to make *Cruising*. He reversed his earlier decision because he could now see how he could transpose Walker's novel to the underground leather scene, which featured in both Jurgensen and Bell's stories.

7 *Cruising* is a radical portrait of a sub-culture that, according to Mark Kermode, "broke all the existing taboos of mainstream cinematic sex with its frank, tactile portrait of an exotic, erotic underworld" (22). In keeping with his beginnings in documentary filmmaking, and to capture this scene's febrile atmosphere, Friedkin carried out copious research in a search for authenticity. So that he could go 'cruising' himself, he managed to obtain introductions and protection from the dubious gangster types who owned the New York leather bars, including the infamous Genovese crime-family member, Matty "The Horse" Ianniello (Bailey 2). When he immersed himself in the scene, he observed: "I wasn't bothered that much… I was just another fat Jew in a jockstrap" (Segaloff 169). The Bacchanalian depiction of this life was inevitably likely to attract a certain amount of negative attention, but the filmmakers never could have anticipated the level of opprobrium that the film generated. Although the strength of the protests was unexpected, Friedkin could hardly have been surprised that the film was contentiously received. Its extraordinarily frank depiction of the highly sexualised leather scene seems to be a overt

act of provocation, a deliberate strategy, perhaps, to raise public awareness of the film. The graphic nature of *Cruising*'s depiction of sado-masochistic practices was calculated, as Friedkin admitted to Linda Ruth Williams in 2004, to "get away with stuff most people weren't getting way with – I wanted to see how far I could push the envelope" (19).

8 *Cruising*'s portrayal of one section of homosexual culture as an environment that fosters murderers gathered a range of objections from both homophobes and homosexuals, albeit, of course, for very different reasons. While there was bound to be resistance to any portrayal of homosexual life from conservative quarters at this time, it was the gay community who rallied together to create problems for *Cruising*'s production. Before it had been completed, the film had already acquired a badge of notoriety when organised protests were staged during its filming on New York streets. An early version of the script had leaked and this resulted in the protestors believing that the film would make correlations between homosexuality and homicidal tendencies. Arthur Bell, whose original story had been one of the inspirations for the film's narrative in the first place, was one of the most vocal opponents of the film and regularly railed against the film in his "Bell Tolls" column in *Village Voice*. The extent of his anger on the subject became yet more apparent during the protests on 25 July 1979 when a radio bulletin direct from the streets reported that "Bell looked right into the camera and said they should do violence to any of the crew they saw" (Van Dorn). The concerted attempts made to obstruct the filming taking place on the New York streets generated huge publicity with regular reports on radio and television news, and in the pages of broadsheet newspapers from both sides of the continent [3]. In later versions of the script, there is evidence of Friedkin seeming to have responded to the protestors' concerns. A few lines not in early drafts clearly seek to mitigate any impression that the sub-culture depicted is typical of gay society. The detective in charge, Edelson (Paul Sorvino) tells the film's protagonist, Steve Burns (Al Pacino), when sending him undercover, that both victims "were not in the mainstream of gay life. They were into heavy leather, S & M. It's a whole different way of life" (Friedkin, *Cruising*). A more obvious attempt to appease the protesters was to begin the film with a similarly motivated, if ill-advised, disclaimer: "The film is not

intended as an indictment of the homosexual world. It is set in one small segment of that world, which is not meant to be representative of the whole" (Segaloff 194)[4]. Feelings ran high about the film and some of the hate mail in the archives illustrates this well, even if it was not always entirely rationally expressed. One particularly crazed example from Max Karnick tells Friedkin:

> I have not seen a movie since *Zhivago*, never heard of William Friedkin… "that door" [homosexuality] should have remained shut in the closet – so "they" could all suffocate and then drop them into the Hudson River… to save a lot of morgue effeuse [sic][5].

9 In fairness, the letters from supporters also sometimes read as similarly deranged, with Stefan Fitterman, who appears to have advised Friedkin on gay life in New York, comparing the reactions to *Cruising* to Nazism:

> Is there any difference between "burn the movie" and "burn the Jews"? More frightening were words painted on streets and buildings, "stop the movie *Cruising*" – so close to "Juden"… another example of growing fascist tendencies in the US… I do salute your efforts. Above and beyond any political movement, there is the truth (underlining in original).

Support for *Cruising*

10 The publicity surrounding the film's production seems to have stimulated a strong opening, but its critical reception was (nearly) unanimously negative, often even hostile. The tone of the reviews was so extreme that a college professor, George Grella, who doubled as a film critic for his local paper, was prompted to send Friedkin his positive review which was unequivocal in its praise: "it constructs some of the harshest, subtlest, and most complex metaphors for our life and time that I have ever seen" (Grella '*Cruising*'). In his accompanying letter, Grella tells the director that "I wanted you to see that at least *someone* reviewed *Cruising* as a movie instead of as some sort of perverse ideological statement" (Grella "Letter to Friedkin"). Even more indicative of the extent of the adverse reactions to the film was that Friedkin took the trouble to write back, telling Grella that his was

"the most perceptive review I've seen of the film. I agree with your conclusions and I'm grateful to you for going against the grain" (Friedkin, "Letter to Grella"). Another supportive, if naïve, letter writer suspects a critical conspiracy and encloses one review from the *Westchester Rockland Newspaper* which described *Cruising* as evidence: "as close to a piece of cinematic excrement as any film I've seen" (Prete).

11 The wave of negativity that dominated *Cruising*'s public discourse at this time obscures how more balanced views were also expressed and the film certainly had its supporters. So, when the editor of gay magazine *Mandate* reported from the set in the February 1980 issue, he observed:

> More than 1600 gay men participated in the filming of *Cruising*... significantly fewer gays protested the filming. The men who frequent the world being depicted... were in the movie, and did not object to their world being depicted... Many felt that the protests were as much a protest against the leather world itself as they are a protest against Friedkin's film. (Bailey 3-4)

12 Indeed, the delight of these extras in depicting their lifestyle in all its splendour is palpable in the film. Friedkin received a number of letters from those who worked on it thanking him for a great experience. One particularly effusive example said: "I do believe in freedom of artistic expression and *Cruising* may, in some way, come to represent just such a freedom" (Williams K). In the face of the public disruption, it is notable that Friedkin also received significant support from the city authorities. The director was sufficiently grateful to pen letters of thanks to both Nancy Littlefield, the mayor's movie liaison, and to Mayor Ed Koch himself. To Littlefield he wrote that, "without your assistance, we couldn't have made the film" (Friedkin, "Letter to Littlefield"). To Koch, he expressed "appreciation for the support... and my apologies for any discomfort... though it would seem the 1st amendment issue was clear, I know yours was a moral stance, not necessarily the most politically expedient. I am grateful for your fairness, guidance and cooperation" (Friedkin,"Letter to Koch").

13 Not absolutely everyone subscribed to the critical consensus and a notable exception was Robin Wood who, in an article for *Movie*

in 1980 (reprinted in his 1986 book), vowed "to do some justice to *Cruising*… it has received none so far" (52).Wood's "The Incoherent Text: Narrative in the '70s" (not necessarily a pejorative term as Wood explains it) considers *Cruising*'s complicated and ambiguous narrative construction and its contentious portrayal of the leather-bar milieu alongside an examination of *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) and *Looking for Mr Goodbar* (Richard Brooks, 1977). Wood invokes an auteurist perspective when he argues that these three films achieve "a certain level of distinction [by] exhibit[ing] a large degree of involvement on the part of their makers" (42). Nevertheless, having been largely unavailable and reviled for years, it was only when *Cruising* was given a further theatrical run in 1998, and then a DVD release in 2007, that the film enjoyed something of a critical and cultural rehabilitation. Of course, societal attitudes towards homosexuality have changed immeasurably in the time since, which has contributed to this re-appraisal, particularly regarding the film's portrayal of gay life. In 2018, Jason Bailey commented that "in the decades that followed, something curious happened. Critics – particularly gay critics – revisited *Cruising*, and came to find value in it through the lens of (ironically enough) representation" (4). Paul Burston had already argued in 1998 that 'the film is now part of queer film history and a testament to how a frightened Hollywood treated a disenfranchised minority… reactions to *Cruising* say as much about the time when they were written as about the film itself… despite the fact that it is not really a film "about homosexuality" at all' (24).

14 The controversies that swirled around the production and reception of *Cruising* can be seen, to some degree at least, to be attributable to the actions and behaviour of its writer-director, but it also suffered from word-of-mouth anxieties that were not necessarily based on what was in the actual film. Objections were stridently and publicly expressed, with the print and broadcast media playing a role in generating headlines that inevitably tended to obscure any opposing opinion. As we have seen, this support included the members of the community that was supposedly being misrepresented in the film. The debates surrounding *Cruising* exposed tensions between the fair representation of minority cultures and the expression of free speech (as laid down in the 1st amendment of the American Constitution). Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the

film's ability to represent the culture it depicts in a nuanced manner was always going to be difficult because, as Bailey observed, "Friedkin remained an aloof observer of gay life and *Cruising* was undeniably a script written from a straight, Other-ing perspective" (2).

Cruising and the Censors

15 After filming was completed, *Cruising* still continued to appear regularly in the press because of a very public, somewhat protracted row between Weintraub and Friedkin on one side and the censors on the other, a furor that actually only arose after the film's initial rating and release. The film was clearly pushing against the limits of acceptability at the time and a number of theatre chains, including the country's largest, General Cinema Corp. (GCC), refused to show it because the film's 'R' rating was seen by many to be unduly lenient (Prince 346). It is this that seems to have prompted the row that emerged between Richard Heffner, the Chairman of the Classification and Ratings Administration and the filmmakers. Again, the broadsheets, as with the protests during production, kept the dispute in the public domain [6]. After an article by Dale Pollock in the *Los Angeles Times* in which Heffner implied that the filmmakers had misled the board, Friedkin and Weintraub published their own official riposte (Pollock 'R-Rated *Cruising*'). They gave the press a written statement that gave a comprehensive account of their version of events before asserting:

> With a series of innuendos, unattributed comments and official releases...the MPAA have charged that we agreed to make certain changes in *Cruising*...to obtain an 'R' rating, and then did not make the changes. This is false...we did not release a different version (other than to delete scenes) than the one that was submitted for rating. (underlining in original) (Friedkin and Weintraub).

16 Despite all the huffing and puffing on both sides, the relatively minor cuts Heffner demanded were carried out for subsequent releases. Stephen Prince's assessment, that the board's reaction was cursory and that the alterations "were cosmetic rather than substantive" seems accurate (347). While Prince's clear disdain for *Cruising* may have caused him to overstate his case, his point about a causal link

between the censors' belated response to the dissent about the film's 'R' rating, and the reactions from GCC and other leading theatre chains is also well made. The implication is that the censors' later decisions were politically motivated in that they were influenced more by the opinions of the major exhibitors than by the sensitivities of the film's putative audience. On the other side of the argument, Friedkin and Weintraub's combative reaction was probably motivated by the thought that the publicity could only stimulate interest in the film. Given the barely discernible cuts that resulted, the eventual effect of *Cruising*'s censorship row being conducted in public, it might be argued, was simply to bring the absurdity of both parties' posturing into sharp focus.

Researching *Rampage*

17 *Rampage* is probably Friedkin's most obscure film largely because the independent company that financed its making, the Dino de Laurentiis Group, went bankrupt in 1987 as it was about to be released. It was not put on general release until 1992, and then only for a brief time when Miramax released a new version re-edited by Friedkin. The protests that emerged early on in the film's gestation were not played out in the national press and, given the film's subsequent problems, they are now merely a footnote in the production history of a forgotten film. What is particularly interesting about the brouhaha generated is how much it tells us about the manner in which public objections were mobilised in the 1980s. One small newspaper article in a specialist publication managed to trigger a reaction that today would, perhaps, "go viral" in the blink of an eye.

18 Friedkin's first film had been, back in 1962, *The People vs. Paul Crump*, a documentary about a man sentenced to death for a crime Friedkin believed he did not commit, made at a time when he was vehemently opposed to the death penalty. In the meantime, Friedkin's views had modified and he was no longer so sure where he stood on this issue. It was, according to Nat Segaloff, this uncertainty about a subject in which he was interested that prompted him to try to make sense of the complexities of the argument by optioning the rights to William Wood's 1985 novel, *Rampage* (262). The novel is a polemic on the morality of the death penalty and on the American, and specifically

the Californian, legal system, and is based on a notorious real-life case. Friedkin was particularly attracted to the inside knowledge Wood was able to bring to his subject, having served as a Deputy District Attorney (like the book and film's protagonist).

19 The film begins by showing how easy it is for Charles Reece (Alex MacArthur), the murderer, to buy a gun. With Reece armed, the film moves swiftly to the first murder. While the killing is discovered and Deputy District Attorney, Tony Fraser (Michael Biehn) attends the crime scene, Reece immediately goes on to commit his second murder. He is quickly captured by the police and much of the latter part of the film is taken up with his trial. The film also follows the procedural complexities with which Fraser has to grapple if he is to get Reece declared "legally sane", thus making him liable to the death penalty. One hour into the film (which lasts 107 minutes), there is a sudden burst of action that seems to have drifted in from another film when Reece escapes as he is being transported in a police van from court. Once Reece is re-caught, the trial proceeds and the film ends with Reece found guilty and likely to face the death penalty. However, the defence demands further, more advanced brain scans which now identify him as insane and the jury reverses their verdict (unseen). This was different from the 1987 version which ended with a guilty verdict after which Reece commits suicide in his cell. The suicide plot of the first version conforms both to the novel and the real-life events on which it was based [7]. When Friedkin altered the ending in 1992, he left open the possibility that Reece might be released in the future. The ambiguity of this conclusion, that seems to endorse the use of the death penalty, reflects Friedkin's evolving views about the positive value of capital punishment (*Friedkin Connection* 401).

20 Wood's book was based on a real-life model, Richard Trenton Chase, who committed a series of horrific murders and mutilations in late 1977 and early 1978 and committed suicide in prison after his conviction in May 1979 (Daugherty). Friedkin's propensity for a documentarian's approach meant that, as he had done with *Cruising*, he used the source novel in combination with extensive research into the subject including the visits to psychiatric clinics that stimulated the production's troubles (discussed below). In December 1985, Friedkin also sought the advice of a a defence lawyer, Colleen Grace, about the

veracity of the source novel and about the arguments used against the death penalty. In January 1986, she sent Friedkin copies from various cases, observing that the lawyers "don't appear to be using the law so much as appealing to the jury's humanity (not so much his insanity). In one case, they appeal to the doubt in the jury even though they had found him guilty" (Grace). Traces of this research fed into the completed film add to its sense of verisimilitude. Friedkin also read up on Chase extensively and in February, he corresponded with the District Attorney's Office in Sacramento who had prosecuted the case. They supplied him with a detailed list of Chase's horrific acts, many of which Friedkin used for his murderer's habits and activities. These included the mutilation of animals and the drinking of blood, although, thankfully, Friedkin chose to omit some of Chase's most horrific acts such as the sodomisation of one of his victims. As with Reece, Chase was eventually diagnosed as a severe paranoid schizophrenic (Daugherty).

Protests against *Rampage*

21 It was this mining for the small details that led Friedkin once again towards controversy. In a story in the January 1986 edition of *NewsRounds*, the monthly newspaper of the Rush-Presbyterian-St Luke's Medical Center in Chicago, it was reported that Friedkin visited Dr Jim Kavanaugh at the facility as research for a film that would "show the world through the eyes of a killer who is also schizophrenic" ("Friedkin Visits"). The consequence of this small report in a minor publication was a torrent of letters of complaint sent to Friedkin that even outdid *Cruising* as an early intervention: this time it came before even a first draft screenplay had been written. Many of these letters said much the same thing: schizophrenics are no more or less likely to be killers than anyone else and the making of a film where a schizophrenic is a murderer will stigmatize, and confirm prejudices about, the illness. The writers were a combination of health professionals and members of the public, particularly parents of schizophrenic children, and included those who were clearly part of a concerted campaign by the Alliance for the Mentally Ill, whose membership numbered thirty thousand[8]. One letter, from Helen E. Smith of Mount Vernon, concludes: "surely, you can make money some way without hurting so many people." There are even several

letters that amusingly suggest that Friedkin's film could be about a film director-murderer instead. Although hardly likely to have made any wider impact at all, Friedkin did feel the need to respond to the comments in the June/July edition of the same paper:

> In no way is it my intention to equate murder with mental illness… the film deals with the death penalty in California and the arguments for and against it. My purpose in consulting the Issac Ray Center and other professionals in the field is to *accurately* portray the role of forensic psychiatry in a murder case. (Friedkin '*NewsRounds*').

22 There is a certain irony that it was Friedkin's determination to provide an accurate representation of the subject matter by making the visit to specialists in the field that should have caused the protest. Perhaps it was natural for concerned parties to have reacted as they did, especially so in the case of the parents of schizophrenics, but there is no sense from the available evidence that Friedkin's intentions were dishonourable or intended to provoke: in fact, he seems to have been determined to be truthful. The film's sober and procedural depiction of the case may have stemmed from this desire and probably hampered significantly the film's commercial appeal. The hysterical nature of the objections focused on a single quotation where it was presumably assumed that Friedkin would sensationalise the issues. The film does not, however, make the sort of links between murderers and schizophrenia that the letter writers feared it would. Rampage is as obscure a film as any in Friedkin's career and was patently out of step with the marketplace at the time of its release. Yet Friedkin's interest in the minutiae of legal, medical and moral issues leads to it having some resonance with present day issues because it asks questions about American society that still seem relevant; some thirty years later, the question of legal sanity and the death penalty in the United States, as well as gun control, remain controversial and divisive issues.

Conclusion

23 Friedkin was a director who often seemed to relish the "difficult" reputation with which he has been saddled. There is certainly plenty of evidence to indicate Friedkin's serious intent to achieve a high

degree of verisimilitude and to explore both the emotion in, and the mechanics of, contemporary sub-cultures or institutions. On *Cruising*, however, his ideas and decisions were elements that contributed to the film's troublesome release and reputation. As writer-director, if any of the negative criticism was warranted, then a large portion of the responsibility for it can be placed at Friedkin's door. The *provocateur*, who had basked in the controversies surrounding *The Exorcist* that helped propel that film to its exceptional box office performance, was undoubtedly fully aware of the sensitivities that a story like *Cruising* would raise. Friedkin himself was not entirely consistent on this point. In 2007, he was still saying that "the vitriol the film was greeted with still confounds me" (Simon 70). Yet in his autobiography six years later, he is prepared to admit that he knew it could "possibly offend everyone but for me it was just an exotic background for a murder mystery," a distinction that does seem somewhat disingenuous (*Friedkin Connection* 365). What is not in question is that the film's frank portrayal of the leather scene pushed hard against the acceptable boundaries of the time. The 'R' rating originally granted before the censorship row looks now to be somewhat ludicrous in the context of the time. In fact, given how the AIDS epidemic would eviscerate New York's leather scene a few years later, *Cruising*'s portrayal of this milieu can be seen as a historical artefact because it depicts a vanished sub-culture. The sexual freedom that the scene celebrated tragically also proved to be its undoing. As Grady Hendrix observed, "a large slice of the men you see in the club are no longer with us" (Bailey 4).

24 By the time Friedkin made *Rampage* in 1987, the American film industry had gravitated further towards populist high concept filmmaking, leaving the New Hollywood auteurs with far fewer opportunities to make the type of personal cinema that had characterised their earlier careers. As many of the maverick filmmakers who had emerged out of the Renaissance period also discovered, if Friedkin wanted to remain in gainful employment, there was a simple necessity to become more willing to co-operate with those able and willing to finance his films, and to avoid his earlier tendency to consciously play the role of *provocateur*. His heart attack in March 1981 may also have been a factor in nudging him towards a less confrontational outlook. Segaloff argues that after the coronary, "his films very clearly

reflect an awareness, barely acknowledged consciously, of the frailty of human life" (212). *Rampage* certainly falls into this category and the furor over its potential depiction of schizophrenia as a trigger for murderous behaviour was an issue that Friedkin appears to have taken seriously, while still noting that the complaints were somewhat tenuous, given that Friedkin had yet to write even a first draft. Both *Cruising* and *Rampage* were magnets for the sort of trouble that shows how difficult it was, and still is, for filmmakers to approach certain types of serious subject-matter in a manner that they believe is truthful. Even if their intentions are both honest and honourable, they must still take account of the sensitivities of a wide constituency of interested parties.

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NOTES

1 Examples include King 49-84; Britton; Shone; Wyatt.

2 See for example Bailey, Burston, Kermode, Krohn and Simon. There has also been a recent (2019) Blu-ray release.

3 Excerpts from television and radio reports are transcribed in Friedkin’s papers: see Jensen, Scamardella and Van Dorn. Examples of newspaper articles include Ledbetter, Ferretti, Pollock (“Friedkin Film *Cruising* into a Storm of Protest”).

4 The disclaimer has long since been removed.

5 The letter writer seems to be conflating ‘effluence’ and ‘refuse’.

6 For example, Harmetz, “R-Rated *Cruising*”; Pollock, “*Cruising*: The Battle Continues”.

7 As far as I can tell, the 1987 version has not been available in any format since its initial release.

8 Letters in files labelled “Hate Mail 1986” in Friedkin’s papers, items f.612 and f.613. The co-ordinated nature of the campaign is obvious because many of the letters are virtually identical.

RÉSUMÉS

English

The writers of American film history tend to consider the 1980s in terms of blockbusters and right-wing ideology. Yet in this decade, as Stephen Prince has observed, ‘Hollywood itself was attacked for films that were unaccept-

ably lewd, bigoted or sacrilegious'. One of the most infamous examples is 1980's *Cruising*, William Friedkin's film about an undercover policeman hunting a serial killer in New York's gay leather scene. Protests during location filming were accompanied by highly partial coverage in local and national newspapers, while, after its release, *Cruising* managed to generate yet more controversy when a spat between the filmmakers and the censors was played out in the national press. Seven years later, Friedkin's ability to attract 'trouble' reared its head again when protests, this time before a screenplay had even been written, were made against *Rampage*'s purported portrayal of a schizophrenic murderer (based on a real case). A concerted letter campaign was the result of one brief article about the writer-director's research which appeared to imply that the film would make a disturbing correlation between schizophrenia and homicidal tendencies. Given Friedkin's seemingly unerring ability to generate inflammatory headlines (also evident, for example, when he was making *The Exorcist*), and making extensive use of Friedkin's papers, this article considers the extent of his intentionality in his approach to sensitive and controversial subject matter. Was he being deliberately provocative or was he simply approaching serious subjects with a documentary-style precision? These two instances of a filmmaker managing to attract 'trouble' opens up a discussion of the effect on filmmaking, and on reception, of such difficult production contexts. Although it has since been subject to some critical rehabilitation, the reputation of *Cruising* was set in stone by the surrounding brouhaha while *Rampage*, a largely unknown work, still managed to generate protests although the concerns of the complainants were quickly forgotten when the film rapidly disappeared from sight. In this article, the employment of archival material allows for a more nuanced perspective on how media accounts can sometimes distort our understanding, in retrospect, of contemporaneous attitudes.

Français

De manière générale le cinéma des années 1980 est souvent réduit aux *blockbusters* et aux films conservateurs. Pourtant, la décennie fut également marquée par un certain nombre de films qui ont heurté la sensibilité du public. Cette étude se concentrera sur deux d'entre eux, *Cruising* (1980) et *Rampage* (1987), tous les deux du réalisateur de *l'Exorciste*, William Friedkin. Si les deux films dépeignent les communautés marginalisées — la communauté homosexuelle « cuir » pour l'un et l'univers de la schizophrénie pour l'autre — les controverses ont troublé le public de façon très différente.

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Mots-clés

années 1980, controverses, provocation

Keywords
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Distorting Perception to Influence Reception: the Troubling Impact of TV Series Representations on US Politics and Society

Sébastien Lefait

PLAN

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TEXTE

1 It is tempting to consider trouble on screen exclusively from the perspective of film and TV representations. On the one hand, the indiscernibility of fact and fiction causes distrust in representations. On the other hand, representing the problems generated by this blurred line seems to be the obvious solution. This can be observed, more and more often, in films or TV series that focus on this very cognitive problem, treating the deceiving power of screen representations as central to the plot (*Black Mirror*, *Mr. Robot*, *Darknet*, *Westworld*, etc.) The trouble with screens, then, is that they are caught in a vicious circle that also seems irremediably closed – exposing the dysfunctional reception of representations by embedding screens within each other may lead to the very misperception that the operation seeks to prevent. To balance this view that the dysfunctional dimension of audiovisual representations belongs in the storyworld, in the mediating space between the viewer and the screen, or, in the worst case, in both the former and the latter, I want to examine here the kind of trouble that is mainly located off-screen – even though it is produced by a certain type of interaction between viewers and interfaces. In what follows, therefore, I do not mean to study the proverbially blurred line between the factual and

the fictional on-screen, nor the consequences of the induced confusion on viewers' level of belief or distrust towards all forms of mediated representation, but a new type of embedding, as it were: the confusion induced by the fact that our screens are used to mediate different types of content, each defined by a factuality/fictionality ratio. This confusion also has an impact on audience reception, which will be the main object of the present chapter.

2 My motivation goes beyond what may seem to be the desire to revert perspectives on an often-studied issue. It lies in the intuition that, while troubled representation has been studied from the standpoint of its impact, for instance its potential for change (e.g., when dystopia acts as a warning or as a prompt to behave differently as a society), the receiving end has been largely neglected in comparison, especially when trouble appears in the reception process without obviously being provoked by problematic representations [1]. Consequently, and to put it rather simply before delving into the complex entanglement of production and reception that characterizes the problem and case studies at hand, I seek to place the emphasis on situations of *troubling reception* – a phrase that describes at once odd reception patterns and the induction of parasitic elements in reception processes. As I seek to demonstrate in this chapter, the very act of interfering with reception processes is exposed as a result of studying cases of problematic reception. Although such cases arise in a variety of contexts, I will mainly focus here on instances of media interference that have an impact on current social and political issues. Through the examples examined here, I seek to demonstrate that studying troubling reception cases reveals the mechanisms by which they are generated, in a way similar to that in which the unveiling of extra layers of meaning brings to the surface the complex operations through which meaning is structured.

A Theoretical Framework in Need of an Update?

3 Of course, I am not ignoring Stuart Hall's work on encoding/decoding, especially the parts on negotiated and oppositional audience responses, which are largely considered to have

generated convincing and final conclusions on problems very similar to the one under study. According to Hall:

> The codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical. The degrees of symmetry – that is, the degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange – depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the 'personifications', encoder-producer and decoder-receiver. But this in turn depends on the degrees of identity/non-identity between the codes which perfectly or imperfectly transmit, interrupt or systematically distort what has been transmitted. The lack of fit between the codes has a great deal to do with the structural differences of relation and position between broadcasters and audiences, but it also has something to do with the asymmetry between the codes of 'source' and 'receiver' at the moment of transformation into and out of the discursive form. (Hall 166).

4 I have reproduced the quotation at length to show how adequate it still is in many respects to make sense of troubling reception. Indeed, in Hall's encoding/decoding system, static in the reception process is caused by a 'lack of fit' between the source code and the receiving code, in particular when receivers choose a code that clashes with the source's – for instance in the case of an 'oppositional' reception mode.

5 Troubling reception, I argue, cannot be reduced to such a 'lack of fit'. For this reason, I suggest here that Hall's theoretical model, as it focuses on structural difference, can be seen as incomplete (for example, because it does not clearly describe the nature of the link between the dominant code and hegemonic ideology), or at least in need of an update. In a paper given at the International Communication Association Conference in Boston in 2011, Sven Ross already suggested a revision of the model that drew a clear distinction between oppositional reception as "text relative", and oppositional reception as ideology-driven (S. Ross). There are, however, numerous other ways in which the model could be revisited. For instance, amended versions of the model could take into account the possibility that some decoding strategies are the result of a thought-out decision by the decoding party; or they could consider the current

trend, where oppositional strategies are provided for by the producers of texts in their encoding strategies – typically, conspiracy-theory thinking is an oppositional mode that media producers may encourage to make their products even more popular with forensic audiences. This necessity for yet another update, which also provides the incentive for the present article, comes from the appearance of new communication strategies that seek to influence reception from within and, in so doing, to preempt the very possibility for an oppositional stance to be adopted. As a result, cases of 'a lack of fit' remain exceptions.

6 In the cases studied below, this operates at the level of encoding/decoding, where the differences between specific codes are elided, and has superstructural consequences, whereby an ideology is invisibly promoted. The second part of the process is not new, as readers of Benjamin or Adorno, and more generally of Marxian critical theory are well aware. The first part of the operation, however, arguably illustrates a new way of obtaining the same hegemonic kind of effect. Indeed, new ways of imposing reception patterns seem to have emerged, which may deter or prevent alternative reception in ways Stuart Hall could not have thought of, in the absence, in his time, of the transmedia configuration that later allowed for new cases to appear. As I will seek to demonstrate through several case studies in which the same issue arises, although each time with a different set of parameters where the encoding/decoding pattern is concerned, the current mode of influence stems from new types of interfering with the level of 'fit' between stable expression (often, but not exclusively, in the form of screen representation) and potentially unstable reception. All those cases involve ways of using resemblances between media forms or platforms to plant an encoding pattern beneath another and alter reception stances, turning them into playful or sophisticated decoding processes that barely deserve, as a result of this modification, to be described as "oppositional" any longer. My hypothesis is the following: intervention in the form of *troubling reception* has all the more impact as this veneer of postmodern self-consciousness and playfulness paradoxically makes it difficult for viewers to become aware of the new ways in which cultural hegemony yields forms of political power.

7 My main argument is that this troubling trend comes from the palimpsestic overlapping of three culturally dominant notions: surveillance, reality TV (or televised reality), and intermediality. Standard definitions of surveillance apply here – I will, however, operate with notions of technologically-aided, in particular *televised*, i.e. visual and remote, monitoring of activities, before introducing notions of metaphorical surveillance. I will use Misha Kavka's definition of reality television – 'the term refers to unscripted shows with nonprofessional actors being observed by cameras in preconfigured environments' (Kavka 5) – especially in the areas where it overlaps with televised reality (which can be provisionally defined by deleting the notion of 'preconfigured environments' from the above). The point is to recall how close reality TV is to surveillance, on the one hand, and to underline that the notion of external intervention, whether before, during, or after the shooting, largely depends on the audience's reception posture. In other words: reality TV was initially promoted as surveillance turned into entertainment, but most viewers are now aware that a lot more fiction than may at first seem is injected while making the programs. Its reception is oppositional, although accepted – or one could say that it is acceptedly oppositional, as viewers take satisfaction and pride in the assertion that they know better, and derive pleasure from spotting signs of scripting in their favorite reality shows. The oppositional stance, in that case, is what makes the viewing pleasant, and viewers do not expect, let alone want, reality shows to be less fictional and more real. Simply put: the code should be maintained, the better to be opposed, an operation that provides a huge share of the pleasure of watching. Similarly, surveillance has from the start been diverted from its aim (protection) and perverted in its function due to the interference of alternative – multiple, and not always oppositional – reception patterns. The first example that comes to mind is, of course, the use of surveillance for voyeuristic purposes, for example, in reality TV shows. The third concept, intermediality, has been defined in various ways. I have chosen here the definition that works best to place the notion at the nexus of surveillance and reality TV (the overlapping of which I have just highlighted, with 'reality' as the main common denominator). The definition is by André Gaudreault: 'Intermediality is, in a minimalist acceptance, this concept which designates the process of transfer and migration, between the media, of forms and

contents […], a standard to which any mediated proposal is likely to owe part of its configuration' (Gaudreault 175, my translation).

Visualizing Troubling Reception

8 In the cases studied here, intermediality allows for the transfer of contents and forms from surveillance to reality TV, or vice versa, and, as a side-effect, from screen to reality. Naturally, to allow for such transfer, several screens often interact. A good example to introduce troubling reception is the Lifetime TV series *UnREAL* (2015-18). *UnREAL* is an American program about the making of a TV game show, *Everlasting*, which is clearly reminiscent of the famous dating show, *The Bachelor*. The season one poster brilliantly visualizes the implications of the show's entanglement of surveillance, television, and reality, while suggesting potential effects on reception (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1


Fig. 1

9 The poster presents the main character, producer Rachel Goldberg, in the nude facing the camera. The season tagline covers her breasts. It says: 'everyone will be exposed'. The phrase provides a good illustration of reality TV's intricate connection with the idea of the *naked truth*, as encapsulated in the play on words. On the show, various levels of deception will be exposed, but the truth will be *naked* only by name. As in the poster, body exposure will remain partial. Despite the full frontal, breasts are not offered to the gaze, and Rachel's lower belly is hidden from view by a tablet used to monitor the shooting of the TV show live (the device is connected to all the cameras on the set). Thus, the notion of ubiquitous vision, borrowed from CCTV to spice up reality shows, is qualified by the role of the very device that is supposed to endow its owner with omnivision, the tablet, which once again blocks the voyeuristic gaze. Voyeurism is presented to be located mainly in the apparatus, so that exposure will have to remain figurative. At least, such are the rules of any regular reality show. Even if the backstage approach of UnREAL

suggests that the usual limits may be exceeded on the show, the embedded tablet, a screening device that screens body parts away from view, acts as a reminder that the surveillant gaze, in a reality TV context, operates within limits. And so on and so forth: the various levels of mise-en-abyme included in the poster are as many ways of delaying access to the actuality of the real beyond the surface of mere televised reality, and of asserting that the realness of reality TV is primarily a matter of perspective. More specifically, it is, in this case, a matter of reception. Any on-screen reference to the popular aesthetics of reality TV encapsulates the notion of the panoptic gaze of surveillance. In turn, surveillance includes the possibility for captured content to serve as evidence (to 'expose' misdemeanor). Or, the mode of reality TV prompts, or at least includes as a possibility, the reception pattern of surveillance, which may in some cases be the reception of pictures as evidence. In reality TV, surveillance places viewers in the position of perceiving reality in the raw, without offering completely objective representations. The poster thus encapsulates one of the tenets of troubling reception – toying with potentialities contained in the resemblance between various types of screen content to induce a specific viewing pattern.

Troubling Transfer Patterns: *The Handmaid's Tale* and 'metoo'

10 *The Handmaid's Tale*'s contextual insertion, and especially its connection with the 'MeToo' movement, constitutes a variation on the same principle. The serial adaptation of Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel is one of the most commented-on TV shows of the last decade. Upon its release, viewers and reviewers noted its political scope, or at least its political pretension. The producers of the Hulu drama acted on the perception of the series, playing up the show's political importance to turn it into an increasingly profitable operation. Adding new seasons, despite the fact the first one had adapted the whole of Margaret Atwood's novel on which the show is based, was a way of acknowledging the show's political appropriation by viewers. Early on, *The Handmaid's Tale* was perceived as an allegory of the United States, a vision of its present and of its future. The trend has shown no sign of abating since. The series' projection is grim and

pessimistic. Press releases and fan comments alike see Gilead, the show's dystopian society where women are reduced to their child-bearing role, as an illustration of America's inability to protect their rights. According to this dominant reading, the show provides, at best, a depiction of the Gilead that America is to become soon – this is the speculative angle. At worst, it is an implicit depiction of what America has already become – this is the allegorical viewpoint. In both cases, viewers are urged to respond, ideologically and politically, to protect such basic rights as abortion or take legal action against the potential consequences of rape culture. Such responses are not surprising. *The Handmaid's Tale* almost naturally reads as a warning. It delivers a barely implied criticism of the condition of women in Trump's United States. Many press articles about the show exaggerate the parallelism between Gilead and the USA, claiming that the show is not a metaphor, but that it feels real or even that it is reality (Nowakowski; Lifshutz; Friedlander; Dray; Nelson). These comments are sometimes amplified by the lead actress on the show, Elizabeth Moss, who incites people to 'wake up' because 'Gilead [is] happening' (Mulkerrins), and of course, by Atwood's own comments in various press releases, the latter being more nuanced as a rule.

11 A brief study of the show's media coverage since its release conducted on the MIT engine mediacloud.org shows the parallel between Gilead and the US to be the dominant reading. A more specific search across global English-language media for coverage that connects *The Handmaid's Tale* and 'MeToo' shows the copresence to be extremely prevalent. The keywords that appear most frequently next to the above are, unsurprisingly, 'harassment,' 'Weinstein,' and the vocabulary of the show-business-industry awards, suggesting that the show's acclaim by the profession is in proportion with its symbolic feminism. Besides, coverage that connects the show with women's rights issues flourishes in the context of progressive campaigns (or in anti-reactionary campaigns, for instance to warn against banning abortion again in certain states). This is particularly clear if one focuses on left-wing press coverage, where extra emphasis is placed on Weinstein-related and harassment issues, but also on Trump, with frequent mentions of two of the torchbearers of the 'MeToo' cause, Natalie Portman and Frances McDormand. The

right-wing press, by comparison, does not draw a connection between the show and the 45th American president, but repeatedly labels the show as 'feminist' – using the term as a negative attribute. One article, in particular, reveals that viewer perception of how rooted *The Handmaid's Tale* is in reality depends on party affiliation (Shevenock).

12 The series is undoubtedly a useful political instrument: it deals with social issues and works to spread tolerance. I would like to complement this consensual reading with an alternative one, tinged with a bit of cynicism. I argue that the connection between *The Handmaid's Tale* and American politics is all but contained. It receives far too much emphasis to keep passing as implicit. The link is even exploited by the show's detractors, who try to turn the argument against it by presenting *The Handmaid's Tale* as a feminist dystopia (Doten; White; Howard; Howard; Cottle), a reproductive dystopia (Weigel), or a criticism of the oppression of women in Saudi Arabia (Sainato and Skojec). But even then, the show is always interpreted from the viewpoint of its resemblance with America, albeit to claim that it is *not* about the US and try to thwart its political agency. This is the case, for instance, in a *National Review* article entitled 'Art for Politics' Sake': 'The hyper-literalists at *Vanity Fair* helpfully summarized the author's thoughts under the headline "Margaret Atwood Says *The Handmaid's Tale* Was a Warning for the Trump Era," but, really, did they need to spell it out? With all the warnings flying about, I'm ready to burn a Bible every time I see a pregnant woman' (Hillard). Even when a conservative publication exposes the show as part of a deliberately liberal strategy, its link with reality is strengthened as a result.

13 With the trailer for the third season, the show started displaying a different type of anchorage in US society. The trailer's voice over directly references Ronald Reagan's 1984 re-election campaign, full of bright promises for the future, tinging the show with ironic overtones ahead of the new season's broadcast. A W blog post digs out the intention behind the promotional clip: 'The Season 3 Trailer Spoofs Ronald Reagan's 1984 Campaign Ad': "It's morning again in America,' a man's voice narrates. 'Today, more women will go to work than ever before in our country's history. This year, dozens of children will be born to happy and healthy families" (W magazine). With the season

3 trailer, *The Handmaid's Tale* uses a cultural reference to TV politics and ties Gilead with Reagan's America as a result, in addition to the usual connection with Trump's presidency. Implicitly, Trump's policy is exposed as backward. Intermedial content transfer operates once again, from real TV campaigning (Reagan) to a fictional TV series we are incited to perceive as televised reality. Cleverly, the show thus endorses accusations of anti-Trump leanings. Indeed, the intermedial shift triggered by the trailer expresses self-disculpating awareness that the third season, even more so than the previous two, is likely to be read as a long pro-Democrat campaign clip.

14 Admittedly, the trick is too obvious, as is the intended impact on viewers, for the reception of the show to be very troubling. It may be, I suggest, because another aspect of the show's reception is at once easily detectable and far more troubling. *The Handmaid's Tale*, although a high-profile series, is show business as usual. Throughout its seasons, however, the makers of the show have managed to incite viewers to read it as serious, ominous, and deeply political. The series was thus defined as necessary. While all those attributes apply, it is no mean feat to plant in viewers a reception pattern that leads them to believe the show is tantamount to political commitment, all the while leading them to forget that it is primarily part of a business operation. The Walt Disney Company owns Hulu, on which the show is broadcast. With such shows as *The Handmaid's Tale*, Disney buys itself the label of political activist. Viewers can comfortably believe that they do not watch Hulu for personal pleasure, but for the benefit of the community, and for America's future. An interesting collateral effect is to strengthen the impression that the business of the entertainment industry is political, which may seem to retroactively explain why entertainment and TV politics have coalesced for decades (S. J. Ross; Troy). Crucially, presenting the consumption of the show as a political act makes viewers more likely to subscribe to Hulu (and celebrities all the more likely to dabble in politics).

Intermedial Collusion: *House of Cards* and Putin

15 In the next case study, the interaction between TV and politics reverses the one exemplified in the previous section. As TV screens and media were rife with coverage of the presidential primary, a fake campaign commercial – in fact, the trailer for *House of Cards*' fourth season, released in March 2016 (Frank Underwood 2016 House of Cards Netflix Ad Season 4) – led Kevin Spacey, and his character Frank Underwood, to steal the show (Greiner). The trick was simple: Underwood, the fictional president of the US running for a second term in the fictional universe of the TV drama, appeared in what looked exactly like a regular campaign spot, as if the character was really running for president. For Shaun Seixas, 'Netflix was able to hijack the media and America's attention to briefly refocus the spotlight from Donald Trump to the upcoming season of *House of Cards* and its main attraction […], Frank Underwood' (Seixas). Netflix tapped into viewer attention where they thought it was likely to be located, placing itself subtly on the continuum of entertainment and politics that the American presidential campaign has been for decades.

16 The trailer provides material that is readily transferrable from the context of TV politics to that of TV series, with the notion of TV promotion acting as a midway point. On the first level of reading, *House of Cards* thus jocularly poses as a reading of contemporary politics that is self-consciously designed to make money. On the second level of reading, the dimension of self-parody denies that *House of Cards* exerts political influence – it is, viewers are supposed to conclude from the trailer, just a show. The latter would seem incidental if Kevin Spacey, in numerous TV interviews, had not so constantly asserted that the show was not a political tool, but that it was just a commentary on US politics, which merely 'invites comparison' (Hoffman; Conlan). As a result, the trailer seems to confirm his denial. Such insistence in claiming that the show is about politics, but not politically committed, may be related to troubling instances in which *House of Cards* had indeed proved its efficiency as a political instrument. Accusations leveled against the show

for trying to tilt the political balance in favor of the Democrats abound in web articles and on YouTube.

17 To provide the best illustration of the show's ability to turn the tide of real-life politics, I have chosen to focus on the sad case of Tom Schweich, documented, for instance, in a May 2015 GQ article (Zengerle). Schweich, a Missouri auditor who was running for governor in 2016, committed suicide before the actual election. Many commentators blamed the Republican candidate's death on a nasty radio ad by an action committee calling itself 'citizens for fairness.' The radio ad involved a narrator who mimicked Frank Underwood's voice. An archetypally Machiavellian Democrat on the show, Underwood said in the ad that Schweich was a weak candidate, and that the moment he got nominated, the Democrats would put their candidate in his shoes. Beyond the dramatic outcome, the tragedy proves Frank Underwood's political influence. As with the season 4 trailer, influence is obtained through an ad that resorts to a fictional character and induces a specific perception of real-life politics. In the Schweich case, the content transfer from the show to political campaigning exploits the notion that all politicians are corrupt and that many real-life Democrats are like Frank Underwood, i.e. that they can pull all the strings, and even manipulate a Republican candidate to ensure victory. In this case, the most common reception of the show (where Frank Underwood is undoubtedly villainous and corrupt) is distorted by content transfer (Underwood's voice and tone is imported from the show into a libelous radio ad) to put trouble in the reception of real-life politics. Thus, a self-proclaimed noncommittal TV show is turned into a lethal political weapon.

18 The same as with *The Handmaid's Tale*, the trend has been coeval with the show's duration. More recently, the impact of the TV show has extended well beyond the often-underlined negative impact on people's perception of American politics as essentially dishonest. It was revealed in early 2019 that Russia had sought to influence the 2016 presidential election in the USA via Twitter. The now available tweets, produced by Russian troll farms to deter traditionally Democratic voters from going to the polls, provide evidence of Russian intrusion. Most of them suggested that the Democratic candidate would be a traitor to the causes of ethnic minorities or women's rights. Recently revealed information suggests that the whole trolling

strategy may have been largely based on the observation of *House of Cards*' likely negative impact on American citizens' political culture, especially where democratic candidates are concerned (Burgess). The process can be simplified as follows: given the increasing appeal of Netflix with viewers, and the excellent approval rates of its political show *House of Cards*, which happens to focus on a democratic political couple, a risk-free way of discrediting a democratic candidate is to tap into the popularity of the show. In his book *All the Kremlin's Men*, Mikhail Zygar claims that Putin insisted his advisers watch *House of Cards* – and another TV show focused on a proverbially corrupt democratic politician, a real one this time, Chicago Mayor Daley as he is depicted in the critically acclaimed Starz Tv series, *Boss* (2011-12). '"You'll find them useful," the president recommended. It is clear why Putin liked them: they affirmed his belief that Western politicians are all cynical scoundrels whose words are bad values and human rights of pure hot air and simply a tool to attack enemies' (Zygar). After watching the show, Putin's 'men' would better understand the Washington microcosm, all those scheming men and women whose way of thinking they would therefore be able to penetrate.

19 The strategy can be considered to work because *House of Cards* lends itself to such simplification as the one applied by Putin. For him, the level of scripting used by the showrunners is kept to the bare minimum. It consists in creating characters that are only slightly larger-than-life. In the case of *House of Cards*, and from Putin's perspective: Frank Underwood is just a little more corrupt than average; the First Lady is the somewhat hyperbolic version of all First Ladies, who invariably seek to replace their husbands as presidents of the US; Frank's henchmen do not in the least recoil at the prospect of committing murder for their boss; investigative journalists are tougher than Woodward and Bernstein were with Nixon, and so on and so forth. Given the unmissable points of resemblance between the show and famous political figures or historical situations, it is quite easy to present it as a type of mockumentary on American political life.

20 More specifically, the Russian disinformation strategy is mostly about forcing or reinforcing the notion of an implicit correlation between *House of Cards*' fictional presidential couple and the Clintons (Stern).

This effect is all the easier to achieve given the number of conspiracy theories surrounding the political careers of Bill and Hillary. The latest one, 'linking the Clinton family to the death of multimillionaire and accused sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein,' is supported and propagated by American president Donald Trump (Diamond). Like the Underwoods, the Clintons seem to have built a presidential dynasty, whose rise to power culminated, or at least should have culminated, in Hillary's election for president. The First Lady's rise to power is indeed implicitly hinted at in the trailer to *House of Cards*' 6th season (the true reason, of course, is that lead actor Kevin Spacey was evicted from the show after being accused of sexual harassment, which explains why his wife on the show had to take prominence – but then again, how Frank and Claire kept scheming as a couple made this a possible, not to say a likely outcome). Indeed, as Romano points out, 'many of the campaigns undertaken by the IRA [a well-known Russian troll factory suspected of intervention in the 2016 American presidential campaign] involved anti-Clinton propaganda, as well as the process of infiltrating and further polarizing already polarized Internet communities on social media' (Romano). Besides, and despite statements to the contrary by the creators and actors of the TV show, some of his interventions in the media make room for the suspicion that Kevin Spacey is actually a strong supporter of the Clintons (Chozick; Kreutz), which strengthens the notion that Underwood is Clinton-like and mechanically, that the Clintons are, like him, deeply corrupt. One immediately perceives the detrimental power of inciting voters to perceive American politics through the lens of the TV show, the way Russian tweets and the extreme right press entice us to do.

21 It transpires from such a reading that the perception mode the TV show entrenches in its viewers is once again close to that of reality TV. In this case, forcing this perception mode has unprecedented effects on reality. Putin, as it were, invited members of his crew to watch *House of Cards* as a political reality TV show recorded in the White House and revealing the secrets harbored in the corridors of power. By inducing a reception of *House of Cards* along similar lines, *i.e.* as some kind of political reality show, the element of corruption that belongs in the fictional program becomes a character feature that can be readily ascribed to real-life politicians. In the process described here, the Russian administration also engaged in a form of

surveillance of American political life that is organized from far away but that provides access to real information. In a way, it takes me back to the connection between surveillance and reality TV from which I started, except that the perceptive mode of reality TV here serves to perform indirect surveillance through a fictional program, where reality-TV viewers watch in surveillant mode for signs of the real beyond the illusion of reality they are being fed. Russia gathered information from the political TV show, declared it reliable, and eventually proved effective to favor Donald Trump by estranging the Democratic candidate Hillary from some of her traditional grassroot supporters. The transfer from the reality TV mode to the surveillance mode results not in that viewers perceive the Underwoods as providing a fictional grid that throws light on the Clintons (although this is one side-effect, this is just the type of reading that expands the meaning of the work, rather than its impact on the real), but in that viewers perceive the Clintons as the real-life inspirations for the Underwoods (whatever the type of media in which they appear, the Clintons will henceforth be perceived as manipulative politicians). Take away a level of fictionalization that is presented to be negligible, and viewers may think the two perfectly match.

Conclusion

22 In this article, I have introduced troubling reception, a strategy that forces decoding patterns into viewers in order to impact reality, for a variety of purposes. It operates by exploiting intermediality as a content transfer mechanism that relies on the blurred areas between media forms. I have focused primarily on the cases of surveillance and reality TV, but the reasoning applies to other types of screen mediation and to other types of mediation altogether. In all the cases studied here, reception is troubled because of the similarity between media forms, which makes it easy to transfer content from one to the other, so that content is received from the perspective of the wrong medium, to produce specific effects on viewers.

23 This observation challenges some classic notions of cultural studies. Indeed, I argue that effects theory here resurfaces under a new form, as screen fictions are seen to exert a new type of impact. Conversely, Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model fails to apply. Indeed, the

reception of shows or films seems to be under some form of control, but not so much because the production frames the reception, nor because viewers are subservient to some ideology or hegemony. The cause, rather, is that guidelines on how to receive the show are intermedially and therefore invisibly scattered over different platforms.

24 There is a scent of conspiracy theory to this conclusion. To qualify this impression, consider an aspect of all the above case studies – the overlapping areas between forms of screen mediation always come with embedding patterns that can show awareness of the potentially manipulative process at hand. It appears that when considered from this angle, the process of manipulating reception can always operate alongside a self-reflexive approach that takes into account the viewers' increased awareness of encoding processes. Troubling reception, in the end, also exists as a virtual development of the intended reception process into a state of awareness by viewers that their favorite show is pursuing a specific impact on them. To put it differently, troubling reception is always on the verge of becoming meta-reception, an interpretive pattern that is able to put an end to the troubling suspicion that a worldwide manipulation of cultural productions is undergoing.

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NOTES

1 A notable exception is Janet Staiger's *Perverse Spectators* (Staiger), which deals with cinematic cases of reception trouble. The present article seeks to go further by analyzing televisual examples, and by delving into *the mechanisms of perverting reception*, without necessarily describing audience members as perverse.

RÉSUMÉS

English

While troubled representation has been studied from the standpoint of its impact, for instance its potential for change, troubled reception has been comparatively neglected. One notable exception, Stuart Hall's work on encoding/decoding, may now be dated, due to the appearance of new communication strategies that seek to influence reception from within. As I explain through three case studies (Shooting the Warwicks, Rifkin, 2015; The Handmaid's Tale, Hulu, 2017-; House of Cards, Netflix, 2013-18), the current mode of influence arises from new types of interference between stable expression and unstable reception. I then argue that this troubling trend comes from the palimpsestic overlapping of three culturally dominant notions: surveillance, reality TV (or televised reality), and intermediality. Finally, I offer the tentative conclusion that the reception of some shows or films currently seems to be under some form of control, but neither because the production frames the reception, nor because viewers are subservient to some ideology or hegemony. The cause is that guidelines on how to receive the show are intermedially and therefore invisibly scattered over different platforms.

Français

Si les troubles de la représentation ont été étudiés du point de vue de leur impact, par exemple en évaluant leur capacité à susciter de réels changements, les troubles de la réception ont été relativement peu étudiés. Seuls

les travaux de Stuart Hall sur l'encodage et le décodage constituent une exception évidente. Néanmoins, ils sont peut-être désormais obsolètes en raison de l'apparition de nouvelles techniques de communication qui visent à influer de l'intérieur sur la réception. Comme je le montre à travers l'étude de trois cas (*Shooting the Warwicks*, Rifkin, 2015 ; *The Handmaid's Tale*, Hulu, 2017- ; *House of Cards*, Netflix, 2013-18), le nouveau modèle d'influence résulte de nouveaux types d'interférences entre une expression stable et une réception instable. Je fais ensuite valoir que cette tendance problématique est le résultat du recoupement de trois couches disposées en palimpseste qui dominent la culture actuelle : la surveillance, la télé-réalité (ou la réalité télévisée), et l'intermédialité. Enfin, je conclus provisoirement que la réception de certaines émissions ou de certains films semble aujourd'hui soumise à une certaine forme de contrôle, mais ni parce que la production encadre la réception, ni parce que les spectateurs sont soumis à une quelconque idéologie ni à une quelconque hégémonie. La cause en est selon moi que les normes de réception de la série sont disséminées de manière intermédiale, et donc invisible, sur différents supports de diffusion.

INDEX

Mots-clés
réception, intermédialité, représentation, surveillance, télé-réalité

Keywords
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Crossing the lines between fiction and reality: *The Infiltrators* and the De-criminalization of Unauthorized Immigrants

Emilie Cheyroux

PLAN

A Fictionalized Docu-thriller
Civil Disobedience versus Illegality: Calling Stereotypes into Question
The Social Performance of the Film
Conclusion

TEXTE

1 While hybrid documentaries are not new[1], some recent experiments have highlighted the creative possibilities of the documentary form. Filmmakers have shown that they are capable of bending and challenging genre codes, often resorting to techniques belonging to the realm of fiction. For instance, in Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing*, audiences have been intrigued (and even shocked) by the filmmaker's wish to have former genocide perpetrators re-enact their past crimes in front of the camera, as if they were actors and filmmakers. In addition to compensating for the lack of images about the 1965 killings of communist opponents in Indonesia, the re-enactments have shed light on the ethical dynamics inherent in the narrative choices made by a filmmaker, especially when it concerns people who were never prosecuted for their crimes[2]. From its inception, the film seems to have been made to disturb, because it stages unrepentant criminals who enjoy being in the spotlight, but also because the film manages to show that screening these men was an efficient way to comment on the atrocities they committed. The prowess of the filmmaker resides in his capacity to create a meaningful form while crossing an ethical line.

2 *The Infiltrators*, the docu-thriller directed by Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera about a for-profit detention center that holds unauthorized immigrants waiting for deportation, also resorts to re-enactments to

show what happened to the two undocumented activists who infiltrated Florida's Broward detention center in order to free some of its detainees. While it seems perfectly sensible to recreate scenes of a secret mission that was impossible to get on camera, a few questions arise, for the film dedicates just as much screen time to the documentary parts as to the re-enactments, for which professional actors were hired. One can wonder why the filmmakers did not use the real "infiltrators" to re-enact their performance inside the detention center asking them to use the persona they created to fool the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents (ICE), and why so much space was given to these staged re-enactments.

3 The answer to these questions lies in the description of the film. Identifying it as a docu-thriller [3], the filmmakers clearly indicate that it includes the representation of real events just as much as fictionality and acting performance. It has to be kept in mind that Ibarra has so far been a documentary filmmaker and Rivera a fiction filmmaker [4]. With their shared film, they illustrate Iversen and Nielsen's claim that "fictionality and reality are not each other's opposites but stand in a relation of mutual exchange" (Iversen and Nielsen 252), and the film is the result of this "mutual exchange." It is not because a film uses staged re-enactments intended to give the sensations of a thriller that it cannot portray a "true story," an expression that accompanies the title of the film in the opening credits. One can suppose that the filmmakers felt the need to add that it was a true story for two reasons. First, they were probably aware that the presence of fictionalized re-enactments could have a few viewers assume that the act of defiance portrayed was total fiction. Secondly, they might have wanted to insist on the fact that the "kafkaesque" situation identified by one of the infiltrators is a truthful portrayal of what happens in the American detention centers and that people did manage to infiltrate one of them and free detainees.

4 To understand the way the film balances the use of traditional documentary techniques (interviews, observational shooting) and fictionalized re-enactments, the concepts of fictionality and performance are crucial. This study argues that every single part of the film (even the documentary parts) and every participant was affected by fictionality and performance. In *The Act of Killing*, fictionality leads the perpetrators to think that they can compare themselves to the gang-

sters they have seen in the Hollywood thrillers, gangster films and westerns. In the same fashion, in *The Infiltrators*, both infiltrators take up the role of undercover agents, in the tradition of films such as Martin Scorsese's *The Departed*. Rivera has even said that he wanted to make the "*Ocean's Eleven* of Immigration" (Aziz), referring to Steven Soderberg's movie. Such comments show how much fictionality affects the way people think and behave. From a cognitive perspective, Walter Lippmann refers to "the pictures in our heads" (Lippmann 12), which are useful to make sense of our world, but which are also the source of most of our stereotypes. And indeed, what is at stake in the film is the way the filmmakers challenge the stereotypes that portray undocumented immigrants as criminals. In that sense, the film seems to seek to provoke trouble calling into question the criminality of the detainees and by the same token the increasing criminalization of immigrant laws in the United States.

5 After exploring the way fictionality and performance help make sense of the sometimes troubling hybrid nature of the film (it takes the viewer some time to understand its structure), the paper will discuss how it challenges the illegality and criminality of undocumented immigrants looking at the portrayal of the infiltrators and detainees. This will lead to remarks about the reactions that the film spurred in the United States and the trouble it caused, highlighting the involvement of the filmmakers in the political sphere of the country. It has to be kept in mind that while the shooting of the film started in 2012 during the Obama administration, it premiered in the NEXT section of the Sundance festival in January 2019, during the Trump presidency – a new situation that is hinted at in the film – which makes the political agenda of the film even more relevant at a time when the enforcement apparatus was extending its scope. The movie's core structure thus crosses several lines: generic and political, portraying an act of defiance that is supposed to disturb the audience at a crucial time in American politics.

A Fictionalized Docu-thriller

6 *The Infiltrators* focuses on the strategies organized by the activists of the National Immigrant Youth Alliance to infiltrate Florida's Broward County Transitional Detention Center, referred to as "Broward" in the

film. The infiltrators are two undocumented young adults from Mexico, Marco Saavedra and Viridiana Martinez, who identify as DREAMers. They were brought to the United States when they were children and are undocumented. In 2012, when the shooting of the film began, the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors), which would allow its beneficiaries to be granted conditional residency and a path to citizenship (provided they go to college or join the army)[5], had failed to pass Congress several times and as a consequence, president Barack Obama had passed an executive order to stop the deportation of the young undocumented immigrants who fitted with the conditions enlisted by the act. Called DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), the program guaranteed a renewable two-year period of deferred action to the immigrants who grew up in the United States and made them eligible to a work permit (Unzueta Carrasco and Seif 286, Negrón-Gonzales 88). It thus provided a safety net against the deportation of people who had no say in their immigration to the United States and who have grown up feeling American. Throughout the film, it becomes obvious that the legal limbo in which the activists feel has motivated their involvement in the Youth Alliance. When the filmmakers encountered them, they were planning on infiltrating Broward, which involved getting detained in order to help some of the detainees avoid deportation. Their main target is Claudio Rojas, an Argentinian man married to a U.S. citizen and father of four American children (one of them called the Youth Alliance for help). The activist who has got most of the legal information needed to free him is Muhammad "Mo" Abdollahi, an undocumented young man from Iran. In the film, he is the mastermind of the infiltration and takes care of the connexion between the inside and the outside. As a consequence, he is only visible in the documentary parts of the film, contrary to Marco (played by Maynor Alvarado) and Viridiana (played by Chelsea Rendon).

7 The structure of the film, troubling at first, seems to be the result of pragmatic considerations: the documentary scenes follow the activists outside Broward whereas the re-enactments involve actors who recreate scenes that happened inside the center. However, from the opening scene, both genres interact: pictures of real identification documents, testimonies and observational footage give way to a narrative, told with the voice-over of a man we identify as the one on

the identification documents: Marco. In other words, the filmmakers did not just edit a film using real footage on the one hand and re-enactments on the other hand to draw attention to "the impossibilities of authentic documentary representation" (Bruzzi 185), they edited their film so that the different contents would interact and create a thriller. At the beginning, the information is indeed presented to create suspense, with dramatic music and several unexpected sentences that consistently end Marco's slow speech: "Inside the matrix of 200 detention centers, almost 40,000 immigrants are locked up. 1,400 deportations every day. One a minute. But tonight, I have one question: How can I get in?" The same goes when he introduces Claudio: "Our inside man was Claudio Rojas. He just didn't know it yet." Thus, since the beginning, the filmmakers establish the parameters of the man-with-a-dangerous-mission type of thrillers with additional prison tropes, namely the new detainee finding a sponsor to help him navigate inside the center.

8 The opening scene is as troubling as it is crucial to understand the embedded structure of the film. As the actor playing Marco approaches the Department of Homeland Security Building pretending to be a helpless undocumented immigrant looking for his cousin, the camera tilts down to his back pocket, revealing the phone that he hid so that Muhammad, in what they call the "Safe House" (ten miles away from the center), can record the conversation. Not only was this recording used to write the script, it was synchronized with the actor's performance. Thus, the viewers see a fictionalized re-enactment and are informed that they hear "[The real cell phone audio]" that inspired this re-enactment. The poignancy of the technique goes hand in hand with a desire to have the viewer internalize rapidly the way the filmmakers juggle with content. A very didactical approach is set up from the beginning: all the "real" subjects are introduced and immediately followed by the name of the corresponding actors, who were, it seems, chosen for their physical resemblance to the real subjects.

9 With such scenes, it could seem that there is a strict connection between on the one hand, re-enactments and scenes inside (and near) Broward and, on the other hand, real-life footage with the scenes outside, and that the filmmakers inserted real content whenever it was possible, in order to lend authenticity to the film.

Yet, one wonders to what extent some re-enactments were fictionalized in order for the film to be look like a thriller. While every participant was introduced with his fictionalized counterpart, one character, Adam, is only present in the re-enactments. His presence in the film is only fictional. Being an American citizen with a valid government ID, he can visit anybody without running the risk of being deported. He thus gives Marco the waivers that the detainees need to sign in order for the politicians the Youth Alliance puts pressure on to study their case. Once ICE agents realize that Adam's behavior is suspicious, they interview him, the same way suspects are relentlessly interrogated in most detective films and TV shows. The following scene is introduced with an abrupt cut: straight-to-camera, Muhammad informs the viewers that ICE has decided to prohibit visitors from bringing papers to the detainees. It seems right to think that being informed via Muhammad would have been enough and that the interrogation scene with Adam was not crucial for the viewer to understand that a new obstacle was going to complicate the mission. Indeed, as Jufith Pernin explains, "at first sight, performativity does not seem necessary to record oral history, especially when people are willing to testify" (Pernin 18). Yet, for the generic purpose of the film, it was essential because such scenes rely on dramatization and suspense, elements which are at the basis of the engagement of viewers when watching thrillers.

10 As Iversen and Nielsen explain when they deal with *The Act of Killing*, there can be "embedded imaginings" and "straight-invention" in such hybrid documentaries, but far from "taking us away" from what really occurred, they "underline the significant aspects of reality" (Iversen and Nielsen 256-257). In *The Infiltrators*, the scenes that might have been invented or fictionalized enhance the danger the infiltrators faced, and make way for a scene that shows the smart strategies they used to circumvent the system and sneak in papers. Such scenes reinforce suspense and work out because at that point in the movie, the "dialectical relationship" that Stella Bruzzi identifies between the filmmaker, the subjects and the viewers has long been established (Bruzzi 13).

11 Most importantly, there is an understanding that performance is at the heart of the film. Indeed, while it is obvious that all the re-enactments are based on the performance of actors, the docu-

mentary footage also relies heavily on it. First, as Bill Nichols explains, the "social actors" give the "performance of a lifetime" giving their best to show who they are, their role in society and their relevance as witnesses in a documentary (Nichols 1994, 72). For instance, each member of the Youth Alliance strives to show that they are knowledgeable people dedicated to their mission. But the infiltration inside Broward is also an acting performance: before infiltrating it, Viridiana, who grew up in the United States and speaks perfect English, works on a fake Latino accent and memorizes a fake life story in order to pass for a recent undocumented immigrant. The irony comes full circle when she tries a first time and fails because she looked too nice to be credible. Thus, Muhammad helps her rehearse as if he was a film director or a theater producer, something that she confirms: "I can almost compare it to a theater play. Mo being the director, Marco and I being actors." It is this particular element that shows that fictionality holds the film together. Indeed, when testifying about her role in the center after infiltrating it, Viridiana proudly explains that she had become known as "la Infiltrada," as if she was a legend. This reference conveys the imagery of famous spy film characters from which Viridiana probably takes her pride. In most Hollywood films involving a form of undercover espionage, the main characters not only show that they have extraordinary skills and courage, they are also praised for their outsider kind of personality. As Yvonne Tasker explains, such "lone heroes" are "cut off from official forms of authority" but derive their success from that particular way of functioning (Tasker 167). When Viridiana becomes "la Infiltrada," she gets access to a higher range of fame that justifies her unruly behavior, and by the same token the fact that a film was made to tell her story.

12 Performance being at the center of the film, the use of fictionalized re-enactments to show what happened inside Broward (rather than testimonies) emphasizes the coherence between the story depicted and the form of the film: the re-enactments are performances that are based on a real-life performance. Thus, they draw further attention to that initial performance. According to Paul Ward, "overt performances" are often perceived to disturb the "documentariness" of a film while in fact, it reinforces its "usefulness as commentary on real issues and the ethical dimension that is central to this" (Ward 207). With *The Infiltrators*, the metafictional quality of the film sheds

light on three elements: the lack of agency of the detainees inside Broward, the fact that the general public can only imagine what happens inside of detention centers and finally, the exceptional nature of the Youth Alliance activists' act. As Iversen and Nielsen explain, fictionality is not used "to deceive but to invite emotional and imaginative responses" from the viewer (Iversen and Nielsen 251). The fact that these activists had to infiltrate a prison as if they were in a movie is enough to draw attention to the dangers they faced, especially if one thinks about what usually happens to covert agents in most thrillers. The film, using re-enactments, reinforces the exceptional film-like life experience the infiltrators went through.

13 Nevertheless, if one had to play devil's advocate, it would be possible to argue that because they used deceitful methods, the infiltrators are a threat to society. Despite the fact that Rivera wanted to portray "wicked smart" people (Aziz), one can wonder if the pun inherent in the title of the film – the infil- traitors – could not feed narratives that portray them as individuals who make too much trouble and disturb the proper functioning of the legal system to free people that are "illegal." As a result, the next section of the paper will show how the filmmakers, while showing that Marco, Viridiana and Muhammad are defined by their "illegality," manage to call that label into question.

Civil Disobedience versus Illegality: Calling Stereotypes into Question

14 In *The Infiltrators*, contrary to *Ocean's Eleven*, the plot does not involve robbing three high-security casinos, but it does involve outsmarting a system and getting its main assets out. But when you make a movie about people acting in an unruly fashion, especially when it involves undocumented immigrants, being careful about their portrayal is essential because there has been a history of detrimental stereotypes, especially for Latinos, portrayed as bandits, gangsters and other sneaky unlawful individuals [6]. Yet, what the film does, more than showing a successful infiltration, is questioning what illegality, criminality and most of all justice really mean in the context of the detention centers, and to a further extent who should be granted the

right to stay in the United States, whether it is detainees or DREAMers.

15 There are two elements that need to be considered to study the way the film questions the notion of "criminality." First, the immigrants in Broward are "detainees" not "inmates"[7]. As Ewing, Martínez and Rumbaut explain, they are not criminals "by any commonly accepted definition of the term," but they have the "stigma of criminality" (Ewing, Martínez and Rumbaut 3). He identifies the increasing criminalization of immigration law as the cause of such stigma, shaped as he explains "more by fear and stereotype than by empirical evidence" (Ewing, Martínez and Rumbaut 3). Studies show that there are in fact fewer crimes committed by undocumented immigrants than by American citizens, and that enacting tougher laws to fit with what Juliet Stumpf calls "crimmigration," does not have an influence on the crime rate. Ewing, Martínez and Rumbaut even insist on the fact that "immigrants as a group tend to be highly motivated, goal-driven individuals who have little to gain by running afoul of the law" (Ewing, Martínez and Rumbaut 6). Yet, the stereotype of the "illegal alien" has become a convenient way to set targets against whom a new set of felonies were enacted, the ultimate punishment being deportation (Ewing, Martínez and Rumbaut 1). In the film, Marco insists on the fact that the detainees' only crime is to be without papers: "You see, because none of the men in here committed crimes, they weren't being legally punished. And so, they don't get a right to a trial before getting locked up; they don't get a court-appointed lawyer. They don't even get a sentence. They just get warehoused." With such a statement, the film emphasizes the injustice detainees are subjected to, and implies that getting people out can then be considered to be an act of civil disobedience, meant to disturb and attract the attention of the public. Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales explains that civil disobedience consists in "the voluntary surrender of one's body in order to call attention to the instances of involuntary surrender" that happens in the detention centers. While she wrote that definition to refer to another act committed by DREAMers, it fits the situation portrayed in *The Infiltrators* perfectly well (Negrón-Gonzales 98).

16 The second element to be considered is that the activists of the Youth Alliance obtained releases for several detainees using legal and non-violent methods. They had the detainees sign waivers so that local

politicians could study their cases, and they put pressure on them using online petitions whose signatures automatically generate an email – sometimes up to 4,000 in 48 hours. The film also calls out the non-application of the Morton Memo (named after the director of ICE) that stipulates that deportations would prioritize criminals (Unzueta Carrasco 285). It should also be noted that the liberation of detainees has nothing to do with the grandiloquent scenes of most prison heist films. The main prison prop, a razor blade, is not used to injure anybody but to cut slips of papers that are used to give information to the detainees so that they (or their family members) can get in touch with the Youth Alliance.

17 The representation of the Youth Alliance activists is never stereotypical and one particular scene sheds light on the gap between what would be expected of them as undocumented immigrants and who they are. When Viridiana rehearses and works on a fake accent, Muhammad makes an interesting comment: "In order to get Viri inside, we have to become the stereotypes we advocated against." The fact that they have to rehearse to succeed in becoming these stereotypes immediately invalidates them. Viridiana, for instance, is a perfect student who graduated at the top of her class. And Mohammad is also a hard-working committed individual with great communication and strategic skills. Thus, they both correspond to the harmless studious young people who would be perfect and deserving applicants if the DREAM Act was enacted. The film suggests that they succeeded in infiltrating Broward because the ICE agents and the Border Patrol, their main antagonists, believe in such stereotypes. One interesting comment uses fictionality to shed light on the power gap between the enforcement agencies and the undocumented immigrants. Indeed, Marco describes the Border Patrol as his own personal "Death Star," referring to the space station in Star Wars that has the capacity to destroy an entire planet. While this comment is exaggerated for the generic purpose of the film, it nevertheless suggests that the enforcement agents have the power to destroy people's lives. The film showcases a series of endangered people – asylum seekers, abused women – that highlights the lack of prosecutorial discretion used when dealing with the detainees in spite of Obama's promise that deportations would only affect high-

priority undocumented immigrants such as criminals and terrorists (Negrón-Gonzales 100).

18 Muhammad is probably the most counter-stereotypical character and the best advocate for the passing of the DREAM Act. Throughout the movie, he shows that he has the skills of a lawyer, while never being allowed to go to college because of his undocumented status. The most eloquent scene is when he calls out double standards to prove that any deportation can be stopped. He takes the example of Barack Obama's uncle, who had been working in the United States without papers for several decades. After being arrested on drunk driving charges, he was eventually given a permanent resident status. Considering that even lawful residents can be deported for traffic offenses (Ewing, Martínez and Rumbaut 3), it seems right to suppose that his deportation was stopped because of his privileged position. With great motivation, Muhammad explains that he hopes for an executive order from Obama because "that is something that is an actual law that has to be followed with actual rules and actual accountability." What is implied here is that the deportations and detention centers are "out of control" because many detainees get deported before their case can be studied and without considering to what extent their deportation can put them in danger. It would have been the case for one Latin American immigrant waiting for asylum without Muhammad's help, and it would be the case for Muhammad if he was sent back to Iran because of his homosexuality. Such perspective prevents the viewer from considering that the behavior of the activists is illegal or criminal. In spite of disturbing the functioning of a detention center to the point of influencing its shutdown, the film shows that they value the law and fight for fair laws.

19 Thus, throughout the film, the Youth Alliance activists appear as exemplars of the "good moral character" needed to be granted a path to legal citizenship. But as Zimmerman explains, their vision of society goes beyond the passing of the DREAM Act "to a broader agenda that includes social and economic justice for immigrant workers and their families" (Zimmerman 17). The counter-stereotypes used in the film create a counter-narrative whose purpose is to have a social impact. Thus, there is a need for the film to perform socially, which is a tendency that is inherent in its form but also in keeping

with the activism surrounding immigration from the turn of the century.

The Social Performance of the Film

20 The activism portrayed in The Infiltrators illustrates the new phase that started around the time Ibarra and Rivera met the Youth Alliance. As Zimmerman explains, because supporting the DREAM Act was not enough and had "largely remained hidden from public view" (Zimmerman 17), there was a shift to the use of "direct action," such as rallies and sit-ins. The well-known phrase to refer to such movement is used by Marco in the film: "We came out of the shadows." What came along such movement of increased visibility and action was the desire to use the media and "bring attention to broader issues of immigrant, civil, and human rights as a strategy for social and policy change" (Zimmerman 14). This desire is explicit in the film since the "plan" of the activists is to "go to the media, go public with the campaign, [and] put national pressure on ICE." Such comment reinforces the idea that the activists wanted their performance (the infiltration) to circulate in the public sphere because, as one of the characters says about the hunger strike organized inside the detention center [8], "What's the point if no one is watching?" This strategy of "coming out" is not without danger for undocumented immigrants who could get in serious trouble. It sheds even more light on the sense of urgency the activists felt to put pressure on the Obama administration. Indeed, by the end of 2016, and in spite of guaranteeing a lenient immigration policy, Obama had deported more than 3.4 million non-citizens (Martínez, Slack and Martínez 173), which was more than any other administration [9]. One can argue that when it comes to reaching a higher state of visibility and engagement, the feature-length documentary format offers good chances that might have attracted the activists. Viridiana mentions that "no one was taking the story," which can mean that Ibarra and Rivera might have offered them the media coverage they needed.

21 The film succeeded in its endeavor to attract the attention of the public, winning the Audience Prize at the Sundance Film Festival. But it also caused trouble to one of its protagonists. Two months later,

the arrest and deportation of Claudio Rojas was making the headlines, with assumptions that it was a form of retaliation supposed to send a message to other activists who would want to disturb other detention centers. Even though ICE denied that the Youth Alliance's activities influenced their decision, there are reasons to believe that it was not the case, especially since Rojas was eligible to an adjustment of status under the 245 section of the Immigration and Nationality Act and had his application for a T-visa pending. What is surprising is that the portrayal of ICE in the film is minor and far from being diabolical, contrary to the eighth season of *Orange is The New Black* for instance that features a guard who terrorizes the detainees. In the film, the enforcement agents are portrayed as quite gullible and naive, but their portrayal never overshadows the representation of a broken system. Paradoxically, the decision to deport Rojas gives even more credibility to the film as it exposes the arbitrariness denounced by the activists. It is as if the film's sequel had happened in real life.

22 From a different perspective, what happened after the release of *The Infiltrators* highlights the performative quality of documentaries in society and their ability to tap into disturbing topics. It confirms that they can elicit strong emotions that circulate in the public sphere, what Belinda Smaill calls the "sociality of emotions" (Smaill 4-8). The touchier the topic, the more it can generate strong reactions because the viewers create a tight link, a "continuity" between the real world and what occurs on screen (Smaill 5). According to the definition that Negrón-Gonzales gives, the film can be considered to be a "testimonio": it is a practice of "documenting silenced histories" that produces a "counter-narrative" and a "counter-spectacle" in order to deconstruct the "master narrative" portraying undocumented immigrants with all sorts of detrimental stereotypes (Negrón-Gonzales 102-103). When they make visible what is hidden to the public eye, and stage both the infiltration and the liberation of Rojas as heroic acts, the activists and the filmmakers respond to the spectacle produced at the border [10], which Negrón-Gonzales calls the spectable of "enforcement" and "security" (Negrón-Gonzales 95). While the master narrative insists on the undocumented immigrants being "illegal," the film, showing the acts of civil disobedience of the Youth Alliance, stresses their heroic qualities and their struggle against unfair laws. In addition to being counter-stereotypical,

The Infiltrators furthers a political agenda of inclusion for people who are in fact "staging a performance of democracy in a space that is considered to be the exclusive terrain of US citizens" (Negrón-Gonzales 95). Rather than dwelling on the living conditions in the detention centers (much more dealt with in Orange is The New Black for instance), the filmmakers focus on the civic qualities of people who have all the requirements to be good citizens. And thus, the film is in keeping with the other acts of civil disobedience that have characterized the DREAMers' movement: it is about reframing the narrative that portrays immigrants as criminals who bypassed border security laws into a new narrative that insists on their bravery. Ibarra and Rivera have indeed said that they wanted to distinguish themselves from the documentary filmmakers who portray immigrants as victims. They chose to empower them and legitimize their defiant act through their film.

23 A month after the release of the film, which was also one month before Rojas was deported, Ibarra and Rivera sent a letter to Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen, Secretary of Treasure Steven Mnuchin, to Florida Congressman Ted Deutch, and to Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott on behalf of the International Documentary Association to denounce his detention at the Krome Detention Center in South Miami-Dade[11]. In addition to stressing ideas that are dealt with in the film when it comes to Rojas being an "upstanding member of the community," they insist on the fact that the release of a documentary tackling a controversial and important topic has to give way to debates:

> It is a grave concern to the documentary community that a willing protagonist in a documentary film may be punished for expression his opinion within a film, and we believe that this will have a chilling effect on the work of journalists and their sources seeking to explore and understand issues of national concern. As a result of ICE's actions, the American public will now lose Mr. Rojas's voice in the many upcoming national conversations about our immigration policy.

24 With such words, they express their wish to have the conversation continue and include all the participants in the film, in an effort to bring about social change.

25 Nothing says if the filmmakers suspected that Rojas would be deported after the film. The end of the film, however, seems visionary. As Rojas drives to the Department of Homeland Security building for his regular check-in, there is a long line of undocumented immigrants. When Rojas parks his car, a voice on the radio announces that a woman was deported after checking in with ICE. While at the time of the shooting of the film, this scene might have intended to show that he was not free and that his life was at the mercy of ICE, in retrospect, it is as if the film was announcing his deportation. It corroborates the idea that is predominant in the film: as long as further reform has not taken place, an endless number of people will be deported. And indeed, two years before the release of the film, president Trump implemented executive orders that cancelled DACA as well as prosecutorial discretion, making every case a high priority. The timing of the film seems to be on point and shows how much documentaries are needed to counteract the stereotypes that Trump himself has passed on and used to be elected. Before the premiere of the film, Muhammad said that he "welcomed any retaliation by the Trump administration" insisting on the fact that his arrest would be immediately lobbied by activists (Siegel). One comment from Jordan Hoffman for *The Guardian* is interesting in that sense as the journalist reminds us that the U.S. is "home of the brave," adding that according to him, there is no braver people than the infiltrators. Portraying such "unafraid" people, it is possible that *The Infiltrators* will set (or be part of) a new trend in documentaries about undocumented immigrants that will focus on David-versus-Goliath stories. Thus, the comment that the film is a "true story" was more than an indication, it was a claim that it is possible to call into question the injustices of a system, and probably a necessity in troubled times.

Conclusion

26 *The Infiltrators* confirms that making a film, whether it is a documentary, a fiction film, or a hybrid film, is a creative act that can use different techniques of narration and dramatization. In the end, the fact that Ibarra and Rivera used documentary footage and fictionalized re-enactments in the same film matters less than their ability to tell a story. The fictionality used in their docu-thriller is first and

foremost "communicative" (Iversen and Nielsen 251): it gives the viewers points of reference. Yet, the role of fictionalization is troubling: while it gives the impression that such metaphor as the "Death Star" is too exaggerated to be real, it stresses the surreal situation in the detention centers. Fictionality protects the viewers from the harsh realities portrayed while at the same time making their magnitude even more intense.

27 The re-enactments have another role: while they are the result of the impossibility to film inside the detention center, they also shed light on the impossibility to know what happens inside. The filmmakers are thus very similar to the activists they portray, seeking transparency and visibility. The performance portrayed in their film mirrors their own: they were part of the infiltration and used media coverage to generate a conversation thanks to a peculiar film portraying an act of defiance. Their film is thus embedded and multi-layered. It reflects their commitment as descendants of immigrants. Sometimes, it feels as if it portrayed a hotchpotch of situations, dealing with immigrants from all over the world (Mexico, Iran, Brazil, China, El Savador, Haiti), all dealing with different situations (seeking asylum, fleeing violence, looking for work, hoping for the passing of the DREAM Act) but what the film does is offer a counter-narrative that denies their dangerosity. Not only does it aim at changing the stereotypes about undocumented immigrants at a time when ideological battles agitate public opinion, it also tries to remind us that the United States was built by immigrants.

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NOTES

1 *Nanook of the North*, released in 1922 and considered as the first documentary, was a docudrama.

2 For a discussion about the use of re-enactments in the context of a criminal narrative, see Kristen Fuhs, "Re-imagining the Nonfiction Criminal Narrative: Documentary Reenactment as Political Agency", *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 58, issue 1, March 2012, pp. 51-78.

3 The term "docu-thriller" was used by the filmmakers themselves and can be found on the official website where the film can be streamed. http://www.infiltratorsfilm.com/stream-the-infiltrators/

4 Cristina Ibarra directed *Las Marthas*, a documentary that investigates an off-beat rite of passage for Mexican-American girls in Laredo, Texas, as they prepare for a ball in which they are dressed like American colonial figures and celebrate George Washington's birthday, something that can seem strange in a town which is 98% Latino. And Alex Rivera directed *Sleep Dealer*, a sci-fi thriller in which the U.S.-Mexico border has been sealed off and Mexican laborers work for the U.S. from Mexican digital factories. It won the screenwriting award at Sundance in 2008.

5 There is a list of conditions to qualify. One needs to have entered the U.S. before the age of 16, must have been present in the U.S. for at least five consecutive years, must have graduated from high school, have a GED or have been accepted in college, must be between 12 and 35 at the time of application and must have good moral character. https://dreamact.info/students.

6 See Gary D. Keller, *Hispanics and United States film: an overview and handbook*. Tempe, Ariz: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1994; Frank Javier Garcia Berumen, *The Chicano/Hispanic image in American film.* New York: Vantage Press, 1995; Charles Ramírez Berg, *Latino Images in Film. Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002; Mary C. Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom.* Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

7 The same distinction is made in the last season of *Orange is the New Black*, in which the inmates that have been the main characters during

the first six seasons have to prepare food for the detainees that are kept in a different aisle of the prison.

8 The hunger strike is part of a re-enactment and as a result, it remains unsure if it really happened.

9 In their article, Martínez, Slack and Martínez explain that even though Obama was nicknamed the "Deporter-in-Chief" for the number of deportations that happened during his presidency, there is a difference between "returns" and "removal" which puts this nickname into perspective.

10 See Chavez, *The Latino Threat Narrative*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013. In the second part of his book, he thoroughly explains what the border spectacle consists in and how it fuels stereotypes about the immigrants being dangerous.

11 The letter as well as the list of the 561 who signed it is available on the International Documentary Association's website: https://www.documentary.org/advocacy/letter-support-infiltrators-protagonist-claudio-rojas.

RÉSUMÉS

English

The Infiltrators (2019) is a docuthriller directed by Latino directors Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera. It combines documentary scenes and fictionalized re-enactments to tell the story of two DREAMers who purposefully got arrested to infiltrate a for-profit immigrant detention center in Broward, Florida in order to help a few detainees stop their deportation. This paper first investigates the way the film balances the use of traditional documentary techniques (interviews, observation) with fictionalized re-enactments using the concepts of performance and fictionality – developed by Richard Walsh and used by Stephan Iversen and Henrik Skov Nielsen in their own analysis of a hybrid documentary. Secondly, it argues that the real performance of the film consists in calling into question the criminalization of immigration in the United States via a portrayal of undocumented immigrants that counters their "illegality" and "criminality." Overall, it shows that the film, which won the audience award at the Sundance film festival in 2019, is part of a social and political conversation about immigration and security enforcement.

Français

Mis-en-scène par deux réalisateurs latinos, Cristine Ibarra et Alex Rivera, *The Infiltrators* (2019) est un docuthriller dont l'hybridité permet l'association de scènes documentaires et de scènes reconstituées et fictionnalisées. Il raconte l'histoire de deux DREAMers qui se sont sciemment faits arrêter

afin d'infiltrer un centre de détention pour immigrants dans le comté de Broward en Floride dans le but d'aider des détenus à contourner les procédures d'expulsion. Cet article s'intéresse tout d'abord à la façon dont le film associe techniques traditionnelles du documentaire (entretiens, observation) et scènes reconstituées et fictionnalisées à la lumière des concepts de performance et de fictionnalité développés par Richard Walsh et utilisés par Stephan Iveren et Henrik Skov Nielsen dans leur propre analyse d'un documentaire hybride. Par ailleurs, l'article affirme que la performance réelle du film se situe dans sa capacité à remettre en question la criminalisation de l'immigration aux États-Unis à travers le portrait d'immigrants sans papiers en déconstruisant leur « illégalité » et « criminalité ». De façon générale, il est démontré que le film, qui a remporté le prix du public au festival Sundance de 2019, s'insère dans une conversation politique et sociale à propos de l'immigration et du renforcement de la sécurité aux frontières.

INDEX

Mots-clés
documentaire hybride, reconstitution, fictionnalité, performance, centre de détention, immigration non autorisée, docuthriller

Keywords
hybrid documentary, fictionality, performance, detention centers, unauthorized immigration, stereotypes, docu-thriller

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Expressive Realism and Troubled Subjectivities in the Films of Lynne Ramsay (1999-2017)

David Roche

PLAN

Color Scheme & Texture
Intrusive Dreams & Fantasies
Slice of (Psychic) Life Aesthetics
Point of View
Conclusion

TEXTE

1 In terms of subject matter at least, circumscribing the cohesion of one of Great Britain's most important contemporary directors, Lynne Ramsay, was certainly an easier task after the release of the 2002 *Morvern Callar* than after that of her subsequent films, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2010) and *You Were Never Really Here* (2017). Like her early short films *Small Deaths* (1996) and *Gasman/1970s Christmas in Scotland* (1998), *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *Morvern Callar* are resolutely Scottish in their material: the first is set during the 1975 dustmen's strike in Glasgow; the second is an adaptation of Scottish writer Alan Warner's contemporary classic; both films depict aspects of Scottish society and history with a degree of realism (location shooting, archive footage, nonprofessional actors like William Eadie in *Ratcatcher* and Kathleen McDermott in *Morvern Callar*), even if the latter film "de-emphasizes the Scottishness" of the original novel[1], notably by transforming Morvern into an English-woman (Wallis 82; Caughie 107). By focusing on Scottish youths — a young adolescent male and a post-adolescent woman — in Western Scotland (Glasgow and Argyll county), Ramsay's first two films can even be said to form a diptych that endeavors to map the contemporary Scottish experience in terms of region and era, class and gender, and have for these very reasons been paired in a 2016 article by Kristine Robbyn Chick. It is for these reasons that both films were

received as testifying to the rejuvenation of the Scottish realist tradition, alongside other works that had received funding from local government, such as the films of Peter Mullan and Loach and Laverty's Scottish films (Sargeant 353). Released seven years later, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* seemed like a radical departure, which was to be confirmed by *You Were Never Really Here* (2017). Both films are adaptations of works by US-American authors (Lionel Shriver and Jonathan Ames), set mainly in New York and New England, and centered on adult protagonists. This departure was, according to Tom Wallis, a welcome one for Ramsay, who was intent on troubling the Scottish-woman-director-of-social-realist-films label that had been imposed on her from the start (82).

2 Yet Ramsay's fourth feature film pinpoints one of the common denominators between all four through an allusion to *Ratcatcher* that occurs as early as the second shot [1:52]. The lateral extreme close-up of Joe suffocating himself with a plastic bag recalls the opening credits of the 1999 film, in which a frontal close shot shows a boy named Ryan similarly wrapped in a curtain as if it were a shroud [0:42]. The parallel between the two films is furthered through a sibling motif, with suffocation making way for drowning: Ryan is also the child who accidentally drowns in a canal three minutes later [5:01], and whom James possibly follows in the end [87:48], while Joe tries to drown himself before changing his mind [63:55]. In linking her two apparently most different films—a naturalist coming-of-age story and a stylish neo-noir reimagining of *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, 1976)—which, for the time being at least, bookend her career, Ramsay draws attention to what appears to be her main aesthetic concern: the expression of the subjectivities of troubled individuals, with trouble being understood in the very ordinary sense of being afflicted with "pain," "discomfort," "emotional strain," "anxiety," "worry" and/or "distress" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*).

3 All Ramsay's feature films are centered chiefly on one protagonist, a feature that the films' titles draw attention to: *Ratcatcher* and *Morvern Callar* through the use of names, *We Need to Talk about Kevin* and *You Were Never Really Here* by explicitly stating the protagonists' anxieties (paranoia and PTSD). Two of the three source texts (*Morvern Callar* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin*) are first person narratives, and Ames's novella employs internal focalization.

All Ramsay's protagonists are troubled subjects afflicted, like the protagonist of Ramsay's first film, with a form of "disorientation and struggle for an identity" (Blandford 78): *Ratcatcher*'s James, who is already trying to deal with the usual problems facing a teenager as well as his family and neighborhood's dire economic situation, is indirectly responsible for the death of Ryan who drowned after they playfought; Morvern Callar is an enigmatic young woman who fails to report the suicide of her boyfriend and momentarily usurps his identity as author of a novel, and whom even her best friend Lanna fails to understand; *We Need to Talk About Kevin*'s Eva Khatchadourian is the successful owner of a guide book company, for whom motherhood increasingly becomes synonymous with being persecuted by her son Kevin; and *You Were Never Really Here*'s Joe is an ex-veteran whose speciality as a hired man is saving kidnapped children and punishing their abductors. If the traumatic experiences the protagonists undergo are varied—much of the writing on her films evokes at least in passing the protagonists' trauma (Johnson 1362; Murray 223; Kuhn; McMahon 471; Art 5; Chick; Singer 32)—they all seem to foreground one emotion: guilt or, in the case of Morvern, the apparent lack thereof.

4 I will argue that John Caughie's contention that *Morvern Callar* "puts in play subjectivities which resist any attempt to contain them within the familiar contours of a national identity" (105) can be generalized to the primacy of subjectivity over identity in all her films. My interest, here, has little to do with the psychology of these troubled psyches, the unconscious reasons for their actions, and even less with determining whether they are authentic representations of various pathologies. It lies, rather, in the devices utilized to express their inner lives. In short, I would like to determine to what extent Ramsay's project can be seen as an attempt to develop a poetics of troubled subjectivities that operates on the levels of both cognition and sensation. Ramsay's focus on audiovisual plasticity is evident in her shying away from the verbal by portraying protagonists who speak very little: her Morvern, for instance, is even more enigmatic than the novel's narrator, who ends up sharing some of her thoughts with the narratee when she expresses her annoyance at Lanna's having slept with her boyfriend; and the openings of both *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and *You Were Never Really Here* delay the moment

we hear the protagonists talk (ten minutes go by before Eva speaks, while Joe utters one word in the film's first eight minutes). The soundtrack of *Morvern Callar*, Sarah Art has shown, invites "the viewer to experience something of what it is like to experience silence as an individual, personal state of being" (1). It is the complexities of subjective experiences that Ramsay's poetics aim to express.

5 What has become increasingly apparent with each new Lynne Ramsay film is how inaccurate early critical attempts to catalogue her as a successor of Loach and the like were. A *New York Times* reviewer said that *Ratcatcher* "could be 'The 400 Blows' as directed by Ken Loach"[2]; David Trotter also compares it to François Truffaut's 1959 film (154-56), while Laura McMahon sees echoes of *Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1948). Ramsay sought to draw attention away fom realism by admitting a debt to the avant-garde, citing Robert Bresson (Blandford 78; McMahon 473-75) and *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid, 1943) as main influences on *Ratcatcher*. Speaking of Ramsay's 1999 film in 2005, Amy Sergeant opined that its "surreal" images make it far more "ambiguous" than Loach's work (354), and three years later, Annette Kuhn insisted that "the comparison [with the social problem films of Ken Loach and Mike Leigh] does not stand up even to minimal scrutiny, because the [...] realism of the film's settings is constantly brought up against its poetic elements" (17). This was already the case in her early short films, *Small Deaths* and *Gasman*.

6 From the start, Ramsay inscribed her work in the tradition of art cinema that David Bordwell calls expressive realism. "Expressive realism," says Bordwell, endeavors to "dramatize private mental processes" and "presents psychological effects in search of their causes" (208); he distinguishes it from another art-cinema tradition, "objective realism," which emphasizes the contingency of everyday life in the name of verisimilitude (206). Ramsay's films do not claim to explain much; they seem content to express the enigmatic entanglement of emotions, memories and sensations. In a sense, her brand of expressive realism would tend to propose an objective expression of subjectivity. Thus, Ramsay's films, and *Ratcatcher* and *Morvern Callar* in particular, ultimately demonstrate how objective and expressive realism may interact, as they did, though perhaps to a lesser degree, in Loach's early films, *Poor Cow* (1967) and *Kes* (1969), or in *The Loneli-*

ness of the Long Distance Runner (Tony Richardson, 1962) before that. In this respect, I expand on Caughie's analysis of the shifts between objectivity and subjectivity at play in the supermarket scene of *Morvern Callar* (108) and rejoin David Forrest's defense of the poetic potential of social realist cinema in his discussion of *Ratcatcher*, in which he calls into question Kuhn's and Ramsay's own restricted view of the genre (203-5). It seems to me that Ramsay's films prove that the difference between objective and expressive realism is by no means clear-cut, and has probably never been; it is just a matter of emphasis, of privileging the social and the physical over the psychological and the emotional, or vice versa. For in the end, both traditions aim to capture human experience: expressive realism by objectifying the subjective, objective realism by subjectifying the objective —which, in our post-modern, post-structural world, is already subjective in the first place.

7 What follows is an attempt to locate the cohesion of Ramsay's films in their aesthetics, and thus to identify elements of a poetics. My exploration of her brand of expressive realism will focus on four elements that aim to express a troubled subjectivity — color scheme and texture, narrative disruptions, sequence-shots, point of view — and that have in common a tendency to trouble the fiction film's formal, epistemological and ontological boundaries.

Color Scheme & Texture

8 The expression of subjectivity is, first and foremost, plastic and involves visual texture. *Ratcatcher*, for instance, is, like *Small Deaths*, dominated by a grayish color scheme appropriate for its setting, context and the Scottish realist/documentary tradition it invokes. The scheme, however, breaks up—again as in *Small Deaths*—when James explores the brand-new white houses and the golden fields under blue skies outside [39:00-42:27]—while the grayish tones of James's second visit seems to contradict the first [81:22-83:06]. The shift is also material, since the mineral, the liquid and the artificial (bricks, cars, garbage bags, rain, overcast skies, the canal) make way for air and lush vegetation (pristine skies and the wheat singled out in close-up in the final scenes [88:15]). In *Morvern Callar*, color and matter are used to distinguish two countries: the darkness of Scot-

land is expressed through a blue gray scheme, the light and heat of Spain through a yellow one, a contrast that is reinforced by the dry and humid earth and flora associated with both countries. Morvern and Lanna's night life, however, looks the same regardless of the country, with the darkness illuminated by harsh artificial white light or shades of blue and red. *We Need to Talk About Kevin* multiplies color schemes and textures to circumscribe singular space-times: the red juice of the opening dream sequence and of the final shoot-out; the gray, cement walls of prison; the sharp primary colors of Eva's former house in the woods; and the pale whiteness of Eva's present house under the beating sun, etc. The colors red and white, called on for their classical function as signifiers of violence, innocence and emptiness in Western visual arts[3], are used to identify the various worlds and express Eva's inability to escape these oppressive emotions, since they seem to inevitably seep into a variety of spaces.

9 In *You Were Never Really Here*, each space has its specific color scheme and texture: the wooden tones of Joe's mother's living quarters [8:44]; the yellow light of the hardware store [25:47]; the salmon walls of the room Fiona is imprisoned in [38:24]; the baroque interior of Senator Motto's country mansion [70:43]. In typical noir fashion, these spaces stand out against the urban backdrop. With its gray tones, asphalt and metal materials, narrow and underground spaces, and occasional streaks of neon lights, this environment appears as a visual continuum, encapsulated by the many lateral tracking shots of the streets, tunnels, bridges and roadsides [32:04, 40:03, 48:16, 62:15, 66:39, 67:36], as well as by the shots of the subway train [19:28, 22:44]. The narration rapidly dismantles the opposition set up in the opening scenes between the violence of the streets and the protection of the home by revealing that the warmth of the inner spaces is by no means synoymous with peace of mind, as the regal quarters Fiona is held in against her will demonstrate. The narrative takes us outside the city—the lakeside [62:36], the mansion—only to show that this rural space dominated by trees and water is equally permeated with death. As in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the memories are initially experienced as disruptions in the cinematic fabric (most notably when the blazing yellowish brown mineral images of the desert erupt in the steamy blue of the sauna [30:09-31:06]) only to be revealed as perfectly in tune within the urban continuum (the dark interior of the

container full of dead young women segues effortlessly back into the darkness of Joe's current location [34:18-34:36]).

10 Visually, subjectivity is evoked through a transgression of ontological boundaries of the material world. This is not to say that the different worlds are not real—they mostly are—but the color schemes and texture are meant to heighten our experience of the protagonists' subjectivities, whether it be primarily memory in *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and *You Were Never Really Here*, or sensory in *Ratcatcher* and *Morvern Callar*. The films' visuals suggest that the boundary between memory and physical sensation is by no means radical; indeed, the insistence on the plasticity of the cinematic image—and the invitation to a haptic relation to the images' texture—posit a view memory and subjective experience as equally sensual. It is the effects of subjectivity that these visuals aim to express.

Intrusive Dreams & Fantasies

11 Narrative disruptions occur in all Ramsay's films, but the effect is certainly more jarring in her first feature because of its naturalist aesthetics, naturalist films tending to posit a stable ontology. Fifty-minutes into the film, *Ratcatcher* offers a scene straight out of the French children's films *Le Ballon Rouge* (Albert Lamorisse, 1956) or *Cerf-volant du bout du monde* (Roger Pigaut, 1958), when a group of children tie a rat to a balloon that sends the animal straight into outer space [51:15-53:06]. This fantastic moment is reabsorbed into the realist logic that governs the diegetic world when the space scene dissolves—through white noise—to a shot of James sleeping (and maybe dreaming) in front of the television. The potential dream sequence retrospectively calls into question the status of an earlier scene when James steps through a window into a golden field [41:23-42:27]. Although the frontier between reality and dream is not marked by a cut, frame-within-the-frame composition likens the shot to a painting on a wall. The ontological certainty concerning the status of the window frames James's transformation from a realist character à la Antoine Doinel or Billy Casper into a hero finding the doorway to Wonderland or Narnia, one that opens onto a space that recalls the American Midwest and its myth of a new Arcadia (Murray 222). In light of these two moments, the status of the penultimate scene of

James's family walking through the fields, which visually resembles the illustrations in the famous British children's book *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Michael Rosen, 1989), is made highly ambiguous—is it a flashforward? a dream?—especially since it is framed by images of James drowning that are not particularly realistic in the first place (the canal cannot be as deep as the underwater shots suggest) [88:15-89:56]. These narrative disruptions are thus also moments of high generic instability where social realism morphs into children's fiction.

12 *You Were Never Really Here*, we have seen, offers a similar scene of Joe floating in an abyss of water (when he is presumably standing) and seeing Fiona in place of his mother [65:40-65:54]. The final scenes, which do not take their cue from the novella, further blur the frontier between dream and reality: Joe glimpses Fiona's reflection on the rainy windowpane of a bus in shot/reverse shot [67:24-67:35], and his shooting himself in the mouth is presented as continuous with the rest of the scene, the shift from one ontological level to another occurring within the same shot and going unmarked [79:24-80:43]. In *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the ontological status of the audiovisual material we are presented with is uncertain from the outset: the film practically opens on a dream sequence, with Eva covered in red fluids among other revellers in what appears to be a festival[4] [1:30-3:21]. The image's ambiguous status — is it a dream or a memory? — is heightened by the subsequent shot of Eva sitting glassy-eyed on a couch with an empty wine glass in front of her. More problematic even is a later scene in which Eva, after returning home on Halloween night, seems to fantasize that hordes of children are banging at the window shouting "candy"—which, of course, sounds like Kevin—an image that is introduced in a cut [31:50-32:48].

13 In all three films, such disruptions are rarely marked by a classical device (such as a lap-dissolve or a different color scheme) but erupt within the narration (through a cut, within a shot) on the same ontological level as the events depicted. However, once past the first instances (and on a first viewing), later instances remain identifiable thanks to our knowledge of the narration's "intrinsic norms" based on what we have already seen (echoes to previous scenes) and occasionally knowledge of "extrinsic norms",[5] such as references to familiar genres and intertexts (in *Ratcatcher*); the utilization of such devices

has been "normalized" and participates in the constitution of a recognizable poetics.

Slice of (Psychic) Life Aesthetics

14 What is especially fascinating in Ramsay's work is how devices more typical of naturalist aesthetics, and thus of objective realism, are also utilized to express subjectivity. This is notably the case of a staple device of neo-realism and slice-of-life cinema: the sequence-shot. Both *Ratcatcher* and *Morvern Callar* tap into this approach quite naturally. Sequence-shots occur in particular in scenes where the protagonists carry out basic actions (Ryan pulling his pants out of his boots [3:34-3:46], James's little sister Anne Marie eating a sandwich while sitting on a garbage bag [30:41-31:05], Morvern and Lanna arriving at the airport in Spain [45:54-46:24], Morvern returning home after her trip to Spain [82:47-85:01]) or share intimate moments (James and Margaret Anne cuddling in bed [75:25-76:31], Ma and Pa slow-dancing [76:32-77:57], Morvern and Lanna hugging [20:08], Morvern rinsing her hair in a bathtub [55:18]).

15 Such scenes also appear in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (Eva walking down the prison corridor [18:25] or the intimate post-birth scene [20:43]) and *You Were Never Really Here* (Joe and his mother talking when he gets home from a job [8:43], Joe pausing in a booth to wipe his forehead [27:46], Joe waiting in a staircase to purchase his meds [28:09]). In the later films, however, the sequence-shots' nature is problematized by the narrative structure they are integrated in. In *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the slice-of-life aesthetics actually serves to express memory. The post-birth scene, for instance, is framed by two present-day scenes (one in the prison and one in Eva's house) [20:10-21:19], while Eva's immediate reaction when she discovers her daughter's and husband's corpses is elided and followed by a sequence-shot depicting her lying down on her bed in silence, the narration mimicking her repressing the shock [98:05-101:06]. In the 2011 film, then, slice of life is, in effect, slice of memory. In *You Were Never Really Here*, it is the generic framework itself that renders the sequence-shots problematic. For though they occur profusely in the early domestic scenes between Joe and his mother, they are equally present in more staple noir scenes, such as the opening back alley

fight scene [4:47-5:49] and later on when Joe is out on a stakeout [33:33-33:52]. The boundary between genre film and psychological melodrama is thus effectively blurred. By adding a touch of realism to stories based on memory or fantasy, a staple figure of objective realism is thus put to the service of subjective realism—this is what I mean by "objectifying the subjective."

16 This is not the case in *Ratcatcher* where the sequence-shots are never problematic as such and are rarely juxtaposed with more subjective scenes. But it is very much the case in *Morvern Callar* where the sequence-shots are welded in a narrative that resists a psychological cause-effect reading in spite of its focalization on the eponymous character. In the film's early stages, for instance during the party scene, the jarring effect could be seen to mimic the effects of drugs and alcohol [18:27-20:49]. Yet sequence-shots depict both the most banal events and valuable information, including Morvern's phone call to the editors at the airport [45:22-45:37] (there is no way of knowing for sure who she's calling if you haven't read the novel). The film thus seems to foreground the inadequacy of slice-of-life aesthetics to capture a subjectivity such as Morvern's, and thus, perhaps, of any subjectivity at all. Or, at least, in the traditional realist sense. Because the iteration of the sequence-shot ultimately becomes the ideal mode of expression of an elusive subject, and thus an apt marker of subjectivity and of ontological and epistemological uncertainty—this is what I meant by "subjectifying the objective." This may explain why *Morvern Callar*, Ramsay's only feature without any dream sequences, may, in effect, be her trippiest. Or why Ramsay's portrait of French photographer Brigitte Lacomb, the 2018 *Miu Miu's Women's Tales #18 Brigitte*, ends up providing material for multiple portraits, including Ramsay's own.

Point of View

17 Indeed, disruptions in visual and aural point of view—what François Jost (1987) calls ocularization and auricularization—are frequent throughout *Ratcatcher* and *Morvern Callar* in spite of the fact that focalization in both films is fairly stable. One device in particular occurs in both films: a lateral tracking shot that moves (right to left in *Ratcatcher*, left to right in *Morvern Callar*) away from

the protagonist (James in the new house [40:15-40:33], Morvern in the Spanish cemetery [81:01-81:30]) and "finds" him or her on the opposite side, standing in profile in positions symmetrical to their original positions. These impossible shots—both diegetically and technically (it is, after all, a trick shot and the character has not vanished and reappeared)—composes a reflection: it is as if the narration had taken us through a looking-glass without us knowing which side is which. This is furthered by the inversion of the trajectory between the two films, which makes it impossible to decide whether the right side or the left one has priority. As instances of what Deleuze calls a "crystal-image," one in which it is impossible to distinguish the actual image from the virtual image (93-94), these tracking shots not only transgress an ontological line that remains invisible; they invite us to invest this space of uncertainty with our own subjectivity: which one of them is James? Which one is Morvern? Are both of them James and Morvern? When does the shot shift from diegetic reality to fantasy? From an objective to a subjective image of the protagonists? Is it a purely mental image ?

18 Although they may not always be as salient, such disruptions in ocularization and auricularization occur frequently in both films. One can be found in the drowning scene in the first seven minutes of *Ratcatcher*. After James pushes Ryan into the water, James is shown running away in a very long shot, the camera now observing him from a distance [4:34-5:10]. This is followed by a close-up of the bubbles on the surface of the canal, metonymically suggesting that Ryan is drowning, and finally by an extreme close-up of James looking worried. Thus framed by shots of James that evoke both distance and proximity, the status of the close-up of the bubbles becomes problematic: it may very well be an image in James's mind and not proof that Ryan is actually drowning. The strategy is repeated in a subsequent scene when James's mother witnesses the discovery of the body from her window [5:38-6:14]. The scene is firmy aligned with the woman through eyeline match, a POV shot through the window showing us the three young men who have discovered the body. The angle of the final close-up of the dead boy's hand, however, is aligned neither with the mother's gaze, nor even with those of the three young men, but is instead connected, through a graphic match, to a lateral close-up of the mother's hand holding a grocery bag. This

strategy of misaligning point of view is repeated more obviously in the next scene when James comes home and his mother is relieved to see he is not the dead boy she saw through the window [6:15-6:53]; the shot/reverse shot of James on the hand and his mother on the other is broken by a close-up of the dead boy that is potentially an expression of one of the two characters' subjectivity.

19 The opening scenes of *Ratcatcher* thus interrogate, through iteration, the status of the images we are shown (the close-ups in particular). The film's naturalism does not preclude subjectivity; on the contrary, what appear to be disruptions—the jump-cuts when the boys play, the subjective inserts—ultimately produce a mode of realism in which the expressive and the objective coexist. When James and Margaret Ann take a bath, for instance, an extreme close-up of James watching as she dunks her head under water is accompanied by recognizable underwater sounds, the insert of James's father getting another boy's body out of the canal suggesting that he is imagining the experience of drowning while watching her [58:17-58:38]. What *Ratcatcher* proposes, then, is a layered experience of reality that includes the subjective (dreams, memories, fantasies) and many subjectivities at that—a jump-cut later evokes Dad's drunken state as he drops some coins [71:03], a POV shot offers Mom's perspective as she watches James running to the bus stop [80:51-81:02]. The fact that the film is framed by James's memories and mostly centered on his character indicates that the whole narration may be an emanation of his subjectivity, a feature we find not in the films of Loach, but in those of Fellini, Lynch or Cronenberg (8½ [1963], *Eraserhead* [1977] and *Videodrome* [1983] come to mind).

20 *Morvern Callar*, as the repetition of the magical lateral tracking shot indicates, orchestrates similar disruptions in ocularization. During the party, Morvern teases a sailor on a boat by pulling up her skirt and displaying her garter belt, a gesture depicted in a very long shot potentially aligned with the sailor's gaze [15:51-16:54]. Halfway through the film, a long shot shows Morvern at work, the reflection in the mirror of a man suggesting that she is the object of his gaze [43:35-43:50] (a point made clearer in the novel through first person narration). In the Spanish scenes in particular, ocularization, auricularization and even focalization are momentarily displaced onto the secondary character, Lanna, as soon as the two friends step out of

the airport (the camera stays on Lanna instead of Morvern [46:15]), then later when Lanna loses herself in the village revels (a scene that is introduced by an over-the-shoulder shot aligned with Lanna) [64:01-67:22]. When the narration is aligned with Morvern, we find her looking for her friend, as if the main focalizer were searching for the secondary focalizer to deprive her of that status. Retrospectively, of course, the images of Lanna can, like the close-ups of the dead Ryan in *Ratcatcher*, be reinterpreted as Morvern's mental images of her friend.

21 The possibility that both *Ratcatcher* and *Morvern Callar* are entirely filtered through the protagonists' subjectivity suggests that *We Need to Talk about Kevin* is not the radical departure it may have appeared to be upon its release. In the 2011 film, ocularization is momentarily aligned with other characters, especially Kevin: a close-up of Eva's right hand playing with her hair is framed by a medium shot of a future male coworker observing her [8:59-9:14]; a POV shot tilts over the maps Kevin is studying [39:56-40:06]; the narration lingers in his bedroom when his mother leaves [58:41-59:13]; a close-up of his eye reveals the target reflected in it [60:48], visualizing his intention. These other points of view express the heroine's paranoia. Something similar is at stake in *You Were Never Really Here* when Joe's rescue mission is narrated primarily through surveillance footage [36:20-37:52]. Although they have the air of authentic proof, the ontological status of these images remains problematic since the film's internal focalization might lead us to speculate that the surveillance footage is also imagined by the protagonist, a hypothesis that is reinforced by the sequence-shots of Joe leaving and returning to the hotel in which he moves in the background [24:55-25:17, 42:58-43:09].

22 Yet it seems to me that, in Ramsay's more recent films, the ontological status of such images is, perhaps, less problematic than their epistemological status. The images are clearly mental ones spurred on by paranoia or trauma (Eva's imagining what Kevin had been doing in the past or what is on people's minds when they stare at her, Joe remembering his abusive father [52:54-53:16] and his witnessing, as a soldier, the horrible deaths of children and teenagers [11:19, 25:49, 29:21-31:06, 34:20]). One does wonder whether these images are memory or fantasy, but the more troubling question may actually be: how do such images allow us to relate with, and maybe comprehend,

not only the protagonists but also the other subjects within the diegesis, as the titles of both films clearly invite us to do. In *Ratcatcher*, for instance, once the mental images have been identified as such, their interpretation becomes fairly easy: James is worried Ryan might have drowned; James's mother is worried her son might be the dead boy and that she might very well never touch him again, but is relieved to find out he is alive and well. In *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, however, the mental images are explorations of a past that remains enigmatic even with knowledge of the outcome (we get a hint as to what Kevin did a dozen or so minutes into the movie). Our puzzlement is reflected on Tilda Swinton's face, as she expresses Eva's own puzzlement at her child and, more profoundly perhaps, Eva's and our own attempt to determine to what extent Kevin's mental condition was innate or determined by his environment (and notably by his mother's own anxieties). In *You Were Never Really Here*, it is not so much the causality linking Joe's mental images to his present actions that is of interest—clearly, witnessing the horrible deaths of children and teenagers and having an abusive father have traumatized him—as the violence with which they take over this bulk of a man and the defense mechanisms he employs to cope; by possibly picturing his actions through surveillance camera footage, Joe dissociates himself from the violent acts that align him with his father who likewise wielded a hammer—thus alienated visually, he was never really there.

23 If disruptions in point of view serve to problematize both the ontological and epistemological, the two dimensions are intertwined in all Ramsay's feature films: what are these images and what do they tell us? How can we learn from images when their nature remains uncertain? Ramsay's films emphasize not the truth value of the cinematic image (such as that which informed the writings of Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes on photography [6]) but celebrate its ambiguity. The medium would be better suited to express the effects of trauma than to comprehend its causes [7], to express the elusiveness of subjectivity rather than to mimic its workings. In a sense, none of Ramsay's subjects are ever really here (in the cinematic image).

Conclusion

24 The various elements of Ramsay's poetics I have highlighted — the visuals, the dream/fantasy-sequences, slice-of-life sequences, and instability of visual and aural point of view—are made to express the protagonists' troubled subjectivities, and thus invite us to experience them cognitively, emotionally and sensually. They have in common that they aim to disrupt epistemological and ontological boundaries. The point is thus not to facilitate our comprehension of these characters and their worlds, but to allow us to get a sense of the complicated waters of meaning and being they navigate. The focus on ontological and epistemological questions in Ramsay's films would make them typically "postmodernist" in the literary scholar Brian McHale's understanding of the term; indeed, the questioning of the very nature of the image—and in particular Ramsay's resorting to crystal-images —aligns her work with the concerns of poststructuralist thinkers such as Deleuze. This would explain what distinguishes her first two feature films from the more classically naturalist work of Ken Loach or Peter Mullan: Ramsay seems to view realism and naturalism as problematic in a day and age when the notions of real, reality and nature are so unstable. But more profoundly, perhaps Ramsay's films are simply demonstrating that epistemological and ontological questions are bound to be linked by a fundamental paradox—that meaning interrogates being, while being is often seen as a precondition of the production of meaning, as in Descartes's famous "Cogito, ergo sum." As such, being and meaning can only be unstable, and aesthetically speaking, it is difficult to separate objective realism (with its apparent focus on epistemological questions) and expressive realism (with its apparent focus on ontological questions). What Ramsay's poetics of disruption ultimately points to are the multiple interactions between the ontological and the epistemological, the sensible and the intellectual, the psychic and the corporeal, and how an audiovisual medium like cinema can, by token of its plasticity, be the playing field of the wonderful paradox that disruptions are also part of the flow of existence.

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NOTES

1 Robert Morace also concludes that the 2002 film adopts a post-devolutionist and “transnational” (122) perspective while the novel is more typically devolutionist.

2 Anonymous. “For a Glasgow Boy, Rats Are Just the Beginning.” *The New York Times*. October 13, 2000. Section E, Page 27. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/13/movies/film-review-for-a-glasgow-boy-rats-are-just-the-beginning.html>.

3 See chapters 2 and 3 of Michel Pastoureau’s *Le Petit livre des couleurs*.

4 Shriver’s novel makes it clear that this event is actually the tomato-battle of La Tomatina, held every August in Buñol, Spain, and thus a memory of Eva’s life as a globetrotter.

5 Borwell distinguishes intrinstic norms from extrinsic ones, the first being those developed by the film, the latter by exterior factors whether filmic (genre, compositional, narrational conventions) or based on our knowledge of the real world; intrinsic norms can be based on extrinsic ones (151-53).

6 I am, of course, referring to Barthes’s “ça-a-été” (120) and Sontag’s “trace” (154).

7 Harlan Kennedy’s review of *Ratcatcher* in *Film Comment* noted that the film “decoupl[es] “cause and effect and – more important – cause and affect” (7).

RÉSUMÉS

English
If all Ramsay's four feature films all center on troubled characters, my interest lies not so much in their psychology, but in the devices utilized to express these subjectivities. In short, I'd like to determine to what extent Ramsay's project can be seen as an attempt to develop a poetics of troubled subjectivities that operates on the levels of both cognition and sensation. I argue that Ramsay's films demonstrate how objective and expressive realism, two art cinema traditions Bordwell initially opposed, may interact. The difference between objective and expressive realism is by no means radical; it is, rather, a matter of emphasis, of privileging the social over the psychological. For ultimately both traditions aim to capture human experience: expressive realism by objectifying the subjective, objective realism by subjectifying the objective, which, in our post-modern, post-structural world, is already subjective in the first place. My exploration of Ramsay's brand of expressive realism will focus on three elements of her poetics : narrative disruptions, point of view and texture.

Français
Si les quatre longs métrages de Ramsay sont tous centrés sur des personnages troublés, cet article ne porte pas tant sur leur psychologie que sur les dispositifs utilisés pour exprimer leurs subjectivités. Il s'agit de déterminer dans quelle mesure le projet de Ramsay peut être considéré comme une tentative de développer une poétique de subjectivités troublées qui opère à la fois aux niveaux cognitif et sensible. Les films de Ramsay montrent comment peuvent interagir le réalisme objectif et le réalisme expressif, deux traditions du cinéma d'art et d'essai que David Bordwell opposaient. Et pourtant, la différence entre le réalisme objectif et le réalisme expressif n'est en aucun cas radicale ; il s'agit plutôt d'une question de degré, plus précisément de la mesure dans laquelle l'accent est mis sur le social plutôt que sur le psychologique. Car, en fin de compte, les deux traditions visent toutes deux à capturer l'expérience humaine : le réalisme expressif en objectivant le subjectif, le réalisme objectif en subjectivant l'objectif qui, dans notre monde post-moderne et post-structurel, est déjà subjectif en premier lieu. L'exploration du réalisme expressif de Ramsay proposée dans cet article se concentre sur trois éléments de sa poétique : les perturbations narratives, le point de vue et la texture.

INDEX

Mots-clés
Ramsay (Lynne), poétique du cinéma, réalisme objectif, réalisme expressif, subjectivité

Keywords
Ramsay (Lynne), film poetics, objective realism, expressive realism, subjectivity

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II - Troubling the status quo: interrogating race, class and gender on screen

Screening the Troubled South: “Professional Southerners” in Hollywood Before and During the Code Era

Claire Dutriaux

PLAN

The Trouble with “Social Equality”
Entertainment, Pure and Simple
Navigating the Pressures of the Civil Rights Movement
Conclusion

TEXTE

1 In an opinion piece on clichés about the African continent, Alabamian journalist and writer James Saxon Childers bemoaned the stereotypes that he felt painted a wrong picture of the South, and especially of Southerners, who could only be portrayed either as backward hillbillies and rednecks or as moonlight-and-magnolia types:

> Any Southerner who goes North finds that many Yankees have all sorts of wild ideas about us and about our way of living. Isn’t the reason for this chiefly the movies that are made about the South, the books that are written about the South, and the newspaper stories that are published in the North about the South?

2 Most of the newspaper stories are sensational. Most of the books emphasize the sensational, the picturesque, the bizarre in the South. Most of the movies have to do with banjo-playing mountain folk who say “gol darn” or simpering little idiots in hoop skirts who sigh “Y’all” to the moon and the magnolias. In other words, the South to the editor, the author and the scenario writer, is stereotyped: a gun, a gal, a jug, a noose, and you have the South [1]!

3 Childers’ article was published in 1939. The films the author had in mind were almost certainly *Jezebel* (William Wyler, 1938) and *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), and perhaps *I Am a Fugitive*

from a Chain Gang (Mervyn LeRoy, 1932) or *They Won't Forget* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1937). Southern state and municipal censors especially remembered Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* (1932), a novel and a play which had toured the entire country, and which they viewed as a humiliating and untruthful representation of Southerners. Southern censors hated *Tobacco Road*, and some tried to prevent the play from showing in the South [2]; it subsequently served as a comparison device to assess the acceptability of later films [3]. The proliferation of stereotypes and clichés about the region and its inhabitants on the silver screen might lead one to think that no Southerners existed in Hollywood to advise studio executives on filmic content. Yet Southerners were present, and they were many, as Robert Jackson has outlined in his comprehensive study of Hollywood Southerners [4], which begs the question of the impact these Southerners had on the industry.

4 Contrary to what contemporary audiences might suppose, White Southerners in Pre-Code Hollywood did have a measure of agency over what appeared on the movie screen, and they managed to nuance certain representations of the South. Called "professional Southerners" [5], these white men acted as ambassadors from the South in Hollywood. According to Thomas Cripps, they were asked to provide the studios with "advice on local color and racial etiquette" [6].

5 The phrase "professional Southerner" referred to Southerners who would explain the South to the North; film scholars and historians often point to several key "agents" in Hollywood whose often unstated roles were to act as mediators and negotiators between Hollywood and the South just before and during the Production Code era. All born in the South, some were prolific screenwriters (Nunnally Johnson, Lamar Trotti at Fox, William Faulkner at various studios over a period of twenty years), film directors (King Vidor or Clarence Brown), theater chain owners (Steve Lynch), or studio executives (Y. Frank Freeman at Paramount); others worked at the Production Code Administration and were sometimes consulted to avoid tensions between Hollywood and the South – especially Southern state and city censors (Lamar Trotti, Francis Harmon). As "expatriates" in Hollywood who remained Southerners at heart, these white men walked a tight line between advocating for the South and its identity and condemning some of the South's most violent practices, from slavery

to segregation and lynching. In various ways, they were all concerned with the notion of "trouble" and its paradoxes, as movies about the South could not completely ignore the region's troubling past and present.

6 Concomitantly, as part of the Hollywood film industry, these professional Southerners needed to ensure motion pictures would not stir up Southern audiences, because the industry relied on local exhibitors to pick up the movies and show them in the South. How did these white men collectively manage to convey representations of the South that would be perceived as authentic, without offending all or part of the country south of the Mason-Dixon Line?

The Trouble with "Social Equality"

7 During the first half of the twentieth century, the South was considered a foreign, exotic land by much of the rest of the country, and Hollywood producers and studios saw the Southern market as such. The ways and customs of the South were different from the rest of the nation: some of the laws themselves — such as the Jim Crow laws on segregation — were specific to the region in the twentieth century. Some southern citizens' attachment to the old ways and beliefs regarding slavery and the myth of the Lost Cause definitely set the region apart from the rest of the country. The success of and the controversy surrounding D.W. Griffith's racist masterpiece, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) also meant that future representations of the South on screen continued to be influenced by his work.

8 Representing a handful of states and a mostly rural population [7], it is tempting to think that the South's state of affairs may not have really influenced studio decisions. However, Production Code Administration records and the work of Southerners in the Hollywood studio system show the opposite to be true. Studio executives regarded the South as a region of paramount importance, as it was considered capable of making or breaking a film nationally. Such views were mistaken, as Thomas Cripps has evidenced in his revisionist history of the myth of the Southern box office [8]. In the words of Matthew H. Bernstein, "more than any other region, the South retained a singular

position in the national film marketplace as a geographic area with distinctive tastes and sensibilities" [9].

9 Records show that the main point of contention concerning the South's relationship with Hollywood was the depiction of race and race issues in movies. Local censor boards and exhibitors did not want to see any suggestion of what they termed "social equality" (that is, racial equality) on screen. The reason often stated was that such depictions could cause public unrest in theaters and beyond. Objecting to the fact that a black man stands up to a white man in the film, Atlanta's unofficial censor, Mrs. Zella Alonzo Richardson, warned that the Atlanta release of *In This Our Life* (John Huston, 1942) could ignite race riots, the likes of which Atlanta had known in 1906: "race riots… will come at any minute under more than slight provocation". [10] Never mind that *The Birth of a Nation*, the film that had caused the most racial trouble in American streets including in the South, was one which emphasized racial inequality. What mattered was that the controversy surrounding *The Birth of a Nation* left Hollywood with a lingering sense that the depiction of racial issues, particularly in the South, could potentially lead to trouble, and that these were best avoided altogether. The Production Code Administration regularly received letters from Southerners who were disturbed by what they viewed as Hollywood's propaganda and interference every time a picture with African-American actors in non-servile roles was released. Such situations led to Hollywood's reliance on the advice of "professional Southerners".

10 A closer look at the work of one such Southerner, Lamar Trotti (1900-1952), will shed light on the vexed role of the "professional Southerner". Trotti started his career as a reporter based in Atlanta. His writing skills were noticed by Jason Joy, and he quickly became his personal assistant in the Association of Motion Picture Producers Studio Relations Committee (SRC), where he would review films and pass along advice to the studios, before starting a twenty-year screenwriting career at Fox Film Corporation, which later became Twentieth-Century Fox. Trotti was a proud Southerner, and reportedly once said: "Being Georgian became for me at birth an incurable disease. And I can recall very few times in my life when I haven't been proud of that fact" [11]. During his time working for the SRC and the Production Code Administration, he rapidly became

identified by Southerners as the person to write to if what they saw on screen displeased them. Often the recipient of the irate letters sent by theater owners or local censors and church groups, Trotti passed their letters on to others in the studio system [12].

11 Trotti regularly corresponded with Mrs. Zella Alonzo Richardson, who worked in the Atlanta Better Films Committee and then later became the city's censor in the Atlanta Board of Review in 1925. They knew one another personally, as Trotti's sister, Frances McCormack, worked with Mrs. Alonzo Richardson for several periods of time in the BFC and replaced her on the Board of Review when she went on vacation [13].

12 Richardson's letters to Trotti and others at the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) and at the PCA frequently concerned the representation of race issues in films. For instance, in a memorandum Trotti wrote to Governor Milliken, the then-executive secretary of the MPPDA, he quoted a letter from Richardson about the release of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Harry A. Pollard, 1927), a film adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 abolitionist novel:

> Colonel Joy has asked me about my reaction to the appearance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the South. I have to write the truth, I think it would be suicidal: I called three members of my Board, this after I had written my own opinion for I did not want to be biased. Everyone agreed that to send this South would increase sectional feeling where it already exists or create it where it does not, that the picture has no historical value [14].

13 Three years later, the Theatre Owners of North and South Carolina sent Will H. Hays a resolution which stated:

> Realizing that much of our success is dependent upon the manner in which talking pictures are received by our Southern patrons and realizing that our Southern men and women are resentful of producers mixing white and black races indiscriminately in production, be it resolved that this association goes on record in questioning the producers, through the Hays Organization, to refrain from using negroes in scenes with whites, excepting in a servile capacity (…) [15].

14 The files at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) library show that studios, directors, and members of the Production Code Administration received mail from Southern censors and filmgoers disgruntled by depictions of "social equality". However, Southern audiences were not the only ones who were greatly displeased by what they saw on screen. Producer and studio executive Darryl Zanuck received a particularly vicious letter from one Roger C. Foss, from Minnesota, upon the release of *No Way Out* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950)[16], a film about the racial violence which erupts when a black doctor treats a white prisoner who later dies. With such reactions, it is no wonder that the industry sought the advice of Southerners on how to deal with matters likely to trouble them most – "social (read: racial) equality" on screen.

Entertainment, Pure and Simple

15 Professional Southerners' responses to outright (and outraged) racism from local censors ranged from ambivalence to resistance, a state of affairs mirrored in the movies produced by the studios under their guidance. Generally speaking, the most influential "professional Southerners" in the Hollywood studio system advised against any storyline that would disrupt the South, which meant that African-American performers and Southern stories which dealt with race issues got virtually no screen time; when they did, care would be taken to avoid going against Southern censorship rules, such as scenes where a black actor touches a white actress. Despite the fact that he was later credited for writing the screenplay of *The Ox-Bow Incident*, an anti-lynching movie, Lamar Trotti leaned on the "conservative side" concerning African-Americans' rights and representation on screen.

16 In a memorandum about *Two Kinds of Women* (William C. De Mille, 1932), Trotti wrote:

> In the scene at the party where there is a negro woman entertainer, this woman has been shown well-dressed, taking a drink with the other guests. It is our opinion that the Southern states particularly will object to the mingling of blacks and whites in such circumstances, and changes will be made in the scene accordingly[17].

17 While this memorandum shows that Lamar Trotti did not challenge the South's views, and did not push for the studios to challenge them at that point in time, his response to Mrs. Alonzo Richardson's letter about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was more nuanced. He stated that her view was that "of a great many Southerners" but that it was "the wrong view". But his reason for not agreeing with Mrs. Alonzo Richardson was strange in its dismissiveness: "It is not mine (my view) because the appearance of Uncle Tom's Cabin could not possibly mean anything to me but an evening not to go to the movies. I've never seen it nor read it. It used to be a joke that no Southerner would ever admit he had anyhow" [18].

18 This position of indifference towards the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* signaled to the MPPDA that most Southerners would not see the movie, which signified that the movie industry should steer clear of any representation of the South's past or present "troubles" on screen if it wanted to keep the Southern market. This decision is precisely what Trotti advised at the end of his memo: "I think Universal should kind of soft pedal its Southern business with this picture". His opinion was taken very seriously – the memo was copied to Colonel Jason S. Joy and to Will H. Hays. Two years later, Trotti's reaction to the all-black cast of *Hallelujah* showed his prejudices in an even clearer light, but also showed that he was aware of his own racial bias:

> I hardly know what to say about "Hallelujah" by King Vidor. If the characters were whites, I would think very definitely that Vidor was treading on very dangerous grounds – that of a renegade parson running off with a strumpet, seeing her die and brutally murdering her lover; But such is the influence of my rearing in the South, I can't get excited about this in the lives of negroes. We think such things happen, everyone seems to accept them as natural and no one bothers about them [19].

19 Later, Trotti recommended that "people interested in the advancement of the negro race" should be consulted in order to avoid them "making a holler". Trotti clearly did not consider himself as a supporter of the "advancement of the negro race." He mainly focused on the fact that white audiences would probably not be interested in seeing the movie, which we may venture was received as the most

significant argument against producing pictures with all-black casts by the movie industry.

20 It would be a mistake to conclude that Trotti and his professional Southerner brethren objected to any representation of African-Americans on screen: rather, they advocated for a particular type of representation. A press article in the *Atlanta Constitution*, praising the film *Can This Be Dixie?* (George Marshall, 1936), whose script was co-authored by Lamar Trotti, was particularly telling about Trotti's views the representation of race in the South:

> Sally Forth has been informed that "Can This Be Dixie?" will be especially appealing to those residing below the Mason-Dixon line. One scene is worthy of mentioning, as it will depict a real cotton field where the darkies are picking cotton. Jane, all blackened with a little black wig and wearing a smart black satin suit with a cutaway coat, makes an attractive figure as she enters the scene as the little preacher and mounting the real pulpit and standing with outstretched arms, with a huge Bible's open pages before her, sings "If You Want to Go to Heaven, Follow Me." Below her are rows of pickaninnies in starched muslin, with their plaits tied with gay bows, and with their escorts, some resembling preachers in swallow-tail coats and gray side whiskers, while others are in striped shirts and white trousers, dressed for church, raising their arms and voices in happy abandon answering her song [20].

21 It is clear that Lamar Trotti understood what would work well in the South commercially, and what would not – hence his advocating for filmic representations of race that did not challenge the Southern status quo. Trotti held the view that the South needed to deal with its own troubles with no interference from the North [21]. In that sense he held the same views as a great many white Southerners in the 1930s and 1940s, who saw laws promoting civil rights for African-Americans as interference from the North in the South's affairs, preventing the South from enjoying "racial harmony".

22 Paramount Vice-President Y. Frank Freeman seems to have generally held the same opinions as Trotti. Paramount was regarded as a conservative studio, headed by Freeman, also viewed as a conservative. He was called an "unreconstructed Southerner" by Walter White, of the NAACP, according to Thomas Cripps. [22] The Southern

character "Y. Frank Freemont" in the Paramount musical film *Star-Spangled Banner* (George Marshall, 1942) was modeled after him – sporting a very heavy Dixie accent, and drinking Coca-Cola, which testified to the fact that Freeman's southernness was a defining characteristic of the businessman in the studio. PCA records and national press articles do not show any attitude of his that was decisively against showing the South's troubles, but they do show that he was a shrewd businessman who understood what would work in the South and what would not, and that he was a staunch supporter of the Production Code and the notion that cinema was entertainment, pure and simple – which usually meant steering clear of provocative silver screen features. In his keynote address to the Screen Publicists Guild in 1951 Freeman declared that "[his] mind was closed to anything which could not be readily classified as mass-appeal entertainment"[23]. In August, a *New York Times* piece had already described him as a Southern Baptist and quoted him as saying "In the present unsettled state of the world, people need something to grasp. Since motion pictures exert a vast influence, I feel the industry has a certain responsibility to meet this need, so long as the screen's initial purpose – to entertain – is preserved"[24]. Controversial motion pictures would not have fit in his understanding of mass entertainment. Thomas Cripps, reporting a conversation he had on the phone with Nunnally Johnson, wrote that he often sank ideas by warning "it would never go down in the South."[25] David Owen confirmed in his article on Luigi Luraschi's role at Paramount that Y. Frank Freeman was "very cold to the idea" of including more African-American performers in Paramount features because, in Luraschi's words, "he [felt] it [would] create a problem for him domestically." Luraschi reported that Freeman required all productions with African-American performers to be checked by him and he would decide whether or not they would see the light of day[26]. One picture he had heavily promoted in 1940 as vice-president in charge of production was *The Biscuit Eater*, whose synopsis revolved around the story of two young boys, one black and one white, raising a puppy in Georgia. The film meant to show simple, perfect racial harmony, showing that black children and white children could be perfectly happy and friendly in the South. However, as Bernice Kliman has shown,[27] inequality between the two boys persists in subtle ways, with Text, the black boy, always taking his cue from Lon, the white

boy, and in overt ways with depictions of crude black characters associated with threats and liquor. For professional Southerners at the production level, racial harmony did not mean racial equality – it meant black characters "knowing their place," which meant that they knew not to directly challenge the status quo.

Navigating the Pressures of the Civil Rights Movement

23 Overall, the movies up until the 1950s broadly reflected a white Southern point of view concerning race, because the advisers often were themselves proud Southern white males, but also because the men who headed the Production Code Administration were wary of igniting any sort of outraged response from audiences, which was a constant preoccupation for them. Joseph I. Breen thus wrote in a letter to Harry Zehner regarding the casting of *Show Boat* in 1935 with Paul Robeson: "I think you should be extremely careful, however, not to indicate any physical contact between the white woman and the negro man for the reason that many people know Aunt Jemima is a white woman and might be repulsed by the sight of her being fondled by a man who is a negro"[28]. The wording here, "repulsed," "fondled," shows that it was not merely an issue of abiding by anti-miscegenation legislation but also a matter of showing the South, and the rest of the US, that white women were safe from black men and that the industry abided by this rule. Motion pictures that directly addressed the South's troubles were dangerous territory, as Trotti eloquently wrote about *The Mating Call* (James Cruze, 1928), a movie about the Ku Klux Klan:

> I have one big thought about *The Mating Call* – that whatever we do is dangerous. As decent people, we cannot be allied with a picture which accepts, or at least condones lawlessness as this one certainly does. As businesspeople, we can't properly afford to alienate a large group of citizens who thrive on attacks. The Klan developed, not through its friends, but through its enemies[29].

24 Trotti outlined here what many Southerners felt – that the depiction of the South's troubles was best avoided altogether, so as not to fan

the flames of an already explosive situation. Here the phrasing also reflects what many professional Southerners and "businesspeople" condemned, that is to say the "lawlessness" of mob rule, without ever linking mob violence to racial violence and African-American suffering [30].

25 As Ellen C. Scott remarked in her book *Cinema Civil Rights*, the Hollywood industry gradually shifted its policies regarding race issues and racial violence during and after WWII, due to several factors: the pressure of organizations such as the NAACP, the growing Civil Rights movement, and a change in MPAA hierarchy, as Breen went on leave several times and Will H. Hays was replaced by Eric Johnston. The principal white professional Southerner in residence was by then Francis Harmon, hailed by Joseph I. Breen himself as a "highly intelligent" man from Mississippi, who had lived "many years in the "deep South" and knew "the so-called Negro problems thoroughly" [31]. In 1937, at the request of Joseph Breen, Francis Harmon had written a memo entitled "Suggested Guiding Principles in Connection with Motion Pictures Dealing with Negroes and Whites," which was approved by Will H. Hays and followed by many studios thereafter [32]. The memo stated in particular that if race was evoked, "members of both races" (black and white), should be seen working together to solve the issue, or "members of both races" should be shown as attackers, so as to avoid the singling out and unfair representation of African-Americans on screen. In particular, Harmon insisted that "sectional aspects of the interracial problem needed to be watched also. Examples: a) Not all southern negroes should be shown as excessively humble while negroes in the north are pictured as independent. b) Not all southern white people are overbearing and prejudiced, and all northerners are not unprejudiced and courteous" [33]. This part of the memo shows how much influence one professional Southerner had on representations of the South and its inhabitants, ensuring that depictions of the South's most racist elements would be toned down so as not to indict an entire region.

26 Producers and directors seem to have heeded Harmon's advice, and Joe Breen consistently referred producers and directors to Harmon's memo (as he did with Walt Disney for *Song of the South* in 1944). Harmon's influence through his memo can be felt in a number of pictures from the late thirties to the early sixties, all of which more or

less always provide a form of mitigation for Southern characters, or frame prejudice as a national and not simply a Southern phenomenon, which was a sure way of rallying the South to Hollywood's cause. For instance, in *The Ox-Bow Incident*, the most violent character is that of Major Tetley, who is also called a "renegade who never even fought the War" by Gil Carter, thus signaling that he is not a true Southerner at heart. Redemption is shown in the character of his son, Gerald, whose guilt indicates that the South wants to atone for the sins of its Confederate fathers. In *Intruder in the Dust* (Clarence Brown, 1949), the lynching of Lucas Beauchamp is stopped by Miss Habersham, played by Elizabeth Patterson, a white Tennessee native who starred in a great many Southern roles. *Intruder in the Dust* was one of the rare Faulkner novels dealing with race and lynching that made it onto the screen without much controversy, which is certainly partly due to the emphasis on a white woman preventing a mob from lynching a black man by standing between them in front of the jail. Southern censors and audiences often bemoaned what they called "the lack of authenticity" or the "phoniness" of motion pictures about the South. Thanks to a screenplay from a known Southern author (Faulkner), and a director, Clarence Brown, who had lived in the South, to filming in Oxford, Mississippi, to Southern actors and actresses, and above all to a Southern character who was a paragon of fairness and virtue, *Intruder in the Dust* was shown in the South with no eliminations at all – which was not the fate of other films of the 1949 race cycle [34]. By having a lone Southern character stand up to racists, the movie avoided indicting a whole region but also avoided forwarding any structural change in Southern society. Clarence Brown even mused in an interview published by the *Los Angeles Times* that the film could do well without the race angle and no African American characters: "However, he continued, 'Intruder' is far from being a purely racial affair. If all the characters were whites we'd still have had a pretty good whodunit" [35].

27 In comparison, *Pinky* (Elia Kazan, 1949), a film about a light-skinned black woman passing for white who returns South to care for her family, spurred more controversy, arguably because it showed the South in a bad light, as a region incapable of progress, and the characters were embodied by "foreigners" to the Southern mind. In 1949,

Francis Harmon had actually recommended that Zanuck go further by depicting Pinky as the result of a rape of a black woman by a white man, a situation which he felt had been prevalent in the South – but this time, Zanuck did not follow the professional Southerner's advice [36]. It seems Harmon was one of the rare professional Southerners who tried to change screen depictions of race issues in the South and make them more unflinching, but it would take more than a decade, long after he left the PCA in 1952, for movies about the South to tackle race issues in a more provocative manner.

28 In 1959, Universal-International encountered trouble in advertising Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* and chose to advertise movies differently for the Southern region and for the rest of the country. A *Variety* piece published in 1959 read:

> For sections of the south where the segregation issue is highly controversial, UI has a different ad campaign. A UI rep said that this policy had been adopted for purely commercial reasons and not to avoid any conflict on the segregation problem. It has been found, he declared, that white southerners avoid films that are advertised as dealing with the race problem [37].

29 This *Variety* piece testifies to the way in which the South's troubles had to remain muted or obscured, for fear that the movies would not do well commercially, just as most professional Southerners had advised in previous decades. It also shows that, as late as 1959, great care was taken by some major studios not to offend a still-sensitive and important, Southern market – showing that Thomas Cripps's myth of the Southern box office actually extended well beyond the 1940s for certain studios. On the contrary, other studios would seek to expose the troubles of the South, like Twentieth Century Fox, nevertheless still making sure that depictions would not go too far.

Conclusion

30 Professional Southerners, who generally held executive studio positions, prominent positions in the Production Code Administration, or directed movies, had some agency over the content of movies – in the sense that they made movies palatable to Southern audiences, which ensured that the same movies would be palatable to American audi-

ences as a whole. It is clear that Darryl F. Zanuck at Twentieth Century Fox gave some of his most inflammatory script ideas to his Southern screenwriters to rewrite into acceptable narratives – making the scripts a little less troubling than the original novels, but still controversial enough that the movies would draw crowds into theaters. However, as these professional Southerners, who were white males, evolved in a Hollywood system overwhelmingly dominated by white males, most productions about the South and its race issues contributed to making African-American struggles invisible, promoting a form of status quo. Productions which directly addressed race issues and the South's troubles revolved around the notion of white guilt towards racism, with scenarios that built up white characters standing up to the region's most racist elements, such as Miss Habersham in *Intruder in the Dust*. What remains of Lamar Trotti's anti-lynching movie, *The Ox-Bow Incident*, is essentially an admission of white guilt, as shown in the letter sequence. Aesthetically, the film seems to indicate that the same injustices will be repeated over and over again, with the end sequence mirroring the opening sequence.

31 The question remains as to why the opinion of these professional Southerners would matter so much, when the Southern box office was not that important to the Hollywood industry as a whole. Southern theaters and their patrons did not represent a significant part of the movie industry's theaters and patrons, according to the figures published by the *Motion Picture Almanac* in 1937 – the five major "Southern" cities (Atlanta, Charlotte, New Orleans, Dallas, Memphis) accounted for roughly 3,000 of the roughly 19,000 theaters in operation then [38]. What might provide an explanation for such importance given to the South's reaction to filmic representations, beyond the fact that they possibly also corresponded to widely-held views about not stirring up trouble with depictions of race, was that these reactions helped the Hollywood industry gauge whether the film would appeal to the nation as a whole. In other words, what pleased the South would please the United States, which would also ensure that there would be no legal challenges to the release of a movie anywhere, saving the studios time and money. Another explanation may be that Hollywood films faced censorship boards all over the world, some of them just as stringent and sometimes even more

so than Southern censor review boards. British censors seem to have often censored films along the same lines as their Southern counterparts [39], perhaps in an attempt to avoid stirring up trouble in the British colonies over representations that promoted "social equality". Documents from the MPPDA show that the PCA made no distinction between US censor boards and foreign censor boards [40]. One can wonder, therefore, whether the South did not represent a way to measure whether motion pictures would be accepted worldwide, a first step before venturing on to foreign markets.

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40 "It is, likewise, enormously dangerous from the standpoint of political censorship, both in this country and abroad." Correspondence between Will H. Hays and Joseph I. Breen, March 16, 1938, MPPDA Digital Archive Record #1196 Reel 12.

RÉSUMÉS

English

The term "professional Southerner" was used by film scholars and historians to refer to several "agents" in Hollywood, whose often unstated roles were to act as mediators and negotiators between Hollywood and the South in the Production Code era. All born in the South, some were prolific screenwriters (Nunnally Johnson, Lamar Trotti, William Faulkner), theater chain owners (Steve Lynch), studio executives (Y. Frank Freeman) and others were purposefully hired by the PCA to appease tensions between the South – especially Southern state and city censors – and Hollywood (Francis Harmon). As "expatriates" in Hollywood who remained Southerners at heart, they walked a tight line between advocating for the South and its identity and condemning the South's most violent practices, from segregation to lynching. They were indeed, most concerned with the notion of "trouble" and its paradoxes, wanting to show some of the South's troubles, while at the same time making the motion pictures not "troubling" or "troublesome" for the South's audiences.

Français

L'expression « Professional Southerner » (sudiste professionnel) a fréquemment été utilisée par les spécialistes et les historiens du cinéma pour désigner plusieurs « agents » à Hollywood, dont le rôle officieux était de servir de médiateurs entre Hollywood et le Sud des États-Unis avant et pendant l'époque du Code de production. Tous nés dans le Sud, certains étaient des scénaristes prolifiques (Nunnally Johnson, Lamar Trotti, William Faulkner), des propriétaires de chaînes de cinéma (Steve Lynch) ou des producteurs (Y. Frank Freeman). D'autres furent engagés par la PCA pour apaiser les tensions entre le Sud, en particulier les censeurs des villes et des États du Sud, et Hollywood (Francis Harmon). En tant qu' « expatriés » à Hollywood, restés sudistes dans l'âme, ils se sont efforcés de défendre le Sud et son identité tout en tentant parfois de condamner les pratiques les plus

violentes du Sud, de la ségrégation au lynchage. Ils étaient en effet très préoccupés par la notion de « trouble » et ses paradoxes, voulant montrer certains des tourments du Sud, tout en faisant en sorte que les films ne troublent pas les spectateurs du Sud.

INDEX

Mots-clés
sudiste professionnel, race, code de production, censure

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The Ku Klux Klan on Screen and the Troubles of Reception

Delphine Letort

PLAN

Politics on The Burning Cross
Emotions *Betrayed*
Satirical BlacKkKlansman
Conclusion

TEXTE

1 Few directors have dared to delve into the dark waters of the Ku Klux Klan, a secret organization with a political aim which the former Grand Wizard David Duke made public by seeking election to the U.S. Senate in 2016 as a Republican candidate in Louisiana. While D.W Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* was instrumental in promoting the supremacist ideology of the KKK, being used as a propaganda tool by the recruiters of the KKK ('the Keagles') in the 1920s, few films attempt to challenge the politics of the KKK. The threat posed by the 'Invisible Empire' is often symbolized by cross or church burnings in films that resist its power through portraying its knights as individuals whose extremist racist rhetoric is confined to fiction and to the past. *Mississippi Burning* (Alan Parker, 1988) retraces the FBI's fight against the KKK in the context of the civil rights movement, making the African Americans of the South the passive victims of racist violence.

2 *The Burning Cross* (Walter Colmes, 1947), *Betrayed* (Costa-Gavras, 1988), and *BlacKkKlansman* (Spike Lee, 2018) dramatize the activities of the hooded racist sect by drawing attention to its individual members. They adopt different narrative and representational strategies in an effort to show the inner workings of the organization and how its members negotiate their identity as white nationalists. The films show that the KKK relies on visual (performances) and aural tropes (slurs) to construct its supremacist discourse and gather its

ranks. Each of them provoked trouble on the level of reception – *The Burning Cross* was even censored in several states –, suggesting that they strike a touchy chord among American audiences (whereas *Mississippi Burning* was hailed for being based on 'real facts'). This presentation aims to question the sense of discomfort produced by these films investigating into the KKK.

3 Filming the Klan has always been a source of controversy since David D.W. Griffith claimed "historical veracity" in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which he presented as a "faithful representation of the events of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras"[1]. Griffith celebrated the courage of Klan members who gathered in vigilante groups to bring justice and order when politics turned into chaos during Reconstruction, following the ideologically biased version written by the historians of the Dunning school[2]. Tom Rice writes at length about the relationship between the film and the Klan, which exploited the imagery provided by Griffith to shape a culture of whiteness: "The Klan imagined the film, and the discourses around it, as a means of shaping public behavior, of defining and creating Klansmen and, by extension, American citizens".[3] A lot has been written on the ideological impact of a film which became instrumental in selling KKK membership; Rice adds: "The group utilized *The Birth of a Nation* throughout the decade, whether arranging its own screenings, making very public appearances at cinemas showing the film, or using the discussions surrounding the film to define and promote itself within American society"[4]. The film permitted contemporary white viewers to reconnect with a historical record that Klansmen pride themselves in, providing "a shared, yet wholly personal experience of whiteness, one that would be immediately and intimately familiar and recognizable to its intended audience [...providing] a collective memory, rooted not in nationality or region but in race"[5].

4 Michael T. Martin contends that *The Birth of a Nation* had a traumatizing impact on white audiences by conjuring a conspiracy to build a black empire that aimed at legitimizing the use of terror strategies by the Ku Klux Klan against black people[6]. The film nonetheless redeemed the trauma by offering the shared experience of a victorious Klan, transcending the sense of defeat in the confederate states after the Civil War into a new collective sentiment of solidarity. The success of the film cannot only be measured by its enduring box

office profits[7] but also by the audience's behavior. Melvyn Stokes quotes from different critics that remarked the unusual emotional engagement of viewers who found themselves "caught up in the enthusiasm of 'an audience that cheered and wept and sung'"[8]. Klan sequences not only triggered frenzied applauses, but the film prompted the revival of the organization in the early 1920s. This point demonstrates, if need be, that audiences were enthralled with the spectacle of white men parading in white robes whom they felt ideologically complicit with. The filmed rituals articulated a unique perspective into a group whose members pledge secrecy. The film had a polarizing effect; Michael T. Martin argues that "Griffith's calculated schematic was to simplify race relations for white audience to a black/white binary."[9] While he underlines the traumatic impact of the film as regards white viewers, one may also posit that the multiple incidents of violence happening around the screenings, some of them organized in the privacy of one's home to galvanize Klan supporters, was a traumatic experience for black viewers. Tom Rice notes that: "In one noted example in Lafayette, Indiana, Henry Brock fired three bullets into the body of Edward Mason, a fifteen-year-old African American high school student, 'after witnessing *The Birth of the Nation*'"[10].

5 *The Birth of a Nation* has left such a traumatic mark on American cinema and viewership that every new film dealing with the Klan triggers controversies. The malaise elicited by filmic representations of the Klan is not only rooted in the organization's deadly historical record, but it is also related to the possible danger of reactivating the ideological power of Griffith's film. The Ku Klux Klan's self-produced imagery draws on *The Birth of a Nation*, especially the white robes that serve to differentiate it from other fraternal groups[11]. While African American directors have consistently challenged and countered the film's racist biases by reinventing black models and figures for the cinema, portraying the Klan on screen remains fraught with trouble. Few directors have dared to delve into the dark waters of the Ku Klux Klan – and the films that try to depict the organization from the inside have met with mixed reactions.

6 *The Burning Cross* (Walter Colmes, 1947), *Betrayed* (Costa-Gavras, 1988), and *BlacKkKlansman* (Spike Lee, 2018) are three films that dramatize the activities of the hooded racist sect to question the

ideological underpinning of individual beliefs and actions. They adopt different narrative and representational strategies in an effort to show the inner workings of the organization and how its members negotiate their identity as white nationalists. Using both contextual and textual analysis, this chapter examines three films that dramatize the Ku Klux Klan's visual performances and populist discourses in an attempt to debunk its mythology. While the films are clearly critical of the KKK and conceived as a delayed cinematic response to *The Birth of a Nation*, each has provoked trouble on the level of reception, albeit for different reasons that will be investigated here. This chapter aims to demonstrate that the sense of discomfort produced by these films about the KKK is determined by the specificity of the narrative and filmic devices but also testifies to an enduring troubled political climate.

Politics on The Burning Cross

7 Although *The Burning Cross* was conceived as a response to *The Birth of a Nation*, the film was banned in several states (including Virginia and Ohio) by censorship boards that feared its inflammatory potential. The film shows how returning WW2 veteran Johnny Larrimer is manipulated by white nationalists into pledging obedience to the secret principles of the Ku Klux Klan. The leader of the local chapter Howard Gibbons's political speeches about "Americans Only" strikes a chord with the young man who has sacrificed six years of his life to fight for his country and comes home to a city where no job is waiting. The film portrays social progress among minorities: Italian American Tony Areni has acquired the local gas station and is about to marry Larrimer's former sweetheart Doris Greene; black farmer Charlie West's economic achievements are symbolized by his driving his own car. *The Burning Cross* highlights the capitalist and class underpinnings of the supremacist discourse: a seller complains about the competition with a grower whose products are cheaper, whereas Johnny feels more and more victimized as a jobless veteran. His identity as a white male American is compromised by his status as an unemployed man whose war commitment is hardly a source of pride ("I never gave any blood. I never got even a scratch."). He finds himself wandering around the city on foot and on his own whereas his former friends have built themselves a family life; Johnny's voice-over

adds a noir touch at the beginning of the film, pointing out his growing frustration with his own failure.

8 Dramatic music starts when Johnny signs his application form to the KKK, indicating that he thereby launches a narrative beyond his own agency. The dissolve between Larrimer's KKK application and a newspaper headline ("Vandals loot and wreck Undstrom's flower shop") signifies the implication of the KKK into the assault – and the possible involvement of Larrimer himself in the deed. Gibbons's nativist rhetoric points out a guilty party for the American working men's plight: "Don't let your birthright taken from you by foreigners who have contributed only their presence to our glorious country." Words lead to actions in the film which shows more and more graphic violence – including a sequence where a man is tarred and feathered as a warning to leave town within 24 hours and another one where Tony is shot in the back. By the time the Klan burns Charlie West's farm to the ground and his family to death, Larrimer wishes to regain his freedom but he has become a prisoner of his oath to the Ku Klux Klan. The film portrays how an ordinary man converts to the Klan and finds himself trapped by the intolerant policy of an organization that accepts "no resignation."

9 Low-key lighting adds to the atmosphere of secrecy around the Ku Klux Klan night gatherings. When Larrimer falls for the nativist rhetoric of the 100% American speeches delivered by Gibbons, who helps him get a job in a machine shop where some workers ("rats" in the mouth of Gibbons) hold picket lines to protest low wages, Larrimer's father speaks up in the name of American ideals: "Since when is it sense to favor one group of Americans at the expense of another?" Walter Colmes questions the ideological tenets of the KKK through following the psychological journey of Johnny Larrimer into an organization that promises to restore the 'honor' of its knights; however, the film underlines the causal relationship between the fraternal values foregrounded by Klan members and the atrocities they lead to. Larrimer finds himself entangled in situations that he disapproves of, realizing too late that he was manipulated into believing that his whiteness was deserving of privileges.

10 While *The Birth of a Nation* avoided showing how a black man was lynched by a vigilante crowd that aimed to serve its own justice,

Walter Colmes depicts the inner workings of the Ku Klux Klan and breaks the veil of secrecy around its secret rituals. Darkness enshrouds the initiation ceremony of five individuals into the KKK, expressively conveying the threats harbored by the Klan's code of blind obedience. The scene takes place at night at the foot of a fiery cross – "the emblem of that sincere unselfish devotedness of all Klansmen for the sacred principles we have espoused," explains one of the Klansmen. The screen is so dark that the standing Klansmen appear like ghostly figures in the background, blindly following the guiding male voice of the Grand Wizard directing the ceremony from the foot of the cross. His backlit figure enhances his authority and the dark power the Klan enshrouds itself in. Five white men are introduced and identified as "strangers" who have expressed the desire to be initiated into the Klan. Standing in line face to the camera, they are about to be interrogated by the Grand Wizard but are expected to answer in the affirmative to every question. The ceremony aims to make sure that the men give up all personal volition to fit in the group and abide by the Klan's principles. The mise-en-scene conveys the strict order within the Invisible Empire, a group that aims to conquer by acting in the shadows. The Klan's costume makes individual features disappear behind a common goal – maintaining white power by all means available, including the terror techniques symbolized by their outfits and the burning cross[12]. The men behind the masks answer in unison that all betrayal will be punished, for a traitor "would be immediately banished and disgraced from the invisible Empire without fear or favor and direful things would befall him." Speaking like a choir from behind the future members, the Klansmen embody a threat for each other and a tool of internal surveillance symbolized by their eyes. The camera pans over the faces of the men who are about to take the oath of allegiance and captures the flames of the fiery cross reflecting on their skin, intensifying the solemnity of the moment:

> You will place your left hand over your heart, raise your right hand to Heavens, You will say 'I' pronounce your full name and repeat after me: 'I […] in the presence of God and Man, most solemnly pledge, promise and swear, that I will faithfully obey the constitution and laws of the Ku Klux Klan and will render at all time loyal respect and steadfast support for the edicts, rulings and instructions of the

> Imperial Wizard thereof. I swear that I will promptly pay all demands made upon me to defray expenses of my Klansmanship at such time as they are presented. I most sacredly vow and positively swear that I will never reveal any secret or secret information of the KKK all to which I have sworn by this oath I will seal with my blood. So help me God.

11 The presence of the robed and hooded ghostly Klansmen in the background creates an eerie atmosphere, participating in the construction of the symbolical power of the Klan. The men gain power from hiding their individuality behind costumes that erase their physical traits, making it impossible to distinguish any of them although their speaking enhances their masculine voice; the robe also "appears as a leveling and equalizing instrument" that does away with "social, economic, or political distinctions" and a symbol of the "righteousness" Klansmen strive for[13]. The panning movement of the camera underlines the number of Klansmen, showing that their gathering together reinforces their collective power. The ceremony also borrows from religious rituals as the knights seal their bonding with blood and pray God while the Grand Wizard performs the role of a preacher. The manipulation of a Christian rhetoric allows the Klan to advocate its legitimacy[14]. Entering the order of the Klan allows the men to give sense to an otherwise purposeless life – aren't they endowed with knighthood? The end of the ceremony shows men who may have recovered a sense of self-confidence, for the Klan provides them with a brotherly family that recalls the all-male bonding of the Army; however, the Grand Wizard mentions how traitors are treated when the camera stops on Larrimer's face in a close-up that heralds his future failure to comply with all of the Klan's demands.

12 The images of the burning cross superimpose over newspaper front pages to emphasize the causal link between the Klan's meeting and subsequent factual events, simultaneously shaping the narrative of violence devised and executed by Klan members. The headlines epitomize both the ideological tenets that guide their interventions and the terror tactics they adopt: racist attacks ("Negroes beaten as they seek to register for vote"), anti-Catholic vandalism ("Tombstones toppled in St. Francis Cemetery"), hate crimes ("Night riders feared responsible for disappearance"), anti-Semitic looting ("Synagogue desecrated"). The film further underlines the split between the horror

of those actions perpetrated under the cover of night and the guise of respectability displayed by a political leader, Howard Gibbons, promising "100% Americanism" on the radio. The film interestingly questions the ideological premises of the Klan, portrayed as a criminal organization that abuses its members to serve the end of the "happy few" – some white men whose supremacist beliefs are tied to socio-economic privileges. It develops a political subtext through characterizing the leaders of the Klan as wealthy men who manipulate the working man into believing that their economic plight is caused by immigrant labor.

13 Although *The Burning Cross* was conceived with an anti-Klan purpose, financed by "individuals interested in tolerance" and supported by *Ebony* ("Movie audiences have been waiting thirty years for Hollywood to answer *The Birth of a Nation*... *The Burning Cross* wallops back at the KKK full measure and more."),[15] it gained the reluctant approval of the Production Code Administration[16] and was even banned locally. Joseph Breen, the head of the PCA, explicitly required that African Americans and ethnic Americans be portrayed positively when reviewing the script: "The Negroes throughout the production will at no time be shown as too subservient and [...] their language will be cleaned up so that English will be grammatical".[17] Although Breen also requested the violence of the film be toned down by avoiding graphic descriptions of the burning victim, some local censorship boards were still concerned about its possible impact on minority groups and demanded cuts for fear the film might stir some racial violence[18]. Virginia banned *The Burning Cross* on September 17, 1947, and the censorship board declared that the film "has to do with the KKK and we feel that such a subject is inflammatory and not conducive to keeping the best relations among various racial or religious groups"[19]. This statement dismisses the anti-Klan message of a film which was released at a time when the Klan was springing up across the South after it had almost vanished during the war[20]. The first cross burning since Pearl Harbor happened in Mississippi in October, 1945, and was a sign of the Klan's revival[21]. Historian Chester L. Quarles explains that the Klan was recruiting new members to contain the returning black soldiers' desire to challenge segregation and to resist the refugee (especially Jewish) immigrant wave[22]. While *The Burning Cross* responded to a context where the Klan developed

its underground activities, the film was met with resistance among local censors who alleged concern about the possible troubles its screening might entail. Dealing with the Klan's white supremacist traditions and past remains a contentious topic, which Franco-Greek director Costa-Gavras discovered himself when visiting rural communities in Nebraska prior to the making of *Betrayed* (1988). Attending the Fourth of July festivities in Crawford, he met with a local woman who told him a disturbing story about Charly, his wife and their two children, the only African Americans living in the area. The family suddenly went missing and everybody believed they had left for California until their corpses were found at the bottom of an abandoned mine a few years later. The woman intimated that she knew more information about the case but would never speak up [23]. Costa-Gavras stirs up this type of hidden and troubling memories in *Betrayed*, a film where fiction seems to trump reality.

Emotions *Betrayed*

14 Costa-Gavras's fiction films unavoidably question the abuses of power, which undermine democracies and strengthen totalitarian states. Striving for authenticity and historicity when making a film about far-right activities in US society, director Costa-Gavras and scriptwriter Joe Eszterhas consulted an array of documents (written reports, photographs and films) collected by undercover FBI agents who had infiltrated extremist groups [24]. The opening sequence of *Betrayed* speaks to their desire to dramatize a situation inspired by true events: the first minutes of the film follow Chicago radio talk show host (Kraus) whose provocative statements incite anti-Semitic sentiment and eventually cause him to be murdered by a supremacist group fighting against ZOG (the Zionist Occupation Government), which they believe has infiltrated the US government. Echoing the real-life murder of Jewish radio talk show host Alan Berg in 1984, which provided evidence of an existing terrorist network thriving in the underside of 1980s US society [25], the sequence ties in fiction and fact to raise political consciousness about the dangerous power accrued by far-right groups operating in secrecy. The murder provides a "body" for an investigation to be launched in the rural Midwest.

15 *Betrayed* interestingly has a woman play an FBI agent who is drawn into a supremacist group by the man she falls in love with. The premises of the story drew criticism as a "wildly melodramatic plot" exposing the director's "hysterical exaggeration" in *Chicago Tribune*[26]. *The New York Times* listed plot twists that undercut the film's credibility and disapproved of its "overheated approach to its subject"[27]. Paul Mavis, for his part, argued that *Betrayed* took "a politically charged notion, ripe with possibilities, and reduce[d] it to the level of 'does she really love him or not, is he really evil or not'"[28]. In his autobiography entitled *Va où il est impossible d'aller*, Costa-Gavras devotes a few pages to the reception of *Betrayed* on its release in California and recalls that some viewers left the theater before the film was over. His observation that one of them did so when the protagonist Gary Simmons (Tom Berenger), a farmer who lives in the Midwest with his two young children and his mother, appears to be an active member of a secret right-wing terrorist organization resembling the Klan, suggests that reactions to the film were not just triggered by a convoluted plot[29]. *Betrayed* complexifies the issue it addresses by portraying characters who, while they are consumed by hatred, are humanized by their family bonds.

16 The political discourse of *Betrayed* impinges on the family plot which the film unfolds, fitting the form of popular and commercial cinema that Costa-Gavras aimed for, believing in the power of political fiction:

> It is imperative that the political film be viewed since its purpose is, if not to transform reality, then to influence the viewer by apprising him. One must utilize the traditional type of production – with dramatic construction and use of actors – so that people may feel involved, and so that the film may have some useful purpose. (Braucourt 1970: 40)

17 *Betrayed* foregrounds the viewer's involvement by exploiting a thriller structure: undercover agent Catherine Weaver/Kathy Phillips (Debra Winger) enters Gary Simmons's life as a seasonal combine driver and falls for the family man before she realizes that he inculcates his racism to his children when teaching them how to pray and participates in criminal activities to concretize his nativist belief that "We

have to return America to real Americans" – words spoken by Jack Carpenter, the candidate to the upcoming presidential election, on television [14:00]. While she is attracted by the sincerity of the man whose confidence she has gained, as proven by his prompt invitation to meet his family, she soon discovers a supremacist environment among Midwest farmers fighting to save their lands from the banks. *Betrayed* raises discomfort by placing racism at the heart of an ordinary loving family. Love and hatred inhabit Gary Simmons, a man whose sincere devotion to a nostalgic image of America (embodied by traditional gender roles) rivals his abhorrence of Jews and Blacks. "The white race is an endangered species", reads a sign at the entrance of the camp where he takes Kathy and his children. Klansmen stand in white robes and hooded uniforms around a burning cross whereas children are taught how to shoot a rifle at targets in the shape of black people. Hoping that Kathy will adhere to the same ideas, Gary invites her to join a night hunting party during which they kill a black man. The murder leaves no trace and therefore causes no one to worry about any possible consequences. Although Michael Carnes (John Heard) supervises the FBI operation, he will take no risk to jeopardize an investigation into the murder of a popular figure (Kraus) to retrieve the missing bodies of black men.

18 Adopting the viewpoint of Kathy, whom her superior constrains to pursue the investigation even after she witnesses the murder of a black man and shoots a guard during an armed robbery to prove herself worthy of the Klan, *Betrayed* explores the tension that arises from the trivialization of racist, homophobic and anti-Semitic jokes. As a female investigator playing the motherly role in the Simmons family, Kathy realizes that she is loved by the Simmons but manipulated by the FBI. In an interview where she discusses her role in the film, Debra Winger recalls a conversation with Costa-Gavras who explained to her that his goal was to make people "explore the racism within themselves"[30] which she did by impersonating a character who compromises her values when seduced by a supremacist man. While exposing the emotional link that ties farmers to their lands and draws them to extreme groups which claim to defend their interests, the director also points out the influence of the far-right networks on politics. Quarles observed that Klan's violence intensified into a "hate movement" in 1985, giving rise to a multitude of racial supremacist

and neo-Nazi new groups (the Order, the Aryan Nations, the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord, the White Patriot Party, etc.) aiming for political and social change through terrorist acts [31]. *Betrayed* speaks to this history of secretive groups that promote violence to bear on political processes: the discovery by Kathy of a long list of names indicating secret membership suggests the power accrued by these extremist groups operating in the shadows and looking for political influence by promoting some party candidates. Spike Lee picks up this storyline in *BlacKkKlansman*, another anti-Klan film which stirred renewed controversy.

Satirical BlacKkKlansman

19 *BlacKkKlansman* explores a different tone to articulate the director's anti-far-right activism, which raised conflicting responses among critics. Some of them celebrated the film as Lee's "best nondocumentary feature in more than a decade and one of his greatest" (*The New York Times*), "a hellraising masterpiece" and a "hot-damn triumph—one of the year's best films" (*Rolling Stone*), "a major comeback" (*Variety*). Yet the filmmaker's provocative political style ("the impassioned work of a cinema giant who has again found his voice and the power to make it heard", *Rolling Stone*; "this admirably, unruly filmmaker back at the height of his provocative powers", *The Guardian*) also drew a number of criticisms regarding form and content [32]. Most French critics, for example, recommended the film while expressing some uneasiness about the mixture of politics and entertainment that is nonetheless characteristic of Lee's filmmaking. For example, *Le Monde* explained that "We may find that Spike Lee is overdoing it. That some gags are a little long. That it may not have been necessary to accumulate so much hate speech in the mouths of racist whites. The filmmaker probably chose the caricature style to hammer home his point" [33]. *Libération* argued that "His latest film did not meet with unanimous approval at Cannes, mainly for a reason that one would tend to consider as good news: the author of *Do the Right Thing* (1989) has not lost any of the rage that goes hand in hand with a certain heaviness—that of militant leaflets and incisive rap slogans. In other words: the fact that Lee has not learned to be subtle over time also proves that he has not given up his fights in any way" [34]. *Télérama* was no less ambiguous with the following state-

ment: “Lee has regained his bite, his humor as a dirty kid militant for this anti-racist and anti-Donald Trump charge”[35]. The racial politics of Spike Lee obviously raised some discomfort among these reviewers who disapproved of the blend of politics and amusement in *BlacKkKlansman*, whereas American critics considered it was a somewhat inefficient means of critique: “Yet the point of *BlacKkKlansman* seems to be that laughing at the KKK, dismissing them as an irrelevant group of backward morons, is what got us Donald Trump” (*Vox*)[36]; “*BlacKkKlansman* is the rare American film that doesn’t treat the KKK as a joke… The racism on display isn’t exactly funny, not unless you find social discomfort humorous” (*Esquire*)[37].

20 Lee artfully combines politics and entertainment in a sarcastic piece, which elicits critical responses rather than emotional reactions, using black humor as a political strategy to level criticism at the buddy film as a popular genre in the so-called post-racial moment. The structural irony of the form creates humorous dialectics between Blacks and Whites that unravel different aspects of race. *BlacKkKlansman* is based on a vaudeville situation where a black undercover police officer (Ron Stallworth/John David Washington) passes for a white supremacist on the phone and has a Jewish colleague (Flip Zimerman/Adam Driver) replace him to attend KKK gatherings. The film, which is based on Ron Stallworth’s autobiography as a black man in blue, evokes the investigation into the Klan as an individual and personal enterprise rather than an institutional commitment, a situation which Lee exploits in order to deconstruct the racial discourses of whiteness and blackness. The phone sequence showing Ron Stallworth pass for a white supremacist by using all the racist clichés to entice a Klan member, if not the Grand Wizard himself, into conversation proves unsettling (as the above-mentioned critics’ responses suggest). That a Black man assumes the Nativist rhetoric (“I hate Niggers, I hate Jews, Spics and Micks, Dagos and Chinks. But my mouth to God’s ears, I really hate those Nigger rats. And anyone else, really, that doesn’t have pure White Aryan blood running through their veins” [29:30]) and manages to strike a bonding with a Klan member (Walter/Ryan Eggold) is dumbfounding. The whole scene may be disturbing for viewers who are torn between laughing at the incongruity of Stallworth’s performance and the racist rhetoric that makes him pass for White. While the proxy response of his colleagues

helps downplay the importance self-conscious political correctness and disinhibit the viewers of *BlacKkKlansman*, laughter may well occasion a sense of shame in a situation where racism appears to be at the heart of joke. This is a visual and narrative strategy that only the cinematic art can achieve, for laughter comes from the discrepancy revealed by editing in the sequence: Stallworth may be impersonating a Klan applicant, but Walter is unaware of the prank and takes his racist rant as real ("You are just the kind of guy we are looking for" [30:10]). The sequence therefore edges on the danger of a hate speech which serves as an ideology for the "Organization", placing the spectator in a conflicting position by affording him amusement while raising awareness at the violence of a racist rhetoric that passes as the norm amid Klan sympathizers.

21 Most Klan figures of *BlacKkKlansman* are caricature characters, excessive impersonations of the redneck who draw power from boasting of their hateful and paranoid ideology. Felix (Jasper Pääkkönen)'s basement contains a collection of artifacts testifying to his commitment to white supremacy, including confederate flag curtains, portraits of confederate soldiers, and a Remington Model 1900—which he calls a "Jew killer" in a display of anti-Semitic obsession [51:28]. The film underlines this ideological aspect of the Ku Klux Klan's crusade by showing Felix appropriate the negationist arguments of David Duke when asking "where is the proof" of the Holocaust really taking place. Felix is not joking at that moment; his tone is serious and so is his threat against Flip Zimmerman whom he (rightly) suspects of being a Jew. While the scene may sound like an exaggeration because Felix appears too menacing to be taken seriously when pointing a gun toward Zimmerman's penis which he wants to see, his statements echo the real David Duke's views on Jewishness and the Holocaust [38].

22 *BlacKkKlansman* portrays the performance of the Klansmen during Ron Stallworth/Flip Zimmerman's induction ceremony, which takes place on the occasion of the Grand Wizard's visit to Colorado Springs. Being assigned to the protection of David Duke (Topher Grace), a dramatic twist that was yet no addition to the original story, [39] Ron Stallworth represents a vicarious spectator through whose gaze the audience experiences the Klan's activities. Watching his observing stance has a distancing effect that allows for a critical eye, for his

spying from a window on the Klansmen's secret rites also increases tension. Before the initiation ceremony starts, the Klansmen stand in line wearing their white robes and masks on their faces to listen to David Duke as he refers to Dr. William Shockley, a member of their society and a "Nobel Prize recipient," as a great scientist in the eugenics movement whose research has proven that "each of us here has flowing through our veins the genes of a superior race" [1:35:00]. Chiaroscuro undermines the facts which Duke claims as "truths", literally leading his followers to the dark side of science rather than enlightenment. The ceremony is filmed like a religious service with David Duke standing in front of an assembly of men ("my brothers in Christ"), with candles burning at his sides and blood drop crosses in the background as he praises "God" for giving them "true white men," "men who have honor," "men who will not lie," "real men, courageous men who flinch not at duty" [1:37:15]. His address ties in religious references to the exceptional character of those white men in a ceremony that depicts the performative dimension of whiteness. A low-angle shot underlines the authority and the superiority of the Grand Wizard, facing a line of men whose outfit erases all signs of humanity —which suggests that ideology and conformity prevail over individuality and creativity in the organization.

23 The filmed ceremony dramatizes the inner workings of the Organization and how its members negotiate their identity as white nationalists. It emphasizes its religious rituals as the Grand Wizard performs the role of a preacher blessing the newly accepted knights with holy water. The camera pans the men's faces and creates a visible link between the white-clad men, now members of a brotherly family that recalls the all-male complicity in the Army. *BlacKkKlansman* describes men who gain power from hiding their individuality behind the robe that "appears as a leveling and equalizing instrument" that does away with "social, economic, or political distinctions" and a symbol of the "righteousness" Klansmen strive for[40]. While the costumes erase their physical traits, making it impossible to distinguish any of them when they wear their hoods, their speaking enhances their masculine voice (women being excluded from membership). The end of the ceremony shows men who rejoice of the celebration with boosted self-confidence, welcoming the wives for a screening of *The Birth of a Nation*. The use of cross-editing during

the sequence which cuts from the Klan ceremony to a Black Power gathering is an obvious reappropriation of Griffith's stylistic 'invention' for Spike Lee's own political agenda. The adaptation of Ron Stallworth's autobiography is set in the 1970s, but the relevance of its political message makes it an ironic comment on the current political rhetoric.

24 The ending sequence of *BlacKkKlansman* is completely at odds with the tone of the rest of the film, sacrificing the post-racial fantasy of the plot to the brutal reality of Charlottesville, Virginia, where a thousand white nationalists and neo-Nazis organized a march to protest the removal of a statue of Civil War General Robert E. Lee from the University of Virginia campus. The final sequence of the film is a brutal flashback to reality: a cut takes the viewers amid the white nationalists parading on August 11, 2017, at night, on the university campus. All of them are chanting "Jews will not replace us!" and "White Lives Matter" – echoing the words of (not so fictional) David Duke. The sequence later cuts to some VICE News Tonight footage [41], showing a car blindly heading into the crowd of Black Lives Matter supporters, leaving one dead (Heather Meyer). The two-minute-long sequence is all the more upsetting as a series of close-ups from the middle of the crowd emphasize how quickly the protests turned into a fight. *BlacKkKlansman* immerses the viewer in a culture of whiteness rooted in the distorted memories of the Civil War (as indicated by the opening extract from *Gone With the Wind* and the embedded excerpts from *The Birth of a Nation*), entertained by the Klan's mythology, that produces real trouble as shown in the final sequence. The interweaving of fact and fiction enhances the idea that white supremacy is a fictional construction with real consequences.

Conclusion

25 The three films under study portray the Ku Klux Klan through different lenses. While *The Burning Cross* was conceived as a political tool in response to *The Birth of a Nation* in the post-war context when returning veterans found it hard to adjust to civilian life, *Betrayed* shows the nostalgic impulse that undergirds the myth of a "white America" which serves political opportunism. In the age of Trump where David Duke's ideas find echoes in the US pres-

ident's speeches, *BlacKkKlansman* exploits a sarcastic tone that highlights race as a visual and verbal construct. Because the films developed distinct anti-KKK rhetorical and narrative strategies, they triggered different types of reactions from empathy to critical distance as illustrated by a variety of reviews. The films obviously toe a fine line between politics and entertainment by using fiction to challenge the nativist rhetoric of the Klan. The unease triggered by each film speaks to the troubled waters of history which they represent and the difficulty to challenge the deep-rooted sentiments that Anglo-racialism continues to feed. The flawed nativist rhetoric is also symptomatic of some trouble with white male identity, which each film discusses through the characterization of their white protagonists. From the jobless white working-class men in *The Burning Cross* to the dispossessed farmers in *Betrayed* and the illiterate white men of *BlacKkKlansman*, the films depict white men who embody the socioeconomic frustrations of the unachievable American Dream. Chester L. Quarles has emphasized the continued success of the Klan, which he links to "the psychological and social problems of 'status insecurity' and 'status disorientation'"[42] among white Americans. The Klan's mystique of masculinity seems to offer some degree of compensatory self-confidence in the face of socioeconomic crisis at all times.

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1 Melvyn Stokes, D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation: A History of "The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time"*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, 171.

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3 Tom Rice, White Robes, *Silver Screens: Movies and the Making of the Ku Klux Klan*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008, xv.

4 *Ibidem*, 2.

5 Michael T. Martin and David C. Wall, "The Politics of CineMemory: Signifying Slavery in the History Film", in Robert A. Rosenstone and Costantin Parvulescu (eds.), *A Companion to the Historical Film*, Malden, MA, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 447.

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14 *Ibidem*, 127-147.

15 Quoted in Melissa Ooten, *Race, Gender, and Film Censorhip in Virginia* 1922-1965, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2014, 105.

16 Ellen C. Scott contends that "the PCA's passage of the film is surprising and probably explained by the fact that the PCA anticipated minimal distribution for this low-budget film, produced and financed by white leftists (Scott 2015: 59).

17 Joseph Breen, letter to Walter Colmes, May 12, 1947. The Burning Cross. PCA file. Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS, Beverly Hills, CA.

18 In Ohio, the censorship board issued this statement: "To the people who are not near the minority problem, this film will undoubtedly produce a high emotional reaction. On the other hand, members of minority groups wear an entirely different color of glasses and must see the picture in terms of their historical backgrounds, past experiences and present problems. Many minority groups are undoubtedly feeling the pressure of invisible control. Some members of such groups may so ally themselves with the 'underdog' that they might find in the picture a pattern for militant leadership. We have no evidence that such would be the case, but there is a possibility of militant minority group members of an audience harboring such an idea and waiting for psychological stimulus to move aggressively 'for the new day for his minority group' with consequent violence." Elle C. Scott, *op. cit.*, 92.

19 Melissa Ooten, *op. cit.*, 103.

20 The organization was mainly active in the South, especially in Birmingham, Alabama, where Klansmen bombed a house purchased by African Americans in a previously all-white neighborhood to enforce racial zoning (Newton 1999: 93)

21 Michael Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2020, 102.

22 Chester L. Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related American Racialist and Antisemitic Organizations, A History and Analysis*, Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland, 1999, 83-84.

23 Costa-Gavras, *Va où il est impossible d'aller*, Paris, Seuil, 2018, 348-349.

24 *Ibidem*, 350.

25 Kraus reenacts Alan Berg's talk shows in Betrayed. Alan Berg "used satire, sarcasm and ridicule on his radio talk show in one-sided (he would hang up on them if he didn't like what they were saying) verbal duels with racists and anti-Semites." Chester L. Quarles, *op. cit.*, 123.

26 Dave Kehr, "Director's Hazy Vision Makes 'Betrayed' Simplistic", *Chicago Tribune*, 26 August, 1988.

27 Janet Maslin, Costa Gavras's 'Betrayed,' the World of Bigotry", *The New York Times*, 26 August, 1988.

28 Paul Mavis, *The Espionage Filmography: United States Releases, 1898 through 1999*, Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland, 2001, 31.

29 Costa-Gavras, *op. cit.*, 350-357.

30 Commentary section to the French DVD released by United Artists in 2017.

31 Chester L. Quarles, *op. cit.*, 119.

32 A.O. Scott, "Spike Lee's BlacKkKlansman Journeys Into White America's Heart of Darkness", *The New York Times*, Aug. 9, 2018. Peter Travers, "BlacKkKlansman Review: Spike Lee Delivers a Hell raising Masterpiece", *Rolling Stone*, August 6, 2018; Peter Debruge, "Film Review: Spike Lee's BlacKkKlansman", *Variety*, May 14, 2018; Mark Kermode, "BlacKkKlansman Review – a blistering return to form for Spike Lee", *The Guardian*, Aug. 26, 2018.

33 "On peut trouver que Spike Lee en fait trop. Que certains gags sont un peu longs. Qu'il n'était peut-être pas nécessaire d'accumuler tant de propos haineux dans la bouche des Blancs racistes. Le cinéaste a sans doute pris le parti de la caricature pour mieux enfoncer le clou." Clarisse Fabre, "BlacKkKlansman: Spike Lee attaque le suprémacisme blanc", *Le Monde*, Aug. 22, 2018.

34 "Son dernier film n'a pas fait l'unanimité à Cannes, essentiellement pour une raison que l'on tendrait plutôt à considérer comme une bonne nouvelle : l'auteur de Do the Right Thing (1989) n'a rien perdu de cette rage qui va de

pair avec une certaine lourdeur - celle des tracts militants et des slogans rap incisifs. Autrement dit : le fait qu'avec le temps, Lee n'a pas appris à faire dans la dentelle prouve aussi qu'il n'a en rien renoncé à ses combats." Marcos Uzal, "BlacKkKlansman, gugusses Klan" Libération, May 15, 2018.

35 "[Spike Lee] a retrouvé son mordant, son humour de sale gosse militant pour cette charge antiraciste et anti-Donald Trump." Guillemette Odicio, "Avec BlacKkKlansman, Spike Lee retrouve son mordant", Télérama, May 15, 2018.

36 Alissa Wilkinson, "Spike Lee BlacKkKlansman draws a ham-fisted line from white supremacy's past to this present", Vox, Aug. 9, 2018.

37 Tyler Coates, "BlacKkKlansman is the Rare American Film That Doesn't Treat the KKK as a Joke", Esquire, Aug. 13, 2018.

38 David Duke, "Thoughts on the Holocaust", *NAAWP News*, quoted in Michael Zatarain, Davie Duke, Evolution of a Klansman", Gretna, Pelican Publishing Company, 1990, 261.

39 "In the latest twist of fate in this investigation, the chief said he wanted me, Ron Stallworth, to act as Duke's personal security detail while he was here." Sgt Ron Stallworth, Black Klansman, *Race, Hate, and the Undercover Investigation of a Lifetime* [1998], London, Century, 2014, 133.

40 Juan O. Sánchez, *Religion and the Ku Klux Klan, Biblical Appropriation in the Their Literature and Songs*, Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2016, 20.

41 <https://video.vice.com/fr/video/charlottesville-race-and-terror-vice-news-tonight-on-hbo/59921b1d2f8d32d808bddfbc>, accessed on April 22, 2020.

42 Chester L. Quarles, *op. cit.*, 125.

RÉSUMÉS

English

Few directors have dared to delve into the dark waters of the Ku Klux Klan, a secret organization with a political aim which the former Grand Wizard David Duke made public by seeking election to the U.S. Senate in 2016 as a Republican candidate in Louisiana. While D.W Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* was instrumental in promoting the supremacist ideology of the KKK, being used as a propaganda tool by the recruiters of the KKK ('the Keagles') in the 1920s, few films deal with the KKK in a straightforward manner. The threat

posed by the 'Invisible Empire' is often symbolized by cross or church burnings in films that resist its power through portraying its knights as individuals whose extremist racist rhetoric is confined to fiction and to the past. *The Burning Cross* (Walter Colmes, 1947), *Betrayed* (Costa-Gavras, 1988), and *BlacKkKlansman* (Spike Lee, 2018) dramatize the activities of the racist sect by drawing attention to its individual members. They adopt different narrative and representational strategies in an effort to show the inner workings of the organization and how its members negotiate their identity as white nationalists. The films show that the KKK relies on visual (performances) and aural tropes (slurs) to construct its supremacist discourse and gather its ranks. Each of them provoked trouble on the level of reception – *The Burning Cross* was even censored in several states. This article questions the sense of discomfort produced by these films investigating the KKK.

Français

Peu de réalisateurs ont osé plonger dans les eaux sombres du Ku Klux Klan, une organisation secrète à visée politique que l'ancien Grand Sorcier David Duke a rendue publique en se présentant au Sénat américain en 2016 en tant que candidat républicain en Louisiane. Si *Naissance d'une nation*, de D.W. Griffith, a été utilisé comme outil de propagande par les recruteurs du KKK (« les Keagles ») dans les années 1920 pour promouvoir l'idéologie suprématiste du KKK, peu de films tentent de traitent de manière frontale de l'histoire du KKK. La menace posée par l'« Empire invisible » est souvent symbolisée par des croix ou des églises brûlées dans des films qui expriment leur résistance en décrivant les chevaliers du KKK comme des individus dont la rhétorique raciste extrémiste est réduite à la fiction et au passé. *The Burning Cross* (Walter Colmes, 1947), *Betrayed* (Costa-Gavras, 1988) et *BlacKkKlansman* (Spike Lee, 2018) dramatisent les activités de la secte raciste en attirant l'attention sur ses membres individuels. Ils adoptent différentes stratégies narratives et de représentation afin de montrer le fonctionnement interne de l'organisation et la manière dont ses membres négocient leur identité en tant que nationalistes blancs. Les films montrent que le KKK s'appuie sur des tropes visuels (performances) et sonores (insultes) pour construire son discours suprémaciste et rassembler ses membres. Chaque film a provoqué des troubles au niveau de la réception - *The Burning Cross* a même été censuré dans plusieurs. Cet article interroge la sensation de trouble produite par ces films qui investiguent le KKK.

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Mots-clés

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Debunking the American Hero: The *Topos* of Intoxication in *One* A.M. (Chaplin 1916), *Wings* (Wellman 1927), *Major Dundee* (Peckinpah 1965)

Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard

PLAN

Intoxication and troubles on the screen
Troubled minds
The oblivion of Time
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Conclusion

TEXTE

1 The visual apprehension of the real in films has been an issue which originated with the beginnings of cinema in debates between those who believed that the photographic reproduction of the real was strengthened by the representation of movement on screen, and those for whom cinema was a mere unreliable illusion of the real created by optical tricks. Audiences have consequently forever been divided between visual fascination answering Ruskin's dream of "a kind of primal opticality" (Crary 95) and its opposite, doubt, or "visual skepticism" (Turvey 99). In many films, spectators are able to experience this tension through identification with some characters' apprehension — or misapprehension — of the real. This contradiction between our laughter and empathy, coupled with the belief that we are wiser than the character, is embodied by the stereotype of the easily beguiled fools which cinema inherited from the theatre. Among these, one particular type of burlesque fool is that of an otherwise quite clear-sighted character who is metamorphosed into a fool by excess of drink. The intoxicated characters are shown suffering a 'loss of control' (OED) over their destiny and making mistakes in their apprehension of their environment owing to the apparent metamorphosis of their familiar world, while the film viewers are allowed

to see how wrong they are by identifying with them as well as by criticizing them. The fact that intoxication is a visual motif found in very different film genres, from classical Hollywood melodrama as exemplified in the war film *Wings* (Wellman 1927), to westerns such as Peckinpah's 1965 *Major Dundee* (see synopses below), shows the great visual possibilities of screening a character's odd behaviour, along with the weird deconstruction of the "general phenomenon of constancy" (Merleau-Ponty 365) which creates the illusion of transparent realism in classical cinema. The impression of reality by cinematic movement and the illusion of cinematic appearances are remarkably combined in scenes of a character's intoxication.

2 The choice of Chaplin's 1916 burlesque comedy *One* A.M (Tomasovic 22-45) in this paper can be explained by my belief that it was a seminal contribution to the creation of intoxication as a visual motif of trouble on the screen, when he transposed it into a 26-minute film. To begin with, because it disrupts the codes of realism, intoxication is a visual motif of great formal unity. This makes its meaning immediately identifiable whatever the genre of the film, a characteristic which allows the scriptwriter to insert such scenes independently from the progress of action, as Chaplin himself does in his feature melodrama *City Lights* (1931). In a large number of Hollywood productions (Tomasovic), a relatively brief scene of intoxication is inserted in film genres in which it would seem out of place, because of its apparent irrelevance to a diegesis which is not explicitly about the destruction of the character by alcohol. And yet, as will be argued, Wellman's and Peckinpah's films are particular examples of the important symbolic connotations which are thus added by the however brief but never gratuitous insertion of the visual icon of intoxication into the narrative.

3 The ensuing parallels between the three films will first underscore the 'trouble on screen' effect of the character's intoxication in visual contrasts between order and disorder. Secondly, it will be argued that this intoxication is also shown by the character's transgressive behaviour that reveals his troubled mind. A major point in the representation of such troubles is the fact that we are made to share the private experience of the characters in subjective camera frames, as if we were intoxicated as well. We also share the protagonists' oblivion of time, of its entropy and irreversible flow, in their unexpected experi-

ence of chance accidents occasioned by their short-sightedness. Finally, the insertion of such cinematic moments will be discussed as vehicles for a deeper satirical meaning, since these troubles on the screen emphasize a critical appreciation of the protagonist's plight, highlighting the folly of human dreams of wealth (*One* A.M.) or heroism (*Wings*, *Major Dundee*).

Intoxication and troubles on the screen

4 The character of the tramp which Chaplin had created for the movies in 1914 was a type which enabled him to develop a narrative form on the screen different from popular slapstick numbers. With the creation of his original narrative, *One* A.M., Chaplin was able to offer moviegoers a new burlesque character, the intoxicated gentleman (Tomasovic 39-41), its novelty being the focus on an inverted mirror image of the tramp, a gentleman. Later in *City Lights* (1931), in which 'the little fellow' is contrasted with a wealthy gentleman, we recognise the earlier drunken gentleman created in *One* A.M. In this feature film, getting drunk is a privilege of the wealthy (Fawell 142–144), a satirical type which actually deconstructs the cliché of the worthless tramp and makes us empathize with him. On the other hand, the cinematographic form of *One* A.M. is remarkable for the fluidity it adds to the slapstick music hall routine, transforming an attraction number among others in music-hall series (Gunning 383) into the psychological portrait of a single character, drawing our attention on a mind which is deeply troubled. As Chaplin explains, this new narrative dimension was made possible by the cinema: "in the theatre I had been confined to a rigid, non-deviating routine [...] films were freer" (Chaplin 153). In the burlesque, but verging on the melodramatic, type of the intoxicated gentleman created by Chaplin's *One* A.M., it is the fluid continuity of movement (Bilton 78-110) and the lengthy manipulation of objects which are developed, contrary to Keaton's own use of the slapstick music hall tradition (Kral 44). As a result, the unity of the theme of a psychological crisis caused by the loss of contact with the real – by an otherwise rather lucid gentleman – makes Chaplin's character become a cultural emblem of weakness (loss of equilibrium), madness (mistaking stuffed animals for live

beasts), and failure (unable to get into his bed, he ends up in his bathtub). All these instances of the intoxication paradigm become more emotionally convincing owing to the power of film editing which, in Chaplin's film, gives his pantomime performances – one third of these have camera movement, only two thirds with a still camera (Bordat 183-187) – a continuity in space-time which can thus become equivalent with the spectator's own space-time continuum, as the following detailed study will show.

5 In this seminal film, the world of order is depicted on the screen as a foil to the chaos caused by drink (Harness 68). The first shot shows a taxicab which has stopped: it is framed frontally, a shooting angle which emphasizes the stability of the familiar urban modern world. The taxicab driver is holding out his hand while looking straight ahead, clearly expecting his customer to read the fare on the slot of the tolling machine next to his elbow. His gesture is a emblem of the standard expected behavior which is deconstructed by inappropriate gestures. When the customer sticks the stump of his cigarette in the man's hand instead of the expected coins, the whole code of familiar behavior is ruined. Inside the house, the mechanism of the grandfather clock's swinging pendulum on the landing at the top of the stairs is also an emblem of security and order which we identify as such. Its regularity and immovable stability provide a foil to the protagonist's erratic behaviour.

6 In *Wings*, the world of order is also carefully depicted on the screen by the training camp sequences where Jack Powell (Charles Rogers) and his friend David Armstrong (Richard Arlen) are to enlist in the Air Service as pilots. The camera frames the different elements of their everyday life – trucks, tents, and planes – at the camp, in a series of in-depth shots emphasizing the land's horizontality and the several degrees of verticality of a plane' flight, conditions of a stable physical world which they must learn to control in order to face German pilots in air combat. But they have to cope with catastrophe when the pilot Cadet White (Gary Cooper) crashes to his death on the airfield [28:14]. Despite this violent contrast between their belief in the regular security of flying conditions and the liability of unexpected disasters, the two friends join the American Escadrille Lafayette as 'cadets' on the French front in 1918. Within the historical reconstruction of a world well known to Wellman, an episode is inserted in

which Jack is seen on leave in Paris where he spends an evening at the Folies Bergères [1:09:60]. Like all the other customers around, he is now free to enjoy himself. But he brazenly gulps down glass after glass of champagne, and soon the subjective camera depicts a hazy and quite imaginary multiplication of bubbles around him, to the point of masking other customers at the surrounding tables. The limits of the frame are now erased as bubbles fly in and out of its periphery.

7 In Peckinpah's western *Major Dundee*, military discipline is enforced by the Major (Charlton Heston) among his unruly recruits. We discover a well-disciplined troop of horsemen, mostly paroled Southern Confederate prisoners still wearing their uniforms, who fall into a military march as they leave Fort Benlin [35 :05] on a punitive expedition against the criminal Apache chief Charriba. This disciplined group is seen on their way through a wild, boundless territory in which Charriba can attack or vanish freely. The bonds of social order are gradually disrupted, and when the cavalry is faced with the regular array of the French Army occupying Mexico at the time, disorder and defeat overrule their enterprise. The disintegration of the order of civilization begins when they illegally cross the Mexican border, and it reaches a first climax when Major Dundee is compelled to hide in Durango to cure a badly wounded leg, and yields to the temptation of gulping down long draughts of Tequila. According to the codes of the stereotype, his troubled mind is now depicted by his surroundings which appear quite chaotic.

8 To revert to the seminal model of such an erasure of the signs of order, *One* A.M., the window seems to him better than the door to get inside his home. The outstretched hide of a dead tiger ordinarily used as a decorative carpet now becomes the body of a tiger's threatening open jaws. Stroking fondly his favorite large stuffed cat's whiskers, he sees it now closing upon his leg with its paws. The secure home has turned into a wild jungle.

Troubled minds

9 Chaplin's gentleman keeps desperately fidgeting inside his side pocket with his right hand while holding a cigarette in his left hand. The icon of the cigarette usually connotes deep thinking, but a close

shot of his eyes concentrating on some place behind us, suggests that he is hopelessly unable to lay hands on his matches. Chaplin's use of a close up on his character's troubled gaze at the camera is the means by which the filmmaker translates on the screen his earlier experience performing a state of intoxication as a stage actor by establishing contact with his audience (Kral 100-145). In the later Hollywood films deeply concerned with making the camera invisible to the moviegoer, the direct gaze at the camera was thought to be detrimental to the illusion of the real, and was no longer in use. Instead, the character's mind could be shown by the editing of subjective shots for the viewer to share in subjective camera frames, a device already used by Chaplin (Jost 65-74), in order to show his disconnection with the real world through the metamorphosis of the orderly images seen previously. The state of intoxication is therefore mostly shown in the character's failure to identify commonplace objects and their inappropriate efforts to face and adapt to 'unidentified things'. When, in Chaplin's film, the gentleman does his best to deal with flying carpets and automatic tables, in *Wings* Jake sees his old friend Mary (Clara Bow)'s elegant dinner dress as nothing but a collection of bubbles that blow up and vanish, being at once replaced by others. As to Dundee, the camera frames him gazing at himself in a mirror as if he were an unknown stranger.

10 Troubled minds are thus displayed by the disorder of the characters' reactions to their environment as they see it. If in Chaplin's film, stuffed dead animals behave like live ones, in *Wings*, when Jack is told that his leave is over, he stubbornly refuses to obey orders and remains seated, gesturing vaguely around him with his glass of champagne. Dundee who had kept unbuckling and then buckling his belt, provokingly dumping his boots on his desk, has doffed his uniform in exchange for a rather messy-looking unbuttoned white shirt. He is now seen playfully fingering his bottle of tequila and whispering to himself a song about the benefits of drink [1:44:30].

11 In addition to their disturbed dealing with the real, their body's uncertain equilibrium causes comic trouble on the screen. As a performer, Chaplin was famous for his capacity to retain his balance, as in *The Rink* (1916) or *The Circus* (1928). In the scenario of intoxication, however, the unbalance of the character's wavering body signifies a similar disorder in his mind. as anticipated by the audience's

expectation that a drunk always seems to about fall but never does. In *One* A. M., the camera cuts to a medium close shot of the gentleman's unsteady body: he is forever on the verge of collapsing. The intoxicated protagonists' inability to stand upright amidst their surroundings also shows us how badly disturbed their minds are in both war films. Just as Chaplin's gentleman must struggle to recover his balance after falling down the stairs, Jack has trouble in standing when summoned by the authorities to go back to the front line, and Dundee finds it equally difficult to stand straight when attempting to escape in the street. He eventually forgets about his lame leg, and collapses into the gutter. Confederate prisoner Colonel Tyreen (Richard Harris), who has remained sober, then has to pull him to his feet and drag him away, a gesture which emphasizes Dundee's utter loss of control over himself.

The oblivion of Time

12 If scenes of heavy drinking and the loss of landmarks have enjoyed such a survival in cinema, from the entertainment of early attractions to the more enthralling powers of narratives (Gaudreault & Gunning 374), they must have done so because they dealt with the human mind, and thus raised more philosophical issues. In the case of Chaplin's *One* A.M., its eponymous title emphatically associates the gentleman's delirium with his oblivion of the flow of time. When inserted in both feature films, apart from their literal meaning as moral tales, the intoxication scenes within the epic narrative make the film viewer's attention shift from an emphatic adhesion to the military epic, to a critical perception of the main characters' capacity to understand the ambiguities of their behaviour. In *Wings*, in the episode of his intoxication, Jack loses all sense of the reality of war, as if he were allowed to go on a voyage in another pseudo-space-time, away from the battle-field. Similarly, in *Major Dundee*, the protagonist forgets his ideal which the chasing of Charriba signified for him by sinking into a different space-time. Both characters are thus suspended out of time by a state of total oblivion of their mission.

13 I would like to suggest that, thanks to the interplay between the diegetic level of the narrative and the ironical distance which the burlesque motif of intoxication necessarily awakens, we are able to

decipher the active presence of Time in these three films. Time's presence is actually very obvious in *One* A.M., as we see a large clock swinging its pendulum on the landing upstairs. However, instead of providing the usual help clocks are meant to give us by measuring the timing of our successive occupations, it is hampering the gentleman's plan to find rest in his bedchamber, as if punishing him for being too late, and reminding him that there is no going backwards. The failure to obey the clock shows that it is indeed the irreversibility of time, inscribed in the ruling power of the automaton, which has escaped his attention. Another time programmed automaton lies in wait for him however when, having at last successfully grovelled away from the reach of the clock's pendulum, he proves unable to press the button on the wall to set his collapsible bed in working order. Just as if it were intoxicated as well, the bed revolves upon itself, capturing him in a never-ending swirl. It eventually sets him free but crashes down without warning, nearly crushing him to death with its feet. The confusion in the time program is irrevocable, and leads him from his bed to the stillness of his bathtub, which expresses another feature of the flow of time in modern physics: entropy. Moreover, scientific time is also characterised by a third feature, contingency, an order of things which has been ruling his homecoming from the start. For example, when attempting to climb the steps of the stairs, the carpet suddenly gets loose and he is propelled down to where he started. Contingency is remarkably underlined at that moment, not only by the carpet unaccountably getting loose, but also because he lands by chance next to his drink which he had previously set aside on the floor – having managed to free bottle and glass from the maleficent power of the turning table where they sat challenging him.

14 In both feature action films, the ternary definition of time in physics (Doane 19) is dramatized throughout, and is shown to have driven the two protagonists to their final tragedy. The presence of a historical frame in both films underlines these features of time's agency, since they remind us that the unravelling of events actually took place. In *Wings*, the battle which we see is historically archived as the Battle of Saint-Mihiel. Jack's organized military time is restricted to the single sequence of military action which is determined by the confrontation between the two enemy camps facing each other across the border-line. Any pilot flying a plane towards the American airfield from the

German front is an enemy whom Jack must immediately meet in an irreversible time period, the air combat. Once engaged in the air-fight, there is no going back, even though the end must be the stillness of entropy following heat. In Jack's case, the third feature of time, contingency, is also at work, owing to a deceitful message which is dropped by a German pilot, announcing the death of his friend David. When a German plane flies in his camp's direction, he automatically attacks it. But adding to his sense of his duty, he is now blinded by hatred and revenge and cannot recognize the pilot as his friend who has escaped with an enemy plane.

15 In Peckinpah's western, the time of action also takes place at a particular moment of national history, during the Minnesota Dakota War in 1862. The historical source for the film's narrative is dramatized by a narrator's voiceover, Timothy Ryan's (Michael Anderson Jr.), whom we see writing his diary. He is also seen and heard sounding his bugle when calling for the cavalry to proceed on their journey, which gives his presence in the film the symbolic connotation of the irreversible march of time. Time is also measured when drums are played [05 :10 and 09 :23], and a leitmotiv, 'The Major Dundee March', is heard – first during the opening credits, then later when sung by the men in chorus, or whistled, as they leave Fort Benlin [35 :05]. When this leitmotiv is again heard at the film's end, echoing the epic film's opening credits, the hero is now a solitary figure moving away in the desert. Time has irrevocably gone by, history will not be re-written, and Dundee's foolish oblivion of its rules lead him to the stillness of the wilderness. Time's rule of contingency has also played a part in the unravelling of his destiny, as when an enemy arrow hits his leg in a moment of inattention when he believed he could enjoy a moment of rest in a clearing.

Intoxication and satire

16 If these three aspects of scientific time are dramatized so clearly by intoxication as trouble on the screen in the three films under discussion, the fact that they can be found in an early silent film such as Chaplin's deserves a brief comment. As his later 1936 film *Modern Times* shows, the characteristic features of the new industrial era and the development of trains or assembly lines in factories were

popularized to the point of allowing entertainment through satire. Though chance is a traditional motif of drama under the guise of Fortune, or Fate, Mary Ann Doane argues that with the advent of the industrial era which also saw the birth of cinema, to which Chaplin contributed so importantly, chance acquires a new scientific garb, 'contingency', by its close association with the scientific concepts of irreversibility and entropy. She writes: "…the epistemology of contingency which took shape in the nineteenth century was crucial to the emergence and development of the cinema as a central representational form of the twentieth century" (Doane 19). Since the nineteenth century entropy has been seen as a general characteristic of time which could be quantified thanks to the second law of thermodynamics. And remarkably, thermodynamics had come to play a major role in the theory of time during the very period when cinema was seen to emerge as an art form. As Michel Serres writes:

> As soon as one can build them – steam or combustion, engines, chemical, electrical, and turbine engines, and so forth – the notion of time changes […] From this moment on, time is endowed with a direction. It is irreversible and drifts from order to disorder, or from difference to the dissolution or dissemination of a homogeneous mixture from which no energy, no force, and no motion can arise. (Michel Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, 1982, p. 71-72, in Doane 114).

17 One result of such energy at work is collision, as the use of crosscutting shows. The parallel temporalities of the various protagonists in the diegesis are visualized on the screen by this cinematographic form, allowing us to follow different simultaneous actions in separate places. It becomes a mode of film discourse which is essential to a representation of time's agency in the dramatizing of collision. Interestingly, 'collision' as a phenomenon is also a concept of early cinema theory which is used to analyse the cinematic continuum, according to the belief that it is the editing of different sets of shots which creates meaning. Chaplin's gentleman is faced with sudden unexpected actions on the part of the automatons, machines which are servants intended to obey his orders. But the result of this technology is that his automatons are ruled by their own pre-regulated timing, as if they 'lived' in their own temporality. The table's clock-

work is started by touch, and therefore collides with him, catching his coat, each time he heedlessly gets near enough. The folding bed's mechanism starts its programme by his dialling, but the program has memorized a form of clockwork autonomy. In his now unfamiliar world, a set of collisions between him and his robots seems to be the rule, and when the folding bed never meets his expectations, it becomes the very emblem of contingency. Both table and bed have a common point with the huge clock on the first floor, as the swinging pendulum collides with the foolish protagonist as if such 'contingency' now punished him for having forgotten that his lifetime is ruled by time's irreversible continuum.

18 While intoxication is the cause for such collisions in Chaplin's film, when the intoxication episodes are inserted in the two feature films under discussion, they contaminate the whole film with the image of chaos which they produce.

19 In *Wings*, crosscutting makes the irreversible linear progress of time, and Jack's blindness to the reality, clearly perceptible to screen viewers. When the swift acceleration slows down to final stillness, and Jack discovers David was the pilot he killed [28:14)], the tragic collision of temporalities results in the ensuing loss of energy caused by entropy. Viewed from the perspective of the whole film, Jack's failure to recognize his friend's face despite the latter's efforts to be identified whenever the two pilots' planes draw near enough, recalls his earlier failure due to champagne to recognize his friend Mary when she was trying to tell him that his leave had come to an end.

20 We come to realize that Peckinpah's western is explicitly a deconstruction of the Western genre, when Dundee is the victim of a failure to identify the truth about his situation which is similar to Jack's blindness in *Wings*. He is driven by his obsession with pursuing the Apache chief, but the initial chase (Costa de Beauregard 232-236) suggesting the parallelism of their temporalities by crosscutting, suffers an unexpected shift when he foolishly crosses the border into Mexico, disregarding his initial plan. Unexpectedly, though in fact historically accurate, Mexico was then occupied by the French. Dundee's bewilderment at the metamorphosis of Charriba into an army recalls the mental disorder of his earlier drinking bout.

21 In scenes which insert subjective shots to depict the characters' minds, as when Jack is gazing at the dead pilot's things early in the film, or later gazing at his dying friend's face in a close-up, and when Dundee cannot recognize his proud former self in the mirror, we share their emotion. Rather than laughing at hilarious misdemeanour, the intoxication scenes paradoxically add to the epic narrative a rewriting of the narrative function of the enjoyable attraction of characters losing their wits, into a more critical stance which gives the scenes a satirical import (Esquenazi 71).

22 Looking closely at the onscreen motif of intoxication, we realize it is not only a source of entertainment, and a demonstration of the impossibility of any oblivion of the physical forces of time, but it is also a glimpse at a deeper truth, the folly of dreams. Jack is introduced to us as a dreamer who is fascinated by the possibilities of engines: his car first, which he drives madly away as if racing with some invisible competitor, and, later, his plane which he pilots proudly [1:45:23]. Dundee is clearly obsessed by ambition, and having been given the humiliating task of watching over prisoners of war, he sets up his own battalion by recruiting some of the prisoners in his punitive enterprise against a native enemy, Charriba.

23 Given these psychological characteristics, the insertion of moments of intoxication within these narratives takes place at symbolically significant moments, as ominous warnings which neither of them is able to decipher. The two characters have in common an inability to imagine for themselves a destiny other than glorious. Jack, in *Wings*, is depicted as a dreamer who allows himself a total eclipse of the real world, and the warning that war is no child's play altogether escapes him. As to the Major, having behaved with great self-satisfaction in many situations including the scene when he shows no pity for one of his men and shoots him as a traitor [1:34:30], he allows himself to get drunk on Tequila with a superior smirk at his Mexican hostess expressing his general disdain for Mexican culture, but is unable to see the progress of his psychic collapse as a wounded man in hiding. The structure of intra-textual echoes which is a rule of coherence in narrative (Maltby 416) creates symbolic parallels between these episodes of intoxication which are inserted in the general theme of the two films, and the general pursuit of personal satisfaction. The two scenes create an uneasiness for the spectator who no longer shares

any initial empathy for them, and understands that they are getting caught into some impending tragedy. If we smile at Jack's innocent wonder at flying bubbles, we cannot share Dundee's smirk.

24 If we look for such a critical distance in the silent film *One AM* discussed above, it is noticeable that the initially burlesque slapstick encounters with unexpected obstacles gradually become the origin of a form of reflection and anticipation on the part of the protagonist himself. For example, having slipped on a carpet several times, the home-comer learns to use it as a 'magic or flying carpet' by travelling with it across the room. However, one also gathers that he is not really learning anything, since this is just a new game he is playing, and the slapstick pratfalls which subvert his American middle-class world now come to signify its essentially futile artificiality. The film actually ridicules the American 'gentleman' image, as for example his delicate handling of his emblematic top hat, a top hat which is soon crushed to threads by the foot of the revolving bed as if it had a vengeful intention of its own. In Peckinpah's film, the mirror of truth which Dundee gazes at is the opportunity for the viewer to reinterpret the whole film as a deconstruction of the myth of the Western hero (Lenihan 11). In a similar manner, the scene of Jack's intoxication in Wellman's post-WWI film also deconstructs a myth, that of the war hero, since the unhappy Jack shoots his friend's plane down, tragically mistaking him for an enemy.

Conclusion

25 To conclude, while Chaplin's intoxicated gentleman eventually exchanges his dream of an artificial world of serving robots for a plain – and empty – bathtub, the subversive figure of the 'anti-hero' emerges in both scenes of intoxication of the epic films. Wellman's film is anti-militarist in characteristic post-WWI spirit, and Peckinpah's film is a deconstruction of the classical Western in equally characteristic post-WWII disillusion. If trouble on the screen, figured in these films by the *topos* of intoxication, gives us a psychological portrait of the characters, it also caricatures the effects of human ambition when depicting the merciless mechanisation of man by his own technology and man's writing of his History of war as fratricide.

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ANNEXE

Synopsis of the three films

***One* A.M. (1916)**, short film, b&w, silent, early cinema. One the twelve films that Chaplin wrote, produced, directed and starred in for the Mutual Film Corporation, which formed Lone Star Studios solely for Chaplin's films. In 1932, Amedee J. van Beuren purchased Chaplin's Mutual films, added music by Gene Rodemich and Winston Sharples and sound effects, and released them through RKO Radio. *One A.M.* can be viewed on *You Tube* Accessed 17/07/2019.

A gentleman in a coat and top hat is seen in a taxi: as the taxi stops, he sticks his right hand out of the window and mistakenly attempts to use the handle outside. Eventually he does open the door but does not pay his fare properly. In front of his door he cannot find his key, climbs inside through the window, steps into his aquarium by mistake, finds his key in his pocket, climbs out through the widow again and opens the door. Once inside for the second time, he slips on a carpet, and gets entangled with stuffed animals: a tiger's open jaws and a cat's paws. He tries to catch a bottle on a table but it turns away; he jumps on the table, secures the bottle and a glass on the floor. Turning to the left stairs he steps up with an uncertain balance but once at the top, the carpet gets untied and rolls him down. But, just as unexpectedly, he lands with his head right in front of the bottle and the glass. He climbs the stairs once more but the pendulum of the clock on the landing strikes him several times. He escapes on all fours and reaches his room. His folding bed is geared to open and come down, but he at once gets caught in it as it becomes vertical again. It then pivots on its axis like a revolving door in which he remains a prisoner until he squeezes out; the bed settles but as soon as he lies down it folds and jumps up again to reach the wall; he again escapes. Then it comes down again but, because he has by then decided to lie on the floor, it comes crashing its metal feet upon him and tears his top hat to shreds. The bed mattress now overturns and gets separated from the spring mattress. He carefully cringes away and seeks rescue in his empty bathtub.

Wings. Director William Wellman, producer Adolph Zukor, 1927. B &W. silent. War film.

Two friends, Jack Powell (Charles Rogers) and David Armstrong (Richard Arlen) join the American Lafayette Flying Corps in 1918 to fight German pilots on the French front. They are both in love with the same girl, but another girl, Mary Preston (Clara Bow) is in love with Jack. And she also volunteers as an ambulance driver on the French front. Scenes of air fights begin with a pilot crashing during exercises (Gary Cooper), and the two friends no longer see the exciting adventure of flying but are faced with the reality of war. They enjoy a leave in Paris during which Jack gets drunk on champagne and no longer recognizes Mary. Back on the front, they engage in air combat during the battle of Saint-Mihiel but David's plane is shot down. Jack decides to avenge him and takes to the air when a German plane is in sight above their camp. He guns the plane down and lands in order to examine his enemy. He finds his friend had been escaping on a German plane and he has shot him by mistake. He then goes home and must meet his friend's grieving parents, have his share in a triumphal parade and go back to his first occupation as a car engineer, this time agreeing to share his life with Mary, the girl who loves him.

Major Dundee. Director Samuel Peckinpah (1965) dis. Paramount, colour. Western.

The action takes place in 1862 during the Minnesota Dakota War. Charlton Heston plays a federal officer, Major Amos Dundee, relegated to the command of a prison camp, who sets out to subdue a band of marauding Apaches at the head of a rag tag volunteer troop of thieves, renegades and paroled Confederate prisoners (the latter headed by Captain Benjamin Tyreen, played by Richard Harris). Charlton Heston is trading on his image of epic man of action but propelled like Wayne in *The Searchers* by racial hatred, worm-eaten by divided loyalties, and finally found wanting. He chases his enemy into Mexican territory where he is wounded and must take a rest in a Mexican house. He then gives free rein to his drinking habits by getting drunk on tequila. Eventually joining his troops with Tyreen's much needed help, he fights against the French who occupy Mexico and sees most of his men killed, including Tyreen. He leaves on his own in the last sequence of the film to an uncertain future.

RÉSUMÉS

English

This paper aims to discuss the screening of trouble with our senses as spectators which is not only visual but also tactile and aural, in the topos of drunkenness. Silent cinema has interesting films on the subject, among which Chaplin's One A.M. (1916). Drunkenness is highly spectacular; space and time are altered, and things are unrecognizable. Its chaotic world is predominantly burlesque, but it also provides cinematography for a mise-en-scène of melodrama, as in Wellman's Wings (1927). Appearing in many films, as Dick Tomasovic shows, drunkenness relies on strongly contrasted moods, between extreme happiness and violent despair. In Samuel Peckinpah's Major Dundee, (1956) drunkenness goes one step further as it expresses the disintegration of one's social and psychological identity. From a reflexive point of view, such blurring of our apprehension of the real is a vehicle for an illusory escape from everyday frustrations, thus encouraging criticism of cinema as intoxication in itself.

Français

Cet article analyse la mise en scène, par l'ivresse à l'écran, de troubles de nos perceptions comme spectateurs, effets qui ne sont pas non seulement visuels mais aussi tactiles et auriculaires. Le cinéma des premiers temps comporte des films sur le sujet, parmi lesquels *Charlot rentre tard* (1916) de Chaplin. L'ivresse est spectaculaire car l'espace et le temps sont altérés, et les objets méconnaissables. Ce monde chaotique est d'abord burlesque, mais il permet aussi de mettre en scène le mélodrame. C'est le cas de *Wings* (1927) de William Wellman. Comme le montre Dick Tomasovic, l'ivresse est un motif écranique qui repose sur de forts contrastes d'humeurs, du bonheur absolu au désespoir le plus violent. Dans *Major Dundee* de Samuel Peckinpah (1956), l'ivresse franchit une nouvelle étape en exprimant l'effondrement de l'identité sociale et psychologique du personnage. D'un point de vue réflexif, enfin, cette altération de notre perception du réel est un procédé permettant d'échapper d'une manière illusoire aux frustrations quotidiennes, au point de rappeler la critique du cinéma lui-même comme cause d'ivresse du spectateur.

INDEX

Mots-clés

ivresse, cinéma, genre burlesque, mélodrame, perte d'identité

Keywords

drunkenness, cinema, burlesque genre, melodrama, loss of identity

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The Trouble with Burlesque (in Classical Hollywood Cinema)

Marguerite Chabrol

PLAN

Between Law and "Good Taste"
Stylistic Options for Burlesque Themes
Performance and audience participation
Conclusion

TEXTE

1 Hollywood's self-censorship notoriously led to a suggestive eroticism, sometimes more effective than an explicit one (Jacobs; Caïra). It found a famous apotheosis in Rita Hayworth's implied striptease in *Gilda*. Did that scene raise any sort of *trouble* at the time? Not exactly, considering that suggesting instead of showing remained the primary goal of the Production Code Administration (PCA). This scene was more erotic than fundamentally subversive and "the fact that Gilda is 'performing,' that is, pretending to be a loose woman in a suggestive musical club setting while not really being a prostitute, allowed the film to work around the censors" (Biesen, 60). Subsequently, during the 1950s, the censors' control grew weaker and many other films featured coded striptease acts which, as arousing as they might feel to the audience, were left during the self-censorship process.

2 But there is more than meets the eye in the very emblematic "Put the Blame on Mame." The understanding of that number cannot be reduced to the eroticism elicited through a fake striptease. Behind what is remembered in film history as a great star turn lies a more complex history, that of the relationship between Hollywood and burlesque theatre, especially during the strict enforcement of the Production Code. Burlesque is indeed a substantial component of the backstage stories of the Pre-Code musicals between 1929 and 1934. In parallel with Mae West's provocations, well embodied by her obvious burlesque queen in *I'm no Angel*, many backstage melodramas, like

Applause, or the Joan Crawford vehicle *Dancing Lady*, related how the heroines of the Great Depression rose from burlesque to Broadway. Later in the 1950s, the mock striptease, both teasing and funny, became a trope of the musical genre when the Production Code Administration lost its efficiency, hence allowing what I would term a "come-back" of burlesque on mainstream screens. Many lavish musicals of that later era feature stylized burlesque acts, like unmistakably *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, typical of the Twentieth Century-Fox taste for lowbrow entertainment. But there are also two suggested stripteases in the supposedly more high-class MGM *Silk Stockings*[1]. By "burlesque," I refer to its Hollywood treatment: mentions of the word without specific contents, or acts implying striptease but where no nudity ever occurs, which is a simplified notion of actual burlesque. The word "burlesque" in the context of this essay will always designate a coded version, or "the sanitized Hollywood representations of 'burley' shows" (Schaefer, 41). It will not indicate the authentic exploitation films which were typically produced in the 1950s for a parallel circuit.

3 Between those two periods, that is between 1934 and the early 1950s, it mostly seems that Joseph Breen's Administration achieved its goal and almost erased burlesque from the mainstream screens. Without denying there was some strong cleaning-up, I argue that the epitome of the classical Hollywood mode of production was not a simple parenthesis. A few musical numbers interestingly anticipated the 1950s trend, and the theme of burlesque remained in some backstage stories. Burlesque actually reappeared clearly in 1943 with *Du Barry Was A Lady* and *Lady of Burlesque*, accompanied by wartime films that frequently included a coded burlesque act, like Gypsy Rose Lee's in *Stage Door Canteen*, and yet Rita Hayworth's in *Tonight and Every Night*. A little earlier, *Dance, Girl, Dance* granted a spacious place to burlesque in its narrative as well as its musical numbers. It did so more significantly than other films from the late 1930s which used burlesque in the narrative but didn't show much of it. In the similar stories of *The Great Ziegfeld*, *King of Burlesque*, or the Fanny Brice biopic *Rose of Washington Square*, characters climb the social ladder from their beginnings in burlesque to legitimate art. But this is less an excuse to offer coarse skits than the expression of a fascination for Broadway revues.

4 I want to question the *trouble* at stake with the presence of burlesque in films from the classical era, which went under strict surveillance both from the PCA and the local censorship boards. It is worth noting that burlesque was not technically forbidden as a *theme*, even if it involved disreputable places, but as *spectacle*. Stories could mention burlesque houses, but danced acts were more problematic. In the PCA correspondence, they are almost the only type of musical numbers which encounter immediate disapproval when they're mentioned in the script but not yet shot. But considering the stake was to prevent what the PCA called "exposure," it would seem that the mock striptease could be approved if decent enough. Euphemism and suggestion are acceptable; is there hence another kind of trouble with burlesque? If even MGM features fake (and supposedly elegant) striptease acts in films, is there any problem left? The PCA archives suggest that the issue is more complex than simple nudity. I want to analyze the ideology at stake behind the moral condemnation of burlesque in films and explore what made some musical numbers sensitive. Moreover, what made Hollywood producers, directors and actresses want to include burlesque acts anyways in that constrained context? I argue that this occasionally goes beyond the teasing power of the forbidden exposure.

Between Law and "Good Taste"

5 I first want to consider the paradoxical status of burlesque in the history of American censorship, both on stages and screens. Robert C. Allen (243) noted that in the 1920s, burlesque theatre, which was initially a complex and structured type of spectacle, became reduced to varied forms of striptease. It was approached by censorship boards mostly as a display of nudity. Raids, shutting downs of houses and court trials were based on that, more than the potential subversive power of the satirical component of the show. But as Rachel Shteir (222) and Maya Cantu (97) pointed out, the interdiction of burlesque by New York mayor La Guardia in 1937 provoked a transition from shady theatres to the main Broadway stages with a wave of "burlesk-minded" shows. Without resorting to authentic stripteases, Cole Porter's *Du Barry Was A Lady* (1939) and *Panama Hattie* (1940), or Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* (1940) included daring acts. They involved a strong suggestion of sexuality and exposure of female bodies, even

if the stake was not nudity itself, but rather the tough and lewd atmosphere.

6 Considering the significant suppression of entertainment perceived as immoral in the history of American theatre and the audacity of Broadway compared to that of Hollywood at the time, one could have expected burlesque to entirely disappear from the movies. Indeed, the film adaptation of *Panama Hattie*, for example, entirely cleaned up the original show that Maya Cantu (91-97) analyzes as a parody of the censorship against burlesque. In general, as Robert Altman pointed out, burlesque "provides the subject matter for relatively few musicals (e.g. *Applause*, *Dance Girl Dance*, *Gypsy*)" (204).

7 Erasing exhibitionist theatre was presumably the moral goal of Joseph Breen, but practically, the only prohibition involved "suggestive dancing." The Production Code didn't forbid the display of burlesque theatre, as long as it was deprived of its genuine contents. In fact, some executives raised an eyebrow when Hollywood studios started to employ former burlesque dancers as chorus girls. But they were more skeptical at first than Breen himself:

> Quizzed about the buttoned-down Code nuzzling up to the unzipped strippers, Breen replied, "That depends entirely on what is shown on the screen," before tossing the hot tomatoes back into the Boss's court. "At this time, this is not a Production Code matter, but, rather, might be a subject of industry policy for the attention of Mr. Hays" (Doherty, 88).

8 Fake stripteases actually led to interpretations of the Code and to tensions between the literal rule, the spirit of the Code, the studios' policies, and Breen's personal opinion. What disturbed Breen about *There's Magic in Music* (1941) was not as much the vague presence of a shady theatre in the story than the age of the young actress playing in burlesque:

> We still urge and recommend that you do not show your 14-year-old star, Susanna Foster, connected in any way with a burlesque theatre. We are sure that this business will cause widespread offense to audiences generally. We think you should eliminate making Susanna too hard-boiled and showing her smoking cigarettes at several points in this story. In this connection, note also: [...] this business of

> Susanna coming in to have her dress zipped up [...] and also as to her "hula" dance. [...]

> Scenes A-18 and seq.: the entire business of the strip tease by Maidie is unacceptable. The same unacceptability applies also to the leering reactions of the audience in these scenes. (Breen, Letter to Luraschi).

9 Breen's commentary sketches the portrait of a burlesque queen according to Hollywood: "too hard-boiled," wearing a dress with zippers (even if they're used "up") and performing exotic dances like the "hula." In spite of Breen's fears, and thanks to a few adjustments at Paramount's, that cleaned film was well met by the local boards of censorship. This is easily explained because it was another burlesque-into-opera success story, based musically-wise on the scores of classical composers.

10 The word "burlesque" is not forbidden in itself, but the precise idea of a striptease is extremely problematic. The PCA's work focused on a few specific details: when the musical numbers were described on paper in striptease terms, Breen usually tried to suppress them entirely, without taking into account the fact that they were intended to be more evocative than explicit. His menaces sometimes seemed out of proportion: while Breen usually suggested minor cuts, he told an RKO executive that "any attempt to portray a 'strip tease' on the screen is in violation of the Production Code and will render the whole picture unacceptable" (Breen, Letter to McDonough). In scripts, the word "striptease" is strictly forbidden. But "act" is acceptable, as is "hula" which is according to Breen a satisfactory substitute. Although he disapproved of a teenager performing a "hula" in *There's Magic in Music*, he had used that very word one month earlier to suggest the replacement of an intended striptease in *Dance, Girl, Dance*, by such an exotic performance: "It was agreed [...] that the suggestion of the 'strip tease' dance will be entirely eliminated from the finished picture, and that a type of 'hula' will be substituted therefor" (Breen, Memorandum). Burlesque dances thus opened a space for negotiation in Hollywood. What is the boundary of "suggestive" for a hula? When is a hula erotic and when is it an inoffensive exotic dance? The line was sometimes delicate to define.

11 MGM's biopic of Florenz Ziegfeld, *The Great Ziegfeld*, exemplifies strikingly the contradictory status of burlesque in films of the classical era. Breen was extremely critical towards a Fanny Brice act – she appears under her own name in the episode where Ziegfeld observes her in a burlesque show and invites her in his prestigious revue. Brice intended to do her parody of a fan dance, a type of striptease made popular by Sally Rand, without actually disrobing. But the PCA decided at the time to forbid fully that type of act. Even a "burlesque of a fan dance" – here "burlesque" means parody or grotesque – was discouraged by Breen who rather stated that "fan dance as we understand it will not be approved. This has been our rule" (Telegram to Hart). That was the crucial issue discussed during production. After the sequence was nevertheless shot, because it seemed that a parodic intent could allow it, Breen deemed it "vulgar" though not technically forbidden (Letter to Stromberg). The PCA head interestingly made it a matter of "good taste" rather than censorship. But consequently, the fan dance disappeared from the film, where burlesque is limited to a few signals indicating a cultural category, but never providing spectacle. Indeed, Brice's belonging to lowbrow entertainment is expressed through the background role of a burlesque queen sharing her dressing room. That character is designated as such by her shiny white skin-tight costume, a Hollywood code to hide in white every shady detail. After that encounter, Brice's inoffensive comedy song is introduced by a shot of the chorus of fully clothed girls, a typical indicator of burlesque. At the end of the production process, Breen seemed proud of that "outstanding musical" he helped produce (Final Summary).

12 But another number of *The Great Ziegfeld*, which is not discussed at all in the correspondence, bears an almost unconscious flavor of burlesque. That number, supposedly that of a lavish revue, reveals about twenty girls in nightgowns dancing around their beds. Its second part uses mobile runways as a key attraction. This is not any shape of a motorized stage. The runway was indeed the dominant feature of burlesque stages, as it can be seen on some of Reginald Marsch's drawings. The film is directed by Robert Z. Leonard, who directed *Dancing Lady* and its introductory scene where the framing and lighting foregrounded the runway. Burlesque is implicitly present in that *Great Ziegfeld* number, because it offers the apparatus

– and even an exaggerated apparatus – but not the extensive view. This did not make Breen raise an eyebrow. An obvious code for burlesque like the runway did not compromise the general "good taste" of that "outstanding musical." It seems that what Ziegfeld did on Broadway worked well in Hollywood too: transforming the burlesque dancer into a decent chorus girl, nonetheless revealing her legs, and shifting from individual acts to choral performances that "deemphasize individual talent" (Altman, 204). The fact that this number involves a chorus, and not a solo dancer, might have substantial ideological stakes. Questions of nudity aside, wouldn't fake burlesque be more subversive in Breen's eyes when it involves a single female performer, an identified subject, and not a certain number of anonymous bodies? It is also a matter of distance: choral numbers allow the camera to remain far from the stage and to provide ensemble shots, when an only performer calls for close-ups and another perception of the body.

Stylistic Options for Burlesque Themes

13 Because the fake burlesque acts cannot unveil what they are supposed to, they frequently have to relate to another type of spectacle. The revue represents one possibility, but girls exhibiting their legs in nightgowns still offer a somewhat voyeuristic show. The other two strategies adopted in Hollywood were comedy or the use of a distinct and prominent musical or artistic style. They were both attempts to prevent any arousal from happening during burlesque acts on screen and solutions obeying the Production Code. But in return, they sometimes proved to be a way of making some of these numbers risqué, possibly even subversive.

14 Let us start with comedy. Fanny Brice's previously mentioned fan dance was suppressed because of the fan dance itself, not because it was a parody. Even though Breen did not appreciate its grotesque side, this was mostly a matter of personal taste, which the head of the PCA admitted in some of his remarks. Comedy was routinely accepted when it disqualified the striptease. Gypsy Rose Lee, one of the most notable strippers of the time, transformed her literary strips (authentic ones) into a comedy act in *Stage Door Canteen*. At the very

end of her number, she takes one last scarf off and is still more than fully covered with fabric. The amount of clothing is proportionate to the notoriety of the stripper, major film stars having gone much farther in that direction. But with Gypsy Rose Lee, the act had to remain strictly funny. One of the rare strip numbers in the musicals of the late 1930s is Martha Raye's recurring song in *Double or Nothing*, "It's On, It's Off." The actress shows nothing but seems to suffer from an obsession with undressing expressed in grotesque and of course uncompleted movements. The act is mostly a crazy dance. Another example is given by Lucille Ball's strip number in *Dance, Girl, Dance*, "Mother, What Do I Know?" The PCA files establish that she was initially meant to dance with a torn dress, which Breen disapproved of. After strong warnings, the final film gave it a comic tone, the whole number being about the wind lifting Ball's dress[2]. The act moves towards a cartoonish ending: right after the actress has left the stage, a prop dress flies away, with a whistling sound producing a mickey-mousing effect. Hollywood censors thus considered that comedy could neutralize the suspense of an actual striptease. But this example emphasizes in return a key element of authentic burlesque, the comedy part of the performance. Even if the cinematic numbers of the classical era don't have much critical content, they nevertheless empower the performer: Lucille Ball's comic energy in this scene distinctly establishes her domination over the male audience.

15 The second way of including burlesque gestures on screen is to make them part of a dance with a strongly identified style that works as a mask. Artsy numbers designed by recognized choreographers could more easily reuse burlesque tropes. This is a part of the burlesque wave on Broadway that reached Hollywood through some adaptations. Balanchine's ballet "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue," from the stage musical *On Your Toes* (1936), starts with the entrance of a burlesque dancer on a runway. Because that moment is included in a sophisticated choreography and is performed by a ballerina (Tamara Geva in the original show), it was left without much difficulty in the Vera Zorina part in the Warner Bros. adaptation, all the more so since Geva's black lace dress is replaced by another shiny white outfit.

16 In parallel to high art, swing music also provided an excellent cover for burlesque moments. Swing dances could indeed be substitutes for burlesque movements, for they justified a deep involvement of the

body and "hot" performances. The displayed energy was connected to a musical fashion rather than sexual suggestiveness. Swing numbers could involve slight burlesque codes in energetic dances that were safe for the Production Code. Lucille Ball performs her "Jitterbug Bite" in *Dance, Girl, Dance* while taking her fur coat off and swaggering on a runway in front of a fascinated male audience. Many visual codes for Hollywood burlesque are there, but the music redirects the number towards the popular dance. Barbara Stanwyck performs an even safer swing number at the beginning of *Ball of Fire* (1941). Her glittering costume disclosing her legs, and mostly her poses backstage on a chair opposite Gary Cooper clearly designate her character as a burlesque queen. But her musical act doesn't exactly match. "Drum Boogie" is indeed a jazzy nightclub number with a big band including drummer Gene Krupa. There are a few visual clues suggesting burlesque: Stanwyck is introduced by a close up on her hand playing with the curtain before her entrance, and her legs show very much. But the staging is careful, long shots are favored and no dancing movement is emphasized as possibly sensual. The energy rather comes out of the upbeat music and musical rhythms.

17 Firstly, swing dances made possibly risky numbers acceptable. They allowed the presence of a few clues to knowledgeable audiences behind the striking appeal of contemporary popular music. Secondly, they could display the performer's energy and authority. They justified hot dances with renewed gestures and thereby empowered the actresses by conveying the control involved in the performance and how it impacts the diegetic audience. The change of style and the dressing of serious art or swing music allowed burlesque to appear in acts and not only in the narrative. Some of these acts valued the performers and made great star turns, as for Ball and Stanwyck, but others were quite sanitized and annihilated the spirit of burlesque.

18 A good example of the latter category is the transformation of Mary Martin's "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," a showstopper on Broadway in *Leave It to Me!* in 1938. Its first film version, in *Love Thy Neighbor* in 1940, tried to save the fur coat and the sitting poses, but without any striptease gestures or specific rhythmical energy. The number thus became literal and static: the fur coat is a fur coat, which is a symbol of social status and wealth. It is supposed to be elegant. It is

not any more the instrument of subversion that it was on Broadway, where burlesque acts aimed at criticizing the "genteel traditions" (Cantu 74) and where "lady" was one of the most ironic words of the time. Mary Martin, like Ethel Merman, Mae West or Gypsy Rose Lee were the antithesis of expected femininity. Their outrageous behaviors on stage were perceived as a critical stand both on class and gender. When transposing their numbers on screen, the movie industry drove them back to their literal meaning, erasing the irony. In Hollywood, "ladies" were supposed to be genuine ones.

Performance and audience participation

19 Some acts, and I should say some performers, nevertheless retained a spicy taste of what could be seen more frequently on stages. The most intense numbers are not necessarily the most daring in suggesting nudity. They are rather those who reestablish audience participation – a strong dynamic in burlesque. This would require an extensive study, and I will merely sketch the broad outlines of three situations preserving an effect of burlesque in films.

20 The first type of audience involvement in Hollywood burlesque numbers relies on a shared knowledge of what is forbidden. Some sequences managed to ridicule the process of censorship, something that was getting common in Broadway shows. Instead of playing on the possible suggestiveness of erotic exhibition, these scenes handle the stripping theme to make fun of either the censorship laws, or simply Hollywood conventions. Viewers aware of recent stage productions and reading in the newspapers about the raids and the misfortunes of burlesque queens drawn into courts, could find echoes of those topics in films. Off and on the publicity also foregrounded the burlesque element to strengthen the clues, which could make the audience especially aware of the subject behind entertaining acts. Significant films with a burlesque topic include representations of raids or trials. Considering that the burlesque acts disclose almost nothing, the raids and trials seem completely out of proportion (besides the following examples, *Eadie Was a Lady* is another compelling burlesque-themed film with raid scenes). The court scenes make the institution surprisingly ridiculous, considering

the rules of the Production Code and its careful treatment of the Law. A prime example is the ending of *Dance, Girl, Dance*, years before the more famous court scene of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. At the beginning of the sequence, Lucille Ball's character shows her hurt legs and back to the judge: therefore, she unties her bulky fur coat, revealing more of her body than she did until then in the burlesque house. In musical acts, fake courts with clowns emphasize the parody: there is one in *Lady of Burlesque* and Ginger Rogers's rendering of "the Saga of Jenny" in *Lady in the Dark* (1944) also associates burlesque with a mock trial.

21 The second type of audience involvement happens through editing and staging when the directors found a way to restore the sensuality in stripteases. Indeed, filming even a fake striptease was technically complicated, considering Breen made very specific suggestions about the choice of frames – he rarely delivered such comments about film technique on other topics. The correspondence during the production of *There's Magic in Music* provides many examples. We have noted earlier how Breen forbade reaction shots. In addition, he had shots cut very late in the production process: a postscript on the visa demanded that "the specific shot of the garment falling to the floor in front of the girl's legs will be eliminated" (Visa). Moreover, Breen defined possible ways to perform dancing scenes and specific lateral movements. A cooch dance in *The Great Ziegfeld* was authorized if the name was withdrawn from the dialogue and providing that "the actual execution of the dance, if shown on the screen, must be limited in general only to side-ways motion of the hips, without backward and forward motion or rolling of the abdomen" (Breen, Letter to Zehner). That description would also perfectly fit Barbara Stanwyck's hips movements in the previously mentioned "Drum Boogie."

22 Eroticism, according to Breen, seems to lie in a "deep" construction of the image. Out of fear of audience absorption, the striptease acts in Hollywood are usually staged in a frontal way in order to look "flat." The most erotic ones are indeed those reinstating depth, or those inventing suggestive sideways dances. Dorothy Arzner's directing in *Dance, Girl, Dance* is genuinely creative and remarkably transgressive for the era, inasmuch as it bypassed almost all of Breen's requests. Lucille Ball's hula sequence, which is not a striptease, is her most erotic performance in the film. It was performed in spite of Breen's

warnings that "there must be nothing whatever sex suggestive about Bubble's dance. Otherwise the whole scene will be unacceptable" (Letter to McDonough). That comment was relevant to the script before shooting. The staging in the film seems to follow the usual recommendation of laterality, but in a spirit which clearly disobeys the intent. Arzner insists on the bulging eyes of the producer auditioning Lucille Ball's character. Ball then dances, her lateral movements outlined by the camera panning, which could seem to satisfy Breen's demands. But she spanks herself and clearly expects to inflame vigorous reactions with that gesture. Instead of abandoning the dancer afar (like Hawks in "Drum Boogie"), Arzner resorts to closer shots which reinforce Ball's presence. *Dance, Girl, Dance* is directed by a woman, it features two actresses in the main parts, and the writing team additionally includes several women. It is a landmark of feminist film history because of another sequence with the ballerina character; but the interest of the burlesque theme is slightly underestimated and I find it significant that a film of the classical era so strongly resisting the Production Code through burlesque, is a mostly feminine project.

23 This leads me to the third type of audience involvement, the one built by the performance. Some burlesque acts, performed by single females and not a chorus, grant them a strong empowerment. They establish complicity with the audience by indicating how the actress dominates her diegetic audience. One of the choicest examples can be found with Barbara Stanwyck in *Lady of Burlesque*, notably because she is not *any* performer at the time but one of the most famous and best paid female stars. (Lucille Ball in the previous example was still at the beginning of her career). As we have seen, Stanwyck's number in *Ball of Fire* is far from burlesque, even though her control of the performance is to be noticed. The star was therefore criticized by real burlesque dancers who thought she did not do justice to the actual shows. A brief note in *Showmen's Trade Review* stated that burlesque dancers locally protested against screening of the film: in Akron, Ohio, "the burlesque strippers and chorus girls of the Gayety Theatre [...] picketed the Palace with signs which stated that Barbara Stanwyck was unfair to burlesque artists" (29). Whether it was in answer to that protest or not, the star became more daring in her following part in *Lady of Burlesque*. The film is adapted from

Gypsy Rose Lee's 1941 autobiography, *The G-String Murders*, another part of the late 1930s/early 1940s burlesque wave on the East coast. During production, Breen had some acts suppressed (Leff and Simmons, 130), but other musical numbers located on a burlesque stage remained.

24 "Play-It on the G-String," Stanwyck's first act, is assuredly but skillfully drawing on the limit of suggesting bumps and grinds on screen without compromising the film's PCA visa. But what is especially noticeable is the way the star runs the whole gamut from distance to dedication to her performance. She goes from boredom, to indifference to her possible suitor and to what seems to be genuine fun in her sensual body movements. The energy is expressed even in shots obeying the Breen regulation (hip movements invisible in some close shots, but suggested by the upper body and the raised arms). In the end, when Stanwyck strongly shakes the stage curtain, the camera angle avoids facing the stage strictly. This is not the usual "flat" image of burlesque shows that are legion in Hollywood films; on the contrary, the framing gives space to the performer and allows the audience to feel her live intensity.

25 Lucille Ball's performances in *Dance, Girl, Dance* bear many similarities. But what is fascinating with Stanwyck is her status at the time. She is a first-grade Hollywood star, a legitimate actress and, to my knowledge, the only one to play a burlesque queen so explicitly under the PCA reign – Mae West aside. Stanwyck was perfect for this: First, she had a Pre-Code aura, and her hardboiled and strong roles of the early 1930s found an echo in her later burlesque-themed films. Her real past as a chorus girl and her fictional past as a heroine of the Great Depression established elaborated characters beyond the burlesque moments. Second, she had glamour to compensate the vulgarity of her characters. This was reinforced by her supposedly ideal real-life marriage to Robert Taylor, omnipresent in magazines of the early 1940s. Third, the star retained credibility as an actress. Even if she did not win an Oscar for *Stella Dallas* and *Ball of Fire*, she was nominated twice for the Award; she already appeared at the time as one of the most versatile American actresses – if not the most. An advertisement for *Lady of Burlesque* promoted the audacity of the film with a quotation from producer Hunt Stromberg: "I have a hunch I've started something." Visually, on a poster showing a full-size Stan-

wyck dressed as a burlesque queen with a raised hand, it also looks like the star is saying so.

Conclusion

26 In conclusion, Joseph Breen put a great deal of energy in making cinematic burlesque acts boring. But some of the rare numbers remaining in Hollywood under the Production Code have, nonetheless, interesting stakes. My main point is that they were less morally shocking than provocative in the way they empowered some female performers. Whilst giving up nudity, the acts banked on the spirit of burlesque: the energy, the toughness, the authority and distance of the performer. They stood for strategic spots for the actresses to display their singularities and obtain spontaneous expression. Their goal was not realism, and the mainstream stars of course did not intend to turn into real burlesque queens and disrobe. But they could explore ways to perform control and letting go. And even though that part is never discussed, it implicitly was "bad taste" for Breen, and it had to be discouraged.

27 My second point is about the musical genre: astonishingly, the most unusual numbers during the golden age do not occur in traditional musicals, but in melodramas or criminal films with musical numbers. Before the musical genre went "Looking for trouble," to refer to the title of a Jane Russell song in *The French Line* (1953), an obvious sexual display of the 1950s, other genres were more daring in recycling the inheritance of the old burlesque stage. Lucille Ball's or Barbara Stanwyck's less sexual acts from the 1940s were probably as troubling in their own times. They were nevertheless more complex in the way they challenged male audiences: they expressed the subjectivities of the performers while resisting any exposure. At the same time, more conventional musicals were usually less daring, though this genre would be expected to be one of the more permissive ones.

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NOTES

1 Other significant examples are provided by Vera-Ellen's "Naughty but Nice" in *The Belle of New York* (Charles Walters, 1952), Ann Miller's "Too Darn Hot" in *Kiss Me, Kate* (George Sidney, 1953) and several numbers in *Pal Joey* (George Sidney, 1957).

2 This number might have inspired the scene of Marilyn Monroe's dress being lifted by the subway wind in *The Seven Year Itch*.

RÉSUMÉS

English
This essay tackles musical numbers indirectly inspired by the burlesque stage in classical Hollywood films from the late 1930s and 1940s. Those mock stripteases were sparse and carefully examined in the self-regulation process, mostly while the Production Code Administration was operating. I argue that the stakes in controlling those numbers went beyond the forbidden nudity. The article analyzes some film sequences through the prism of the PCA correspondence to define the boundaries between the rules and what was only "good taste" at the time. Through transforming and stylizing burlesque, the staging and performances in these numbers could seem to have erased their models. But the article shows how these paradoxical acts sometimes managed to bring up the spirit of burlesque theatre and empower the female performers, and therefore inspire some inexpressible trouble.

Français
L'article étudie un type de numéro musical des films hollywoodiens des années 1930 et 1940 indirectement inspiré par le théâtre *burlesque* : le faux striptease. Pendant la période classique et l'apogée du système d'autorégulation des films, ce type de numéro assez rare fait l'objet d'une vigilance particulière, mais pas seulement pour les raisons évidentes d'un interdit de représenter la nudité. L'article analyse des numéros au regard des archives de l'Administration du Code de production, pour établir les limites entre les règles strictes et ce qui relève seulement du « bon goût ». À force de transformer et de styliser les traits du *burlesque*, la mise en scène et la performance de ces numéros semble l'avoir effacé. Mais ces numéros paradoxaux ont parfois su restituer l'esprit originel du théâtre *burlesque* et de ce fait pu susciter un trouble plus indicible par leur manière de donner du pouvoir aux actrices.

INDEX

Mots-clés
code de production, faux striptease, théâtre burlesque, actrices

Keywords
production code, mock striptease, burlesque theatre, female performers

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The "Trouble" with Female Power: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Magic in the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (Netflix, 2018-2020)

Anne Sweet

PLAN

TV's Good Witches: Empowerment Contained
Sex Positivity vs. Monstrous Sexuality
Patriarchy, Empowerment and the Queen of Hell
Conclusion

TEXTE

1 "Being wicked never felt so good" announces the trailer for the second season[1] of the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*[2] (Netflix, 2018-2020)[3], a fantasy and horror TV series about a high school student who is half-witch[4] and half-mortal, and who belongs to a family and greater magical community of devil-worshipping, human-dissecting, cannibal witches. Sabrina is different from many other representations of TV witch heroines as she revels in her powers, which are associated with the Dark Lord (devil). Yet the figure of the witch on TV has always been linked to the representation and conception of female power and agency.

2 The *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* inscribes itself within streaming platforms' production logic of creating innovative fare for diverse niche subscriber markets in order to offer something for everyone, which contrasts with the way in which traditional TV networks produce mainstream-acceptable media products in order to appeal to mass audiences to sell advertisements.[5] A *Wall Street Journal* article more specifically confirms that the series is part of the streaming platform's "young-adult push" (Jurgenson). It is also noteworthy that it is from the same creator, Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, as the teen series *Riverdale* (CW 2017-). Both series focus on the lives of high-school students based on Archie Comics' characters, and

contain dark, violent, and sexual content. However, as Netflix is unencumbered by network censorship, the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is gorier than *Riverdale*, and also able to explore teen sexuality much more explicitly, which can be seen as empowering but also troubling, especially to viewers and critics concerned about the young target audience (Flood). [6]

3 John Fiske notes television's potential as "a cultural agent, particularly as the provoker and circulator of meanings" (Fiske 1), and the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is notable for its revision of the transgressive figure of a powerful teenage witch, as well as a number of other significant innovative gender representations that can be found within, including many main characters with non-heteronormative sexual identities. Thus, it is very deliberately distinguishing itself as a "woke" [7] series presenting non-traditional gender roles, and positioning itself as falling within the current "Fourth Wave of Feminism", of which key components are questions of social justice, LGBTQ+ rights, diversity, sex positivity, body positivity, internet activism, and inclusivity, as well as the examination of these questions through the lens of intersectionality, a theoretical framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw that allows for the analysis of the way in which power dynamics, race, gender, and social forces interlock and interact to create discrimination and oppression [8].

4 The figure of the witch is a key symbol in the feminist movement, and of female empowerment, both on and off the screen. The first magical TV heroines appeared on screen in 1960s sitcoms like *I Dream of Jeannie* (NBC, 1965-1970) and *Bewitched* (ABC, 1964-1972) and were created in the wake of major shifts in consciousness about female roles and sexuality following the release of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 (Douglas 123-148) [9]. Explaining the appeal of witches, second-waved feminist writer Erica Jong notes, "The more disempowered people are the more they long for magic, which explains why magic becomes the province of women in a sexist society" (Jong 36). And like its predecessors, the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* was created during a particular cultural moment of striving for empowerment, and an increased awareness of the need for feminism in the wake of #MeToo. A critic writing about the release of the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* highlights the renewed importance of the witch as a symbol in contemporary culture and feminist

narratives thus: “Witch narratives are not only in vogue thanks to #MeToo, but also natural metaphors for stories of marginalization and othering. Then there’s the history of witch persecution, all steeped in the intersectional nexus of sexism, racism, classism, and ethnocentrism that upholds patriarchy” (Joho). In this vein, the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, positions the heroine as both oppressed—as a member of a group that was hunted and killed during the witch trials, a fact that is mentioned often in the series—but also as magically empowered. The overarching narrative opposes Sabrina to the patriarchal figure of The Dark Lord, and thus the series prominently features the fourth wave narrative trope of “reclaiming power from a toxic male” as identified by Valerie Frankel in her work on TV representations of fourth wave feminism (Frankel 2020).

5 The symbol of the witch is linked to conception, birth, life and death, and thus to sex and sexuality. Barbara Creed notes that in “patriarchal discourses” the witch is perceived as “an enemy of the symbolic order” (Creed 76) and thus representations of witches often embody a form of trouble on screen. The showrunners of the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* appear to be embracing this particular form of “trouble”, using the kinkier, darker and more violent aspects of the symbol of the witch to explore sexuality and sexual identities, to fight patriarchal oppression and thus to transmit certain gender messages. This chapter will first explore how the series inscribes itself in a historical lineage of TV depictions of female witches that reflect feminist gains and participate in the negotiation of discourses concerning female empowerment, power, witches and witchcraft, while also breaking with certain conventions; I will then examine the gender and feminist messages in detail to determine if they are truly as progressive and intersectional as they would seem at first glance.

TV’s Good Witches: Empowerment Contained

6 In order to understand the significance of the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, it is important to examine how the series both conforms to and departs from other series containing magical heroines, and the way that these series have reflected shifts in conceptions of gender and women’s roles in society. The character of Sabrina is

clearly inspired by and inscribed in a long lineage of pretty, magical TV heroines, starting with the 1960s series *I Dream of Jeannie* and *Bewitched* which debuted at the beginning of the women's liberation movement. The lead characters in these series were magical, and thus they were more powerful than the men in their lives, but they were told not to use their powers. Therefore, Susan Douglas believes that, through these representations "a significant proportion of the pop culture moguls were trying to acknowledge the impending release of female sexual and political energy, while keeping it all safely in a straightjacket." (Douglas 126) Moreover, she adds that:

> In these shows, the potentially monstrous and grotesque was beautified and tamed; what we saw, in other words, was the containment of the threat posed by unleashed female sexuality, especially in the wake of Beatlemania and Helen Gurley Brown. Since viewers had been socialized to regard female sexuality as monstrous, TV producers addressed the anxieties about letting it loose by domesticating the monster, by making her pretty and sometimes slavish, by shrinking her and keeping her locked up in a bottle, and by playing the situation for laughs (Douglas 126).

7 Linda Baughman, Allison Burr-Miller, and Linda Manning note that *Bewitched* and its witches are part of our "media history" and that all the modern-day witches are viewed through our "media memory" of this show, which affects all current representations of witches through "intertextuality" (Baughman, Burr-Miller, Linda Manning 106-107). The 60s blond hair and retro-style clothing of the heroine of the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* resemble that of Samantha, *Bewitched*'s beloved housewife, and seem to be deliberately co-opting this imagery and association, while simultaneously turning the convention of the pretty, ladylike good witch on its head through the series' dark atmosphere, violent heroine, associations with the devil, and horror tropes. This distinguishes it from the series it is a reboot of, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (ABC/WB, 1996-2003). Like its magical predecessors, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* played magic for laughs and placed its eponymous lead character firmly in a cheery domestic sphere.

8 *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and its offshoot, the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, are part of a larger trend of associating messages of

empowerment with magical powers. In fact, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* is part of the 90s-2000s phenomenon of Girl Power, which includes a number of supernaturally empowered heroines whose magical powers were used as a vehicle for feminist messages, like those of *Charmed* (WB, 1998-2006), and *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (The WB/UPB, 1997-2003). These sorts of shows, which issued from what many consider to be feminism's third wave[10], depicted witches and other magical heroines as main characters in a positive way. They were clearly influenced by the "Goddess Spirituality Movement" of the 70s, which, during the second wave of feminism, attempted to cast the figure of the witch in a good light as a political statement, reclaiming it from the figure of the "weird woman" (Sanders 79). Yet, even if these third-wave shows had undeniable feminist potential, in order not to alienate media consumers and advertisers alike, post-feminist series unequivocally featured young, attractive heroines who corresponded to the aspirational lifestyle products that TV advertisers were peddling. Of the link between commercial capitalism, young women and representations of empowerment, Valerie Frankel affirms, "This was the third wave, roughly synonymous with 'girl power', as young women emphasized assertiveness through attraction and even materialism" (Frankel 2)[11]. And this is something from which the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*—distributed as it is on a lucrative streaming platform juggernaut—does not completely dissociate itself, featuring as it does a white, thin, blond, fashionably dressed heroine.

9 Yet the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* breaks with previous representations in an important way. The supernatural powers of the *Charmed* sisters, as well as those of Buffy of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*[12] and her witch friend and fellow hero Willow (WB/UPN, 1997-2003), were "contained" and limited to being used for good and for the good of others and not for personal gain. For instance, Willow actually had to restrain herself from using her powers, as she was a magic addict whose unrestrained use of magic was shown as having serious and dark consequences. One of the witches of *Charmed* (Piper) often wears a cross necklace, as does the supernatural character Buffy of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, emphasizing the association of empowered magical female characters and their power with the forces of good. In contrast, the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* re-associates the figure

of the witch with devil-worshipping and black magic, by unleashing the potential of a witch's power and showing her reveling in it. In fact, Sabrina's powers are revealed to be not only witch powers, but also demonic powers, as her true father is revealed to be the devil, or The Dark Lord himself. Despite the political prominence of the religious right in the US, interestingly enough, the devil seems to be getting somewhat of a reimagining in popular culture on TV, notably with the contemporary series *Lucifer* (Fox/Netflix, 2016-2021), in which the devil is essentially, a very attractive "good guy" whose well-sculpted body is an important visual spectacle. Likewise, The Dark Lord on the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is a very handsome fallen angel who serves as an important visual spectacle and sex object, as a well-muscled man who spends a significant amount of screen time mostly naked for the pleasure of the viewers' gaze, even if he is still very much an antagonist. America has a very vocal conservative Christian right, and the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (as well as *Lucifer*) did receive some backlash from Christians, but that does not seem to have stopped the success of either, as both were renewed for several seasons [13]. In fact, the producers of the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* even seem to be completely uninterested in Christians' good opinions, as can be evidenced by the broadcast of a special Christmas-themed episode apart from the regular season in December 2018 that showcased the satanic traditions of Sabrina's family as they celebrated the winter solstice with Christmas-like decorations.

10 The *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is more graphically violent than many of its predecessors, or even *Riverdale*, which plays on a network in primetime. Netflix is unfettered by network censors and the network-TV imperative to attract large audiences for each series [14]. Thus, Sabrina can actually be quite openly violent, notably slitting the throat of one of her classmates and burying her in a garden where she will be reborn as part of a spell. Unlike many of her predecessors, Sabrina does not seem to completely be punished in the narrative for enjoying using magic and exercising power, or forbidden to use it like Samantha in *Bewitched*, even if certain uses of magic are shown to have consequences (like bringing back someone from the dead). Compared to many older series, the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* would appear to be positioned as "woke", intersectional and

unabashedly feminist, at least on the surface. For example, in the very first episode of the series, when Sabrina's friend Susie gets bullied, Sabrina starts a club called WICCA (Women's Intersectional Cultural and Creative Association) to empower the girls at Baxter High. WICCA's purpose, her friend Roz emphasizes, is to be "a club to topple the white patriarchy", while Sabrina underlines that the club will allow them "to mobilize and protest if we need to get political, to fight when we need to fight, to defend each other"[15].

11 Thus, like her predecessors, Sabrina's powers are often used in service of others, even if, due to the satanic origins of her power, she is more of an anti-hero than a hero. It is the obligation of care that Sarah Projansky and Leah R. Vande Berg note undermined and contained the power and feminist potential of Sabrina's previous incarnation in *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*:

> Nevertheless, despite providing many potential moments for particular kinds of feminist pleasure, the series' affirmation of traditional patriarchal feminine concerns with physical beauty, acquisition of heterosexual male attention, and responsibility for others undermines Sabrina's access to independence and contains her potential as a feminist role model (Projansky and Vande Berg 27).

12 Likewise, there is a duty of care incumbent on the current incarnation of Sabrina, and her active interest in boys somewhat undermines her good sense and decision-making at times. Her ultrafeminine, stylish, made-up appearance, represent a link with the consumerist discourses of third-wave or postfeminism that linked sartorial style to empowerment,[16] and would seem at odds with the emphasis on "real" beauty associated with the body positivity movement of the fourth wave. Yet Sabrina, whose powers are rooted in dark magic—even if she is part human and was baptized in the Christian Church, in addition to belonging to the Satanic Church of Night—is freer in her use of magic than many of the pretty magical heroines who came before, and is unanchored from the absolute imperative to do good and to associate herself with the forces of the light. Moreover, as for its representation of violence, the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is freer in its exploration of sexuality and in its representation of violence than its predecessors.

Sex Positivity vs. Monstrous Sexuality

13 The series represents a site of negotiating discourses in terms of its representation of sexuality, which can be seen as innovative to some extent, but also troubling in some ways. The atmosphere in the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, which is inspired by the 2014 Archie comic book version of Sabrina, is meant to be disturbing. Sabrina's family runs a mortuary out of their home in the small town of Greendale, and the dead bodies they receive (and sometimes dissect) are stored in the basement of their gray Victorian house, which features its own cemetery and is reminiscent of the style of a classic haunted house, or house of horror. Her familiar, Salem, named after the city where witches were prosecuted in the 17th century, is not just a black cat, but a rather sinister shapeshifting goblin who can take the form of a feline. The landscape is bleak, and the sides of the shots are often blurry and out of focus, with Sabrina often wearing red, which contrasts with the dreariness. The color red is reminiscent of the fairy tale, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and much of the action—and magic—takes places in a dark forest near Sabrina's house. The fact that Sabrina is often garbed in red is also highly symbolic, due to the color's association with blood and horror. To wit, the series is filled with horror tropes, many of which, Barbara Creed notes, are associated with female sexuality and reproduction:

> The witch is defined as an abject figure in that she is represented within patriarchal discourses as an implacable enemy of the symbolic order. She is thought to be dangerous and wily, capable of drawing on her powers to wreak destruction on the community. The witch sets out to unsettle boundaries between the rational and irrational, symbolic and imaginary. Her evil powers are seen as part of her "feminine" nature; she is closer to nature than man and can control forces in nature such as tempests, hurricanes and storms (Creed 76).

14 Interestingly, Sabrina can only fully express her powers when she comes of age and undergoes a dark baptism. Thus, her powers are tied to puberty and the beginning of her sexual awareness, as expressed through her relationship with her mortal boyfriend Harvey

Kinkle, and later with her witch boyfriend Nick Scratch. Yet, in order to receive her full powers, she must remain a virgin until she participates in the dark baptism, during which she wears white like a bride. Sabrina actually comes to the dark baptism wearing her mother's lacy white wedding dress, which looks a bit like a 60s, fit-and-flare, party dress and which she had actually donned as a costume for a Halloween/16th birthday party that she had attended just before. At the party, she seemed the very picture of an innocent young woman, a "girl", as she danced with her friend Roz who was also in costume. Yet, Halloween can be a moment for the narrative device of the masquerade, or "come as you aren't day"[17], and once Sabrina arrives at the dark baptism, the dress turns black, reflecting Sabrina's true nature a Satan-worshipping practitioner of the dark arts. Her dress is then removed to reveal a white slip underneath. Sabrina is thus to receive her dark baptism in front of her coven whilst wearing a slinky, form-fitting white undergarment, which illustrates her vulnerability and disempowerment at this moment as well the sexual component to the dark baptism during which she is cut until she bleeds in order to sign the book of The Dark Lord with her own blood (i.e. make a pact with the devil). The *mise-en-scène* is highly symbolic. She is dressed in white, the color associated with purity and virginity, and the knife-cutting is symbolic of penetration and thus loss of innocence, as Sabrina makes a sound that could be interpreted as being quite sexual, and thus transgressive. The Dark Lord, who is positioned as a "groom" to whom, in a certain manner, she pledges her troth, is portrayed in this scene as a hairy, manly goat-like creature, with large horns, which alludes to bestiality.

15 Later in the series, the positioning of The Dark Lord, who turns out to be Sabrina's father, hints at incest. Not only is The Dark Lord positioned as a young[18], handsome, male, sex object who spends a fare of amount of screen time unclothed, and whose bared muscled chest is an important visual spectacle, but he gazes at Sabrina in a way that is quite unsettling for a father. Moreover, after he is later imprisoned in Nick's body, Sabrina is taunted that her boyfriend still has part of her father inside him. The Dark Lord wants to possess her, for her to do his bidding, which raises the issue of male control over her body autonomy, as at one point, she seems possessed and imbibed with his power as she, his devil's spawn, becomes "The Dark Lord's Sword" (in

more phallic symbolism)—or his tool—an extension and an instrument of his power without self or agency.

16 The issue of "will she or won't she lose her virginity" is a subplot of much of season two, as Sabrina's sexuality continues to be connected to horror and horror tropes. Sabrina notably participates in a sex festival called Lupercalia, with her aunt Zelda's approval, that ends in horror rather than in an orgiastic experience, with her chopping up her boyfriend Nick's familiar Amalia (who looks like a humanized wolf) with an ax, whilst wearing a red cape over sexy white lingerie, the blood of the animal splattered all over her. Once again, this scene recalls *Little Red Riding Hood*, a fairytale that is correlated to the loss of virginity and innocence. Yet the coming-of-age and loss of innocence are Nick's. He loses his only parent when Sabrina kills Amalia, who took the place of his mother when his parents died, and who had gone crazy with a murderous rage in a version of the "castrating mother", one of the monstrous-feminine horror tropes defined by Creed (Creed 139-150).

17 In season three, a group of pagan witches who worship pagan gods, thus differentiating them from Sabrina's coven of devil-worshipping witches, are depicted as genuinely evil characters, which places the audience in the position of rooting for devil-worshippers to survive the conflict as the "good guys". The pagans go on a hunt for virgins, as killing one is the key to bringing "The Green God" to life on Earth, which will give them power. Sabrina's friend Theo is shown losing his virginity to escape this fate. In an interesting role reversal, it is not a girl who is seen to be the virgin sacrifice, but Harvey, who is then tortured in a horrifically gory manner, penetrated by vines of The Green Man, as blood streams out of him. Then the flowers of The Green Man release their powdery seed to pollinate the Earth, as if they had "ejaculated" after Harvey's penetration. If coming of age, and sexuality are linked to blood and horror, chastity would seem to be equally punished in his case.

18 If the fact that Sabrina's sexuality remains connected to horror tropes undermines a possible feminist message of sex positivity and sexual empowerment in one respect, the series nevertheless pushes the envelope and posits intersectional and fourth-wave discourses on sex and gender issues in other respects. For example, it attempts to be

inclusive and intersectional by showcasing an ethnically diverse cast of characters of different sexual and gender identities [19]. It notably features a transgender character in the cast: Sabrina's friend Susie who transitions to Theo and enters into a relationship with the male hobgoblin Robin. It also features other lead characters on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, notably her cousin Ambrose, who is shown as being in love with a man and then a woman, and who is also shown in a pansexual, polyamorous orgy with Sabrina's second boyfriend, Nick. The orgy was a scene that shocked some viewers, and was seen as taking the empowerment of teen sexuality too far, given the youthful target of the series and featuring, as it did, characters that were technically enrolled at a sort of high school for witches, The Academy of Unseen Arts [20]. The series also explores the sexuality of older women, showing both of Sabrina's aunts (with whom she lives) in relationships: Zelda, who marries the Church of Night's high priest for power, to become Lady Blackwood, but is also seen kissing the Voodoo Witch Marie; and, Hilda, who is in love with a man possessed by an incubus. It also promotes sex positivity, notably by revealing that Sabrina's friend Roz is not a virgin without any judgement in the narrative. In fact, the conversation between Roz and Sabrina about this was even praised by *Teen Vogue* for the manner in which the series "gets the sex talk totally right" (Drucker).

19 Yet Sabrina's sexuality is shown as being quite "contained", as she is completely heteronormative, and is comfortable with her expressing her sexuality only when she is in a romantic relationship. She remains a virgin almost to the very end of the series (Lupercalia and an invitation to join the orgy non-withstanding). Sherrie Inness notes that "Typically, popular media genres go out of their way to emphasize the heterosexuality of the tough, heroic woman. Emphasizing a woman hero's heterosexuality reassures the audience that she has not departed too far from a woman's 'normal' sexual orientation, despite the other ways she might call into question gender stereotypes" (Inness 168-169). While Sabrina is, in many respects, more of an anti-hero than a hero, as the focal point for the series, the same logic may apply. As a strong, powerful female witch, she is a transgressive character, and so depicting her as unequivocally straight might therefore be a way to "normalize" her. Thus, even if the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* depicts sexuality in many non-traditional ways, which

distinguishes it as a series trying to offer contemporary gender messages, it operates as a "site of negotiation" between traditional and non-traditional gender representations rather than completely challenging the status quo.

Patriarchy, Empowerment and the Queen of Hell

20 Deliberate messages of female empowerment run throughout the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, as the producers seem very aware of the feminist potential of the female witch. The third season embraces the concepts of "sisterhood" and "The Goddess Spirituality Movement" of the second wave when Sabrina's coven, now led by her Aunt Zelda, in order to empower themselves, call upon the assistance of non-Satanic witches (many of whom are older or otherwise marginalized women) and end up embracing worship of the triple goddess Hecate in place of The Dark Lord. As one critic writes, "*Sabrina* honors Hecate as a triple goddess, an expression of the totality of a woman's life, and it's her power that saves Hilda and empowers all the women of Greendale. I love that it's now a powerful, unseen Goddess that these witches serve, free of male dominance" (Mason) [21].

21 Moreover, not only is the word "patriarchy" actually used in the series, but Sabrina clearly and overtly opposes patriarchal figures, structures and roles, and engages in the fourth wave narrative trope Valerie Frankel describes as "reclaiming power from the toxic male" (or males) (Frankel 2020). For example, she joins forces with a group of young women from her coven called the "weird sisters" to sexually punish and torture some young, human, male high-school students who are bullies. She fights to be head girl of The Academy of Unseen Arts, shocked by the fact there have only ever been head boys. Moreover, many of the plotlines involve Sabrina opposing herself to the patriarchal forces of The Dark Lord, and the high-priest of the Church of Night (with his male disciples and favoritism for a male child) who would have power over her.

22 Sabrina is generally rather victorious in her defeat of male evil, and the second season notably finishes with these hegemonic patriarchal figures disempowered and with a message of female empowerment.

The evil and misogynistic high priest of the Church of Night, Sabrina's patriarchal coven, leaves town. The Dark Lord is dethroned and contained within the body of Sabrina's boyfriend Nick Scratch who is then condemned to hell. The Dark Lord's lover Lilith (or Madame Satan) becomes the queen of hell, in a literal incarnation of the old adage that "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." The third season involves Sabrina displacing Lilith — whose power as a former concubine to The Dark Lord is not recognized by the very masculine demons of hell — and taking her place as the queen of hell as The Dark Lord's heir. Even though Sabrina says she does this in order to protect humans and the Earth, she is also seen as enjoying the power. This lead one critic to laud the series as "the feminist revenge fantasy we need right now" (Toomer). However, others took umbrage with Sabrina's "intersectional feminist witchcraft" (Joho). Jess Joho for instance, underlines that the series fails its intersectional promise by focusing on a white feminist and white feminist issues, while positioning the lead character as the "white savior" of even more disempowered people, notably her less privileged friend group, noting that "she's painted as the model of white feminist ally. And that savior complex is exactly where CAOS' wokeness gets iffy real fast" (Joho). Thus, even if the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is inclusive and intersectional in some respects, by featuring a "white savior" on a quest for power, it would seem to not fully realize its fourth-wave intersectional potential.

23 The fact that Sabrina longs for power is something that is openly discussed and acknowledged in the narrative. Yet Sabrina's quest to retain her place as queen of hell leaves the town of Greendale, and everyone in it, vulnerable to the pagans, who kill most of them. In order to save her family and friends, Sabrina goes back in time. Once she puts everything right, the future Sabrina realizes that she may possess the solution to her work-life balance problem: Sabrina-from-the-future takes her place at her aunts' home to be a high-school student, leaving her power-hungry doppelganger, who did not witness her family's demise, to take over ruling hell. In the coronation scene, Sabrina is dressed in a style similar to England's Queen Elizabeth I, "The Virgin Queen", with a freakish twist. She looks quite ghoulishly monstrous with white face paint, ribs on her golden corset, spikes on her collar, and blood red lips—the literal incarnation

of the "monstrous feminine." Creed notes that "Women's abjectification is crucial to the functioning of the patriarchal order" (Creed 166), and the coronation scene is representative of many of the ambiguities of feminist TV series. On the one hand, Sabrina challenges the patriarchal powers that be; on the other hand, taking their place renders her monstrous.

24 Tania Krzywinska notes of TV series that "splitting adds surprise and diversity to the shows, often inviting views to choose whether they like a character in good or bad guise. The split character strategy may also provide an important resonance and meaning for audiences, as it offers a way of symbolizing one's own experience of conflicting character traits" (Krzywinska 181). Witches are often depicted as having a dual nature, as being good or bad, as "a descendant of ancient goddesses who embodied both birth and death, nurturing and destruction" (Jong 5). The *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* emphasizes "splitting" as a recurring motif, as Sabrina, up until the moment when she splits herself into two, continually struggles to choose between the path of light and the path of night; her everyday "real" life as a student at a human high school or her magical one as a witch at The Academy of Unseen Arts. Yet Sabrina's literally splitting into two people only creates trouble for her family and herself, as it almost leads to the colliding of realms and the end of their existence as it breaks the rules of magic for there to be two.

25 Many 1990-2000s Girl Power heroines denied their power, and just wanted to be "normal", and this desire to be normal was a form of containment. Thus, the manner in which the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* handles this final-season "splitting" plot twist, where one Sabrina is a "normal" girl and the other is a queen, is telling in terms of its ultimate feminist messages concerning women, empowerment and power. The "good" Sabrina on Earth (Sabrina Spellman) is unhappy, lonely and not having any fun; the "evil" Queen of Hell Sabrina (Sabrina Morningstar) has a sexy husband and parties, as if to prove the old adage that "bad girls have more fun". Yet it is the "good" Sabrina upon whom the series is hitherto centered, and it is she who saves everyone from the impending danger of the colliding realms. Even the Dark Lord (now out of Nick's body) admits that the "good" Sabrina (Spellman)—who has renounced her throne (and her power)

to live a human life, who is contained, and full of abnegation—is the better of the two Sabrinas. Yet, for everyone to live, Sabrina must die.

26 While Sabrina Morningstar is essentially sacrificed to an alternate realm, and perishes trying to get back to her own, Sabrina Spellman sacrifices herself and lets herself die a heroic death (in a complicated plot twist, this is while her soul is in the resurrected dead body of Sabrina Morningstar whose soul remains dead). Thus, in the last season, her character does a 180-character arc. While her power has always been used to help her friends, she has always been a bit more anti-hero than hero, reveling in her power, rather than wallowing in sorrow. Yet her heroic sacrificial demise places her in a trend of "sacrificial heroines" in science fiction and fantasy series, as outlined by Sara Crosby, that dates back to the era of the third wave of feminism. These are powerful lead female characters like Xena of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (Syndicated, 1995-2001), Prue of *Charmed*, or Capitan Janeway of *Star Trek: Voyager* (UPN, 1995-2001) whose deaths are the ultimate patriarchal containment of their power and agency. Crosby notes that tough or powerful women are seen as threatening the patriarchal community and thus are often not allowed to achieve political agency or ascend to power in popular culture narratives, in contrast to the traditional trajectory for a male heroic character (Crosby 153-178). Patriarchal society must find a way to keep women from being in charge and punish transgressive women for their "sins". Therefore, in popular culture narratives, powerful lead female characters often "snap"—or in other words, sacrifice themselves, renounce their heroism and/or die—so that women are discouraged from having political agency. She notes that this "snap" is accomplished in three ways: female characters feel guilty about having power or being heroic, patriarchy makes women want to give up their power and become "normal," and the only true community is understood to be the patriarchal one (Crosby 155-156).

27 This "snap" leads female characters to sacrifice themselves because they feel it is the "right" thing for them to do, or for the "good" of others—or in other words for the good of the patriarchy and of the patriarchal community (Crosby 153-178). The sacrificial heroines have often managed to survive far worse situations than the ones that finally kill them, leading their deaths to often be rather unbelievable, incoherent, and incongruous patriarchal smackdowns. In this case,

for example, Sabrina's aunts have a magical patch in their garden where they bury the dead to resurrect them, amongst various other supernatural means by which she could have been saved. Sabrina Spellman's "snap" in this last and final season means, first, that she chooses to live her life as a "normal" girl on Earth, rather than as queen of hell, miserable and ridden with existential angst, until she then dies a passive sacrificial death, lying on a slab, and bleeding out as the world's savior, and as atonement for her transgressions and her guilt over the inglorious death of "hellish" Sabrina Morningstar. The end of the series' finale, after her demise, finds her possibly in the afterlife with Nick, who has also perished, or possibly in alternate universe, a theory which is given credence by her postmortem appearance in a rather convoluted alternate universe episode of *Riverdale*, set in "Rivervale," in what is possibly a dream sequence in which she explains that witches never die. Nevertheless, it appears that the troubled terrestrial "normal" life of Sabrina Spellman is at an end.

Conclusion

28 The *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* sets out to create "trouble", or to destabilize traditional gender boundaries and binaries and pushback against the patriarchal order. It seems to be offering a new conception of female power and teenage-girl agency, one where teenage girls can be unapologetically violent, magical feminist and powerful, but one which is not without its ethical and moral issues in terms of TV's role as a cultural agent in particular as regards Netflix's "young-adult push" that is targeting young viewers with extremely explicit violent and sexual content. Writing about the evolution of feminism, Valerie Frankel notes that if "the second and third wave were criticized for featuring middle-class white women's struggles, the fourth wave showed a much more fiercely inclusive model" (Frankel 6, 2019). The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina's emphasis on the issues of a white privileged feminist heroine with contained heteronormative sexuality would seem to undermine its purported "wokeness" and intersectional, fourth-wave discourses. Nevertheless, it is significant in terms of the overall TV series landscape, which is evolving, through streaming platforms, to feature representations of women that are increasingly subversive and transgressive, even if imperfectly

progressive, with shows like Glow (Netflix 2017-), Orange is the New Black (2013-2019), or even Jessica Jones (Netflix, 2015-2019). Even if, like the Chilling Adventures of Sabrina, the series all have in common a focal-point character who is a middle-class white woman, they nevertheless offer images of diversity and inclusivity, establishing themselves as fourth-wave feminist fare and as pushing the envelope on gender issues and discourses further than their second and third-wave precursors.

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NOTES

1 Entire seasons of the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* are marketed as "parts", which is very series-specific. As an episode or a season can also have many parts within a "part", for the sake of clarity, and to avoid any confusion, the valid, and more typical terminology of "season" will be applied throughout and is also used when discussing the series in other formats, like on the IMDB: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7569592/episodes?season=1. Accessed 20 April 2020.

2 The official name of the series is *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, with no "the", which is why "the" is not in italics here. However, for grammatical and stylistic reasons, it would seem more appropriate to add the "the" throughout.

3 Clip available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8dLwiT2KOo. Accessed 31 March 2019.

4 Later in the series, it is discovered that The Dark Lord is Sabrina's father, which would technically make her half-devil. Yet, she is still considered part of the Spellman family of witches and her powers are witch-like powers. Moreover, she still belongs to a coven, and she practices the craft, by chanting spells and working with plants and potions, etc., and thus for all intents and purposes, even if she is half-devil, she can nevertheless be considered a practicing witch.

5 For further information on Netflix and other streaming platforms' niche-targeting strategies and their programming production and logistics, *see* Lotz, *Portals*, which analyzes Netflix's "mass customization", or "conglomerated niche", strategies.

6 Netflix does not regularly release viewership numbers for its programs (*see*, for example, Welch). However, statistics of user ratings on IMBD would seem to indicate that *Chilling Adventures of Sabrin*a is indeed watched by young viewers, including viewers under 18, *see* the data collected at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7569592/ratings. Accessed 28 April 2020.

7 The term "woke" is applied to TV series (as well as people, ideas and cultural manifestations) that demonstrate or promote awareness of social and political issues inherent in exclusion, oppression, and social and racial injustice.

8 *See* for example, Frankel, or Sollee, for an analysis of components of the fourth wave of feminism.

9 See for example, Bartel, Douglas, or Sanders, for more on the witch as a feminist symbol in popular culture.

10 Some scholars also consider it the era of postfeminism, although the usefulness or validity of either term is debatable, *see* for example, Lotz who notably finds that these expressions are "too fraught with contradictory meanings to be useful" and applies the concept of "post second wave" to her analyses, as she considers that feminist popular culture representations have their origins in the second wave feminist movement (Lotz 23, 2014). Nevertheless, Frankel finds such terminologies helpful for understanding and categorizing different trends and eras of cultural productions (Frankel 1-8, 2019).

11 *See also* Miller and Sanders, for their analysis of *Charmed*, and the links between young female media consumers, consumer capitalism and

discourses of empowerment in the era of the third wave, also called the era of postfeminism.

12 Bastién notably sees the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* being "deeply indebted to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" and its supernatural heroines, noting that "*Buffy* excelled at vacillating from interrogating gender politics to finding arch humor in the dark trappings of its fantastical world. Similarly, *Chilling Adventures* has its tongue firmly planted in its cheek, even in its dark consideration of witchcraft, to interrogate sexism and the way women's power has been circumscribed" (Bastién).

13 *See*, for example, Kelly, or Smith.

14 Many of the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*'s predecessors were also violent, especially the magical and supernatural Girl Power heroes, as their mission was to kill or destroy their enemies in every episode. The difference is that when the *Charmed* witches killed their enemies, for example, the deceased often just sort of vaporized, whereas when someone is killed in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, there may be lots of blood and gore. Netflix allows the series to be very graphic, with shocking images like close-ups of dissected cadavers in the family's morgue, etc. The *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is so gory as to be potentially upsetting and off-putting to some viewers, illustrating the difference between a network series' imperative to please censors and attract mass audiences, and Netflix's comparative creative freedom and strategy of producing content for various categories of niche subscribers (*see*, for example, Lotz, 2017)

15 The dialog is from the episode "Chapter 1: October County." *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, created by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, performance by Kiernan Shipka, season 1, episode 1, Netflix, 26 October 2018.

16 For more on postfeminist discourses in women-centered series, *see*, for example, Henry.

17 *See*, for example, Sweet

18 It is interesting to note that the actor who plays Lucifer, Luke Cook, was born in 1986, so is only a few years younger than Kiernan Shipka who plays Sabrina, who was born in 1999. Source: IMDB: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2215143/?ref_=tt_cl_t_1 and https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1981177/?ref_=ttfc_fc_cl_t21. Accessed: 28 March 2022.

19 *See also*, Frankel (2019) and Frankel (2020).

20 *See*, for example, Sutton, for her collection and commentary of online viewer feedback, or Flood.

21 *See also* Mason or Schultz for any analysis of Paganism and ancient religious symbols in the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*.

RÉSUMÉS

English

The first magical TV heroines were those of 60s sitcoms like *I Dream of Jeannie* (NBC, 1965-1970) and Bewitched (ABC, 1964-1972). They were created in the wake of major shifts in consciousness about female roles and sexuality and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Though possessing magical powers, the lead characters in these series were told not to use their powers, and Susan Douglas believes that through these representations "a significant proportion of the pop culture moguls were trying to acknowledge the impending release of female sexual and political energy, while keeping it all safely in a straightjacket." Moreover, she adds that, since viewers had been socialized to regard female sexuality as monstrous, TV producers addressed concerns surrounding female sexuality by domesticating the monster, by making her pretty and sometimes wildly subservient, by shrinking her and keeping her locked up in a bottle, and by playing the situation for laughs. Linda Baughman, Allison Burr-Miller, and Linda Manning, note that *Bewitched* and its witches are part of our "media history" and that all the modern-day witches are viewed through our "media memory" of this show, which affects all current representations of witches through "intertextuality." In contrast, the atmosphere in the Chilling Adventures of Sabrina is meant to be disturbing. The landscape is bleak, and the sides of the shots are often blurry and out of focus. Sabrina's family runs a mortuary out of their home, and the series is filled with horror tropes, many of which, as Barbara Creed notes, are associated with female reproduction. How is women's power expressed and possibly also contained by the narrative, and what do these representations show about the evolution of gender roles on TV? What messages about women's power and agency could be conveyed by the series? At first, the narrative clearly opposes Sabrina and the patriarchal figure of the dark lord, whom she resists before ultimately signing his book, but will, Sabrina, like many of her predecessors, ultimately be punished in the narrative for enjoying using magic and thus exercising power? How does this new series both conform to and break with other TV representations of witches and witchcraft, and what is the significance of this new conception of female power?

Français

Cette étude analysera comment la figure de la sorcière dans les séries télévisées aux États-Unis est en train d'évoluer au XXI[e] siècle d'une façon

souvent troublante. Initialement figures comiques, les sorcières des séries des années soixante et soixante-dix, telles Samantha dans *Bewitched* ou bien Jeanie dans *I Dream of Genie*, cherchaient surtout à se conformer aux codes de la femme au foyer idéale, niant ou cachant leurs pouvoirs en faveur d'un dévouement servile auprès de leurs maris. La série *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* mettra en question ce modèle, ainsi que celui des séries de « bonne » magie comme *Charmed* ou *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* en accentuant les liens troublants entre sexualité, pouvoir féminin et magie noire. Cette analyse cherchera à étudier comment la série brise certaines conventions genrées et télévisuelles, tout en se conformant à d'autres.

INDEX

Mots-clés
sorcières, télévision, agentivité féminine, pouvoir, féminisme, séries télévisée

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TV, witches, female agency, power, feminism, TV series

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Working Girls, From Ally McBeal to Rebecca Bunch: the Evolution of the "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend" on Screen

Anaïs Le Fèvre-Berthelot

PLAN

Representing mental distress in *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*
Crazy women and gender oppression – "You do/don't want to be crazy"
The Mad Woman and the Music
The importance of being earnest about mental health in comedy
Conclusion

TEXTE

1 In 1997, Ally McBeal, the title character of the Fox TV show (*Ally McBeal*, Fox, 1997-2002), banged her head on her office door while repeating "I have my health." Over the course of the following seasons, this initial assertion was regularly questioned, as Ally always seemed to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown brought about by her complicated love life. Yet, Ally was never diagnosed with any specific trouble; her emotional distress, anxiety, and hallucinations were mostly dismissed as quirky manifestations of post-feminist femininity, as the white Harvard-educated lawyer tried to balance her love life and her career.

2 Two decades later, another show featured a mentally unstable thirtysomething female lawyer who had trouble getting over her ex and fantasized about people breaking into song. From 2015 to 2019, Rachel Bloom played Rebecca Bunch, aka the "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend" of a CW musical series she co-created and co-wrote (*Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, The CW, 2015-2019). At the beginning of the series, upon seeing a billboard for butter emblazoned with the words, "When was the last time you were truly happy?" Rebecca quits her job in New York to go meet her teenage crush. In the third season, she is diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and the fourth season focuses on her journey to live with her diagnosis, find balance

and purpose. Both creators of the show, Rachel Bloom and Aline Brosh McKenna, clearly wanted to channel the heroine's perspective through comedy rather than to make Rebecca's mental health the butt of the series' jokes (Bradley), and critics and fans alike have praised *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* for its portrayal of mental illness (Doyle; Bradley; Bastién).

3 Comparing *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* allows for an analysis that covers a period of twenty years and major social and economic evolutions: *Ally McBeal* aired on Fox at the beginning of the post-network era; it gathered between 9 and 14 million viewers in the United States; out of 112 episodes, 110 were written or co-written by the show's creator, David E. Kelley and the show has gained cult status in part thanks to its use of popular music. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* was written by a team of diverse writers led by Bloom, who talks about her mental health issues very openly. The CW picked it up after Showtime turned it down and the show became part of the small network's efforts to distinguish itself from its competitors. The network kept the show on the air for four seasons even though it garnered less than one million viewers each week and had one of the smallest audiences of network TV. The deal between The CW and Netflix allowed subscribers to access entire seasons eight days after the season finale first aired. The musical numbers from the show were available on YouTube both on The CW's channel and on Rachel Bloom's where some videos gathered up to 5 million views. These elements point to evolutions in the modes of production and consumption of audiovisual entertainment that have had an impact on the diversity of representations – in terms of gender, race, sexuality, and mental health – offered on TV shows.

4 As Stephen Harper points out in his book, *Madness, Power and the Media*, "mental distress has always been –and continues to be– constructed both 'negatively' and 'positively' in Western culture." (Harper 1) Yet, research on the representations of mental distress in media and popular culture mostly stresses the negative images of "madness" conveyed by television and film. Characters suffering from mental distress often are secondary characters who do not have a job or steady relationships; studies also point out that, especially in crime dramas, they are more likely to commit violent crimes or to be victims of crime (Ma).

5 Many scholars of media representations of mental distress embrace a cultivation theory approach (Gerbner et al.) that insists on the role of television in fostering "stable, resistant, and widely shared assumptions, images, and conceptions" of mental distress in real-life (Gerbner et al.). There is little difference between the conclusions drawn by Otto Wahl in his 1992 literature review (Wahl, "Mass Media Images of Mental Illness") and those of Zexin Ma who analyzed 41 studies published in the early 21st century to "investigate how media portrays people with mental illness, what effects they have on the public, and how to use media to reduce stigma effectively." (Ma 91) For the past two decades, most research has concluded that, because of the lack of depth of mentally ill characters, the tendency to depict them as violent, and the emphasis on bizarre symptoms, "media still contribute to the mental illness stigma." (Ma 101)

6 However, in keeping with cultivation theory, some argue that media could be also used as a tool to reduce this stigma. For instance, Hoffner and Cohen conducted several studies to determine fans' (Hoffner and Cohen, "Responses to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder on Monk among Series Fans") and viewers' (Hoffner and Cohen, "Portrayal of Mental Illness on the TV Series Monk") responses to the representation of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in *Monk* (USA Network, 2002-2009). They concluded that a parasocial relationship with the main character was "related to lower OCD stereotypes and lower social distance from people with OCD" and "for respondents with OCD, a stronger parasocial relationship was associated with the belief that watching the series had helped them deal with having OCD." (Hoffner and Cohen, "Responses to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder on Monk among Series Fans" 663)

7 In *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness*, Otto Wahl lists TV shows that feature characters who suffer from mental distress, from depression to split personality (generally wrongfully associated with schizophrenia) and from OCD to psychopathy. Examples from that list show that, in the 1990s, such characters were often secondary and they generally conformed to negative stereotypes:

> *Baywatch*: A psychopathic murderer who has escaped from prison takes Stephanie and Summer hostage in a lifeguard tower. […]

> *Cagney and Lacey*: Cagney and Lacey pose as prostitutes to trap a psychotic. […]
>
> *Cheers*: Diane fears she's being followed by a deranged actor released from a mental institution. […]
>
> *Doogie Howser, M.D.*: On Christmas Eve, Doogie gets sidetracked by a schizoid patient who thinks he's Santa Claus. […]
>
> *Magnum, P.I.*: A Vietnam veteran suffering from psychological problems murders a beautiful surfer. […]
>
> *Seinfeld*: Hypochondriac George gets advice from a "holistic" healer for his claimed heart attack. […] (Wahl, Media Madness 180–88)

8 Recently, with the emergence of the antihero as a central figure of post-network series, more and more shows have offered more nuanced and varied portrayals of characters suffering from mental distress. Tony Soprano's struggle with depression in *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), or Carrie Mathison's bipolar disorder in *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-2020) are good examples of this change. More recent shows also come to mind, such as the adult animated series *BoJack Horseman* (Netflix, 2014-2020) whose title character suffers from depression and addiction, or *Lady Dynamite* (Netflix, 2016-2017) in which Maria Bamford is recovering from a severe mental breakdown. Shows like *Elementary* (CBS, 2012-2019) that turns Sherlock Holmes' addiction into a central element of the plot, or *Jessica Jones* (Netflix, 2015-2019) that depicts a superhero suffering from PTSD, offer new takes on old characters and suggest that mental health can be treated with more depth in the post-network era (Lotz, The Television Will Be Revolutionized).

9 Yet, the results of Dr. Stacy Smith's team at USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative's content study of the most popular 50 TV series from the 2016/2017 season show that the situation is still very unsatisfactory. According to the study, mental health issues are underrepresented: while 18.9% of the US adult population is affected by mental health conditions, only 7% of TV characters struggle with mental health issues. (Smith et al. 4) "25% of TV characters with mental

health conditions were shown acting violently; [...Out of 86 TV characters] three were shown taking medication and 20 were in some form of therapy". Not only are mental health issues underrepresented, when they are portrayed, it often is in a stigmatizing manner that does not accurately represent possibilities of treatment and does not show characters seeking and getting support.

10 In this context, both *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* stand out as network shows because of the importance they give to mental health conditions in their narratives. This chapter aims at comparing the two shows to see how the treatment of mental distress in female characters points to gender dynamics and how it can contribute to challenging the norm. It argues that broader issues of identity and social norms are at stake in the representation of mental distress in female heroines.

11 This study relies on an analysis of the opening credits and several sequences from the two series (mostly musical numbers explicitly meant to convey the characters' states of mind) to provide first an overview of the representations of mental distress offered by both shows. It then analyzes the relation between gender oppression and representations of mental distress in women and examines how *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* dealt with these tropes thanks to original uses of music. A second part focuses on the contexts in which the shows were produced and how political economy and identity politics can influence representations of what is and is not "normal" behavior. Finally, the analysis offers a brief foray into the reception of the representation of mental distress in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* by looking at a limited sample of online reactions posted below YouTube videos of musical numbers from *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* dealing with mental health issues as a preliminary for further investigation on this particular aspect.

Representing mental distress in *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*

12 *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* are ensemble shows that mostly take place at law firms, workplaces usually associated with strict conventions and norms, which makes them the perfect environment to question those norms. In both shows, the title characters are new recruits and their arrival quickly exposes the quirks and inadequacies of their co-workers, clients and friends. The shows stand out in their use of artificial forms to tackle marginal behaviors and appearances: voiceovers, musical numbers, fantasy sequences, sound effects, etc. are used to question how representations are built and how imaginations are shaped.

13 In *Ally McBeal*, senior partner John Cage's eccentricities do not lead to a diagnosis but earn him the nickname of "funny little man": his nose whistles; he hears bells and Barry White; he has a stutter that he controls by saying "Poughkeepsie"; he uses squeaking shoes to destabilize other lawyers and a remote control to flush the toilet before use because he likes "a fresh bowl". Despite his talent in the courtroom, Cage is often mocked and his masculinity is questioned more than once by other characters. If members of the main cast often do not fit the stereotypes of people working at a law firm (Elaine and her inventions, Ling and her multiple side businesses, Richard and his "Fishisms"), there is a clear difference between the treatment of the protagonists and that of the secondary characters. Many clients and other secondary characters suffer from various conditions that lead to their being stigmatized. These characters are often stereotyped and presented in a disparaging manner. They are called "nuts," and "weirdos" while the main characters are generally uncomfortable around them. It is true that, more often than not, the narrative seems to encourage empathy towards these characters. But, because of the show's narrative structure, they appear for one episode only and mostly serve as foils for the main cast. The show does not give itself time to dig into the characters' relationships. Thus the social and political dimensions of these characters' situ-

ations are never developed and their struggles are mostly used for comic effect. In addition, the visual presentation of these secondary characters often objectifies them and produces a freak show effect that simply reinforces the white, privileged and only slightly neurotic norm embodied by the main cast.

14 What is really striking – and disturbing – about *Ally McBeal* is the way in which all sorts of non-normative appearances and behaviors are bundled up together in one wide casting net of stigma. The best example of this is in Season 3, Episode 14, when Cage and Fish represent four persons fired from their jobs for being "oddballs" (AMB, s03e14): one of the clients is a Black transvestite or transgender woman (the show seems to confuse the two); one man has OCD; the third one is presented as nerdy, mostly because he wears a necktie, and the last one is an obese White woman. In line with the show's celebration of eccentricity, the episode suggests that these people are treated unfairly by society and it closes on a victory parade gathering all the "oddballs" who attended the trial. However, the four employees are discriminated against for very different reasons. During the trial, shots of the courtroom show that every day more people whose physical appearances do not match the standards of Western capitalist society are attending in support. In the end the plaintiffs lose in court and the norms they all subvert in various ways are never challenged. The parade launched by John relies on the idea that "sometimes there is triumph in the battle alone" but the episode does a poor job of sorting out the power relationships at play in this battle. The parade is an escapist performance that closes on a fade-to-black after which these particular "oddballs" are never to be seen again. More will come and also be othered by the visual spectacle that is often made of them. Overall, the succession of cases involving people who are often hastily diagnosed or simply singled out as "wackadoos, but nice ones" (AMB, s03e14) because they challenge social norms related to gender, behavior, or physical appearance suggests a freak show that acts as a counterpoint to the eccentricities of the main characters. While the show often questions social norms as well as the boundaries between reality and fantasy, guest stars and supporting characters are the only ones who –because of diagnosed mental health issues or simply of personal quirks– really have to deal with the consequences of challenging the "real world".

Because these characters are rarely present for more than one episode, the audience is not given the possibility to contextualize their troubles or to relate to them: secondary characters dealing with mental health issues are used for comic effects or to provide a commentary on the main characters, but their issues are rarely taken seriously.

15 *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* also presents a gallery of characters dealing with a variety of mental health issues: Greg is an alcoholic, as is his father; Nathaniel's mother attempted suicide when he was a child; Paula's youngest son has OCD and ADHD; Bert also suffers from BPD although he was previously misdiagnosed with schizophrenia... In part because these characters are not guest stars but regulars, their issues are woven into the narrative in a less dramatic way than in *Ally McBeal*. Over the course of four seasons, the show tends to destigmatize mental distress because it suggests that most people have to deal with mental health issues at some point in their lives. At the same time, it does not shy away from the complex personal issues faced by the characters, nor from the social and political questions that might underlie their troubles. These can be tackled over the course of several episodes.

16 For instance, Greg's alcoholism becomes a central element of the narrative at the beginning of the second season. The character re-emerges after being forced to confront his addiction because of a DUI arrest, but his problem is hinted at several times in the first season, as Greg is told by other characters of events that occurred when he was drunk. The writers spoke "to mental health experts and [had] people who have been in recovery come speak to the writers' room." (Gallagher) and this deliberate approach allows for a more nuanced representation of the disease. With "Greg's Drinking Song" (CEG, s02e02), a parody of an Irish drinking song in which Greg explains what he used to do when he drank (including puking on his cat, trying to fly airplanes and having sex with a bush), the show suggests a way that comedy can be made out of serious issues without relying on stigmatization, by letting the characters speak for themselves. The sequence points out the – mostly masculine – culture that encourages drinking, but mainly stresses the personal dimension of the character's struggle. Greg's alcoholism is presented as a general coping mechanism, not as the result of whatever other characters

might have done since the show's beginning. This gives more depth to the character and allows his recovery to become central in his development. It is worth pointing out that this is not done at the expense of comedy or form. The main contribution of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* from this perspective is that it shows how adopting a more inclusive approach can be an opportunity for formal and aesthetic innovation.

Crazy women and gender oppression – "You do/don't want to be crazy"

17 US TV shows generally represent mental health conditions as individual troubles, anchored solely in one's neurobiology or past. The social, economic and political factors that partly determine mental distress are generally left out of the narrative. While this is mostly the case for race and class in both shows, gender is clearly presented as one of the factors of the heroines' troubles both in *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

18 Ally and Rebecca act irrationally because of their quest for romantic love and the shows suggest that this behavior is encouraged by popular representations of women. Both shows are specific in the way they associate mental health conditions with issues of gender; they point to the relations between the heroines' issues and their condition as women. This is rarely done in shows that focus on male heroes suffering from mental distress – for instance BoJack Horseman's depression and addiction are not depicted as gendered issues. Although there is little research on the issue of the gendering of mental illness representations, there is a gender bias in the perception of people with mental health conditions that benefits women: studies suggest that news stories tend to provide more objective and sympathetic representations of mental illness when women are concerned while articles about men are more negative (Whitley et al.). More generally, mental health conditions in women are seen as less threatening to society and they are often explained and sometimes justified by women's personal history. This is visible in news media but also in fiction: "female soap opera characters are also

depicted in ways that suggest that their mental illness is a response to relational trauma." (Quintero Johnson and Miller 224) These representations are anchored in gender and they are likely to evolve based on the way gender issues are perceived at a given point in time.

19 Gender differences in mental illnesses are well-documented: Clarke and Miele point out that several theories can explain "gender differences in the expression of emotion and mental illness." (Clarke and Miele 2) These theories are all anchored in the symbolic, social and economic construction of gender: basically, men and women are encouraged to process their emotions in different ways and their mental health conditions are interpreted and treated differently. For instance, Johnson and Miller suggest that in the media, violent acts perpetrated by women with mental health issues are more likely to be framed in terms of social oppression and thus "reify the notion that violence committed by women is reactionary." (Quintero Johnson and Miller) As far as popular representations are concerned, the gendered association of women with heightened emotions is a trope of female-centered series. But it is a double-edged trope.

20 The association between mental illness and the oppression of women can support a sexist or a feminist perspective, as women's psychological distress can be read either as proof of their inferiority or as a result of their systematic oppression. Contemporary representations of female characters suffering from mental distress build on this tradition and play with it as they question the gender norms that tend to produce personality disorders: in a patriarchal society, normal, rewarded behavior is masculine behavior while behaviors and attitudes culturally coded as feminine, such as stronger emotional responses for instance, are more likely to be seen as pathological. Such representations are also shaped by the society that produces them. For instance, the success of media discourse about therapy and individual empowerment may have consequences in the definition of social norms and identity. Similarly, the evolution of the representation of gender issues in mainstream media between the late 1990s and today, is likely to have an impact on the way gender and mental illness are associated. Recent evolutions in the industrial structure of audiovisual entertainment, such as the rise of SVoD platforms, the new strategies of networks, the emergence of web series, and the growing number of production companies owned by women have all

opened doors to new content creators who promote more inclusive and diverse narratives. In addition, the rise of feminist criticism of popular culture in academia but also among fans, and the spread of intersectional feminist ideas and discourses online through a variety of media play a role in creating space for less stereotyped representations.

21 In a way typical of the post-feminist discourses[1] that dominated mainstream media in the US in the 1990s, *Ally McBeal* first suggests that the problems the heroine faces come from being dissatisfied with her life as a single professional woman[2]. The pilot makes it clear: it all started with Billy, the love of her life, and Ally is "the victim of her own choices." (AMB, s01e01) The reception at the time focused on Calista Flockhart's extremely thin silhouette and on her short skirts – Ally appeared as the face of the death of feminism on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1998 and was described as "a ditsy 28-year-old Ivy League Boston litigator who never seems in need of the body-concealing clothing that Northeastern weather often requires" (Bellafante). Ally's appearance sexualized the character and undermined her professional skills in the reception of the show; it contributed to her characterization as an unhappy single woman rather than a successful professional with a strong support system. This is in line with Faludi's analysis of the media backlash against feminism that emerged in the 1980s. (Faludi)

22 Yet, some of Ally's symptoms are clearly gendered. For instance, she sees her breasts or lips grow bigger when she looks in the mirror suggesting that the character has internalized the male gaze. In the first season, Ally starts to worry about her so-called "biological clock" and hallucinates a dancing baby. The baby first appears in a dream but then Ally hears him running around her room and tries to tackle him (for real) arguing that if she can "throttle him in her imagination then she can make him go away in her imagination". The episode concludes with Ally confronting her guilt of having had a one-night stand and her fear of being childless by dancing happily with the baby (AMB, s01e12). The heroine's thoughts and feelings are conveyed visually and the viewers are privy to her perspective and this fosters empathy. The viewers are encouraged to side with Ally, to be part of the group that embraces the illusion and the fantasy, and possibly also the notion that motherhood is the key to Ally's happiness. A few

episodes later, when the dancing baby comes back, Ally ends up kicking a child because she thinks she is hallucinating and she wants to break the spell (AMB, s01e18). Most of this episode centers on power relationships between women and men, both in the workplace and in romantic relationships; it promotes an apolitical perspective according to which it is really just up to women to seize power. And of course, if they do not or if they complain that they cannot do whatever they want, something is wrong with them.

23 In the post-feminist perspective adopted in the show, Ally's troubles are not taken seriously because they are presented as the results of the unrealistic expectations set by liberal feminism and by Ally's refusal to live in the real world, a man's world. Ally is always caught in a double bind: she is either too much (too loud, too eccentric, too selfish, too crazy) or not enough (not big enough, not sexy enough, not warm enough).

24 One of *Ally McBeal*'s specificities is the way in which it conveys Ally's mental distress by representing what goes on in the heroine's head on screen with visual effects and through a voiceover: Ally is thrown into a garbage bin when a man dumps her; she is crushed by a boulder or hit by arrows when her heart is broken; she becomes tiny when she feels shy, and thanks to the voiceover, the audience is privy to her thoughts. But, soon the visual tricks are not used simply to literalize common emotions. When Ally starts to hallucinate babies and unicorns, when she feels like she is swimming across her office or sees all her colleagues or the court turn into musical numbers, the viewers also have access to her visions. The fact that Ally is sometimes unable to tell the difference between her fantasies and the real world proves that these visions are not simply the result of her fertile imagination and yet, this is how the show presents them since it never addresses them as real symptoms of gendered mental distress.

The Mad Woman and the Music

25 *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* suggest that music, and especially popular music, can help people cope with the challenges encountered in the real world and with the emotions they create. Songs allow the characters to make sense of what is happening to them and process their emotions by referring to tropes conveyed by

popular culture and dominant narratives. But while *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* deals with these tropes tongue-in-cheek, *Ally McBeal* mostly uses music and popular culture to promote a romanticized vision of mental distress. In several episodes, Ally hears and sees Al Green sing to her; after Billy's death, she is pursued by Gloria Gaynor singing "I Will Survive" (AMB, s03e17). Greg Smith argues that in *Ally McBeal*'s "narrative system, the ability to hear the music is a sign of sanity, a sign that the person is still vitally alive. The point is to be receptive to the power of music without being subject to it, to use the discourse of pop music for one's own purposes, to choose the right voices to listen to." (Smith 45) But Ally does not always get to choose: she does not have control on what she hears or on when she hears it and she is subjected to the cultural injunctions conveyed by the music.

26 In the case of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, Rebecca clearly does not always listen to the right voices either. Many musical numbers show how various genres of popular music convey unhealthy messages and how they have shaped Rebecca. What is at stake in the series is her ability to detach from those stories and create her own. As both shows suggest, music can be both a symptom and a cure.

27 The opening credits for the third season of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* spell out the double bind perpetuated by popular culture: women should be crazy in love but not "crazy in the head". Combining four musical genres (country, pop, rock, and rap), the credits point out how popular culture conveys the notion that there is "good crazy": the madness associated with romantic and physical passion and "bad crazy": the unhinged vengeful type of madness. And yet, popular entertainment shows that the line between the two is easy to cross. The romantic narrative can justify everything. This is what the credits for season 2 mock. In a Busby Berkeley-like number, the song suggests that the irrationality of love justifies Rebecca's irresponsible actions. The heroine sings "I'm just a girl in love / I can't be held responsible for my actions", but her words eventually take on a completely different meaning at the end of the season, when they are revealed to be the plea Rebecca's mother made to stop her daughter being thrown in jail after she set fire to her lover's house. Seasons 2 and 3 explore the negative consequences of popular narratives and social injunctions that limit women's aspirations to being fulfilled and

defined by somebody else. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* literalizes the popular tropes of romantic, heterosexual love to underline their toxicity and it thus leads towards a different happy ending, one that does not rely on a heterosexual happily ever after.

28 Both shows conclude with the notion that the heroines do not in fact need a man to be happy or balanced. Rebecca is shown on stage, about to perform a song she wrote and telling all her new friends in West Covina how much she loves them and that she has found herself: "It's about how, when I'm doing that, when I'm telling my own story, for the first time in my life, I am truly happy. It's like I just met myself — like I just met Rebecca" (CEG, s04e17).

29 As the shows end, the heroines' monologues suggest that the craziness is over because they finally know who they are and what they want. *Ally McBeal*'s finale is more bittersweet, as the heroine declares, as she walks away from her friends, "Looking backward, many of the saddest times of my life turn out to be the happiest, so I must be happy now. This is going to be good, why else would I be crying?" (AMB, s05e22). Still, Ally is doing better than in the pilot; she is no longer the victim of her choices and the series offers a twist on the traditional love story: it turns out that Ally did not need a man to take care of her, she needed a child that she could take care of. Ally does not find peace in a traditional heterosexual romance but in her newly-formed relationship with the ten-year-old daughter who suddenly barged into her life (courtesy of a forgotten egg donation). Motherhood, another typically feminine role, replaces romance as the solution to Ally's troubles. Seventeen years later, the end of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* presents a heroine who finds balance, not in marriage or motherhood, but in creative work[3]. Rebecca's happiness is not dependent on somebody else. Even though the four seasons and the series' finale insist on the importance of being surrounded by supportive friends, the show ends with Rebecca standing up alone on stage, having found her voice, even if it is probably off-key.

30 I agree with Greg Smith when he writes that, "the broad narrative of *Ally McBeal* boldly asserts the advantages of clinging to madness and illusion" (Smith 135) but I disagree when he argues that choosing to represent and celebrate "eccentricity" is simply a trade-off in favor of "beauty" or aesthetics over politics. (Smith 200) The decision not

to explore the political dimension of exclusion and personal struggle is not just an aesthetic choice; it is a political one. The world Ally has to navigate is deeply sexist (she quits her former job in the pilot because she was sexually assaulted by a senior partner) and conveys the message that a woman is never complete without a man or a child; her quirks, fantasies and her musical world testify to this but the way they are treated dismisses the political and systemic dimensions of the constraints that weigh on the character. In its efforts to gather a larger audience, the show does not really question the trope of the incomplete woman and in the end Ally's troubles still seem to stem from her apparently irrational desire to have it all. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* looks for factors beyond Rebecca's personality to explain her issues. Doing this allows the show to embrace madness and illusion knowingly, not as an escape or a crutch but as a way to make sense of the world, and maybe change it, since it is presented as a social construction that can be influenced by the stories we tell.

The importance of being earnest about mental health in comedy

31 The way *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* have tackled issues related to gender and mental health can be explained in part by looking at the industrial context in which they were produced. *Ally McBeal* aired on Fox in the 1990s, a time when Fox was still the fourth network in a market dominated by the "Big Three". This position of outsider made Fox more willing to take risks and broadcast shows that defied conventions. Thus, *Ally McBeal* was not the typical Boston lawyer show and it allowed the network to stand out.

32 The situation was similar with *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* and The CW. The CW is a mixed venture of CBS and TimeWarner and results from the fusion of UPN and The WB. The CW thus became the fifth network in a post-network era when the competition came not only from cable but also increasingly from online contents and SVoDs. From its beginnings, the network relied on narrowcasting, branding, and transmedia to attract and keep a very specific share of the audience (Le Fèvre-Berthelot). In this increasingly competitive context, less normative content could be supported by the network's executives because it could help set the network apart. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* was

among the shows that allowed The CW to be praised for its female characters who "are a little bit square, and who still get to be challenging, flawed, and surprising. […] women [who] don't have time for certain kinds of drama, yet [whose] adventures are so often crisply entertaining." (Ryan) The fact that The CW kept a show that had some of the lowest ratings of network TV on the air for four seasons points to major economic and industrial changes that have allowed for the emergence of more nuanced representations. Since the aim no longer is to appeal to the broadest possible audience but to catch the sustained attention of smaller segments of the audience on multiple platforms, it becomes possible for shows to tackle more complex issues in depth and sometimes to adopt more polarizing political stances since the shows' dependence on advertisers has evolved as well. Beyond the representation of mental health, this evolution is also visible in the progressive treatment of political and gender issues (workplace equality, abortion, bisexuality, gender identity, etc.) in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* compared to the much more politically neutral approach of *Ally McBeal*.

33 When focusing on the representations of mental health issues, the difference between the romantic outlook of *Ally McBeal* and the critical perspective of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is visible in the way treatment and diagnoses are dealt with. According to Greg Smith, *Ally McBeal* "both participates in and satirizes the therapeutic conception of romance" because even though Ally keeps on seeing therapists to solve her romantic problems, she also clings to the symptoms that therapy is expected to cure (Smith 135). While Smith makes a strong case that therapy eventually allows the character to grow and "come through her psychological trials with her faith in romance intact" (Smith 139), I would argue that overall mental health is never taken seriously and that Ally's troubles are mostly presented as funny quirks or inadequacies that can be fixed if the character just grows up. This is linked to the spectacle that is made out of Ally's hallucinations for example; it is also made obvious by the fact that Ally's many therapists are as bizarre and eccentric as their patients: One sings during sessions, calls Ally nuts and plays a laughing soundtrack when her patients say something stupid (Tracey, played by Tracey Ullman); another gives out pills like candy from a change dispenser; the last one is a former lawyer who insists on taking Ally's hand when he

needs to convey something to his patient. It all makes for efficient comedy, but in the end, Ally's symptoms are mostly narrative props meant to comment on the character's vision of romance. Wahl points out that, "a common complaint of mental health advocates about mass media is that psychiatric labels are often used incorrectly and serve to misinform and confuse viewers." (Wahl, Media Madness 14) In fiction, writers rarely offer a diagnosis, which allows them to use symptoms however they might fit with the plot. This is what happens in *Ally McBeal* both in the portrayal of main characters and in that of guest stars. The show does push narrative and aesthetic boundaries, and this was made possible by the freedom granted to David E. Kelley by a network that tried to distinguish itself from the Big Three. Yet, in terms of representation of gender and mental health, the show still relies on stigmatizing stereotypes.

34 The perspective and the writing process were radically different in the case of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Aline Brosh McKenna explains that, when the shows tackled sensitive issues, whether it was Greg's alcoholism as mentioned above, or Darryl coming out as bisexual, or Rebecca's diagnosis, the writers consulted professionals and people who were directly concerned by those issues to "make [their] depictions of really specific stuff as real and grounded as [they] can" (quoted in Gallagher). Rebecca's diagnosis thus does not come out of the blue: starting from the idea that Rebecca suffered from mental distress, the writers sent their script to several psychiatrists so that they would offer a diagnosis (Bradley). Then, they made sure that the descriptions of BPD and of the treatment were accurate. The careful and respectful approach adopted by the writers can also be explained by the fact that Rachel Bloom herself suffers from anxiety and depression (Mahaney) and that "both co-creators have intimate knowledge of people with borderline personality disorder" (Bradley). The depiction of mental health issue in the show is clearly shaped by Bloom's belief that the stigma around this kind of distress and the pain it causes can be lifted by talking about it and normalizing it (Depression, Anxiety and What I Would Tell #MyYoungerSelf | Rachel Bloom).

35 The show is quite clear that the diagnosis is not an end *per se*; it is a tool that can help the character live a healthier life because it is the basis for treatment. In the series' fourth episode, Heather presents

Rebecca's case in her psychology class. While Heather argues that her neighbor "doesn't fit into any of the categories of your little book" (meaning the DSM, the manual that classifies mental disorders), her professor argues that Rebecca seems to suffer from a number of classifiable disorders but Heather does not want to "label her" because she "just wants to be her friend". In Season 3, Episode 6 ("Josh is irrelevant") Rebecca recovers from a suicide attempt and is diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). The musical number that precedes the announcement of her diagnosis insists on the feeling of belonging associated with the right diagnosis. The song is a clear reference to the "I Want" songs that allow musical theater characters to convey what they are searching for and why (fans cite "The Wizard and I" from *Wicked* and "You and Me (But Mostly Me)" from *The Book of Mormon* as possible sources). In such songs, the character's elation is suggested through rising melodies and crescendos, as is the case here. Clearly, Rebecca's expectations are high: she has seen multiple therapists and been misdiagnosed several times and the diagnosis is not presented as a source of stigma but as something that can open "a whole new future of possibilities" (CEG, s03e06)[4]. Yet, the BPD diagnosis actually comes as an anti-climax since the disorder has no easy fix. Seasons 3 and 4 thus show Rebecca dealing with her disorder and its consequences. The diagnosis has not solved everything, but it has put the protagonist on a new path.

36 A detailed qualitative and quantitative analysis of viewers' reactions and a survey would be necessary to rigorously assess the reception of Rebecca's behavior and diagnosis, especially among people living with BPD, but a quick look at comments posted on YouTube videos of three musical numbers that focus on Rebecca's mental health (the one that precedes her being diagnosed with BPD, s03e06; an ode to the "darkness" that has accompanied her for so long, s04e12; and the Emmy-winning number claiming that "anti-depressants are so not a big deal," s04e13) suggests that, for many viewers, the show and these particular musical numbers offer an accurate and relatable representation of mental distress.[5] The personal tone of the comments below these videos is striking. Next to more expected remarks on the performances or on the show more generally, many comments address the viewers' personal histories, including their diagnoses, the way depression manifests in their lives (and in two instances the

name given to their personal "darkness" after Rebecca baptized hers Tyler), and sometimes how the show has encouraged them to either seek a diagnosis or ask about medication options:

> Thank you thank you thank you for making this show. I think my life might have been changed thanks to this episode. I hope it is. I always knew I was off and I had no idea why or how or what it was. I didn't know if I was crazy or just quirky. I never knew there was a list you could look up to see if you match the issues this have. I've never seen a therapist or was treated for any mental health issues and even though I thought something about me was off, I didn't know where to start to find out. So I when to my psychiatric consultation today and the jury is still out, but I might have general anxiety disorder. If there is a thing that's real and treatable and I'm not just a panicked worrywart then that changes so much. I don't think I would have ever known that or tried to address this without watching this episode. Thank you so much. (racheldoesstuff, The Darkness - Feat. Rachel Bloom - "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend")

37 A significant number of comments, including from people with BPD or other mental health issues (comments mention depression, anxiety, autism, ADHD, bipolar disorder, etc.) express gratefulness for the show and its creators for depicting mental distress in a relatable manner. For instance, a commentary with close to 300 likes on "A Diagnosis" states,

> I wanna thank you for this episode. I also have borderline personality disorder, been diagnosed 15 years ago, and daytherapy free for 14 years. I liked that you gave accurate description of Borderline (psychiatrist talk) so you did your research on this topic. And since there is such a stigma about it, it is refreshing to see it done seriously but also with a sense of humor. I will be looking forward to see Rebecca go into therapy and how she will rebuild her life after the diagnosis. (racheldoesstuff, A Diagnosis - Feat. Rachel Bloom - "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend").

38 While for some the depiction of Rebecca's struggles "hits too close to home" and can be triggering, what often comes out of the comments is the validation of their experiences that viewers find in the show's representation. Some health professionals or people suffering from

BPD also say that the show is useful to help other people understand what this disorder is about.

39 The comments on "Anti-Depressants Are So Not a Big Deal" fall into three main categories: those gushing about the performance and its similarity to the opening number in Damien Chazelle's *La La Land*; those that appreciate the way the song removes the stigma around prescribed drugs and those that worry that the song is a dangerous apology for antidepressants. Some comments lead to extended debates about the risks of unsupervised or inadequate medication. In these, people who have knowledge of the show often insist on the context to undermine claims that the number is just propaganda for Big Pharma interests. Instead, they point to the show's awareness that pills are not an easy fix but one element in Rebecca's complex path to live with BPD. Most negative comments are not based on the narrative or the character but the video's message taken out of context, whereas viewers who are able to provide narrative context are usually appreciative of the message conveyed by this number (racheldoesstuff, Anti-Depressants Are So Not A Big Deal - Feat. Michael Hyatt - "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend"). This particular video is interesting because it shows how efficient the musical number is in eliciting deep personal engagement and structured debates about serious issues. Overall, this brief overview suggests that in keeping with a cultivation theory approach, the show contributes to encouraging less stigmatizing images and representations of mental health issues that can have an impact in real life.

Conclusion

40 Looking at representations of mental health issues from a gender perspective stresses the sexist tropes associated with these images. Gender norms imply that many behaviors coded as feminine are deemed abnormal, excessive or irrational and this has often led to the pathologization of women. Both Ally McBeal and Crazy Ex-Girlfriend play with this double-edged trope of the excessive woman who fails to control her emotions. They do so by using music and other audiovisual tricks to convey the protagonists' states of mind, but they do not apprehend the political dimension of such representations in the same way. *Ally McBeal* is quite typical of the post-feminist

perspective that tends to dismiss political readings of the main character's situation; despite conveying a superficial message of acceptance and celebration of quirkiness in an often sanitized and too-rational world, the show also trivializes mental distress, using symptoms haphazardly to celebrate the eccentricities of a group of privileged white characters who do not suffer professional, social or economic consequences related to their behavior. The same apolitical approach is adopted when looking at gender oppression: the characters are presented as the victims of their own choices without really taking into account the multiple injunctions that weigh on them. Twenty years later, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* tackles the ambiguity head-on by reminding the audience that its very title "is a sexist term" in the opening credits (Season 1) and by offering a more nuanced portrayal of the characters' struggles. Looking at viewers' online reactions suggests that this portrayal can have a positive impact on the representations of mental health issues and BPD in particular and help lift the stigma around these issues.

41 The differences between *Ally McBeal* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* result from the evolutions of the industry and of society in the past twenty years, evolutions that have allowed for new voices to convey new gender norms in the media and therefore new representations of mental distress. In addition to the arrival of fresh talent made possible by the restructuring of the industry, the re-emergence of feminist discourses and the rise of intersectional perspectives online and in the media have created higher standards for the representation of marginalized groups. The evolution of the representations of mental distress between these two shows points out that fair and inclusive representation should not be put in opposition to creativity and that humor does not have to rely on oppressive tropes.

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NOTES

1 Post-feminism can be understood from three perspectives (Nurka): as a conservative reaction to feminism, as the intersection of feminism and postmodernism (Brooks), or as a media discourse celebrating the success of liberal feminism while blaming educated rich White women's issues on the "excess of feminism".

2 The literature on post-feminism in the media highlights the ambiguity of this concept that both dismisses feminism and supports its core values (Dow; Lotz, "Postfeminist Television Criticism"; Tasker and Negra; McRobbie; Morin).

3 About madness and creativity in a feminist perspective, Gilbert and Gubar write, "before the woman writer can journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy, however, she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, with, that is, those mythic masks male artists have fastened over her human face both to lessen their dread of her 'inconsistancy' and —by identifying her with the 'eternal types' they have themselves invented— to possess her more thoroughly." (Gilbert and Gubar 16–17) The comments on popular culture and cultural discourses conveyed in CEG certainly echo this description of the situation of 19th c. women writers.

4 The lyrics here echo the "I Want" song from Disney's *Aladdin*: "A Whole New World".

5 This sample includes over 1700 comments posted below the YouTube videos of "A Diagnosis", "The Darkness", and "Anti-Depressants Are So Not a Big Deal". The comments were collected on July 24, 2020, the sample includes 387 comments on "A Diagnosis", 242 comments on "The Darkness" and 1119 comments on "Anti-Depressants…".

RÉSUMÉS

English
The association between madness and the oppression of women is a trope of narratives focusing on women which can support a sexist or a feminist

perspective —women's psychological distress being either a proof of their inferiority or a result of their systematic oppression. Contemporary representations of female characters suffering from mental distress build on this tradition and play with it as they question the gender norms that tend to produce personality disorders. Such representations are also shaped by the society that produced them and, in this case, the emergence of "therapy culture" (Füredi 2004) may have political consequences for the meaning conveyed by the shows. Comparing *Ally McBeal* (Fox, 1997-2002) and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (The CW, 2015-2019) allows for an analysis that covers two decades and major social and economic evolutions to adopt a social and historical perspective on the representation of female characters suffering from mental health issues in US TV series. This chapter aims at comparing the two shows to see how the treatment of mental distress in female characters points to gender dynamics and how it can contribute to challenging the norm. It argues that there are broader issues of identity and social norms at stake in the representation of mental distress in female heroines.

Français

La folie et l'oppression des femmes sont souvent associées dans les récits centrés sur des personnages féminins. Ce lieu commun peut soutenir une perspective sexiste ou féministe –la détresse psychologique des femmes étant soit une preuve de leur infériorité, soit le résultat de leur oppression systématique. Les représentations récentes de personnages féminins souffrant de troubles mentaux s'appuient sur cette tradition et en jouent, en remettant en question les normes de genre qui tendent à produire des troubles de la personnalité. Ces représentations sont également façonnées par la société qui les a produites et, dans ce cas, l'émergence d'une « culture thérapeutique » (Füredi 2004) peut avoir des conséquences politiques sur les représentations. Comparer *Ally McBeal* (Fox, 1997-2002) et *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (The CW, 2015-2019) permet de mener une analyse qui couvre deux décennies et des évolutions sociales et économiques majeures pour adopter une perspective sociale et historique sur la représentation des personnages féminins souffrant de problèmes de santé mentale dans les séries télévisées étatsuniennes. Ce chapitre vise à comparer les deux séries pour voir comment le traitement de la détresse mentale chez les personnages féminins renvoie à des dynamiques marquées par le genre et peut contribuer à remettre la norme en question. Des questions plus larges d'identité et de normes sociales sont en jeu dans la représentation de la détresse mentale chez les héroïnes.

INDEX

Mots-clés

télévision, États-Unis, genre, santé mentale, représentations, réception

Keywords
network TV, gender, mental health, representations, reception

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