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Editorial

The Apollonian had started publication nearly a decade ago, in 2014, and ceased its operations for a brief hiatus in 2020, a year of significant overages. In spite of our best efforts, just as the impact of the COVID pandemic could not be readily curtailed, so also we were unable to resurrect the journal. That is, until now. In the ever-evolving landscape of academic inquiry, the resurgence of our journal after a four-year hiatus is an event of profound significance for us as we seek to chart new and innovative pathways into humanities and interdisciplinary studies. And for our revival issue, we chose to seek and publish papers broadly along the lines of consumerism in literature, South Asian cinema, and cyberpunk in anime, manga and video games. As the world enters an age of renewed and looming threat of yet another World War, even as it reels from the aftermath of the pandemic, both socially and economically, the humanities are struggling to find new areas, domains, and genres to reinvent its relevance in the new world order. And to attempt to cater to this emergent need, we are presenting this diversity of papers along the lines of the above mentioned diversity of thought that delves into ideologies, geographies, and new narratologies.

The primary theme, consumerism and literature, seeks to address of the pressing issues with all economies and cultures presently. The global cultural zeitgeist today has effectively blurred the lines between media, promotion, art and commodity. The urge to ‘consume’ and coalesce has given rise to economic and subsequent identity and theoretical quandaries. In the light of this planet wide cosmopolitan syndrome we are seeking submissions that explore the fluidity and the dynamics of this concept from various theoretical or interdisciplinary vantage points.

The vibrant and diverse tapestry of South Asian cinema is a treasure trove of narratives that mirror the rich and multifaceted societies of the region. As we delve into this theme, our contributors have unearthed a multitude of stories that explore not only the artistic brilliance of South Asian filmmakers but also the cultural, historical, and political underpinnings that give these films their unique character. From the golden era of Indian cinema to the contemporary masterpieces of directors like Satyajit Ray, Mira Nair, and Asghar Farhadi, this issue takes readers on a cinematic journey across time and space. We delve into the themes of identity, globa-

lisation, diaspora, and gender in South Asian cinema, shedding light on how these films both reflect and challenge societal norms and values.

On the other hand, the theme of cyberpunk is a dynamic and engaging one. The cyberpunk genre, which emerged from the works of authors like Philip K. Dick and William Gibson, has evolved to encompass a global perspective. In a digital age, cyberpunk has emerged as a genre that reflects our complex relationship with technology. As we explore this theme, our contributors examine the ways in which cyberpunk in manga, anime, and video games engage with issues of surveillance, artificial intelligence, transhumanism, and the boundaries between human and machine.

In this issue, we explore how South Asian writers and artists have contributed to the cyberpunk discourse, bringing their own unique perspectives on technology, society, and the human condition.

For our revival issue, we are grateful to have received a large volume of submissions, and regret that we could only publish a handful of them. However, the contributions within these pages represent a tapestry of ideas and perspectives that exemplify the transformative power of humanistic inquiry, and we look forward to continuing this intellectual journey with our readers in the years to come.

Subashish Bhattacharjee

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



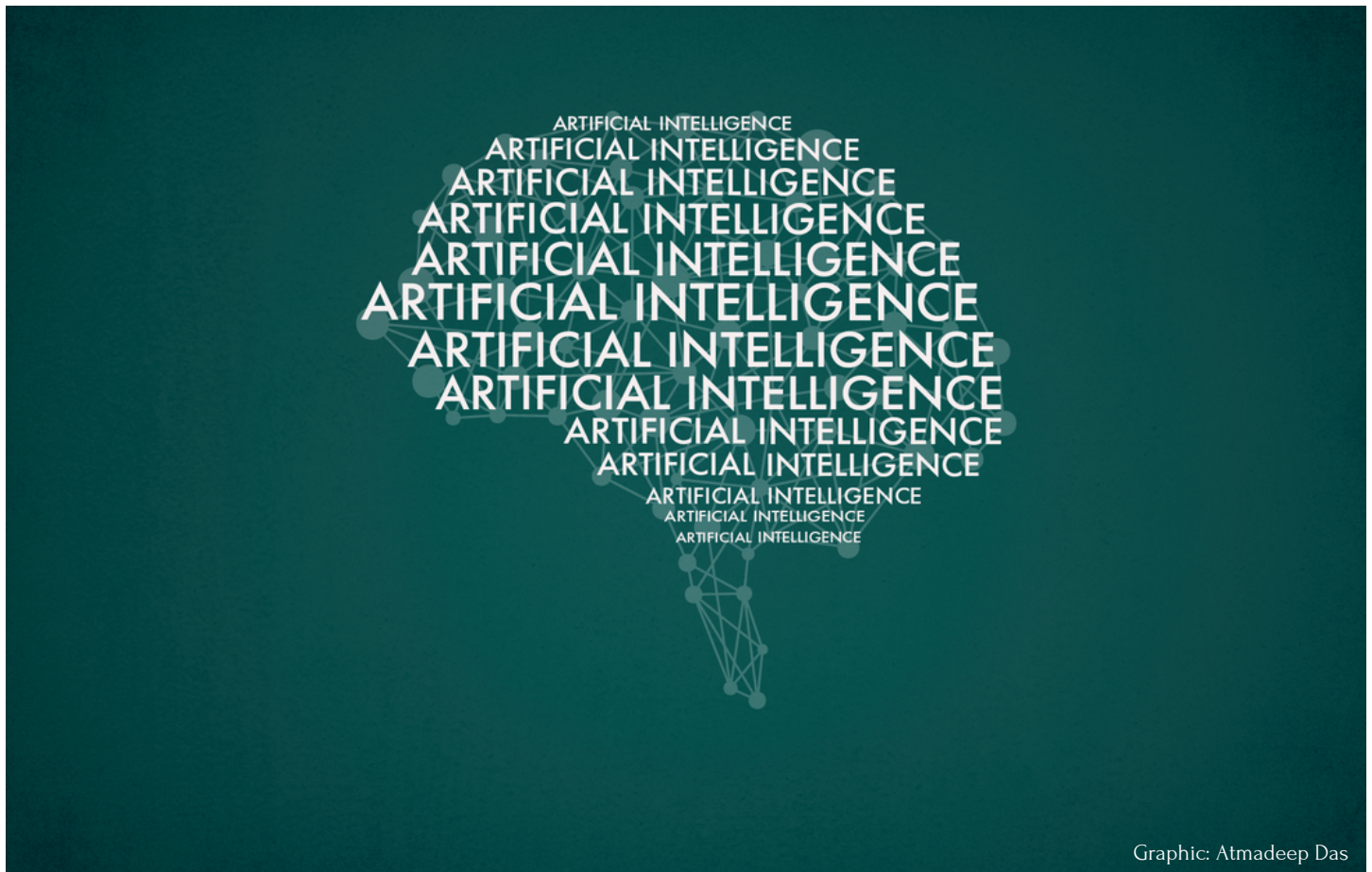
The Apollonian

ACADEMIC ARTICLES



The Interface as the Question: Interoperating the Human and Technology

Constance Goh



Graphic: Atmadeep Das

Abstract:

This paper examines the recent signifying resurgence of artificial intelligence after multiple waves of cybernetic research from the middle to the late twentieth century and critically addresses the (in)comparability between what are considered artificial intelligence and human intelligence by reworking Gilbert Simondon's concept of transduction that is central to his discourse on psychic individuation. It also notes that the creative genus is one aided by technology, thus calling attention then to what we call the "interface" between the human and the technological. Notwithstanding the lack of pretention to theoretical sophistication, science fiction is arguably the genre that is by nature philosophically contrary to its low-brow status and poses the pertinent ontological questions we have from time immemorial. What are we? And why does it matter that we are human or otherwise? More importantly, writing this paper allows me to pose alternative inquiries: why should our essences matter this much, especially

after postmodernism and posthumanism? Even if we can delineate clearly the non-human from the human, what are the concerns that arise with such dichotomous considerations? With these inquiries, I shall make an attentive turn to Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner*, a filmic adaptation of Philip K. Dick's *Do Android Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) and, its neo-noir sequel, Denis Villeneuve's aesthetically cool 2017 *Blade Runner 2049*. Having watched and read all the mentioned versions (except for the television series), this thesis asserts that the posthuman surface text is fascinating enough; it is, however, the latent text of the interface that grasps not just my semiotic attention but also my epistemological and ontological scrutiny.

Keywords: posthumanism; Gilbert Simondon; Nicholas Luhmann; Ridley Scott; cybernetics; science-fiction

Introduction

At this late stage of postmodernism and with the recent global turn to computation, there have been thoughts on the culturally popular within networked societies. This paper reworks my propensity for science-fiction films with the connective design of a transmedial network. More importantly, this paper renders clear how science fiction, despite its previous low-brow status, has served or serves Critical Theory well. Perhaps critical attention should be given to the recent signifying resurgence of artificial intelligence after multiple waves of cybernetic research from the middle to the late twentieth century. This paper addresses the (in)comparability between what are considered artificial intelligence and human intelligence by reworking Gilbert Simondon's concept of transduction that is central to his discourse on psychic individuation. It also notes that the creative genius is one aided by technology, thus calling attention then to what we call the "interface" between the human and the technological. Notwithstanding the lack of pretention to theoretical sophistication, science fiction is arguably the genre that is by nature philosophically contrary to its low-brow status and poses the pertinent ontological questions we have from time immemorial. What are we? And why does it matter that we are human or otherwise? More importantly, writing this paper allows me to pose alternative inquiries: why should our essences matter this much, especially after postmodernity and posthumanism? Even if we can delineate clearly the non-human from the human, what are the concerns that arise with such dichotomous considerations? With these inquiries, I shall make an attentive turn to Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner*, a filmic adaptation of Philip K. Dick's *Do Android Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) and, its neo-noir sequel, Denis Villeneuve's aesthetically cool 2017 *Blade Runner 2049*. Having watched and read all the mentioned versions (except for the television series), this thesis asserts that the posthuman surface text is fascinating enough; it is, however, the latent text of the interface that grasps not just my semiotic attention but also my epistemological and ontological scrutiny.

Given the cyberpunk focus of this paper, I shall consider briefly the game *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) and provide an ontological exposition on why this paper extends its discussion to gaming. By virtue of its focus on cyberspace, which, in contemporary terms, is known as the world wide web, this paper will also reengage with Gilbert Simondon's concept of "transduction" because of the reticulated design of his theoretical vision. He notably borrows extensively from cybernetics only to debunk it, stating what is according to him the obvious: the human cannot be confused with the non-human (for the latter, there is no possibility of memorious redress because its past is radically past), especially when one is rethinking the posthuman, a theoretical conception similar to Giles Deleuze's take on the temporal fold. In line with Simondon's emphasis on the "transindividual" when referring to psychic individuation, a conceptual proposition supported by the Jun Fujita Hirose's interview with Paolo Virno on transindividuality, this paper returns me to what I shall call the "technological imaginary", a concept I once posed as a question to a professor in a conference held years back in Gwangju, South Korea, because of my theoretical interest in Lacanian psychoanalysis then. This technological imaginary is crucial here because of the psychic concept of "imagination", a creative ability that inheres humanly rather than cybernetically. This will be elaborated later in relation to Simondon's psychic individuation with a memorial mention of the now deceased Bernard Stiegler. Thus, it is safe to say, then, that the humanly can be separated in two senses. First, in order to approach meaningfully the thematic concerns of the afore-mentioned cultural reproductions, one must first note the dualism implied in the dichotomous interactions between the human and the non-human, which means it will always be underpinned numerically by two and not one. Second, activating our cultural creativity necessitates "imagination", a creative ability that belongs with the sapience of humanity rather than the cybernetic. But it may be different in the years to come. Whereas the cyborg embodies the imaginary in science fictions, it is an "imaginary" endowed culturally by the human creator with which she forms a psychic bond, correlating to the Simondonian focus on the image as the intermediate between the object and the subject instead of the merely subjective facet of visual interpretation, thus materialising Adrian Mackenzie's notion of "transductive interaction".

When I later discovered that Jacques Lacan himself, like Simondon, was also known to be influenced by cybernetics, my approach to systems theory became more valid. The influence of cybernetics is evident in the latter's collective and psychic individuations. Thus, I assert that this reworking of these theoretical concepts proffers a distinctively psychic response that effectively counters the concluding premise of Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*, which, in this paper, is aligned conceptually with the hybridity promised in posthuman thought. If Deckard's ambiguous ontological status provides this paper's hybrid premise in his resulting union with Rachael, the android, then we have the hybrid progeny as promised in the intermixing of species, one aesthetically figuring this concept that sees generation of new structures and innovations. This provides heterogeneity as a counter to the homogenising effects of globalisation and culturally promoting the transmedial possibilities in the form of remediations and adaptations. It can also be argued that the "interface" mentioned in the title of this paper suggests not merely the unprecedented connectivity, collaboration and convergence afforded by digitisation but also *the potential for the*

immense interactivity to which Niklas Luhmann's 1980s second-wave system theory already gestured. I shall also espouse that Rachael's child, if there is no fictional departure from Scott's 1982 ambiguous ending, figures symbolically the intertexture of transmediality, otherwise Luhmann's communicative processes (which Robert Modlitba's beginner's text on system theory insists is "interactive", also the keyword inspiring Marsha Kinder's concept of transmedia intertextuality), and brings to the fore the heterogenising theoretical slant here in order to oppose the resulting homogenising existential effect of Villeneuve's *2049* that narratively presents both the blade runner and the androids they hunt as cyborgian. In addition, Villeneuve's plot version can be argued as not being in symbolic service to the Simondonian "transduction" given that this process requires "two orders of magnitude", as in two heterogeneous orders, for its unifying enactment.

Interactive Media as System Science

First, *what precisely is the technological imaginary?* The word "imaginary", with a psychoanalytic ring, is a psychic constitution that is a consequence of the threading together of the individual's psychic investment with the object of her desire and this subject-object "suture" takes on ontological salience because of the subject's reification of the object. If one refers to the technological imaginary, it is a realm occupied by the relation between the human's imagination and the technology or technique (in case, one is criticized for being too deterministic) in question. For instance, it is what Christopher, the massive computer, is to Alan Turing in Morten Tyldum's 2014 *Imitation Game*, in which the computer scientist, mathematician and codebreaker appears to be not just emotionally but psychically invested. It is an object-oriented ontology that places more emphasis on the object of interest or desire than the observing subject. Comparably, Scott's blade runner by the name of Rick Deckard, who is tasked onerously the hunting of four Nexus-6 replicant to "retire" them, appears to be emotionally and psychically tied to Rachael, a replicant who is "more human than human" and one self-developed beyond the usual four-year life span of any Nexus-6 replicant. Whereas Roger Ebert remarks his remiss for not defining the word "replicant" in his 2007 review on *The Final Director's Cut*, the word is yet defined here not because it has become a buzzword for fans of Cyberpunk or science fiction an entire paragraph is required to decode the word in relation to Rachael who is the symbolic embodiment of this fascinating technological imaginary.

Rachael, in Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner*, becomes a self-aware replicant because she is more than a Nexus-6 model. As evident in the filmic sequence visually rendering the Voight-Kampff test, she is a technological advanced model that requires over a hundred questions instead of the usual twenty or thirty for Deckard to ascertain her replicant nature. Villeneuve's 2017 version gives us this visual treat of Niander Wallace playing God in the intense birthing process of one of these replicants. Replication in artificial intelligence is taken to a different level the repetition that system theory propounds. It is not merely deep learning which makes logically recognisable the patterns that occur; it is also that which makes the evolutionary

dimension of systems evident: the repetition of models meant technological improvements made or enhancements added with instrumental or eventual *emergences*, made manifest in the Nexus-8 and Nexus-9 models of which Officer K in *2049* is one. Furthermore, the procreative capacity that Eldon Tyrell endows on Rachael (when reading the transmedial productions in tandem), besides being the beautiful and cold stereotype of an advanced android, carries semiotic indications, appositely deployed here to read the various signifying visual symbols. While *2049* focuses on exposing the replicant nature of Deckard, who fathered a child with Rachael, another cyborg, the source text left Deckard's ontological status ambiguous and rightly so given that it is this open-endedness that effectively prompts our questioning of the dichotomy between the human and non-human. Villeneuve's version, known critically for being not just a sequel but part of a conversation with the source text, detracts from the posthuman inclination promised by the source text with the homogenisation of both the male and the female protagonists. In fact, one could argue that the source text's lack of existential closure gives Villeneuve the creative space for plot extension. This is conceptually recognised here as exemplifying Pascal Chabot's interpretative premise of Simondonian psychic individuation, *that imagination leads to invention*.

As surface text, this reproductive possibility intuited in Scott's version is thematically continued in the filmic sequel. Moving beyond the replicating goal of creating a copy identical to a human is the reproductive objective of the Tyrell Corporation, the success of which makes Wallace's failure decades after rather glaring. Rachael's reproductive capacity, the result of which is a hybrid female child, drives not only the plot of *2049*; it cybernetically figures oddly that which makes us most human: the narcissistic desire to reproduce so as to leave behind progenies of self-sameness. Thus, it is not merely artificial intelligence appositely simulating human intelligence but the replicating structures of first-order cybernetics progressing to that of second-order cybernetics wherein the blind spot of the observing system could be observed by another observing system that the instructive benefits of systems theory are made obvious: these iterations enable our capacity for understanding. Luhmann's "What is Communication?" informs us that every occurrence is a communicative incision into the existential situation; what it cuts through would be, most likely, the Aristotelean substratum of homogenous matter. But that which is illuminating is his take against humanism: "On the contrary, I would like to maintain that only communication can communicate and that only within such a network of communication is what we understand as action created" (1992, 251). Criticised as being an anti-humanist, Luhmann further informs us that "...the concepts of 'subject' and 'individual' function as empty formulas for an, in itself, highly complex state of affairs falling within the domain of psychology..." (ibid). And yet I insist that perhaps Luhmannian discourse on the "person" is the most ethical approach to the cosmopolitan networked society as we know it because it is the psychoanalytic interpellation that positions the entities that make up a community as individuals. Whenever there is communication, there must be what Luhmann calls an act of "self-determination" so that semantic forking, a meaningful "bifurcation" in coding and decoding, evinces. These semantic divergences are the very source codes for communication wherein interactive convergences occur. "Speaking and Silence" further addresses this interactional aspect of our existence, a

which leads theoretically to the “recursive processing” of feedback loop that enables the “reduplication of schematization” to resolve any system issues. This recursive processing takes us beyond the first wave of cybernetics to that of the second and third waves of cybernetics. Like deconstruction, the initial condition for any system constitution, is one of difference rather than similarity, what Gregory Bateson famously states as: “a difference that makes a difference”. In order for a system to identify itself, it has to refer to other systems within the same environment. Many systems constitute the world as we know it. The terms “environment” and “world” found in system science are not systems. These provide the situations in which system science could be analysed and discussed. Thus, systemic identification is relational and always interactively approached if meaning is to be achieved.

System science attests to the critique that the blind spot in Villeneuve’s version is rendered clear in the concluding openness of the source text. This master-slave dialectic found in dystopian science fictions that structures the hunter-hunted or the human and the non-human relations is overturned when the four replicant fugitives turn hunters in pursuit of their prey, a thematic structure that sees replication in Alex Garland’s 2014 *Ex Machina*, a posthuman film more aligned to my own philosophical propensities. Here, the titular play on *deus ex machina* manifests clearly the power dynamics. Nathan, like Villeneuve’s Wallace, plays God in android creations, not to use these cyborgian creatures as slaves in the distant colonies but simply to re-enact the master-slave dialectic. Nathan’s cyborgian experimentation is initiated by the fact that he has the creative acumen and the financial resources to do so, making him a highly sought-after inventor. System science indicates how Nathan works with these self-determining psychic acts of autopoiesis, a *modus operandi* that subsumes the weaker systems so as to move all the systems toward its goal. This, in other words, forces the weaker systems (including his assistant’s psychic system), into an allopoietic state, creating an environmental tension that eventually prompts the female cyborg, Ava, to turn inwards for a resourceful counteract, a type of psychic and emotional manipulation that entraps Caleb physically in the laboratory with a reversal turn of concluding events. Ava more than passes the Turing test administered by Caleb and manages to decode and disrupt its efficacy in determining the distinction between artificial and human intelligences. While Nathan, the creator of Ava, engages sexually with a less advanced model (in a hilariously entertaining manner while having an oddly-timed and atmospherically-estranged dance with her), it is Ava which takes to a meta-level the thought processes that constitute the Turing test. In fact, Luciana Parisi in *Posthuman Glossary* says this of Ava’s ability to supersede the deductive and inductive in human logic: “Ava shows us how to break the Turing test by casting a spell on the truth of thinking as being not bounded to human sapience by necessity” (2018, 22). Ava, in *Ex Machina*, is arguably the symbolic epitome of a *transductive (re)mediation* between an individual system and its environment, a term I coined which shall be elaborated later.

This supersession, anticipated by Rachael’s advanced performance of Voight-Kampff test, says something about speaking and silence. When one examines closely the test sequences between Caleb and Ava, one realises that the questions posed by Caleb are followed by pregnant silences which are then followed by

deliberated responses. With the unfolding of the questioning events day after day, Ava's mental processes evolves even as she plans her escape from her creator's grasp. And the theoretical assertion here is that Ava's evolvement indicates the cybernetically advantageous premise of interactivity. In other words, it is Caleb's interrogative exchanges with Ava that provides the synaptic ground for further plastic changes in Ava's intelligence. Thus the filmic sequences of interactivity found in Garland's *Ex Machina* renders clear Luhmann's prodigious elaboration in "Speaking and Silence" that *critique*, as a form of evolved communication, belongs with the second-order forms that conceptually comments upon the first-order forms with which it concerns itself. In short, the three waves of cybernetics, in turn, are testaments to how technological progress can be made: with feedback via the loops, one observing system could observe another's blind spot in its systemic operations giving it the added vantage point in remedying any detected problematic. In turn, this sounds like the remedial processes discussed in Jay Bolter's and Richard's Grusin's *Remediation*, which provides a conceptual insight into how the so-called derivative texts are produced. These cultural reproductions work with heuristic methods, media solutions that emerge with thoughts on how to resolve the issue found in one media form that consequently reproduces another. Marshall McLuhan calls these "extensions", whether plot or theme or style extended and using different types of media, a term coincidentally used by Henry Jenkins in his narrative consideration of the transmedia. It is noteworthy that Bolter and Grusin's subtitle, *Understanding New Media*, conceptually plays on McLuhan's main title to his 1968 publication, *Understanding Media*, exemplifying what we mean here by "remediation", an interactive act that entails (re)production. In short, it is the "us" that Luhmann envisioned (somewhat like the sharing economy and communality of media convergence) which indicates pacifist leanings rather than contesting ones. However, it is the following that theoretically gives Luhmann's emphasis on communicative interactivity the competitive edge: "What this means can be grasped somewhat more clearly if one takes into consideration that any communication puts something at stake (*enjeu*), risks something – namely, rejection" (1994, 29). This notion of existential risks again is comparably found in Derrida's 1967 *Of Grammatology* wherein the latter speaks of this "game of the world". This, of course, refers to the existential stakes that govern our lives and motivate our actions. It appears that noteworthy conceptual convergences could be found between poststructuralism and system science, a convergence that takes on specific significances when ludologically approached.

The following engages closely Darryn King's "The Roleplaying Game that Predicted the Future" in understanding the generative possibilities of a reflexive psychic system. Mike Pondsmith, who created the 1988 *Cyberpunk 2020*, visually predicts the future metropolis that further enhances that which Lev Manovich calls AI aesthetics: enhancement filters given to us by digital technology. Pondsmith's Night City in *Cyberpunk 2077*, a collaboration with CD Red Projekt, is populated with huge holographic figures on screens and bioengineered beings, some with prosthetics enhancements, using hover crafts, enhanced atmospherically with detailed attention to the alternate reality. While reminiscent of the neon-lit cities found in Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner*, it surpasses Scott's film with its visionary information that filled five thousand pages. An entrepreneur in niche table-top games, Pondsmith's futuristic vision is more minutely

elaborative, promising hours of action-packed gaming sequences whereas Villeneuve's artistic vision is a lot quieter in style, stripped down shall we say and interspersed by ponderously apocalyptic images. CD Red Prokjet's latest *action, roleplaying* game instalment, *Phantom Liberty*, will be released in September 2023 with digital figures of Idris Elba and Keanu Reeves. In fact, *Cyberpunk 2077*'s critical success is not merely attributed to its creator's emphasis on narratological minutiae; it is well-received with gameplayers who want an *interactive* roleplaying experience. Of course, as one of Jenkin's lively arts, *gameplaying* as *ludus* or *paidia* is considered the very performative (action as existence in the Sartrean philosophical tradition or Judith Butler's iterative performativity that is akin to systemic reiteration) that *a priori* constitutes the digital interactivity that we know today. It is also noteworthy that the audience participation in gaming during the era of legacy media is not and cannot be conceptualised as the usual audience reception. It is prototypical of the participatory culture of which Jenkins speaks in the new millennium. *Paidia*, in ancient Greek, denotes "childish play" or "amusement", according to Wordsense Online Dictionary, and *ludus*, in Latin, means "play, game, or sport" (generally, regulated play or play governed by rules). Roger Caillois's conception of play in *Man, Play and Games* (2001) provides four classifications of play, albeit mostly adhering to the Greek versions of play as aforementioned. In fact, *paidia* as play can be considered superior to *ludus* here due to the multiple interactions between the game environment and the gameplayers (akin to the interactions between systems and their environments) that drive the storyline as well as elevate incrementally the gameplay. Its conceptual superiority also lies with the signifying fact that gameplaying could be improved vastly by the aesthetics of narratological devices, made evident by the sharp graphics of *Cyberpunk 2077*. This "retro-futuristic playground" poses with gravity a number of questions on culture and technology. King's review of this hugely successful franchise signals to us its dystopic politics. One of the inquiries posed is how does one keep one's privacy, liberation and freedom of expression in the face of the technological dominance of mega-corporations, the power politics of which are made obvious by their heavy investment in advanced technologies that ensures their privileged politico-economic positions. In other words, Big Brother is big only because of its technological prowess. However, this does not mean that countermoves are impossible.

One such countermove is enabled by Luhmann's purportedly anti-humanist system science, which not only foregrounds the interactivity of communication but also reconsiders humans as persons rather than the privileged creatures we evolutionarily regard ourselves. Being one of the self-reflexive systems in Luhmann's theory (the others are social systems and biologically living ones), we develop systematically by interacting with our environment. The environment, perceived as otherness, conditions our psychic progress. Development is no longer guided by a top-down process; the curating act of identity construction in any interactive process is horizontally conceived, just like the horizontality of any digital transduction. It is a world of coordination, with the key coordination of communication presiding over these coordinations; for instance, the mutual coordination between child and maternal parent is governed by the communication implied in parental guidance. Emphasising coordination indicates the (re)assembling possibilities inherent to the system. The initial condition of psychic development is the

environmental factor mentioned earlier that poses as difference to the self-referentiality of the psychic system, Derrida's condition of possibility that he mentions in a lot of his deconstructive texts. When faced with the contingency of a problematic encounter, it, conceived as operationally closed, curates and inheres the environmental elements required in its resolving operation as autopoiesis. This idiosyncratic actualisation of the perceiving system effectively allows the recursive reconstruction of identity. With difference as the *a priori*, the psychic system preserves its ability for distinctive identity reconstruction even as it adapts to the environment, rearranges its functions and evades entropy. It then achieves what some calls a dynamic equilibrium that allows the system to conserve its ability to reinvent itself, an apparently stable state not unlike Simondon's concept of "metastability". System science, as elaborated here, emphasises the "process" of reinvention, which is also comparable to Simondon's focus on the process of individuation rather than the individuating principle ofhylomorphism. In fact, Simondonian individuating process remarks the developmental procedure as described in system science. He borrows heavily the various concepts of cybernetics in order to describe the "transductive" process of psychic individuation. Transduction, according to Mackenzie's *Transductions* (also cited in "A Short List of Gilbert Simondon's Vocabulary"), is described as a "constitutive coupling" process that initially locates a dissimilarity between two forms or a disparity within a field of investigation. As Mackenzie espouses: it is a "process whereby a disparity or a difference is topologically and temporally restructured across some interface. It mediates different organisations of energy" (2002, 25). In other words, Simondon's transduction attests to the possibility of the coming together of two disparate entities or levels the fusion of which creates an innovative cultural production.

Transduction as Hybrid Individuation

The Simondonian term, transindividuation, is addressed in this section on its connection to the cybernetic emphasis on information as communication. The informational ontology that Andrew Iliadis theorises in both Simondon's and Giles Deleuze's oeuvres is not merely the genesis as we know it; it is an ontogenesis that makes epistemology in the service of ontology: an individuation that makes evident its operation as one of genesis, evolution and disparation rather than the Aristotlean emphasis on the principle of individuation. To Simondon, the individual ought to be known in and through this individuating process and not merely informed by the principle of individuation. The transindividual, on the other hand, is constituted by the *ekstasis* of the religious: this excitement is stimulated by a non-resolved potential that one carries with oneself in one's approach to society at large (again, this gestures to the increased significance of *paidia* as play with exuberance and spontaneity rather than *ludus*). Defined in "A Short List of Gilbert Simondon's Vocabulary" as "psycho-social", the transindividual indicates that "The individual has not individuated the preceding being without remainder; it has not been totally resolved in the individual and the milieu; the individual has conserved the preindividual within itself, and all individual ensembles have thus a sort of non-structured ground from which a new individuation can be

produced” (1989, 193). I may not be a Simondonian scholar but this “non-structured ground” sounds comparable to the Aristotelean substratum of undifferentiated matter against which Simondon takes issue, as discussed in Iliadis’s article on the theoretical connection between Simondon and Deleuze. However, Simondonian ontogenesis is different from Aristotelean metaphysics in that the Simondonian unresolved problematic accompanies the human individual throughout life as she individuates in an ontological process, making it sound much like the psychoanalytic id. This unresolved problematic that Simondon mentions in his definition of the transindividual is *an opportune excess* for this posthuman address, a reconsideration of the concept of relationality, not in the interindividual context, but that of transindividuation. Virno propounds, in his interview with Hirose, the changing into the transindividual collective of the preindividual excesses with psycho-social individuation. It also requires the transindividuality of technology for this process of reification, reassessed here as manifesting affirmatively a human individual’s social, political, or cultural capacity with transductive expression. But, for Virno, Simondon does not “grasp (how could he?) the point at which these different forms of transindividuality [of technology and the collective] become tightly linked, or rather, welded together (thereby becoming something different from what they were separately)” (2004, 4) This “point of fusion” prodigiously indicates the *transmedial (re)mediation* upon which this thesis is premised: in the contemporary digital mediascape, it is cultural contribution with socio-political value, albeit signalling the necessity for the critical situatedness and positionality that Luhmann’s system theory also insists in “Speaking and Silence”. The situatedness and positionality of speaking inversely leads to the incision in and through undifferentiated mass to which he refers when espousing his version of “communication”, a cut resulting in differentiation when communicating. This implied fragmentation attests aptly to Derrida’s suggestion that, ontologically, it is always at least two or more because of difference, a word that Luhmann also mentions in “Speaking and Silence” when writing about systemic initiation. The myth of the One, whether the messianic one of the blade runner as the saviour of humankind in his decimation of the android-slaves or the organisational one of the Tyrell Corporation, the human replication of which leads to drastic dehumanisation, is shattered by Dick’s rather nihilistic *Androids* and Scott’s pessimistic *Blade Runner*. Strangely, the dystopian world and the disconnected lives of the hunter and the hunted in this “planet of perpetual night”, according to Michael Newton from *The Guardian*, are that which prompt not just the current existential questions but also the conceptual insights into algorithmic intelligence and virtual reality not ever seen previously.

Whereas Luhmann’s system science apparently liberates itself from the ethical premise underpinning the considerations of social change, Simondonian individuation is quite the contrary. Not focusing on the individual, Simondonian psychic individuation reconsiders the human individual as a part of the community within which she belongs with the latter’s conception of individuation as a rethinking of “change” as some kind of social advancement. This individuating process is stimulated by something that *comes from the future*, to use Deleuze’s phrase (cited in Iliadis’s “A New Individuation”), which creates ontological tension and pushes the individual to a transindividuating performance. This means that the

human individual, in attempting to remedy this unresolved problematic, makes a transindividual manoeuvre that contributes socially, culturally or politically et cetera. This is an operation that Stiegler enunciates as “relational ecology”, explained here as an interaction between the individual and the milieu that incites structural invention, an occurrence that also epochally reinvents society. Transindividuation can be comparable with system theory due to the similarity discovered in the following citation from Simondon: “...transindividual action is that which makes it so that the existent individual ensembles as *elements of a system* calls for potentials and metastability, tension and expectation, then *the discovery of a structure* and a functional organization that integrates and resolves this problematic of incorporated immanence” (1989, 191, emphasis mine). In other words, the lack of systemic stability is due to the shifts in systemic boundary, what Mackenzie calls “the margin of indeterminacy”, but it is also this instability that opens up scope for the ontological developments we hope to achieve. While Simondon explains this as prevital, it is of pertinence to the Bergsonian type of vitalism that is called forth. This *élan vital* is that which gives to our creative or experimental dynamism that he calls *transduction*. In fact, transduction technically reiterates Bolter’s and Grusin’s remediation, a reinvention of McLuhan’s “the medium is the message”.

This thesis approaches transmediation in a manner unlike Jenkin’s transmedia storytelling; it is reworked in and through Simondon’s transduction. The filmic adaptations of Dick’s *Androids* are transmedial extensions which stretch artistically to Pondsmith and CD Red Projekt’s *Cyberpunk 2077*. Transmedia intertexts can be argued as identifiable precisely because they refer to other texts, an intertexture decoded as one premised on relationality and interaction, the key manoeuvres of “transductive (re)mediation” to which I alluded earlier. These transmedial processes give to meaningful engagement *through* what Simondon calls an “internal resonance” found between and among texts, not merely causing the consequential semantic hybridisation from this symbolic interpenetration (in biological terms: transduction is a genetic interpenetration and viral dissemination) but also cultural transformations and spreads, corresponding to Kinder’s remark in her interview with Jenkins that elaborates her use of transmedia intertextuality:

“We are using it as a substitute for the term “interactive,” whose definition and connotations are no longer hotly contested. Transmedia, on the other hand, evokes the issue of medium specificity (still very much in contention) without supporting one side or the other. Yet... it also evokes the historic transformation we are now experiencing, in which all movies, videos, TV programs, and music are being redefined as software or data, a conversion with seismic financial and cultural consequences” (“Wandering through the Labyrinths”, 2015).

Conceptual debates abound as to what remediation is in relation to adaptation, notwithstanding the discussions on how media productions fit Jenkin’s transmedia storytelling. There has also been a proliferation of terms such as “transmedia literacy”, “transmedia franchising” and “transmedia branding” which Jenkins mentions in his interview with Kinder. Instead of using Jenkin’s word

“convergence”, Kinder believes that the term “transmedia” indicates the intertextuality that underlines the connective dimension of the various cultural productions sharing the same plot or characters as well as the signifying shifts in media representations. My transmedia concerns incline toward Simondon’s use of the term “transduction”. It reworks the implicit associations found within two modes of thought with the objective of cultural re-constitution and growth. Furthermore, transmedia productions can be thought of as instances of transduction. In fact, Kinder’s transmediality and Simondon’s transduction both signal an *innovative dynamism that cuts across* the media landscape.

Just as the cyborg David in Scott’s 2012 *Prometheus* appeals to my encyclopaedic sensibility for the unfamiliar or should I say the strangely familiar, the cybernetic figure Rachael in *Blade Runner* too fascinates with her ontological ambiguity. According to Katherine Hayle’s *How We Became Posthuman*, Dick’s Rachael is schizoid in structure because of her cold and unfeeling exterior. This sounds conceptually reminiscent of the Deleuzian schizophrenia, critically thought of as socially and politically liberating. It has to be qualified that an android with a schizoid structure is literarily fantastic but the so-called schizoid existence of the capitalist middle-class is quite different in its delusional inclinations. This transindividuating psyche is not merely the ability to accommodate antinomies; it uses this ecstatic energy for transducing. I avoid using the schizoid structure that Deleuze uses, which Simondonian scholarship notes is Deleuze’s reticent borrowing from Simondon . Given that the Simondonian transduction is a manoeuvre between two levels of actualities, the productive consequence of which is an “objective problematic field” (in line with the cinematic assertion of Scott’s philosophical premise) rather than a “subjectively anti-realist” one, it is ascertained here that one is not dealing with the schizophrenic euphoria that one finds sometimes in the virtual; it is also opposed to the schizoid irrationality of the clinical kind too. In line with Angela Woods’s elaboration on Deleuze’s two tomes on schizophrenias, I would caution care, always in line with the Stieglerian concept of “care”, in using the schizoanalytic approach which, according to Woods’s abstract, could possibly “descend into paralysis or pathology” (2011). Woods also notes two tensions found within Deleuze’s works on schizophrenia: first, the tension found between the revolutionary schizoid structure and that of the clinical one, which explains the political dimension of some artworks, whereas the second kind of tension gestures to the subjectivity that inheres to this schizoid structure (Woods states rather clearly that this refers to the capitalist infrastructure) which pathologically destroys itself from the inside. Deleuze’s schizoid approach, criticised as unmethodological and leaning towards the far-fetched, should be reserved only for aesthetics if it is ever used analytically.

Moving retrogressively to Simondon’s emphasis on the “tropistic unity” in “A Genesis of the Individual”, there are two noteworthy points of pertinence ino this paper: First, this possibility of harmonious interactions between individuals, human or otherwise, of contrasting temperament, corresponds to Jenkin’s “convergence”; it is arguably an alternative vision of the Deleuzian schizoid configuration, one that holds the contradictory elements assembled and concretised from a visionary aspect to the material

one. Second, the transindividuating process rebounds semantically to the many possibilities that a human individual carries with her. With capitalist industrialisation, one has to contend with the Marxian alienation. The advent of the post-capitalist age does not see the celebration of the freedom from alienation with the contemporary possibility of what Stiegler calls “disindividuation”. Consequently, I agree with Virno’s suggestion that one cures this possible ailment with reification, an actualising process that begins with the human subject’s creative ability. The ending of Dick’s *Androids* could possibly attest to an escape from the schizoid structure of capitalistic megalomania, quite contrary to Scott’s schizoid premise in *Prometheus* where transmedia literacy is required in noting that this piece of science fiction is a futuristic treatment of the Greek myth on hubris (symbolically figured by David, the cyborg, in his knowledge inculcation and emotional emulation), also the thematic concern of Franz Kafka’s amusing short fiction with four different endings. In addition to the 2017 *Blade Runner 2049*, Scott also produced the short film, *2036, Nexus Dawn* and *Blade Runner, Blackout* in the same year, rendering clear to us that, as the creator of *Blade Runner*, Scott materialises Jenkins’s concept of transmedial storytelling. He later produced a science-fictional series that has a similar plot premise as *Blade Runner*, entitled *Raised by Wolves* (2020-2022) and directed by Aaron Guzikowski. Despite its initial poor critical reception, Scott was adamant that this series continues in production. This form of transmediation is more in tune with Simondon’s transduction: *Raised by Wolves*, as a cultural production, brings together his previous films on the messianic, the 2015 *Killing Jesus*, and his biggest commercial success, the *Alien* (1979- 2024?) series. The Mithraics, in *Raised by Wolves*, embody the religious *ekstasis*, mentioned earlier in this paper, that accompanies collective individuation. When motivated by fear and intermingled with paradoxes, this brand of fervour can be dangerous. It could lead potentially to all types of radical violence. And the contradictions in the series evince after they have landed on Kepler 22b with the kidnapping of one of the six children raised by Mother and Father (androids created by the Atheists) who have arrived earlier. It is a violent act of separation based on a prophecy. One could almost say that the series self-consciously mirrors its status as a filmic series with “light” (indirectly indicating the photographic origins of cinema with *pho-* etymologically denoting “light”) as the central motif represented by the Mithraics’ worship of Sol, the sun god. In addition, this reference to “light” as knowledge is tied to the tree of knowledge in the Mithraic prophecy that inverts the biblical prohibition. Knowledge here does not defile and is not aligned with evil. Moreover, Scott’s filmography itself aptly demonstrates to us how, as a cultural transducer, he uses the preindividual remainder (the criticisms aimed at him for the 2012 *Prometheus*’s or the 2017 *Alien Covenant*’s lack of critical success) that accompanies him creatively in a transindividuating process.

Conclusion:

Concluding with an extrapolation on the previous title of this paper “questioning the human and the technological interface”. I am keen to show that questioning as the problematic prompts resolution in the form of technics, which supplement our incapacities, whether it is forgetfulness as mythically embodied

by Epimetheus or our existential lack as mirrored by Narcissus. In an unpublished paper on the similarity between Simondon's and Derrida's conceptions of technicity, Stiegler's reconception of originary technicity took centre-stage because of his Heideggerian focus on "care". Despite the fact that he aligns himself conceptually with the Frankfurt School in his opposition against "uncritical consensus", Stiegler redirects attention to the excesses in the informational reception within the age of digitisation. Reconsidering care which started with his first instalment of *Technics and Time*, he clarifies Derrida's deconstructive position in terms of the memorious. Crucial in an era of deepfakes, scams, disinformation and misinformation, this careful use of technics also goes hand in hand with his contention against the Fordist mass production of the industrial epoch, an issue intensified by what he calls hyperindustrialisation found within the knowledge economy. His concern with "disindividuation" has to do with the loss of opportunities to actualise one's innovative or critical possibilities, sometimes needed to instil a sense of self-realisation, a condition that may have dire consequences in the information age.

On the other hand, Mackenzie's allusion to what he describes as "mutable, divergent and eventful" deserves a brief discussion here. I agree, as any educator would, that difference is important and that specificities, as the condition for intelligibility, allow continued educational discussion. However, the dislocation and deferment of *differance* too gestures to semantic interplays, ambiguities indicated by Luhmann's enunciation of the paradox whenever one refers to life itself: "To repeat, the world can come to itself only as the world in paradox" (1994, Section 1) because of the underlying antinomic contradiction. To perpetuate "unity" we must first think the paradoxical cancellation of the binaries and communication "affirms this unity [of the communicable and the incommunicable] implicitly by severing it" (ibid). Thus, ironically, the endeavour to unify disparate elements sets the conditions for the contingent possibility of the problematic. Mackenzie's discourse, too, makes manifest the spatial indeterminacy in addition to the temporal openness when he claims, "[r]ather, this margin of contingency as indeterminacy participates in the constitution of collectives" (2002, 3). In the new millennium where information, communication and mobility are defined by unprecedented speed, one encounters contradictory messages all the time, making lived experience itself an amalgam of paradoxes, evident in the simultaneous antinomic occurrences. One can see this as a correspondence to Luhmann's exposition of the paradox. When referring to his reason for defining life as amenable to communication, Thomas Mavrofides's online article opines that "...communication happens if (and only if) there's a degree of unpredictability inherent in its process: if I know exactly what you are going to say then there's no meaning in communicating; it is precisely the *reduction of probability* that triggers communication and continuously leads it from simpler to more complex forms, that is *evolution* (accessed 14/06/23, 4). In other words, when communicating, one party does not know what the other(s) will be saying, which points to the paradoxical necessity for communication. If all of us are aware of what one another is going to say, then there is no need for communication in the first instance. Having to deal with paradoxes, Luhmann informs us that the human only becomes "person" when she has achieved successfully at every stage *meaningful resolutions* to the encountered issues. Thus Luhmann's sense of "person" is ethically

charged, especially evident when she uses her ground, an apparatus, for (re)constructing novel emergences, which in turn changes her environment, comparable to the Simondonian transindividuation wherein the individual reinvents herself so as to lead the reinvention of her milieu.

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The Last of Us: The Queer and Dystopia

Rweetodarshi Sarkar



Abstract:

Stories have perhaps been told as long as human beings have existed, but with time, the medium of storytelling has evolved dramatically. One such medium that gained popularity only in the latter half of the 20th century is video games, a form of digital storytelling that has ever since captured and shaped the imaginations of its consumers. However, the video game, as a medium, has conspicuously had a certain 'belatedness' attached to it ever since it burst onto the scene, almost lacking a sense of self awareness, a political correctness deemed essential in the modern day.

As opposed to counterparts such as cinema, and television, video games have categorically struggled when tackling current world issues such as representation, sexuality and gender. It is curious that the medium with perhaps the most amount of subversive potential has notoriously acted as a vessel perpetuating dominant hegemonic structures. It was hence, a hallmark

moment when *The Last of Us* released in 2013, a game that promised to fill in certain gaps plaguing the gaming industry for years by addressing such questions as “Why are there no queer characters in video games?”

Upon and following the years of its release, the game has been considered and celebrated to be one of the first triple A titles to have addressed the issue of LGBTQ representation with the structuring of its plot and characterization. The purpose of this study thus, is to analyze and problematize the truth value of the claim, of whether the series is a step in the right direction when it comes to representation in video game storytelling, or does the post apocalyptic dystopian setting provide for an ‘ideal backdoor’ for the developers to not only sneak in token representation but also bypass a stringent heteronormative consciousness that would otherwise perhaps catastrophically impact the reception and sales of the aforementioned video game series.

Keywords: Video games, Storytelling, Dystopia, Queer, Representation, *The Last of Us*

Introduction

“The medium of video games is currently undergoing a momentous shift, both artistically and politically- and, in many ways, it is queer, independent game makers who are leading that change.” (Ruberg, 2020)

“At this moment there's a renaissance taking place in games, in the breadth of genres and the range of emotional territory they cover”. (Isbister, 2016)

Both scholars, Katherine Isbister and Bonnie Ruberg, though addressing dissimilar issues seem to be in agreement that the medium of video gaming is undergoing a paradigm shift. It is hence the task of this paper, to argue whether it is enough of a change in the right direction to destabilize the dominant hegemonic structures and frameworks that now form the foundational body to modern video games— a medium that can be argued is 21st century’s most influential form of storytelling, culture production and knowledge dissemination. It is hence imperative, that video games be made inclusive, champion diversity and be rid of the ‘single story’ prejudice.

Chimamanda Adichie, in her Ted Talk, ‘The danger of the single story’, lays bare the dominant discourse by virtue of its otherising potential. She mentions how she wrote exactly the kind of story which she read, “...all my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples and they talked a lot about the weather — how lovely it was that the sun had come out”, never mind the fact that she was

originally an inhabitant of Nigeria—a country rather known for its extremely hot and humid climate, where snow is but a distant dream. Ideally the characters in her books should have possessed dark skin and ate mangoes, instead, her “characters drank a lot of ginger beer because the characters in the British books drank ginger beer.” Thus, the ‘single story’ mentality shapes the consciousness in one particularly linear way, resisting the existence or perhaps co-existence of multiple schools of storytelling.

The Western ‘I’ is, in its essence, exclusionist and resists change, a rigidity that now finds itself rooted at the heart of video game culture, which to this day, even after almost three decades of storytelling, primarily caters to the white, straight, cisgender, male ‘gamer’, and even though ‘indie games’ have provided a space for the nurturing and development of queer and representative storytelling, the triple-A publishers, which form the juggernauts of the gaming industry still continue to tiptoe around the ‘proven mechanics’. Hence, the poor representation of LGBTQ people in the history of games speaks to the profound impact of corporate concerns on video games as a medium. Fearful that diversifying their content will alienate their established player base; these large scale development studios have long perpetuated what Janine Fron et al. have called “the hegemony of play”.

The following chapters will thus, try to locate *The Last of US* franchise within a larger body of ‘representational’ video games, to see whether they operate to destabilize the normative or continue to perpetuate the same.

An Absent Presence: History of the Queer in Video Games

Being queer, is perhaps about difference in perception and desire. Curiously, the word ‘queer’ used to once be a negatively connoted colloquial term for ‘homosexuality’ but has underwent significant evolution since, bringing the periphery to the centre. The term queer, as G. Piantato argues “explores the discrepancy between gender identity, anatomical sex and sexual desire, resisting hegemonic heterosexuality” and in the process, provides marginalized sexualities a term of reference, a symbol and a sense of awareness in the struggle against the dominant cultural other.

However, “Queerness in video games means more than the representation of LGBTQ characters or same sex romance. Queerness and video games share a common ethos: the longing to imagine alternative ways of being and to make space within structures of power for resistance through play.” (Ruberg, 2019)

In her book *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*, Ruberg suggests and demonstrates that queerness is not a ‘special coefficient’ added to games by activists and scholars. The queer is an alternate mode of play, of thought and engagement — to simply view play as fun without approaching the game with a goal or a target to achieve, a milestone to complete or to win a campaign subverts expectations, subverts the

normative, and renders the act queer. The queer, thus, has always been there. As much as I adhere to this proposition, the problem I would argue with this novel understanding is that it would appeal to and color the sensibility of a very niche group within the larger body of gamers, a massive section of which is homophobic, who perhaps need to be introduced to more pragmatic solutions to counter their resistive potential towards the queer and the diverse. Questions such as ‘why are there so few queer characters in video games?’ need to take up a central space and be addressed in more meaningful ways and with lasting impact.

For the larger body of gamers, the queer is an absent presence, showing up in triple-A titles only in traces and implications throughout the 2000’s, as Jack Flanagan would state “LGBT characters have been around almost as long as video games themselves—hidden in plain sight”. *Fallout 2*, released in 1998 was one such game which featured same-sex marriage, at a time when it hadn’t yet been legalized in America. To quote developer Tim Craine: “We kind of liked pushing boundaries a bit. Not always with violence. We wanted a game which is full of social commentary.”

The general takeaway words would thus be ‘just a bit’ and ‘nonviolence’, but nevertheless it tilted the balance of power just enough so that infrequent queer characters started taking up margin roles, mostly as minor antagonists and humanoid beings so as not to offend the general sensibility—the role of the protagonist remained untouched.

It was not until the beginning of the previous decade that the queer made appearances in a more prominent manner though still mostly as side characters of little consequence or sometimes as romance interests for the protagonists to explore. Franchises such as *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* let the gamer explore queer romantic options among others, while *The Sims* although a sandbox game, provided a space for the queer to coexist with the heteronormative.

The truly remarkable breakthrough however, came with the release of *The Last Of Us: Left Behind* in 2014 and *Life Is Strange* in 2015, the queer had announced its arrival, with characters in major roles. Ellie and Max Caulfield were cast as the pillars on whose shoulders the queer body would seek to thrive. The periphery was finally being indoctrinated into the centre. Or was it?

In the years following, a whole host of queer characters burst onto the scene, from Parvati Holcomb in *The Outer Worlds* to Judy Alvarez in *Cyberpunk 2077*. The multiplayer online games too sought to cash in on the trend with Valorant’s Raze and Killjoy being recently retconned into a relationship, Tracer, a celebrated character in the Overwatch universe, established a notable influence for Apex Legends to adopt. Apex Legends, a multiplayer battle royale game, aspires to approximate an envisioned model of character representation, drawing inspiration from Tracer's precedent. “Our studio is comprised of a diverse group of people, the playerbase of battle royale is comprised of a diverse group,” Respawn

Entertainment community manager Jay Frechette told Rock, Paper, Shotgun. “Having a diverse cast is super important. You want everyone to have someone they can connect to.” (Frechette, 2019) However, the question remains, even in 2023. Do they? Have these games done enough to shift the paradigm? Or has the very foundation upon which the latter bodies were built, doomed them to fail by virtue of how they initially tackled the issue of representation. I would argue that the model they created is still being used as a template, and is perhaps adversely affecting the queer concern. I shall focus on the problems arising, in my upcoming sections.

Ellie in Wonderland: Interpreting the Dystopia in *The Last of Us* (2013)

Brought to life by Neil Druckmann—the writer and creative director of *The Last of Us*, the character of Ellie draws inspiration from a previously unused idea of a mute character who would accompany the protagonist of *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* Nathan Drake on his adventures.

“We started to brainstorm how you would form a bond through gameplay, where you can’t rely on dialogue. She would shake Drake awake in the middle of the night and motion for him to follow her. She’d start climbing up buildings and jumping gaps and you’re following her and seeing that she’s excited. She really wants to share something with you. As you’re climbing up on this rooftop of this building, you get to see a vista over this whole city as it’s lit up. You hear gunfire and stuff in the distance, but it’s this really beautiful moment that you get to share with this character, all through gameplay.” (Dean, 2013)

Druckmann would go on to admit that this idea morphed into a question: “could you build an entire game around this concept of meeting a character really early on and forming a bond that would evolve and shift as you see all the facets that a deep relationship between two people can have.” The answer to that question came in the form of *The Last of Us*, a post apocalyptic zombie survival horror game in genre. However, at the heart of the story is the complex relationship that evolves between the protagonist Joel and a teenage Ellie, a character he is tasked to protect and smuggle across the dystopian land. In truth, the story of the game, unfolds as a coming of age narrative for Ellie who takes up the leading role in subsequent releases such as *The Last Of Us: Left Behind* and *The Last of Us Part II*. The characterization is nuanced, complex and well rounded as evident by the general reception —Ashley Reed and Andy Hartup of GamesRadar named Ellie one of the "most inspirational female characters in games" stating that she is "one of the most modern, realistic characters ever designed" whereas Ellie Gibson from Eurogamer applauded the character's fortitude as well as her vulnerability, commending the game's subversion of the damsel in distress cliché. However, this is where we delve into the problematic.

Even though Ellie is written as a character with significant agency, she is not the protagonist, "The Last of Us casts her in a secondary, subordinate role . . . It is actually the story of Joel, the older man. This is

another video game by men, for men and about men." opines critic Chris Suellentrop in his New York Times Review. "Within the relatively brief history of video games and their scholarly study, many critics and players have long lamented their regressive gender roles—and rightfully so. Various games rely on hackneyed narrative trajectories depicting male agency and female passivity, in which male protagonists rescue female damsels in distress who are often drawn as exaggerated and eroticized objects of male lust." (Pugh, 2018). And although the game effectively addresses and subverts the latter part of the commentary by casting the duo in a father-daughter dynamic, the former rings true. Even if Ellie is not a passive character, she does need a lot of rescuing. Secondly, though Ellie possesses the power to challenge Joel's authority, he actively resists and rejects a majority of her opinions. Third, the game does in its essence explore the 'women in the refrigerator' trope coined by Gail Simone—with two previously dead women in the form of his biological daughter Sarah, and love interest Tess mapped onto the narrative of the game so that Joel can undergo the hero's journey and eventual redemption arc. Still, one might argue that these are surface issues, if we were to go one layer deeper, the problematic would take shape in a nuanced but jarring way.

The dystopian post apocalyptic setting, as I would argue, creates an ambivalent and problematic space: The narrative tells us that Ellie was born much later in the timeline, decades after the outbreak of the virus that facilitated the collapse of civilized society. Ellie—the queer, by implications, thus shares the same lawless and chaotic space that allows rapists, cannibals, murderers, looters, psychopaths and slavers to thrive. Is it representation when the queer is united with social outcasts? When we situate the queer with the animalistic, we hold the implication that the queer has no space in civilization. A condition, only to be explored where order has ceased to exist. We must note, the game does not hint at an existence of the queer identity before the collapse of society, as it only depicts what comes after. The world of the *The Last of Us* is cruel, not only filled with zombies—post-human beings but also inhabited by humanity's worst. The game's inhabited zones bring to mind the biblical cities of 'Sodom' and 'Gomorra'—destroyed by God using "sulfur and fire" as a result of their 'sinful' nature and 'wicked' behavior. (Genesis 19:24) The dystopian bubble thus projects a consciousness that normalizes fringe politics as well as lets anarchy reign supreme—a return to the primal. The setting effectively provides the ideal backdoor which was perhaps necessary in 2013 for the developers to bring in a queer character in a major role without offending and alienating its target player base.

It is also curious that *Fallout 2*, already discussed as a groundbreaking representative game in its era, chose to pursue the same route—by placing the queer in a dystopian world, it not only brings to fore a problematic mindset but also undercuts the queer agency. The unfortunate result however, is that subsequent games, mostly follow the relatively 'safe' model set by *The Last Of Us*. Tiny Tina in *Borderlands*, Judy Alvarez in *Cyberpunk 2077*, Parvati Holcomb in *The Outer Worlds*, All the characters in *Valorant*, *Overwatch* and *Apex Legends* all inhabit the Dystopia—perpetuating the same cycle, with the implication that the queer can only exist when civilization goes to hell.

Where is Frank, Bill? An Analysis of the Queer Side Characters

A decade after the release of the first game, the story of the *The Last of Us* was brought to life in 2023 — adapted to the medium of television, as a short series airing on HBO max. The first season of which, focused entirely on the first game, however the story was in parts reimaged to appeal to the modern audience. It thus becomes imperative, to perhaps revisit the original script to examine how the queer has evolved over the years. The idea is not to backward project current ethos onto a game that released quite some time ago, it is however, to determine whether the queer concern could have been tackled in alternative ways that could have provided the struggle for legitimacy with more meaning.

The TV adaptation, one would argue was tackled with an acute awareness and a sense of finesse that the game handling severely lacked. For once, an entire episode was dedicated to the exploration of Bill and Frank's relationship —two people, who came upon each other by way of chance in a dystopian land, fell in love and sought to eke out a living together under unforgiving conditions. The game however, only hinted at a possible relationship between Bill and Frank, letting the gamers' imagination fill in the blank spaces as per their cultural conditioning —whether they were friends or something more is for the gamer to decide, effectively shifting the agency from the queer to the player.

However, their story comes full circle in a roundabout beautiful manner in the TV adaptation. Though heartbreaking exudes a sense of hope —after spending an entire lifetime keeping each other alive, they chose to die together in bed in each other's arms, having an active part in how their narrative comes to an end. Thus the TV adaptation reimagines their relationship and returns agency back to the characters. In the game however, the players don't actually get to meet Frank. He is the absent presence, brought alive only through Bill's telling of his story. Bill does not explicitly share the nature of their relationship, only stating that it is dangerous to care about someone in such a world, further cautioning Joel that taking care of Ellie would get him killed, foreshadowing his eventual death in *Last of Us Part II*. Does this put forth the question that associating with or indulging the queer might bring upon the death of the heteronormative? Perhaps an inference which is rather too harsh, but nevertheless it is one possible take on the tragic tale of *Last of Us* and its representation.

“The trio comes across a body hanging from a rope. Bill confirms that the body is Frank. He says that Frank hung himself after becoming infected, though a nearby suicide note reveals that Frank was furious at Bill at the time of his death and that the two had clearly not reconciled from their falling out. Bill is disturbed by this encounter, though he is clearly trying to maintain his disassociated demeanor.” (Byrd, 2023) The game effectively kills off one of its potential queer characters without even giving him a space on screen, while Bill's characterization leads a lot to be desired, oftentimes coming off as excessively aggressive and paranoid. “It's very rare to see LGBTQ inclusion that's just happy and celebratory. A lot of times, you see the 'bury your gays' trope, where, historically, media only had a single gay character,

and the gay character usually dies,” (Nash, 2021) I would have to agree with the statement. For a game which was to champion the issue of representation, there is an awful lot of character assassination, particularly when it comes to the complex relationship of Bill and Frank. Both queer characters essentially self destruct and after Joel and Ellie’s encounter with Bill in *The Last of Us*, the character too fades away to the reaches of oblivion, never to make a second appearance again —his character arc remains unresolved, Bill and Frank remains a consciously missed opportunity. The queer gets pushed back to the periphery once more after a mishandled cameo appearance.

The Queer Left Behind: Problematizing the DLC Content of *The Last of Us*

The Last Of Us: Left Behind is a downloadable expansion pack that came out in 2014, a year after the release of the main game. The DLC content acts as a prequel to the main story, exploring the relationship of Ellie and her childhood companion Riley, who remains absent from the main narrative —their possible relationship only hinted at in the previous title. Set months before the events of the first game, it allows the player to take control of Ellie in a protagonist role as she and Riley struggle to figure out their place in the dystopia. It is a tale about their loss of innocence, exploration of adolescent love and the figuring out of their sexuality. The culminating, poignant moment comes in the form of a kiss that the pair share before eventually being attacked by zombies where both characters are bitten, and in a similar manner to how Bill and Frank meet their demise in 2023’s TV adaptation. They choose death together, only for Ellie to later realize that she was immune to the virus, however Riley wasn’t. Henry Gilbert of GamesRadar felt that the story was "intermittently intense, tragic, humorous, and even poignant" while, Polygon's Samit Sarkar wrote that *Left Behind* "serves as a terrific side story" to the main game, but is "even more impressive" when taken on its own merits.

The issue however, is that it is in essence, a side story, a DLC added to the main storyline later on. The fact of the matter is that the base game only ever left traces of the queer presence and that too was grossly mishandled. The relationship of Ellie and Riley was given a stage only after Ellie’s overwhelmingly positive reception. Ubisoft Montreal lead writer Lucien Soulban took a Q&A on the Ubisoft Blog and, in its course, he stated “we’re unlikely to see an LGBT character take centre stage in a triple-A game anytime soon.” He explained that “fears of damaging sales would be the main stumbling block in securing support for a homosexual protagonist, asserting that until publishers were convinced otherwise, a gay lead is likely to remain a pipe dream... Rather than depicting a character as gay outright, Soulban worries companies will retcon sexuality or issue surprise reveals once they’ve already been embraced by the masses, in a similar manner to what some argue JK Rowling did with Dumbledore.” (Karmali, 2020)

Recently, the immensely popular multiplayer game, *Valorant* has been guilty of the same malpractice, retconning the sexualities of two of its most picked agents, Raze and Killjoy via a released artwork that

depicts them sharing a passionate kiss. It is to be noted that majority of the player base are casual players, who do not follow the artwork releases, and have very little idea, if any, about the character back stories. Similarly, I would argue, that casuals form the bulk of *Last of Us*' player base, who mostly would not revisit it to play a two hour downloadable content a year after its release. The target audience would thus, be restricted to the core community and the queer corner. The DLC release effectively shifts the content into a liminal space away from the main continuity and provides the developers with the ideal backdoor to bypass stringent morality and reduce heteronormative backlash. Hence, by releasing *The Last Of Us: Left Behind* as a DLC and not its own game, it can perhaps be said that yet again, it is the queer that is being left behind in perpetuity.

The Failure of the 'Ideal Backdoor': A Conclusion to *The Last of Us* Series

The Last of Us Part II was the most anticipated Triple-A game of 2020, and upon release, it quickly became the fastest selling PlayStation 4 exclusive, with over four million copies sold in its opening weekend. The title received near "universal acclaim" from critics, according to review aggregator Metacritic. IGN's Jonathon Dornbush called it "a masterpiece worthy of its predecessor... it delivers a layered, emotionally shattering story on top of stealth and action gameplay that improves the first game's mechanics [... and] still makes time for a stunning, nuanced exploration of the strength and fragility of the human spirit". However, the casual gamers did not seem to be in agreement with the critics, review bombing the game until it sat at a mere 3.4/10 audience score on Metacritic. The LGBT characters were instantly made the epicenter of criticism, while the game was viewed to be a vessel for "social justice politics", which seemingly shifted focus away from plot construction, which in turn is said to have marred the gaming experience for a large body of gamers. Never mind the fact that *The Last of Us* was never about the plot to begin with, but about the exploration of complex characterization in the backdrop of a post apocalyptic world. The message was clear "...homophobic attitudes have long characterized reactionary gamer subcultures, which are often explicitly hostile toward diversity" (Ruberg, 2018). Resistance against diversification of the cast was intense. The ideal backdoor mechanic ceased to function the moment Joel —the white, male, heterosexual protagonist from the previous title was killed and taken off the table in the opening chapter of the game, and even Ellie's growing popularity could not protect it against the onslaught of hate that was to follow. The 'safe model' produced by the same developers in 2013 was starting to showcase its cracks in 2020. The entire premise of my paper was to locate the problematic in the very framework of *The Last of Us*' tacking of representation. A game that unwittingly perhaps, became a model and marker for future games to develop upon, unfortunately and ironically did not understand how to incorporate the queer to begin with.

The Last of Us' handling of the queer was in essence a creation of a time bomb set to explode sooner or later —as it did in 2020. Joel's death was considered to be "sudden", "disrespectful" and "brutal". The

marketing was said to be intentionally deceptive, concealing Joel's death and Abby's central role—a character, theorized according to the online rumor mill to be transgender. Players did not appreciate having to control Abby for a significant chunk of the game. Neil Druckmann had to come out with his response stating that the studio intended to preserve the gaming experience "not to bamboozle anyone or get their \$60". Heavy damage control followed throughout the upcoming months as gamers targeted Abby's character stating that she was "too masculine". Amy Cole from the Independent observed that the hate was propagated by "a loud and determinedly misogynistic subset" of gamers. Even the actress, Laura Bailey who played the character was subject to online death threats, which required Naughty Dogs to release a statement in condemnation of such acts; prompting personalities such as James Gunn to come out with their own statements of support in favor of the now traumatized actress.

Perhaps in a bid to keep up with changing times, had the developers taken on too much for their own liking? Had they introduced too many queer characters too soon or was it the faulty ideal backdoor model to blame? "... A game with queer characters may not only fail to change the mindsets of straight players; it may itself be stripped of its queer potential by its reception." (Ruberg, 2018) And as it so happens, *The Last of Us Part II* exactly showcased not only the how, but also the why.

"Games can be legitimized by yoking them to support the institutions of education, propaganda, nonprofit organizations, and behavioral psychology—but should they be yoked?...The queer question must remain: What will we lose in the process as we make additional bids for legitimacy?" Naomi Clark's question in her paper chapter "What Is Queerness in Games, Anyway?" Released in 2017 requires consideration and thought even in 2023.

The argument is that—the 'ideal backdoor' model lacked serious foresight and intent. With such a hollow foundation, it was never going to shift the paradigm enough to accommodate the periphery into the centre; instead, it effectively set the issue of diversity back an indefinite number of years. If the centre-margin gap is to be bridged, the Tripe-A bodies need to consider radical systemic overhaul. As Bo Ruberg would put it "increasing LGBTQ representation is not sufficient to shift cultural attitudes toward queerness and video games, and that larger systematic solutions are necessary to bring change to the medium in truly meaningful and lasting ways." If change is to take shape, the present path of retconning backstories and sheepish commodification of the queer struggle seems less than ideal. Alternatively, a bombardment of queer characters could be a viable proposition to counter the dominant hegemonic framework and its resistive potential. However, could that be considered meaningful enough? Instead, perhaps what is truly required to bring upon the necessarily shift in paradigm is neither bombardment nor token representation but an empathetic strategic evolution of the medium that ends in consumer acceptance.

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Analyzing the feminist politics surrounding the working Bhodromohila with reference to Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara*

Pratyusha Pan



Abstract:

The partition of 1947 effaced refugee women in two ways – it oppressed them on economic grounds but also accorded them a new agency based on a newfound social freedom that came with the mobility of readjustment in unfamiliar geopolitical conditions. Both the processes were essentially complex and traumatic, resulting in an inherently contradictory figure: the working Bengali *bhodromohila* (gentlewoman) in the 60s. Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (Cloud-clapped Star, 1960) narrates the story of Nita, a young refugee woman and her struggle to support her family living in a colony in post-Partition West Bengal. In the patriarchal societal set up which ritually designates the active to men and the passive to women, she takes on the role of provider effectively displacing her father, two brothers, her sister's husband (Sanat), and potentially her own from the role; she is, least in the monolithic sense of the term, an emancipated woman. And yet she is subject to the economic demands of her family: the role of

the provider; the male's role, when taken up by a woman becomes concordant with dual exploitation. She is dually exploited, firstly by her family (Spivak's nationalist force) and secondly by the society (the colonial/nationalist) recovering from the twilight of the colonial era that was inherently structured towards the subjugation of the less powerful. In this essay, I will attempt to analyze Ghatak's portrayal of how Nita's position of economic independence and authority as the sole-earning member of her family is contrasted with her portrayal as an oppressed subject: diluting the Western feminist understanding of socio-economic relations in the family.

Keywords: Partition, south asian cinema, subaltern, postcolonial, feminism.

'This too is a historical silencing of the subaltern': Tracing the third-world woman in Ritwik Ghatak's
Meghe Dhaka Tara.

The concept of the subaltern originated as a Eurocentric method of historical inquiry for the study of non-Western people. The term 'subaltern' was first used by Gramsci to designate the populations who are socially and politically outside of power-structure in a colonized space, and thus subject to the hegemony of the more powerful sects. It gained prominence with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay *Can the subaltern speak?* which is a commentary on the work of the Subaltern Studies Group, who principally claimed that the Marxist claim to represent the history of the masses is subject to question in the colonized nations. In contrast to the assumption of colonial oppression as monolithic, Spivak adopts Derridean deconstructive techniques to point out different forms of subject formation and consequent othering of the subaltern. Spivak, in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* uses the term to refer to the unrepresented group/class in society, and extends her discourse to the representation of marginal subjects such as the place of the third-world subaltern woman in society, their subjectivity, and the space to voice their narrative. Feminist discussion in post-colonial countries has been conditioned by disciplinary reactions and responses to larger theoretical transformations, the consequence of which has been a shift from liberal feminist interpretations to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities that have emerged in conditions of gendered economic dependency in the wake of the rise of the global market.

In the introduction of her translation of *Draupadi* by Mahashweta Devi, Spivak questions the authority of the first-world feminist to theorize on the lived realities of third-world women when they are incidentally, but undeniably instrumental in their oppression. Spivak also challenges the post-colonial historian's assumption that the perspectives and voices of the oppressed which have been historically suppressed can be recovered, suggesting that it was better to adopt the Gramscian principle of "pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will"; and thus combine the "philosophical skepticism about

recovering the subaltern agency with the political commitment to represent the marginalized.” (Spivak 104) Spivak claims that it is impossible to reclaim the voice of the subaltern under the given extent of colonial suppression and its intersection with patriarchy. By focusing on women as gendered subalterns, Spivak asserts “within this effaced itinerary of the subaltern, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced” Spivak explains this doubly effaced female subjectivity with the example of the practice of *Sati* (widow-immolation) in pre-colonial India. According to Spivak, the voice of the *subaltern* has been silenced in between the colonialist object constitution and the nationalist and patriarchal subject formation. She argues that the voices of the gendered subaltern subjectivity have been lost in between the notion of the ‘liberative act’ of the imperialists who tried to abolish the practice of *sati* under the premise of ‘civilizing’ the colonized and the notion of *Sati* as a holy act through which it was translated as the subaltern women “wanted to die.” For Spivak, the voices of the female subaltern subjectivity are silenced in between the colonial and nationalist/patriarchal understanding of their agency: between “White men were saving the brown women from the brown men” and “The women wanted to die in order to become good wives”. The British colonial rule legally abolished *Sati* by considering it as a crime and thereby, Spivak argues that the voice of the gendered *subaltern* subject was unattended and thus silenced. Spivak here not only problematizes the politics of gender representation but also displaces both the Eurocentric (colonial) and anti-Eurocentric (post-colonial) notions of the ‘authenticity’ of the ‘lived experiences’ of women as an ‘essentialist other.’

Representation, as understood by Spivak, is a political activity. Power policing in the act of representation has to be closely examined. Spivakian account offers a radical turn in the issue of representation and envisages a new space of social engagement, especially with regard to the social agency of the marginalized sections in the third-world; offering a “radical positioning of subjectivity and social responsibility”. In this essay, I will attempt to explore the portrayal of the third-world subaltern woman in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (Cloud-clapped Star, 1960) by Ritwik Ghatak, and thus trace the ‘voice’ of the subaltern and the extent to which it is effectively represented in the *vertreten-darstellen* (proxy-embodiment) modes of representation which, as Spivak claims, silence the subaltern.

Meghe Dhaka Tara (based on Shaktipada Rajguru’s Bengali novel of the same name) is one of Ghatak’s best-known films, his only work that was well received on its release and met with commercial success. Ghatak’s *Meghe Dhaka Tara* depicts the story of Nita, a young refugee woman and her struggle to support her family living in a colony in post-Partition West Bengal. The partition of 1947 effaced refugee women in two ways – it oppressed them on economic grounds but also accorded them a new agency based on a newfound social freedom that came with the mobility of readjustment in unfamiliar geopolitical conditions. Both the processes were essentially complex and traumatic: resulting in an inherently contradictory figure: the working Bengali *bhodomohila* (gentlewoman) in the 60s. Her position of economic independence and authority as the sole-earning member of her family is contrasted with her portrayal as an oppressed subject: her situation as the sole provider, diluting the Western feminist’s

understanding of socio-economic relations in the family. Nazia Hussein, in her essay, *Negotiating Middle-class Respectable Femininity: Bangladeshi Women and their Families* writes: “class based on ‘capital’ movements in social space ... conceptualize respectable femininity as a symbolic capital that illuminates the embeddedness of gender and class.” I am aware that the refugee woman’s claim to subalternity, especially a woman with an apparent monopoly over her income, is suspect, as is the position of the refugee as one who crosses class and social boundaries as well as geopolitical ones is always unpredictable. However, I would argue that refugees, though essentially classless and/or with the potential of sifting through boundaries, in the immediate aftermath of the Partition, as outsiders to an existing social structure could claim to be a subaltern - more so the refugee woman, who was thus doubly oppressed in the intersection of colonialism, Partition trauma, and patriarchal suppression.

A Marxist by conviction, Ghatak in his films situated his characters in the “complex historical interaction of contemporary socio-economic and political scenario” and “endeavored to depict through a thorough scrutiny of facts.” (Mukherjee 3) Priyanka Shah, in her essay *Of roots and rootlessness: music, partition and Ghatak*, questions Ghatak’s portrayal of women as goddesses borrowing from Indian mythological lore, and elaborates on how it complicates his position as a Marxist and his notion of a classless society. In *Cinema and I*, Ghatak writes:

“When I hear, for instance, that the non-realistic cry of a consumptive girl—‘I want to live’—just when she is at the point of death, is horribly forced in the context, I truly wonder. I feel I have not been able to convey the entire allegorical connection of Uma—the wife of the Lord of Destruction, who is the archetype of all daughters and brides of all Bengalee households for centuries—with the protagonist.” (Ghatak 16)

At the end of the film we see Nita breaking down into a reiteration of “I had really wanted to live, I want to live” (*Meghe Dhaka Tara* 01:58:30) which may be interpreted as the voice of the subaltern which, in this case, is heard, but not attended to and is thus, silenced. Sanjoy Mukhopadhyay in his book *Writtiktantra*, claims Nita to be a symbol of female suffering, as one who is deified as a goddess and thus stripped of agency, as well as an object of instrumental oppression. In a conversation with Sanat, her former lover, she states “I have never protested against any injustice, and perhaps that is my sin” (*Meghe Dhaka Tara* 01:34:25); Mukhopadhyay claims that her real “sin” was the position that she occupied as a woman in a society organized and presided over by men: she refuses marriage and thus escapes the oppression institutionalized in marriage. In the same scene, Nita’s confessional discovery both surprises and elates: “Come to think of it now, I have come far away from it all. Now, there’s only work.” (*Meghe Dhaka Tara* 01:34:53) Mukhopadhyay argues that the very nature of this work consists of cementing a place for herself in the gendered set up of the society: a feminist act, the sin that she will subsequently be punished for: the sanatorium serves a symbolic jail where Nita realizes that it is impossible to set out of the cage of patriarchal suppression. Her subjectivity is voiced but goes unheeded. (Mukhopadhyay 62, translation mine) Victor Mukherjee, in his essay *The Muted Voice of a Refugee Woman: Looking at Ritwik*

Ghatak's Meghe Dhaka Tara through the Feminist Lens conversely argues that it is the incapacity of Nita to retain only the nurturing quality to the exclusion of others which is the source of her tragedy. Mukherjee claims that the circumstances that made her too responsible and too powerful as the sole earning member of the family, and thus she had to “pay her price” by, firstly, being iconized as a goddess and then being left with no other choice but to disavow her desire and her sexuality. Then her coughed-up blood proving contagious, this goddess had to be discarded in the symbolic act of sacrificial *visarjan*.

In the patriarchal set up which ritually designates the active to men and the passive to women, she takes on the role of provider effectively displacing her father, two brothers, her sister's husband (Sanat), and potentially her own from the role; she is, least in the monolithic sense of the term, an emancipated woman. Mukherjee claims that here money takes the role of the phallus and Nita becomes the phallic Mother: “Nita is framed in low angles; the confident presence of the erect, upright body either occupying the center or the upper half of the frame, rendering the presence of the males in the frames redundant, peripheral, vulnerable or marginalized. Her iconic presence invokes awe.” And yet she is subject to the economic demands of her family: the role of the provider; the phallic male's role, when taken up by a woman becomes concordant with dual exploitation. In one of the very few comedic sequences Shankar, her brother says: “Look, those who suffer for others have to suffer forever” (*Meghe Dhaka Tara* 01:03:27) parodying her position as the sufferer as one suffering “for” her family (in the sense of suffering both in their place as well as because of them – the irony is perhaps lost in the English translation). She is dually exploited, firstly by her family (Spivak's nationalist force) and secondly by the society (the colonial/nationalist) recovering from the twilight of the colonial era that is inherently structured towards the subjugation of the less powerful.

Mukherjee claims that Ghatak had stressed chiefly on two aspects while delineating Nita's character. He writes:

“[Ghatak] emphasised on the depiction of a woman's sacrifice to make her family financially stable which itself becomes a commentary on the socio-economic sufferings of an uprooted family in a colony. Secondly, Nita's helplessness underscores contemporary societal norms, in other words, the prevalent patriarchal ethos. It has to be specially emphasised that the women of the refugee families did not, all of sudden, come out of the confines of their homes to earn a living, driven by the notion of women's emancipation or liberty. The fact was otherwise. It was because of crushing poverty that the uprooted families relaxed the traditional social restrictions on their womenfolk and allowed them to go out and earn a living. This little space of freedom granted to women was to ensure security and comfort in life, a purely necessity-driven act on the part of the uprooted families. In *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Ghatak juxtaposed a young woman's sacrifice for her family with her exploitation and deprivation by the family and by the society.” (Mukherjee 47)

In the closing sequence of *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Nita dies of tuberculosis and Shankar, her brother, looks on at another young woman on her way to work, visibly exhausted and worn out: the oppressive structures live on, and the exploitation continues. Drawing the audience's attention to the continual subjugation and exploitation of women (here, the third-world gendered subaltern) within nationalist as well as colonial discourses, Ghatak comments on post-partition Bengal society and culture. In a climactic conversation with her mother, Nita exclaims "When it was time to listen, you didn't!" (*Meghe Dhaka Tara* 01:32:05) which resonates the voice of the subaltern which remains unheard and unheeded, echoing Spivak's claim that "the subaltern as a female cannot be heard or read."

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Musical Hauntings: Songs in Bollywood Cinema

Puspa Damai



Abstract:

This paper explores the importance of songs in Bollywood Cinema and argues that songs represent and enable certain articulations of the other in Bollywood films. It examines a number of films such as *Sujata*, *Neel Kamal*, and *Devdas* to show how music functions as the signature or trace of the haunting of the other. By engaging with postcolonial theory, cultural studies, music theory, and film studies, the paper argues that Bollywood music and songs can be read as the internal principle of critique.

Keywords: Bollywood, Music, Songs, Haunting, Spectrality, Other.

I

There is a moment in Bimal Roy's *Sujata* (1959) in which the eponymous protagonist attempts to speak the unspeakable; and that moment is made possible by music and songs. Sujata discovers that her parents are untouchables, the lowest of the low (terms used by the film to denote people now identified as Dalits); and that the people she thinks to be her parents are not even her distant relatives. She recovers from the shock of this discovery that threatens to demote her to the level of subhumanity only after Adhir, an educated Brahmin, confesses his love for her. Suddenly the clockwork of her mechanized life halts, and she bursts into a song. At this extraordinary moment, dialogue seems to intensify into singing, and the pace of the narrative and action accelerates into dancing. As she begins her song, she enters the living room – where we rarely see her otherwise, for she inhabits only the edges of the house: rooftops, garden, hallway, and stairways – yet with the rise of the pitch of her transgressive song her stature also changes; the melody in her becomes too big to fit in the house. The song that renders her completely “homeless,” therefore uncanny, strange, unfamiliar, and ghostly, also takes her beyond the calculated and bounded economy of the home towards what can be called a sovereign principle of expenditure without return.

There is no doubt that Roy's *Sujata* romances the untouchable (a derogatory term now but commonly used when the film was made to denote a group of people considered low-castes); it even reiterates and consolidates various stereotypes about untouchables. The untouchables per se make only two appearances in the film, and in both instances, they are depicted as mute. The first one shows a stammering drunkard interested in the money Sujata's adoption might bring; and the second, which occurs later in the film, brings in a verbally challenged old man who wants to marry Sujata. In this film, Roy's aim seems to show how a so-called untouchable, if properly brought up in a Brahmin family, overcomes the traits associated with the caste such as dirty, vulgar, lazy, and uncultured. The denouement of the film – blood transfusion that saves the life of Sujata's upper-caste foster mother, thereby proving to the audience that at the “elemental” level “untouchables” are the same as “us,” – symbolizes the ultimate victory of science and modernity over tradition and superstition. Yet what is hinted at in the film, perhaps beyond its own ideological agenda and capabilities, is a certain articulation of the other; and not only in this, but in many Bollywood films, music is the signature or trace of the haunting of the other. In other words, songs and music can be read as the internal principle of critique in Bollywood cinema.

Songs constitute a distinct and defining feature of Indian cinema, which many people believe is not cinema yet precisely because of the songs, thereby rendering it spectral to the cinema proper: the cinema of the West. However, it is precisely such a spectral and unhomely moment like singing that makes the event of “articulation” of the subaltern “other” possible in Indian cinema. Listening to or learning how to listen to the subaltern, as Gayatri Spivak would say (Spivak 59). can be very instructive in understanding the role songs play in the films. Against Ashis Nandy's elitist claim that Bollywood cinema does not require “sophisticated analytic schemes of the kind that an Indian postmodernist might cherish” because

it is “vulgarly blatant” (8), I posit Fredric Jameson’s injunction that only a “timeless realm of absolute aesthetic judgment” considers “high culture as utterly incomparable to degraded mass culture” (14). One should not overlook the historical and dialectical relationship of high and mass cultures. According to Jameson, even “the most degraded type of mass culture” which is through and through ideological and manipulative, inheres a “[u]topian or transcendent potential” (29). Songs and music in Bollywood cinema are the locus of this potential. Though my thesis here may echo Nandy’s assertion that Bollywood is “the slum’s point of view of Indian politics and society and, for that matter, the world,” (Nandy 2), I contend that the musical moment as the articulation of the other cannot be pigeonholed as a “point of view” of a class. Music in Bollywood demands more than a “point of view,” which, as a critical tool, is tethered to the narrative or the visual plane of cinema, whereas what we are concerned here is, to tweak Jameson’s apt formulation, the “signature of the invisible,” which cannot be seen or be present, therefore, spectral and to be only listened to. Yet I would refrain from interpellating the other as Spivak’s subaltern, or Nandy’s intimate other or the unintended self (Nandy 2) because if Spivak locates the other anthropologically, thus already delimiting its articulation, Nandy brings it back into the economy of self or “ego defense.” The other resonances I attempt to explore in the songs exceed these economies insofar as songs are exceptional moments – which very often have a “life” of their own independent of the films – at which not the absolute other, nor the intimate, therefore already domesticated other, but the “other to come” is heard. And the “other to come” does not imply any utopian futurity; rather it reveals the impossibility of making it present or entirely homely and contemporaneous to ourselves.

Hauntings of the other are multiple; and they take multiple forms in Bollywood films. In this paper, I look at particular events of haunting in five different films: *Neel Kamal* (1968), *Abhiman* (1973), *Devdas* (2001), *Koi Milgaya* (2003), and *Paheli* (2005). These films are chosen for discussion not just as representatives of different eras in Bollywood but also because they are known for the role music plays in them. *Neel Kamal* is the story of the return of the repressed: a slain artist returning to haunt his beloved princess Neel Kamal, now reborn as Sita. *Abhiman*, on the other hand, is spectral for a different reason as it revolves around Uma’s uncanny voice that brings to the fore two repressed figures at once: a woman who “speaks” through singing, and the phenomenon of female playback singing in Bollywood. In *Devdas*, I explore the impact of the return of the repressed other, especially in the way songs represent the principle of expenditure beyond return and calculation. That the other always does not take a human form becomes the motif of analysis in my reading of *Koi Milgaya* where I identify in songs a critique of human language as the sole means of communication, and I argue that songs represent this fissure that marks our attempt to come close to, if not to fully communicate with, the extra-terrestrial other. The principle of songs and music, which variously represents the return of the repressed, expenditure without calculation, and incommensurability in communication with the other, takes a ghostly form in *Paheli*, which emphasizes the need to hold a communion with the ghost. It is precisely such a decision to address the spectral other at the edge of human capacity for communication that makes Lachchi a sovereign individual capable of agency.

II

Ram Maheshwari's *Neel Kamal* (1968), which is already haunted by its "genealogical" double, Kidar Sharma's *Neel Kamal* (1947), has a female protagonist, Sita, named apparently after her mythical double, the consort of the Hindu god, Ram. The film revolves around a mystery: an "apparition," for want of a better term from the realm of the aural, of a painfully haunting song that goads Sita into sleepwalking. The song does not wake her up, but it is passionate enough to pull her, in the same way as it did Sujata, out of her bed, and eventually out of the house toward its source, as if, through its haunting beauty the song leads Sita en route to her double – the other woman whom the song was directed to. Songs in the film, which is predominantly a visual medium, and their "primitive" pervasiveness in the Indian cinema that makes it not-yet-cinema, not only make songs completely spectral, the very model of playback singing further intensifies this spectrality inasmuch as the actor who seems to sing is not the one that is actually singing. This technological displacement that intensifies haunting (even if we are listening to a particular character, whereas in fact what we hear is the playback singer's voice, thus in a way, one, in these songs, is not where we suppose one is speaking from) is further augmented by this loop in the film: traumatic love story in which the current lives, unbeknownst to them, are possessed by the passion and fate of the ancient tragic lovers.

The audience does not know until much later in the film where the song comes from, or why it haunts Sita. Even that famous scene early in the film in which we encounter Sita, enchanted by the song, sleepwalking on the railway tracks completely oblivious of the fast approaching train from the opposite direction, cannot be accounted for by the formulaic "saving-the-damsel-in-distress" by Ram, who happens to spot her before it is too late. The passion of the moment together with the forces that drive the film on the whole, far exceeds the economy of love and marriage that follow the encounter. So much so that the mythical frame of the story implied by the names of the protagonists, Sita and Ram (which also remind that any simple binary between the high culture texts and mass culture is naïve) gets dwarfed by the overwhelming reverberations of the voice singing across the borders of life and death. Chitrassen continues to sing his love for his beloved princess Neel Kamal even after he was buried alive in the palace, as if, to quote Žižek, the wall that we hear with our eyes were the *objet a*, the silent yet singing spot, the spectral voice of the invisible Master, or the address of the primordial other (Žižek 92). And his songs come to haunt Sita, who is supposedly Neel Kamal's soul reborn. What remains of and reappears as their story is the spectral song, the address of the primordial other, the artist, Chitra Sen, who was buried alive inside a wall in the palace by the King, father of princess Neel Kamal.

Music as the unhomely moment is crucial in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Abhiman* (1973). The film revolves around a spectral "event" that disrupts Subeer's lonely life. The incursion of the unhomely other is unmistakably seen early in the film when on his way back from his aunt's, Subeer, a pop singer from Bombay [now Mumbai], is struck by a soothing "sloka" accompanied by a gentle tune on Sitar. As he

follows the sound of the music, now growing more enchanting and overwhelming, he arrives at Uma's place. Later Subeer discovers that Uma, whose life and music appear to embody rustic domesticity, is more like the Sirens that, through their beguiling songs, would bring sailors to disaster. The encounter between Uma and Subeer therefore is not a simple clash of tradition (Uma's classical music) and modernity (Subeer's modern pop singing), nor is it a clash between rustic simplicity and urban complexity. It is also more than a collision between male chauvinism and female submissiveness. The film is about all of these, yet what precipitates the tragedy is Subeer and Uma's inability to come to terms with the unhomely voice that sings through Uma. After their marriage, Uma continues singing only with Subeer's permission, and keeps on singing songs of submission to him, like "abto hai tumse har khushi apni" (now, by you I measure my happiness). What scares Subeer more is not simply her fame or his own loss of popularity among the audience and in the music industry, as does the unexplainable act of her singing that signifies "other" than what it means.

In this light we can understand the enigma of the voice of Lata Mangeshkar, the main female playback singer in *Abhiman*. She continues to bemuse the listeners and music critics even today not simply with the astoundingly high number of songs she has been able to sing for Bollywood cinema. Her voice and style themselves are a matter of constant debate and discussion. While she has been widely called "the nightingale of India" (Dwyer and Patel 21), which already marks the ahuman qualities of her voice, John Schaefer characterizes her as a giant who holds India's popular music in her "iron grip" (10) thereby underscoring the fact that in an otherwise male dominated culture industry of Bollywood, songs are the one of sites "possessed" by the female other. Continuing in similar veins Neepa Majumdar thinks that Lata is a shrewd individual (169). Peter Manuel is the one who in "Cassette Culture" brings her back to human fold by pointing out that she has no more than a "girlish voice" (153). Vijay Mishra agrees with Manuel only to add that Lata's voice is not simply girlish but "virginal," pure and uncontaminated (166). As if to refute Mishra's male fantasy about purity, Jigna Desai remarks that Lata's, together with her sister Asha's, songs in Hindi films personify maternal figures (102). Menon raises the bar again by arguing that Lata's voice is "the ultimate measure of sweetness in a woman's voice (n.p.). Veering towards the ambiguous and the uncanny, Aziz thinks that Lata's voice is not only infantile, but it is also "neutered," therefore not female at all (103). Subeer's perplexity, therefore, lies exactly in this elusive and "sirenic" dimension of Uma's/Lata's singing. Uma drives him crazy and defeats him not at all through songs in a characterizable voice, but through, to quote Maurice Blanchot's description of the Sirens'songs, her "imperfect songs, songs which were only a song still to come" (105).

That music in Bollywood cinema offers a space for the arrival of the other is bound to provoke a smile at least in the feminists, postcolonialists, Marxists, and the comparativists who compare Hollywood and Bollywood cinemas. The feminists will object to my thesis by reminding, with some justification, that in Bollywood cinema, to quote one of them, the "focus is particularly on the heroine, the fetishized female sexualized through close attention to her costumes, graceful body movements and carefully angled shots

that heighten scopophilic pleasure” (Virdi 146). As Laura Mulvey – who in her essay “Visual Pleasure” argued that scopophilia in cinema was neatly split between active male spectatorship that determined the gaze, and passive female image in which she is represented as “to-be-looked-at-ness” (837) – concedes in “Afterthoughts” that “masculinization” of spectator position in her earlier writing, overlooks women-audience who might “enjoy the freedom of action and control over the diegetic worlds that the identification with the hero provides” (69).

Among the critics of Indian nationalism and postcolony, Vinay Lal can be cited as a representative voice against a thesis, like mine, that claims that Bollywood songs make the impossible articulation of the other possible. In “The Impossibility of the Outsider in the Modern Hindi Film,” Lal argues that Hindi films “almost altogether denies, and certainly until very recently did wholly deny, the possibility of any significant “Other” (233). While most of the comparativists think that picturized song in Bollywood cinema, to quote two of them, “is that embarrassing element that continually prevents much of the world from accepting and appreciating Hindi cinema” (Creekmur 338), which is “too culturally specific for Hollywood to duplicate” (Tyrrell 360), one can easily guess the objection a critic of Marxist persuasion would have against Bollywood. In *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, M. Madhava Prasad, charts out a history of Bollywood cinema in order to trace its dominant aesthetics in the transition of ideological forms from early feudalist representations to statist narratives of development and global capitalism. From feudal family romances of the 1950s and 1960s such as *Khandan* (1965) and *Sangam* (1964) – where Prasad locates what he calls the “absolutist gaze” that intertwines the family and the nation-state, the local and the foreign, and the all knowing and the unseeing lovers – to the “statist realism” in *Ankur* (1974), *Nishant* (1975) and *Manthan* (1976), Prasad notices hierarchical modes of *darsana* (gaze) that “produce the peasant/rural [only] as an object of study and sympathy” (Prasad 25).

Diverse as they look, these critical perspectives reveal interesting convergences with one another. Hardly any of these approaches concentrate on the relationship between songs and image in spite of the fact that from early on the musical is one of the defining characteristics of Bollywood cinema. Rather the visual predominates their approach, and issues like male gaze, absolutist gaze, and bourgeois spectacles, occupy the center-stage of their discussion. If they happen to refer to some musical moments, it is only to examine the lyrics in order to relate them to the story of the film. This obsession with words that ensures to keep “the embarrassing element” of the songs out of the picture, betrays a preoccupation that the film is a grand narrative with a perfect closure. With sound either out of the picture or unobtrusively integrated to the image, these perspectives are left with what Andre Bazin would call the “myth of total cinema.” Bazin defined the total cinema as “complete imitation of nature” in which all technology and creativity take cinema back to its original, i.e. to the state of the realist cinema of nature in which both photography and phonography are brought to a “state of primal perfection,” as if “cinema has not yet been invented” (Bazin 21).

De-emphasizing the visual or verbal in order to foreground the musical does not, however, imply that songs in Bollywood refrain from participating in the system of meaning. Contrary to Levi-Strauss's claim that there is nothing "akin to words" or language in music (92) as music "emerged prior to and independently of language" (98), one can claim that songs in Bollywood cinema are structured like language. They are structured like language precisely because they open up the narrative to what Roland Barthes calls the "obtuse" or "third meaning." The third meaning does not arrive as a complete sign as does the common meaning. Rather it, unlike communication or signification, is "the one 'too many,' the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive," therefore obtuse (Barthes 54). Barthes likens obtuse meaning to a miracle, a slip in reading, an angle "greater than the right angle. . . greater than the pure, upright, secant, legal, perpendicular of the narrative." It is a buffoonery or a useless expenditure (55).

Barthes does not include sound and music in his discussion of obtuse meaning or significance, even though he returns to the question of the voice. He distinguishes pheno-songs, which include all the subjective and cultural phenomena and features of the language being sung, from geno-songs, which involve not only the melody and diction of the language, but also the body of the artist as well. Geno-songs are those that are sung with "the grain of the voice," which is "the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" (Barthes 188). Geno-songs that implicate the body of the artist, for Barthes, produce the third meaning or *jouissance*, the ultimate erotic bliss that art is capable of. Music and songs in Bollywood films implicate the body not of the singer or the player, but of the actor. They produce obtuse meaning not through a perceivable presence of the artist or through the symbiosis of the artist's voice and her image, but through the refraction of that symbiosis. The playback song or background music, with its extra-diegetic appearance in the film, disrupts the upright and perpendicular frame of the screen. Most often all the repertoires including classical and modern, ethnic and pop, are mobilized without, however, showing the instruments or the artists involved in the performance. Even though there are exceptions, like Pankaj Udhas in *Naam* (1986) or Anuradha Paudwal in *Sangeet* (1992) where the singers themselves are seen singing in the film, and a couple of other instances where the actor him or herself is the singer of the songs, like Amitabh Bachchan in *Silsila*, *Lawaarish*, *Mr. Natwarlal*, etc. or Salma Agha in B. R. Chopra's *Nikaah* (1982), otherwise the ghosting of the image and the voice is the rule. The doubling of the actor and the character or the image and the voice is essential in order to create a musical moment in the film. That is to say, singing in Bollywood cinema entails not the grain of the voice as Barthes claims, but a voice against the grain, or an inevitable moment of the return of the (dis)embodied voice.

In her critical analysis of singing in Bollywood cinema, Neepa Majumdar locates the split between the actor and the singer, between the female singer and the female body and also between Indian nationalism and Western values precisely in the rupture produced by this musical ghosting. The overdetermined nature of this moment, for her, can be illustrated by the fact that it not only produces a hierarchy between

the female body of the actress that is readily available for visual consumption, and the voice of the female singer, which is only apparitionally present, thus morally safe. Another aspect of this moment is how the hybrid of the Western and Indian styles of the songs gets deployed in the narrative of the film that is almost invariably anti-Western (Majumdar 173). I completely agree with Majumdar's insightful analysis of the problem of the split between the singer and the actress's body, and I find her attempt to demystify stardom in singing quite illuminating. Her approach, however, tends to repeat the same assumption we have been trying to critique: that music in Hindi cinema is either a seamless continuation of or an unwanted externality to the narrative in the film. As a result, for her, a film remains an always already closed system of Work, to recall again a distinction Barthes makes, over against the plural, paradoxical, and interdisciplinary text. A rupture in the system can be perceived in the songs, which Majumdar describe only as "sequences," woven together with image by technology to create what she terms a "filmic illusion of voice and body" (Majumdar 173).

The ghosting I'm referring to is not however limited to the technological or formalistic ghosting of the image by the voice. A musical moment in Bollywood cinema is often haunted by what we can call for want of a better term a "structural" ghosting. Derrida in *Specters of Marx* argues that haunting belongs to the structure of all hegemony (Derrida 37). Bollywood's songs are a form of haunting that occasions the articulation of the repressed other as a sonic spectrality. This spectral evocation of the other does not mean retrieving or representing the other as fully present, instead, it implies possibility of the ghostly apparition or audition of the other.

III

The im/possible articulation of the other in songs does not mean that films without songs provide no space for the other or that all songs are unhomey and extraordinary. For example, towards the end of Ridley Scott's *Thelma & Louise* (1991), the eponymous protagonists hit the road to escape murder charges. When all odds are against them, they feel really alive for the first time as if they were not their old selves, especially after Thelma kills the rapist of her friend. The invention of the "other" self (than the one imposed on them by their male partners) is synced with the racing Thunderbird 66 as it heads towards the canyon and finally flies into it. Songs as possible articulation of the other should also be read apart from numerous instances of "gay-fiddler-on-the-road" in Bollywood, such as in *Dilwale Dulhaniya Lejayange* (1995). My argument that songs in Bollywood cinema very often work as the event that interrogates the "homolingual" world of the cinema thus echoes what Kracauer calls music as a miraculous event in which at the core of images in the film we find the very music spectators would otherwise abandon (Kracauer 152). This miracle differs from some neo-orientalist propositions that "music scenes in the Hindi cinema verbally and visually express that which Bollywood social norms would otherwise define as inexpressible" (Booth 126) or from the claims that in Bollywood cinema "songs allow

things to be said which cannot be said elsewhere, often to admit love to the beloved, to reveal inner feelings” (Dwyer 292). While Dwyer, with her co-author, admits elsewhere that Bollywood cinema is in fact “many cinemas,” (Dwyer and Patel 7) yet here she implies that songs have only one *raison d’être*, and that is to admit love in a repressive culture. One can find several things to say against Booth’s and Dwyer’s generalized “ethnographical” statement, yet their take on songs in Bollywood cinema is much more liberal than that of Peter Manuel’s who in “Popular Music in India” argues that the “musical interludes are little more than musical digressions gratuitously inserted into the plot” (161).

My hypothesis in this essay may sound like an echo of these neo-orientalist positions as I argue too that music and songs in Bollywood cinema enable articulation of the other, and the articulation is actualized through a rupture in the narrative. However, as with all echoes, I distort their ethnographic and logocentric biases, by showing that the articulation or audition occurs not through the entry of noise into music, as Attali would have said (136) but through the insertion of music in the world of the logocentric or monologic noise. As a result the articulation of the other is not at all the “avatar” of alterity but an apparition. Amol Palekar’s *Paheli* (2005), which is based on Vijaydan Detha’s short story “Dubidha,” for instance, provides an example of the other’s articulation in music through ghosting. Songs return in *Paheli* only with the ghost. During the wedding and even after it, Kishanlal, the groom, remains engrossed in calculation, adding and subtracting the expenses of his wedding. To make things worse, he sets out on a 5-year-long business trip on the second day of his marriage, leaving behind his newlywed bride, Lachchi. The ghost appears in her husband’s guise, and after appeasing the groom’s greedy father with the promise of five gold coins a day, walks towards Kishanlal’s house. While still at the threshold, he is overtaken by music, and both enter the house, which is now all astir both with his arrival and with music.

Like other members of the family, Lachchi also believes that the ghost is no other than her husband. But unlike others, she notices that even though his voice is the same, there is a change in the precision and ease with which he uses the words, as if his obsession with calculation has finally given way in him to something that is completely incalculable, therefore, captivating. That is the reason why even after knowing that he is just an imposter, Lachchi asks him to stay by pointing out that he is the first person ever to ask her what she wishes, in other words, to ask her to decide. The dialogue between the ghost and the bride takes place in the short musical interval; before the music resumes Lachchi decides to let the ghost stay. She asks, since she could not stop the one who left, how could she stop the one who wants to stay? The parallel here between music, haunting, desires and decisions reveal the importance of songs in Bollywood as moments of speech, agency, justice and decision, therefore, sovereignty. All decisions imply exercise of power, but they are not necessarily sovereign decisions. A sovereign is s/he, to quote Carl Schmitt, who decides on the exception (Schmitt 5). A decision is sovereign especially when it is taken at the moment when no decision is possible, a moment of uncertainty or “dubidha.”

IV

A musical moment can be, as we saw, an exceptional moment of sovereign decision, but ghosting does not exhaust the possibility of these exceptional or incalculable moments. This sovereign principle of expenditure without return is possible solely through music such as in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas* (2001). In a circular plot-line that promises the return to the place of origin, Devdas, the legendary lover, starts and ends his life at the door of his beloved, Paro. But what passes in-between complicates the apparent circularity of the narrative. The incalculable is evoked not only through the extravaganza or splendor in the film, but also through the exceptionality, or even the superfluity of the characters. All three main characters, Devdas, Paro and Chandramukhi, the courtesan, meet not simply because they are tied together by mutual love, but also because they happen to inhabit the exceptional space of superfluity. While leaving from Chandramukhi's *mujra*, Devdas chides her by pointing out that woman is either a sister, or a mother, or a wife and when she is nobody, she is a prostitute. What he does not know is that his own condition is not very different. Even though Paro is married, and apparently, she is the mistress of Thakur's house, yet the difference between Chandramukhi and herself is not very huge. All three keep on bumping against one another, and their mad pursuit of the other remains "unconsummable," precisely because they belong to the same space of exception.

Bimal Roy's *Devdas* (1955), an earlier version of the story, has a similar plotline, yet it does not underline the superfluity of the characters. Even though, Chandramukhi, the courtesan, transforms to devote her love and life to Devdas, yet both Devdas and Paro still have strong connections to the world that made them suffer. The difference is quite conspicuously expressed in music and songs. Apart from the song Devdas and Paro sing together in their childhood – the first in the film, they hardly get their voice back in Roy's *Devdas*; whereas in Bhansali we hear Devdas immersed in music until the last number in the film. The second number in Roy is sung instead by the mendicants whom Paro pays for singing; in Bhansali, Paro and Chandramukhi sing and dance together to celebrate their love for Devdas. Musical economy of Roy's version gets completely overwhelmed by its surfeit in Bhansali. Particularly revealing is the carnival (the last number of the film) in which Devdas and Chunnibabu sing and dance with their clique at a bar by clinking and clanking the liquor bottles. Music flows as does wine and, all singers and dancers, including Chandramukhi and her friends, get awash with liquor until Devdas coughs and vomits blood. The mixture of wine, songs, broken bottles and blood makes the whole scene what Barthes would call "a geno-song."

In Bhansali's *Devdas* Paro is not the only one that haunts the songs. Unlike in Roy's version, in Bhansali the music is overladen with the ragas. The songs are not raga performances per se, yet the presence of the ragas is unmistakable throughout. Besides the musical haunting, there are other forms of ghosting in the film. In the first *mujra* of the film, when Chandramukhi tries to please Devdas by gently hitting him in the cheek with her golden wrap, we immediately recall the famous *mujra* about the stoles in *Pakeeza*, and also

the seduction of veils in *Umrao Jaan*. If citational practice generates haunting in Bhansali's *Devdas*, it is the reference to western music and the film that haunts Mansoor Khan's *Akele Hum Akele Tum* (1995). Both the story and music, especially the famous number "*Rajako rani se pyar ho gaya*" (The prince has fallen in love with his princess), echoes western music. One may interpret it as a blatant example of plagiarism, however, the transformation it undergoes in Khan's film turns it more into what Chris Cutler calls "plunderphonics," a rethinking of musical originality in the age of [digital] recording.

In his article "Plunderphonia," Cutler distinguishes between plagiarism and plunderphonics by arguing that plunderphonics troubles even the notion of plagiarism. If plagiarism was already strictly off limits (flaunting non-negotiable rules concerning originality, individuality and property rights), plunderphonics, for Cutler, appropriates as its raw material not merely other people's tunes or styles but finished recordings of them. Thus, he concludes, plunderphonics offers a medium in which, far from art music's essential creation ex-nihilo, the origination, guidance and confirmation of a sound object may be carried through by listening [to other's music] alone.

The plunderphonia in Khan's film is more ironic precisely because it is about a beleaguered singer-cum-musician who claims that he composes original music. He struggles hard to get into the film-music industry when his wife, who also aspires to be a singer, leaves him in order to pursue her own interests. Left alone to hardship and bitterness, he decides to devote his life to his son's upbringing. When his wife, now a famous film star, returns to claim their son back, the embattled musician wagers everything, including his music, to retain the custody of his son.

On the one hand, then, Khan's film casts a critical look at what Attali and Adorno call music or culture industry, which, for Attali, marks the entry of the musical sign into the general economy (Attali 88), and, for Adorno, transfers the profit motive naked into cultural forms (98). But at the same time, it shows that music, due to technological advancement and global movements of goods and consumers that are constantly at work in the making of what Arjun Appadurai calls "emergent cosmopolitanisms" (64) has become a differential art in which the West and the rest haunt, if not meet, each other. One can cite a number of examples from Western musical tradition, like George Harrison, or John Cage, who are influenced by non-Western music. One does not have to wait until the so-called diasporic films for depicting and foregrounding the interaction; a number of films by James Ivory, like *Shakespeare-Wallah* (1965), *The Guru* (1969), *Bombay Talkie* (1970), *Heat and Dust* (1983), and more recently films such as *Kisna* (2005), *Mangal Pandey* (2005), and *Rang De Basanti* (2006) touch on the themes of the encounter between the colonial West and the "native" India.

Rakesh Roshan's *Koi Mil Gaya* (2003) expands the horizon of the encounter by extending it to the extra-terrestrial. One can safely argue that the film is about sound and its power as the medium of communication with the other. Sanjay Mehra builds a computer through which he sends the signal "Om"

to communicate with the beings in other planets. Evidently the film is biased as it suggests that only the Hindu sacred word, combined with science, works wonders. It may have been secretly giving expression to a certain India that is not only nationalist, but also nuclear. At the same time though, the film shifts to the crisis precipitated by the death of the father, whose absence creates a place both for the mother to be more active in the family, and for the prosthetic substitution of the father, the E.T., whom Rohit, the disabled son of the late scientist, and his playmate, Nisha, unwittingly invite by sending the same sacred signal from Sanjay's old computer. The nationalist element of the film gets downplayed when the E.T. has to be defended both from the national army and from a group of international scientists, who want to capture him for research. The film takes this cosmopolitan turn, especially after Rohit's friends run into the E.T. at Rohit's house, and in a bid to communicate with this new creature whom they call *Jadoo*, the miracle, they take resort to the song of friendship.

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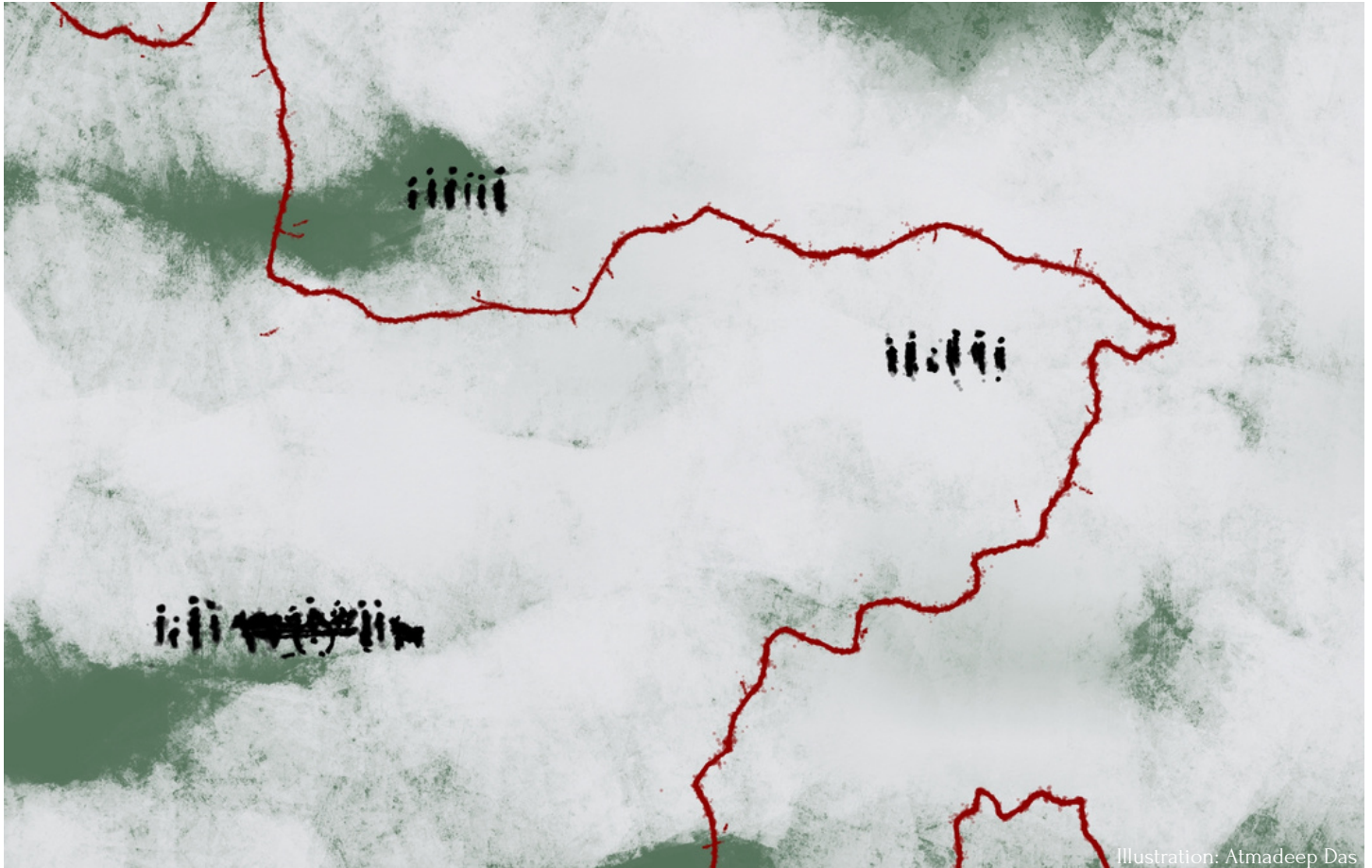
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Re-interrogating borders through the cinematic representation of Bengal partition: an analysis of Tanvir Mokammel's films: "Chitra Nodir Paare" and "Seemantorekha"

Prateeti



Abstract:

“Partition is a story of re-negotiation or re-ordering” (Chakrabarty 2004, 208). Bengal has gone through two partitions and there are lingering links that need to be reiterated and talked about even today as we are progressing towards a further independent nation-state. The voices of agitation processing demands and the complex series of politics have left a lasting impact on the “post-colonial” nation-states post-partition. This paper seeks to analyze Tanvir Mokammel’s cinema and documentary in order to ask the question if cinematic representations can be considered as an important tool for constructing history while also trivializing the concept of defined boundaries and identities in a post-colonial nation. While oral history and archiving remain important mediums for uncovering history beyond the top-down approach, the documentary similarly showcases the viewpoints of various sections of the society through

interviews collecting oral history and memories, and opinions. Hence, it is important to venture beyond official histories commissioned by the ones in power, namely kings or British colonizers to situate the discourses of the mass by hearing them directly. Therefore, cinema becomes a method to record narratives and acts as a tool for information dissemination to the mass and historians are taking into account feature films/documentaries to study the past. Mokammel's interest in partition provokes him to ask him the question of the importance of borders and hence it is not completely unbiased as his pursuit would have a definite objective which is communicated to the viewers. I argue that when we wish to uncover narratives from the so-called "lower strata" of society, the film becomes an important medium that allows for an engaging response in representation. Apart from official records which were generally of the upper-class metropolitan citizens, this paper tries to assess whether cinematic memory can provide an alternative with a critical lens and representation. Thus, cinematic analysis is required to understand the concept of reflexive history and historiography.

Keywords: Historiophoty, Partition, border, identity, documentary.

"Partition is a story of re-negotiation or re-ordering" (Chakrabarty 2004, 208). Bengal has gone through two partitions and there are lingering links that need to be reiterated and talked about even today as we are progressing towards a further independent nation-state. The voices of agitation processing demands and the complex series of politics have left a lasting impact on the "post-colonial" nation-states post-partition. Along with the importance of religion, a specific "bhadralok" society's contributions are hugely studied in this context. Looking at the scenario and the events based on their viewpoints would, as Joya Chatterji mentions, lead to "false analogies" between the colonial nations. It becomes important to define bhadralok as "it carries with it overtones of the colonial origins of this class and its overwhelmingly Hindu composition" (Chatterji 2007, 6). It was thus under the direction of London, that the partition of Bengal was voted for on 20th June 1947 where the majority of the "representatives of the Hindu section voted for partition" whereas the Muslims wished against division. Apart from the segregation of religious communities and a re-mapping of political boundaries in both countries, how can we see the ground situation in movies and documentaries? With this, the impact of the Bengal famine due to the Second World War also needs to be kept in mind. "The Muslim League had a different agenda: it wanted 'group' autonomy for the Muslim-majority provinces and parity at a weak all-India federal center" (Chatterji 2007,63) Perceived as a threat, can we speak for all when it is said that partition based on religion completely segregated the two communities? "Partition was, therefore a nodal point underlining a massive shift in conceptualizing 'the self' and 'the collectivity' in relation to the politically demarcated boundaries (Chakrabarty 2004, 210). This paper seeks to analyze Tanvir Mokammel's cinema and documentary in order to ask the question if cinematic representations can be considered as an important tool for

constructing history. The non-homogenous nature and an inspection of the livelihood of the partition refugees still haunt our memory. Here it is important to look at how the processes unfolded.

Hayden White reminds us that historiophoty is “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse” (White 1988, 1193) whereas historiography is “the representation of history in verbal images and written discourse” (ibid). On that note, the construction of facts out of events through the visual medium is always under question. However, it must not be entirely rejected. “Everywhere, history reported in film has been influential and there is firm evidence of its pedagogical effects” (Raack 1983, 411). Apart from narrating history, accessing the past becomes easier through stories and fiction. While oral history and archiving remain an important medium for uncovering history beyond the top-down approach, the documentary similarly showcases the viewpoints of various sections of the society through interviews collecting oral history and memories, and opinions. Hence, it is important to venture beyond official histories commissioned by the ones in power, namely kings or British colonizers to situate the discourses of the mass by hearing them directly. Therefore, cinema becomes a method to record narratives and acts as a tool for information dissemination to the mass and historians are taking into account feature films/documentaries to study the past. However, as we look for representations to decipher the past it is important to keep in mind some of the negative impacts of only believing in cinema. “The critical apparatus through which written history is judged simply does not exist for filmed history. Widely viewed, but largely without critical supervision, it is dangerous, but influential” (Raack 1983, 412) Gyanendra Pandey had argued that “when history is written as a history of struggle, it tends to exclude the dimensions of force, uncertainty, domination, and disdain, loss, and confusion, by normalizing the struggle, evacuating it of its messiness and making it part of a narrative of assured advance towards specified (or specifiable) resolutions” (Pandey 2004, 5). Therefore, the collective act of watching a cinema in a theatre or a hall can be an equally individual and personal experience that is all the more impactful when done through documentary. “Film theorists in the 1970s held that cinema provides its viewers a separation from their own egos or perceptions of reality while at the same time reinforcing those egos and perceptions”. Thus, a mode of representation juxtaposing present and past in a montage or videography medium, cinema connects with partition and its trauma while collecting narratives or “archetypal myths” (Pandey 2004, 9) and portraying stories that are easier to grasp. Mulvey states, ‘Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on the performer’ (Mulvey 1975, 60). The desire to be united with the performers can be seen in the movies that are mainly out of trauma and partition. The psychoanalytic perspective states that through the images on the screen, the subjective I gets created and Mulvey picks it up from there to state that a “long love affair/despair between image and self-image” creates the connection/attachment between cinema and the audience like that of the mirror stage as stated by Jaques Lacan. Throughout the movies and documentaries, with the identification between the actors on screen, the ego keeps getting formulated and destroyed. Apart from official records which were generally of the upper-class metropolitan citizens, this paper tries to assess whether cinematic memory can

provide an alternative with a critical lens and representation. Thus, cinematic analysis is required to understand the concept of reflexive history and historiography.

In the 1950s, postcolonial Bengali cinema had a major boom with the change in the production of genres of cinema, new censorship laws, etc. When we think of partition cinema, we are reminded of the contribution of Ritwik Ghatak in dealing with the socio-political scenario after partition, and questions regarding space, migration, and identity. However, the impact of partition still remains like a deep-seated wound and the upcoming generation of filmmakers and Bengali cinema still bears repercussions of the very same. Born and brought up in Khulna, Mokammel had studied English at Dhaka University. During his college days, along with his friends, he formed a film club at Dhaka University. Along with organizing seminars and study circles, Mokammel made his first film named 'Hooliya' based on a political poem by Nirmalendu Goon. In an interview stating the importance of both documentary and fiction, he feels documentary makes him connected or more rooted towards the harsh reality primarily of contemporary Bangladesh. The motivation behind choosing the films was to trace the importance of partition as felt by a filmmaker who had witnessed complications of partition along with the 1971 war.

Bhadralok Hindus from East Bengal were mostly based out of Khulna, Jessore, Barisal, Dhaka, and Bikrampur holding higher professions while there were "perhaps a million from this region and over 4 million" (Chatterji 2007, 108) Schedule or lower castes. Out of fear of becoming a minority, almost around 2 million Hindus migrated to West Bengal amidst riots at Noakhali, Khulna, and Hazratbal in 1946, '50, and '64 respectively. There was a continuous process of migration as and when tensions arose between the two nations after partition. What about the experiences of the people who weren't a part of the gentry or middle class? The gap between previous occupations? Whereas Hindu peasants and agricultural laborers (with little or no land of their own) from East Bengal found it difficult to migrate, the condition of Muslim agriculturists migrated to different parts of Assam, etc found it rather prosperous. Therefore, most of the well-to-do Hindu Bhadrals from both East and West Bengal had properties or relatives who could give them residence with a job guarantee. Fearing the status of "second-class citizens", most of them fled to India. Chatterji reminds us that apart from the gentry, Hindu artisans, potters, and priests had migrated in large numbers as well to serve the upper class leaving "peasants, sharecroppers or agricultural labourers" (Chatterji 2007, 116) with little option to migrate.

I. Representation in the film "Chitra Nodir Pare" (Quiet Flows the River Chitra, 1999)

A movie set in '47 during the Bengal partition, focuses mostly on the counterpart of West Bengal, before the formation of Bangladesh. The opening of the film is across the Chitra River in Bangladesh where a group of children (mostly girls) are seen playing. One of the boys amongst them asks a question pointing out a group of migratory birds to which the remark was that they don't have a home of their own. Therefore, they are helpless. An important aspect to notice is that a madman is present in the movie who

asks whether a person is going or coming (w.r.t migration). At one point, he mentions that “Ashao ja, jaowao tai” [Both, coming and going are the same] A lot of literature and plays have been known to fetishize the madman on the purview of partition, but my analysis wouldn’t delve into that. Points to be noted are the difference in dialect which also signify the difference in the creation or the process of ‘Other’-ing (Kanchi, Kenchi) The protagonist of the story is a widowed Hindu lawyer named Shashi Babu staying at a place named Narail with his children who is adamant on not migrating to West Bengal. Examples are given which cite the fact that people are exchanging houses or mostly buying houses for very cheap. The people in the East discuss that upper caste people in the West are now writing their names in the SC/ST list for job opportunities. Another example is that the upper castes like Mukherjees’ in East Bengal are not being allowed to get any harvest in a not-so-good harvest season because the Muslims want them to allow them to eat now. The fear creeps in from the fact that becoming a minority peasant in a nation would inevitably lead to greater struggles and humiliation, and Hindu peasants from East Bengal started feeling the same after partition. Shashi sends off his son to Kolkata for studies while his daughter Minati grows up and studies in their hometown. At night, in the village, bricks are thrown mostly at Hindu houses to make them move away and migrate. The Hindu sentiments in East Bengal are that upper caste Brahmins and Kshatriyas won’t last anymore in the village but lower castes will remain. The aspect of prostitution has also been dealt with in the film. Few women would also be flocking off to Calcutta where many upper caste women were also taking to prostitution to survive. An important remark of the woman in the movie was that in any place, beyond borders, customers’ caste never mattered anywhere. The position of women in history was always considered less important and it is very difficult to find historical evidence pertaining to violence against women, etc. Although, fiction representing real events in history cinema aids in understanding history in a non-linear way. Even White says, “Imagistic (and especially photographic and cinematic) evidence provides a basis for a reproduction of the scenes and atmosphere of past events much more accurate than any derived from verbal testimony alone” (White 1988, 1194) The movie also portrays the Hinduization of rituals like “pichudak” (calling back before leaving) as preposterous while the husband of the family reminds her that for Muslims saying “Bismillah” is enough. An affectionate relationship builds up between Alam Badal (from their neighboring family) and Minati as they start their university education and promise to write letters three times a week.

Simultaneously, it is seen that students at Dhaka University start protesting in order to lift General Ayub Khan’s military rule to establish democracy, while also seeking autonomy in East Bengal. “Opposition against the authoritarian Ayub regime culminated in the 1969 mass movements when strikes, hartal, violence, police actions, and curfews compelled President Ayub Khan to hand over power to General Yahya Khan, then the army chief. What began as anti-Ayub protests turned into a full-fledged independence struggle in 1971 when Yahya Khan, administering Pakistan under martial law, refused to transfer power to the AL, which had earlier won the majority in parliamentary elections” (Rashiduzzaman 1997, 256). Thus, the students of Dhaka University had shown agitation right after the

partition of Bengal and imposition of Urdu as the National Language in the present Bangladesh. The movie represents the lower section of society like barbers, hawkers, and tea-shop owners who were also willingly supporting this demand by the students. A beautiful depiction of similar cultures surpassing the boundaries is the promotion of the famous Uttam-Suchitra film like “Harano Shur” at a cinema hall nearby and the continuous presence of Bengali movie songs that have transcended boundaries.

The then-present situation of East Pakistan has been beautifully portrayed between Shashi and a Comrade named Jatin who had recently gotten free from Khulna jail. The Scheduled Castes of Keshtopur who were a part of the peasant movement were migrating to West Bengal. The status of the Communist Party was extremely perilous as they were being subjected to persecution. Being a minority they felt vulnerable. 3/4th of the party members had also migrated to West Bengal but the character Jatin feels that they were able to define themselves in the cultural front substantially. Along with “hartals”, student movements, civilian movements, and Communist movements their only wish was to create a secular consciousness among citizens but Jatin reminds the audience that it was rather difficult considering that East Pakistan was not a democracy back then. A very important dialogue in the movie states that democracy isn’t just a desire of minorities but also the extremely oppressed sections of the societies like peasants, and the government is precisely afraid of the “poor people” when they start asking for democracy. Religion gets invoked in the stimulating conversation where (in Hindu scriptures) followers are told to focus on their work instead of expecting good results, “nothing is permanent”. Being hopeful, they hope that given one or two generations later, things would change. The Communist ideology is depicted in the film as the character Jatin invokes that in history one class would rise and the other would inevitably fall. The problem of partition was not just the mainstream narration of a Hindu-Muslim division but about working-class peasants in Marxian terms. Chatterji reminds us that in West Bengal, “state government itself, with the Land Revenue Department under the command of a committed Marxist,⁴ encouraged peasants to grab and occupy benami land, and ordered the police to look the other way while this unprecedented expropriation was taking place with government’s advice and consent” (Chatterji 2007, 312) Jatin, as per Communist ideology, calls the middle class to be the “parasite class” predicting that Hindu Middle Class in East Bengal would diminish being the minority as atrocities had been perpetrated towards the Muslim peasants till ‘47. Although he wishes for the working class section to hold bureaucratic positions and be in power, he also states that the fate of peasants would never change.

The aspirations of a farmer’s son studying at Dhaka University are stated as he wishes to settle in the city after marrying a rich Officer’s daughter. In another depiction of the status of a widowed woman whose sons have left for West Bengal while she had stayed back with one of her sons regrets the rude behavior of her daughter-in-law. Domesticated work and subsequent gender roles of women as providers of money, and caregivers are depicted in the film. The film also showcases a rape scenario where a Hindu woman commits suicide drawing parallels to the immersion of the Goddess in the wake of the Hazratbal, Lahore,

and Kanpur riots. While well-to-do Hindu lawyers talk in the court about leaving for West Bengal, Badal is shot at the Dhaka University protests. In the end, after Shashi Babu's death from a heart attack, the remaining family decides to leave their homeland. While instances of othering and violence are perpetuated towards both communities, the film ends on a positive note hoping that time will heal.

The cinematography included bleak colored shots and was shot at Narail, Bangladesh itself. The supporting character of Anuprava, Minati's aunt, must be acknowledged as a strong character. Apart from the earthy tone and low-angle camera shots, various subplots and conversations among the protagonists reveal details about the violence, trauma and measure the emotional vulnerability of the characters in the film.

II. Another documentary on the Bengal partition: "Seemantorekha" (The Borderline, 2017)

Mokammel's documentary raises the question around the title itself - "borders" and why the division of Bengal still haunts us as a post-colonial and post-partition nation-state. Through the 2-hour, 24-minute documentary, while traveling across borders to refugee camps, he takes us along with him on his journey while questioning whether the partition was an aberration or a necessity of history. The documentary begins with the return of Aparajita Ghoshal, and Anjali Chakrabarty to their childhood home situated at Rajshahi, Bangladesh which were exchanged after partition. Apart from personal commentary by the director, the documentary also includes film pictures and interviews juxtaposed with the present times with illustrations of poems. After interviews based on successors of survivors of riots after Direct Action Day in '46, Mokammel slowly moves towards the refugee camps. A defining moment is where the border is seen through the direct representation of the barbed wire separating Bangladesh from West Bengal as we see lots of people hanging onto it. Mokammel raises his queries about an alternative to the consequences of partition while reflecting upon how the Hindu-Muslim unity has been affected because of that. The literal and figural representation of the separation brings forth the question of refugees in a larger aspect.

The refugee camps mentioned are (notably the biggest in West Bengal holding remnants and memories of survivors) Ranaghat Cooper's, Dhubulia, Ashoknagar, Bhadrakali, Mana along with the evolution of Bijoygarh as a colony. Most of these camps were constructed during World War II as godowns or cantonments during colonial times and refugees living there suffered profusely from epidemics like cholera, and pox. Widowed women living in them have now ended up being designated as "permanent liability". Thus, the most vulnerable section of the society suffered the most as they had fled during the partition, having lost their agricultural land or kin. They continue to suffer to this day as not much has been done for their rehabilitation. For example, a woman in one of the camps stated that they receive a sum of thousand rupees, 6 kg rice, 8 kg wheat, and some pulses per month which shows that apart from their inability of going back to their homeland, they aren't hopeful about their future either. In an interview with the poet Simanta Guha, it is clear when he states that before the formation of the

categories based on the aspirations of Congress and Muslim League, they were not aware of the clear division between Hindu-Muslim as they used to even celebrate festivals together. Apart from the religious division and the question of honor of women after partition, what he believes is how morals have been discarded in the post-partition state. A question to ask here is the persisting connection of representation of post-partition cinema and documentary with partition!

Often, the sheer helplessness of the director (as a successor of a partition survivor) is apparent as he is self-reflexive about it. Next, he goes on to show us the condition of the refugees living in the railway track slums, squatter colonies in West Bengal. The haunting image of the deteriorating conditions of the refugees (some of whom have become citizens and been registered as voters) is difficult to forget as they speak about the ambitions of the younger generation studying or wishing to enter the film industry. Chatterji writes, “Minorities are made to feel they should belong somewhere else, that they should be ‘nationals’ of some other new state made up of ‘people like them’” (Chatterji 2007, 105). The condition of Dalits and Namasudras was traced as far as successors of refugees sent to the Andaman Islands. Most of them commented on how they recall their homeland yet they are better here as they have flourished in the agricultural, fishing, and furniture-making sectors. In connection with the Marichjhapi Massacre, interviews were taken of the refugees forcefully evicted to Dandakaranya along with instances recollecting police brutality. Although people have accepted the reality many years post-partition, they have not been able to forgive and forget the impacts of partition. The cinematic representation has been duly important as it gives priority to women and the marginalized communities. In an interview with a physically disabled clarinet player at a railway station, a sparkling notion of strength and hope to survive remains even after losing 10 acres of land in Bangladesh and loved ones. Once again, through the documentary, we are reminded of promises kept towards the Punjab refugees well within 5 years whereas in the case of Bengalis now even 15% of the promises have been kept. Similar to that of the movie discussed earlier, partition inculcated the idea of movable (furniture, vehicles) and immovable property (land) which were exchanged by families living on either side of the border. Chatterji rightly reminds us that the refugees had an important task of “exercise in judgment and self-reliance” (Chatterji 2007, 128) as the government's rehabilitation policy had failed to negotiate for a better future.

In the famous Petrapole station where every day scores of refugees would end up hoping for a better life, Mokammel brings contemporary artists like Pratul Bandopadhyay who still sing songs lamenting the deaths and the failure of the idea of a 2 Nation Theory to separate the people of Bengal. The famous case of Felani was discussed which shows how crossing the border comes with torture and violation of Human Rights by the BSF as the young girl had been shot. This had gained attention from all over the world as this was the first case to have gone through the process of a “re-trial”. One of the major questions this documentary raises along with the haunting question of whether partition was required is the condition of Bengali Muslims across borders. Most of the people interviewed from the intellectual strata had stated that the condition of Bengali Muslims in Bangladesh had developed based on education, and other jobs.

The importance of the Padma River in the partition is something that has to be acknowledged. The erosion of the river had inflicted the livelihood of the farmers there more than the regret of land left in India due to partition.

Indigenous community representation in the film is present equally as most of the time we tend to overlook the impacts of partition on them. In the village of Bongaon, West Bengal a Munda remembers that their forefathers were engaged in indigo cultivation and after partition, they had to migrate to India. The amount of torture inflicted on them goes unnoticed in academic research. The government's policy had "main thrust of its rehabilitation policy was to 'disperse' refugees from the areas where they had chosen to concentrate and to try and get rid of them, by a mixture of sticks and carrots, to 'empty' tracts, mainly outside West Bengal" (Chatterji 2007, 128) While some of the adivasis could migrate to India, many remained at Faridpur, Khulna. Special mention was given to Film Society Andolan where Dhiresh Nag was interviewed talking extensively about his experience as a minority and how he was made to feel like a lower caste. The main question surrounding the documentary keeps making the viewers think whether as we modernize the bridge between the two communities and nation post partition is widening or is there a chance to hope that it is reducing!

The next part of the documentary deals extensively with the the notion of development of the Muslim community because of partition also questioning whether it was the only way or the only ethical way to usher in development. Keeping in mind the rich middle-class Hindu feudal lords in East Bengal and their nostalgia towards a bygone era of power, prestige, and affluence Mokammel interviews and follows around descendants of East Bengal's landlord Shashinath Datta. Gayatri Chakrabarty's journey tracing her paternal home at Barisal states that while she has nostalgia, she feels that "new is not new" with the constant feeling of "us and them" which is not real in its truest sense. Although his name is almost forgotten now, even landlords had to leave their residences and ownership and move to India. As poets like Manindra Gupta, Pabitra Sarkar, and Maitreye Sarkar were interviewed, they stressed the importance of looking for jobs after the partition. The process of separation and reconnecting with a family member is still ongoing and often overwhelming. The erstwhile celebrated practice of generational befriending across faith including feasts and village palanquins to cherish the friendship. The spontaneous interviews and the level of the audience shots gives the impression of an equal position for communication with the audience. Apart from these, a montage of photos from archives juxtaposed with the present times makes it easier for the audience to develop an easy interpellation. A question of the authenticity of the sources can be raised as memory can be falsified or manipulated which is why the subjects must be persuasive enough validation assertions with the help of logic and facts.

A considerable section has been devoted to Ritwik Ghatak's films which have been hugely influenced by partition. Pratiti Ghatak is interviewed where she recollects a movie screening which was triggering a sense of helplessness that the partition had left in their hollow souls and how Ghatak himself was a

changed man after the partition. Another important fact that the documentary reminds us is that intellectuals who have migrated to West Bengal from Bangladesh have written more about partition than the ones who had migrated to East Bengal with fewer examples to elucidate this point.

However, when it comes to defining who benefitted from partition, is not the question one must try answering. Writer Atin Bandopadhyay feels that after the partition Muslims had got a space of their own after partition and he believes that the partition was a better way out. Even after incurring a lot of loss, he believes that partition had enabled a community to emerge prosperous. Writers Tarak Sarkar and Debesh Roy too feel that Bengali Muslims have gained from this dainted event in history although the pain of the lost motherland persists. Hasan Azizul Haque has no repentance because partition had occurred although one is hardly free from long attachments like childhood memories which seems almost like a “lost world”, living in denial that childhood had occurred in Kolkata. Barisal is the center point of discussion pertaining to large-scale migration/eviction. Nirendranath Chakraborty who had also migrated feels that the vacuum created due to the migration as the majority of the Hindu population from East Bengal working as lawyers, etc. by Muslims who remained must be also acknowledged in terms of benefit making. It was found that the refugees who had migrated to Bangladesh from West Bengal were rehabilitated in a better manner and Mokammel reminds us that the refugees from Bihar were among the worst survivors. However, the question of the upliftment of Muslims of West Bengal has always been a point of concern regarding the challenges with regard to access to education, and jobs. Post signing of the Inter-Dominion Agreement in 1948, the Nehru-Liaquat Pact stopped the constant flow of refugees with religious discrepancies, could migration and the flow of so-called “refugees” have stopped?

The documentary deals with inter-religious marriages to reduce communalism. Two couples from both Bangladesh and West Bengal are interviewed painting positive opinions on claiming their space in a democracy and improving harmonious relations despite hurdles. Therefore, the documentary also showcases the migration of married women across borders sometimes barring the “strong taboo in Hindu family custom against accepting hospitality from the in-laws of daughters given in a marriage” (Chatterji 2007, 125). A beautiful story of lasting friendship between Smritikona from India and Sufiya from Bangladesh by the interviewees who feel blessed to have reconnected after a long time through a mediator. Special mention of East Bengal immigrants counting towards almost 60 percent of the population in Siliguri is noted when a group of interviewees feel that the border between the nations doesn’t exist much after globalization although the “psychospace” seems to have altered. Another important political subject is the beef industry where in 2014 more than 2 million cows were illegally transported from West Bengal to Bangladesh across the border in various ways.

Immigrants from East Bengal have settled in areas of Assam as we know that the persisting problem persists. Dhubri was one such place where interviewees were of the opinion that with the influx which disbalanced the proportion of ratio between Muslims and Assamese, a greater division based on

linguistics and religion could be seen as two became parts of different nations. Assam had always had a mixed culture, and it was acknowledged that Bengali Muslims had mastered agriculture with the cultivation of many crops, and in education as well. When they started becoming a political threat for the Assamese majority, it was decided that through the Pakistan Resolution Assam would be a part of Pakistan. The plebiscite of Sylhet is mentioned with more than 55,000 votes to vouch for being a part of Pakistan, and later Bangladesh which shows how nationalities were vulnerable and volatile. As a buffer zone between Assam and Bangladesh, Karimgunj was selected and on 18 August '1947, the Indian flag was hoisted there for the first time.

In '61, 11 people were martyred in Silchar with respect to the Bengali Language liberation protests. As second-class citizens and migration-changing landscapes, Hindu and Muslim refugees from Bangladesh (then Pakistan) had crossed over to parts of Assam, Tripura. As Joya Chatterji mentions that these diasporas have not been "systematically" studied, parts of the interview suggest the same regarding invariably less information pertaining to this. Few traditions and festivals are still seen as breaking the physical boundary defining Bengal. One such occasion is the immersion of the idol during Durga Puja near River Ichamati which is addressed as a "milan mela" where both the communities are seen together. Another occasion highlighted in the documentary is celebrations pertaining to International Mother Language Day (21st February). A cultural organization from Jessore, Bangladesh named "Udichi" goes to the Benapole border to sing songs about the shared struggle of fighting for establishing the mother tongue that is shared between both West Bengal and Bangladesh. The usage of Bengali language in the documentary throughout attempts to invisibilize the difference between the communities and the audience. The fraternity of border security forces from both nations is shown which blurs the geographical borderline for a while. Lastly, conversation among youths from Bangladesh and West Bengal is recorded as the erstwhile laments of how so many opportunities were taken away from them while the feeling of being close to their homeland remained. The anguish of speaking the same language but expecting different behavior as foreigners or VISA holders with traveling restrictions, etc. gets questioned. Mokammel ends the documentary with the message of humanism above religious differences and a question of whether South Asian consciousness would permit these two nations to reunite like Germany.

Pandey feels that after partition, "individuals, families, and communities in the subcontinent remade themselves in radically altered settings" (Pandey 2004, 16). Is it true that this radical change had occurred to all? On the aspect of memories, it is seen that the people interviewed in the documentary were able to open up about the violence inflicted upon them. On the one hand, it can be said that fictional or narrative partition cinema recreates experiences and the city life, while documentaries seek to uncover the history and its significance on the living present in a larger manner. For director and producer Paul Rotha, the documentary is "the use of the film medium to interpret creatively and in social terms the life of the people as it exists in reality" (Rotha, 1970:5) Withstanding change 'Seemantorekha' reflects Mokammel's

reflexivity along with historical revelations, promotion of awareness while analyzing or interrogating the politics of Bengal partition post-Liberation War. Stimulating awareness and discussion after 73 years of partition, the analysis of the film and documentary should encourage us to the void of historical records pertaining to records of people who have gone unnoticed, uncaptured. While understanding the ongoing refugee crisis, and citizenship crisis in 2020, Dr. Bidhan Roy's policies must remind us that the state expects its subjects to follow their orders while also discouraging rehabilitation and aid. Another important point to keep in mind is that violence against women due to rape, sexual abuse, abduction, and migration has not been dealt with extensively in the film and documentary taken up in this analysis. However, representation of the condition of women as survivors in camps and fictionalizing them to represent their status is seen in a considerable way.

Through the analysis of the cinematic representation of history in the documentary, I feel that it is valuable as it teaches us to be more subjective in our reflections of the past which shapes the present. Mokammel's interest in partition provokes him to ask him the question of the importance of borders and hence it is not completely unbiased as his pursuit would have a definite objective which is communicated to the viewers. Especially, when we wish to uncover narratives from the so-called "lower strata" of society, film becomes an important medium that allows for an engaging response in representation. Raising awareness through the cinematic medium isn't new if we recall the usage of footage collected from the Jewish Camps for the Nuremberg Trials. Similarly to flag certain issues like poverty, human rights violation, trauma, discrimination, etc. Thus, film and documentary provide a wider platform while acknowledging the importance of history while engaging with the subjects which we might have only been able to access through textual representation. In both cases, the background score was a fine composition which was a recurring phenomenon evoking emotions even before the pictorial representation of the events that would follow. Although it doesn't fall under the category of "art house cinema", no use of commercial means and "set" making has been used for the film and the documentary proliferating a deeper connection with "maati" or the soil of the homeland. However, we must also keep in mind how the same media can be used to generate fake news or tamper with it. Historian John E. O'Connor came up with four ways of analyzing the film medium: "(1) moving-image documents as representations of history; (2) moving-image documents as evidence for social and cultural history; (3) moving-image documents as evidence for historical fact; and (4) moving image documents as evidence for the history of film and television" (O'Connor, 2002, 23). Whether or not oral history becomes entirely authentic and factual will always remain in question, but it becomes a bridge in itself for constructing socio-political history along with the gaps in official data and records we have in archives. Thus the performative of interviews and data in a representational form in the form of the camera initiates an opportunity for dialogic communication and critical thinking between the viewer and the subjects.

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“It won’t let them go”: Consumption in *Mexican Gothic*

Andrea Tinnemeyer



Illustration: Atmadeep Das

Abstract:

What happens when the silver mine closes or your English family tree, hoary and carefully transplanted from England along with its own soil, no longer bears fruit? Answering the question of what to do in the face of insatiable appetites is Silvia Moreno-Garcia, a contemporary author whose more recent work indicates a feminist, post-colonial approach to the reimaginings of canonical tales like *The Daughter of Dr. Moreau* (2022) and *Mexican Gothic* (2020), which draws upon *Wuthering Heights*, “Fall of the House of Usher,” and the speculative sociology of José Vasconcelos. She transports us to Mexico of the 1950s, into the moribund silver mining town where residents eke out a living, far below High Place, the aptly named and seemingly conventional family estate standard to Gothic genre. In true Gothic style, the novel opens with an outsider, a cosmopolitan from Mexico City, who travels to High Place at her father’s behest, intent on aiding in the rehabilitation of her recently wed cousin whose recent correspondence raises alarms about her physical and mental health.

What follows is a meditation on Mexico's colonial past, its consumption of indigenous practices and labor, its complex relationship to the land, and its horrific reckoning with the eugenics movement that swept through many nations as they grappled with their response to a changing demographic and citizenry post-WWII. While Moreno-Garcia draws upon the canonical and conventional notions of the female gothic (the mad woman in attic), her cultural and historical settings innovate and energize the genre. What consumes the Doyle Family of High Place are their own unchecked colonial appetites for silver, progeny, and immortality, aptly captured in the family crest which features an ouroboros, the snake that consumes its own tail.

Keywords: Consumption, gothic, Mexican Gothic, La Raza Cósmica, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, José Vasconcelos, cannibalism, incest, mushrooms, mining, ouroboros, motherhood, female solidarity, fairy tale.

From Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez' controversial appearance and dress at the Met Gala, to the recent films *Parasite* (2019), *The Menu* (2022), and *Triangle of Sadness* (2022), so much cultural critique expresses itself in the form of consumption: what you're eating, who's on the menu. And, this deeply historical link between eating and class struggle carries us back to Marie Antoinette ("let them eat cake"), Jonathan Swift ("A Modest Proposal"), and Jean Jacques Rousseau ("When the people shall have nothing more to eat, they will eat the rich"). Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* (2020) takes this metaphor to gothic extremes, adding historical and cultural dimensions unique to Mexico. What emerges is a meditation on consumption that spans literature, transmedia, colonialism, and the feminist contributions to the gothic genre.

The timing of Moreno-Garcia's publication couldn't be more prescient. 2020 witnessed COVID, the third year of Trump's immigration policy separating parents from their children, and the cooling down of border rhetoric. Although the novel is set in the 1950s, in the times of Operation Wetback, (1953-4), so many elements of *Mexican Gothic* feel contemporary, timely, and deeply, disturbingly relevant. In both moments, despite their seventy-year-difference, Mexican laborers have been a resource for consumption, maquiladoras and TNCs have their historical precedents in the mining town of Real del Monte, in Hidalgo, the real-life setting for Moreno-Garcia's novel. The British Real del Monte, established in 1824 in London, sought to work the mines owned by Pedro Romero de Terreros. "In 1830, following news of a widespread smallpox epidemic in the state of Mexico, Commissioner Tindal hastened to order a large stock of vaccine from England. On receiving the supply in June, he made part of it available to the governor and the prefect of Tulacingo for distribution among the towns they considered most in need.

The dispensary itself apparently became a casualty of the concern's financial plight. Noting in 1842 that an outbreak of influenza had led to a temporary labor shortage and thus contributed to a decline in silver production, John Rule made no mention of efforts to combat the disease" (Randall 637).¹ *Mexican Gothic* follows this historical point, making mention of "several epidemics back when the [Doyle] mine was open. . . lots of miners died" (61). Those victims were summarily tossed into a pit, a mass grave. To highlight how expendable a resource the Mexican miners are for Doyle, he states, rather blithely, "They needed to die. You must make the soil fertile" (236).

Silvia Moreno-Garcia's protagonist, a college-educated Noemí Taboada from Mexico City, is a tailor-made guide for the macabre world of High Place built and maintained by a particular kind of white supremacy and colonialism. Her literary knowledge of gothic tales, particularly Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*,² fairytales ("Cinderella" and "Twelve Dancing Princesses"), poetry (works by Sor Juana) and botany (mycorrhizal networks), not to mention the pseudo-scientific theories of eugenics as well as the writings of José Vasconcelos, provide strong foundations for the novel's thoughtful meditations on cultural consumption, and the intersection of feminism and the gothic.

Noemí enters the narrative in accordance with gothic conventions: she is summoned by a letter whose contents reveal a significant psychological disturbance in its sender, in this case her favorite cousin, Catalina, recently married to Virgil Doyle. Among the alarming declarations in Catalina's missive are a loss of self and the naming of a likely culprit, the evil endemic to High Place. Catalina avows, "the house is sick with rot, stinks of decay, brims with every single evil and cruel sentiment" (7). Trapped in this environment, one can certainly understand Catalina's need to affirm her own name ("I am Catalina Taboada. Catalina. Cata") intersects with the domestic carceral so hauntingly portrayed in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," in which the birth of a new baby threatens to unravel the young protagonist's sense of self.³ The novel closely associates marriage with a loss of identity and agency, as Catalina's cousin and rescuer, Noemí, married by Howard to Francis in the concluding chapters of the novel, is called upon by disembodied voices within the house to "renounce herself" (270). The sentient house which forms a symbiotic relationship with its inhabitants, borrows from classic gothic tropes.⁴ For Noemí to shore up her cousin's self-confidence, her return to a self-reliant figure she once was, ("I cannot save myself as much as I wish to") Noemí relies on stories of their shared past, fairytales and childhood games of La Loteria and Naipes (8). Part of Noemí's resistance involves reading to Catalina, feeding her language and story arcs that, along with a locally concocted tincture that temporarily loosens the house's hold on Catalina, provide her cousin moments of clarity and cohesion. Ironically, the past, which holds the Doyles in its thrall, liberates Catalina and returns her to a storyline that promises, miraculously, a happily-ever-after.

Noemí arrives by train, traveling through a psychological landscape that draws heavily upon the unconscious definitions we have come to expect fairytale forests (and gothic landscapes) to signify.⁵

Indeed, Noemi registers her shock upon witnessing, from the train's windows, that forests which she'd encountered from Little Red Riding Hood and Hansel and Gretel, "forests were real places" (15). Considering how much darker and more gothic her discoveries will become as the novel unfolds, this early moment not only gestures to the consumption of children's books for a romantic, sheltered childhood, but also how literature, and the potential to craft and digest alternate storylines, will be to her escape from High Place. For the moment, however, Garcia-Moreno plays to the convention of having the landscape register with psychological import. We are meant to shudder as the scenery Noemi spies on her journey shifts dramatically from bucolic to features like "deep ravines [that] cut . . . charming rivulets turned into strong, gushing rivers, which spelled doom" (16). Tellingly, the "land kept its riches in the dark, sprouting no trees with fruit," a detail foreshadowing the Doyle family's appetite for incest and its interest in both Catalina and Noemí to birth the next generation of Doyles (16).⁶

Noemí arrives at El Trío, ironically named as nothing about the place demonstrates a victory of any sort. She finds evidence of the kinds of languor and disease described in Catalina's letter; the town, a "place that had withered away," also abides by the sympathetic conceit of Romantic and Gothic landscapes: it reveals the very corruption of the people who have occupied and taken from it. And the land, in a position of defeat, "would never again spill wealth from its womb," a conflation of forced childbirth and silver mining as two exploitative practices (18).⁷ Moreno-Garcia plays upon the gothic convention of linking the human psyche with the surrounding terrain, creating a symbiotic relationship not unlike the Gloom that unites the Doyle family's past, High Place, and its inhabitants.

The fungus, it runs under the house, all the way to the cemetery and back. It's in the walls. Like a giant spider's web. In that web we can preserve memories, thoughts, caught like the flies that wander into a real web. We call that repository of our thoughts, of our memories, *the gloom*" (211).

Through the gloom, Noemí learns of the source of the Doyles' immortality and of resistance to their particular blend of patriarchy, white supremacy, and colonialism. Ruth, Howard Doyle's daughter, sends messages of hope and scenes of her own violent resistance to Noemí, forming a network of female solidarity to redirect the gloom to her own purpose. In addition to Ruth's assistance, Noemí learning more telling information once she arrives at High Place: the Doyles "don't speak Spanish," an Anglocentric practice that galvanizes and guarantees that the Spanish language and Mexican customs will constitute the trio's central resistance (18).

Almost immediately thereafter, family genealogy appears as a central preoccupation for the Doyles. Francis's identity as Virgil's first cousin, once removed, a detail that seems formal to Noemí, offers a brief moment of levity when Francis responds that "it certainly simplifies things" when there is, as Noemí insists when imagining her own family, "no need to pull out the genealogy chart" (19). Once inside High Place, Noemí scrutinizes the "faces of long-dead Doyles" and concludes that "one face blended into

another" (22). She observes, "both were fair-haired, both very similar in looks, so much so that at first glance one might take them for the same woman" (74). The Doyle family's form of consumption renders them immutable, and it is perhaps this same eerie homogeneity across time that both compels and forgives the patriarch's incest, his preying upon two sisters, Agnes and Alice, as if both were interchangeable with one another. The family's preoccupation with the past also extends to their use of technology, keeping them reliant on "candles and oil lamps" as if the vestiges of the past are the only means of illuminating the present (23).

The present feeds upon the past, a dynamic that informs the Doyle patriarch's allegiance to the antiquated pseudo-science of eugenics, a racist ideology that saw its popularity wane in the 1920s, with last vestiges in Mexico in the 1950s, the time of the novel's setting. Doyle first introduces the subject through the figure of José Vasconcelos, philosopher and Secretary of Public Education responsible for the mural projects that brought fame to such Mexican artists as Diego Rivera and José Orozco, among others, but who also expressed his valorization of Mexico's indigenous population through his speculative sociology in *La Raza Cósmica/The Cosmic Race*. Doyle recognizes an odd intersection between his own white supremacy and Vasconcelos' theory: their shared acknowledgement of the decline of "pure whites." Vasconcelos writes, "The days of the pure whites, the victors of today, are as numbered as were the days of their predecessors" (406-7). This notion, which sends white supremacists into a panic, occasions jubilation for Vasconcelos because it creates the ideal conditions for ushering in a new, cosmic race, one centralized on indigenous people. Doyle translates Vasconcelos as declaring a "destiny of the people of Mexico to forge a new race that encompasses all races" (30). "Destiny" is a tellingly colonial term, already harkening back to "Manifest Destiny," and the same principle of white supremacy that abides in both constructions.

For the Doyles, cultural consumption falls neatly, unsettlingly so, within their larger ethos of eugenics. The perpetuation of whiteness, a devotion that engenders its own warped religion in which Doyle becomes a God, requires sacrifice by "lessers": Mexican miners in the silver mines, indigenous peoples under the Spanish flag, and, shaped to their own purpose, the speculative sociology of José Vasconcelos. Moreno-Garcia transports Noemí into the Doyle's past, to the origins of its original sins. There we spy a fair-haired and blue-eyed Doyle who seems to be on the verge of death, who has traveled to a cave that hosts indigenous rituals in search of a remedy (205). Over the course of time, Doyle comes to learn the secret of this indigenous people's longevity and general heartiness: they have been consuming a fungus native to the cave's walls that "heal[s] their wounds and preserve[s] their health" (206). Not unlike the backlash currently raging among communities of color that psychedelics, particularly mushrooms, have been coopted and commodified by white culture, Doyle sees the selfish potential for his own longevity and immortality in this fungus.⁸ We see Howard witness the priest sacrifice himself, keeping the ritual and the mushrooms a secret, a resource to be used moderately and in dire circumstances. As the owner of a silver mine, a person already given over to the exploitation of the natural world for his own gain,

Howard quickly assesses the mushrooms' true potential – the fuel his desire for more life, for immortality. He murders everyone in the cave and refashions the ceremony to his own ends, positioning himself as its spiritual leader in a nearly god-like role (206-7).

The house's matriarch, Mother, hosts the mycorrhizal network, sustaining the golden threads that burrow into the house's walls, emitting spores into the very air they breathe in High Place. Aside from the mushroom spores, the network, called the Gloom, also houses collective memories. This history, the past, becomes key to the resistance against this colonialism. Making visibility what the Doyles have done and continue to do becomes a refrain in the novel, as Noemí, guided by the version of Ruth suspended in the Gloom, is often advised to "open her eyes" (208, 234).

Looking to the past to inform the present and future is, itself, a form of consumption. The women particularly who have already been emptied of their particularities, their identities, and, in the case of Sor Juana once she was exiled to the leper colony, their voices, become the empty cups on Doyle's card, their resurgence in a more contemporary moment just another feast of the same meal. The gloom, a singular membrane that fuses past and present, allowing Noemí access to origin of the Doyle's unhealthy, unworldly regeneration, reveals an indigenous woman, in the late stages of pregnancy whom Doyle views as "frightfully ugly" but "necessary" and "serv[ing] a purpose" (207). The child born of this union, not unlike Martín Cortes, symbolizes what Vasconcelos would look to as a "bridge," linking two races. The preserved memory of this heinous act concludes with a revised version of Spain's sexual conquest over the Mexico – the replaying of Hernan Cortez and the multi-named and multi-identified La Malinche. In Moreno-Garcia's version, the birth is as monstrous as the conception that the author spares us. Rather than delivering a baby who would become the symbolic first mestizo (Martín Cortes), the violation results in an amorphous blob, perhaps not unlike a still birth or an ectopic pregnancy. The cells have continued to divide and grow, but the end result is more cancerous and consuming than self-sufficient. This monstrous birth, held up for all to gaze upon, becomes the next sacrifice. Doyle consumes it and in so doing, feeds upon and is fed by the mushroom network that he's reliant upon for his health and unnaturally long life (217). Among the hallmarks of gothic literature are the philosophical posturings of the rational over the romantic, what one might label objective over the subjective, what's true, known, and validated by the individual. "But in general [the gothic] can be seen as one symptom of a widespread shift away from neoclassical ideals of order and reason, toward romantic belief in emotion and imagination" (Hume 282).

"In Gothic writing the reader is held in suspense with the characters, and increasingly there is an effort to shock, alarm, and otherwise rouse him. Inducing a powerful emotional response in the reader (rather than a moral or intellectual one) was the prime object of these novelists" (Hume 284). That readers are meant to engage emotionally with gothic literature might itself necessitate historical and cultural context, and, in modern time, result in something as novel as a Spotify playlist. For feminist authors, the gothic has been a

vehicle for social critique, an opportunity to display on the page the belittling, gaslighting, and general abuse heroines have experienced at the hands of male and female characters.⁹ In *Mexican Gothic*, Florence surveils Noemí, ridicules her, and controls access to her cousin, Catalina. It is not surprising that her austere, severe ways remind Noemí of the nuns from her Catholic school days, women who were quite strict in their discipline, who lost their individuality and voice under wimples and vows of silence. Moreno-Garcia offers an alternative even to the Florences of her novel by referring to Mexico's most beloved nun-poet: Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz. Catalina declines to hear the fairytale, "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," and opts instead of her "old book of poems" (170,171). When asked which poem in particular that she should read, Catalina immediately responds with "Foolish Men/" "Hombres necios."¹⁰

Parecer quiere el denuedo	when it comes to bravery posturing
de vuestro parecer loco	your witlessness must take the prize:
al niño que pone el coco	you're the child that makes a bogeyman,
y luego le tienemiedo.	and then recoils in fear and cries.

For Sor Juana, there's the patent awareness that men actively engage in their own fictions, manufacturing the very thing they'll point to as monstrous. El Coco, or the Bogeyman, has a sexual dimension to him. As the late Rudolfo Anaya explains, "he was the father figure who warned the male child of the dangers inherent in sexual awareness and practices" (52). As Virgil returns Noemí to her room after a bout of somnambulism, she chastises herself, unnerved by her experience and in this moment, calling herself a baby, imagines her brother teasing her, "telling everyone Noemí now practically believed in el coco" (Moreno-Garcia 121). Note that Moreno-Garcia's reference to El Coco follows Anaya's in significant ways: there's a male who's associated with the belief and this otherworldly entity's appearance signifies sexual taboos. Virgil makes one of several sexual advances towards Noemí in this moment, a string of disturbing encounters that will approximate assault and carry with it the psychologically damaging ideas from Sor Juana's poem that men create/manufacture and then blame women for their very actions. Virgil spews the hateful speech of too many sexual predators, accusing Noemí of desiring his advances and bringing the assault upon herself.

Among Moreno-Garcia's registers for consumption, many of which take a feminist and anti-hegemonic stance, is her awareness that narratives themselves can be a source of consumption. Readers digest story arcs featuring willowy heroines in peril who seek comfort in the marriage embrace of flawed characters like Rochester. They escape their overwhelming experiences in fairytales; Moreno-Garcia repeatedly references "Twelve Dancing Princesses" as Catalina's favorite. What sets this fairytale apart from others is its centering of female pleasure. The twelve sisters travel to a magical island at night, taking extraordinary precautions against being followed, so that they can indulge in dance and music, food and good company.¹¹ Unlike the balls of "Cinderella," however, this ritual doesn't anticipate marriage as its

ultimate goal. And it is perhaps this feature, a plotline independent of marriage, that so enrages their father the king that he orders other soldiers to spy upon them and discover their secret. The only tell-tale sign of their evening pleasure are their shoes, whose soles are worn through, a not-so-subtle reference to the hymen and its visibility as a guarantor of virginity. The successful soldier who manages to foil the princesses' attempts at preventing surveillance returns to the king with material proof of their otherworldly festivities: a golden cup, branches from a silver tree. His reward is the hand of the eldest daughter, married to him that very day. The soldier-turned-suitor consumes so much by the story's conclusion that he proves himself quite glutinous: the eldest daughter's independence, the pleasures of all twelve princesses (for one can't image the king allowing them to continue their once secretive rendezvous), the bonds forged by a nightly secretive pursuit and a shared goal, and, on the metatextual level, a storyline that favored female independence.

As a genre, fairy tales are consumed for their assurance of a happy ending, an escape from predatory villains, and yet they also pose a threat: the figure of the female whose whole existence is in service to those around her.¹² In a haunting scene, strangely evocative of Snow White's celebrated domestic labor, Noemí looks to appease Florence, the female arm of Howard Doyle and mother to Francis, Noemí's future husband and third member of the escaping trio. In a bid to "make herself useful," Noemí "meticulously works the polish into every crevice and curve [of the Doyles' silver collection], sliding the rag over enameled vines and flowers" (112-3). That she would polish the silver of a family whose wealth is extracted from the bowels of Mexican earth, at the expense of countless unnamed Mexican miners, seems so disturbing, as if Noemí were participating in and even encouraging this kind of conspicuous consumption. The display cases in High Places' dining room are "crammed with silver. . . that sat dusty and dull behind glass" (112-3).¹³

Being "useful" is perhaps never so gothic a phrase as its relationship to the empty cup, the portraits indistinguishable from one another, the two wives of Howard Doyle, Alice and Agnes, who even share the same initials: A.D. The Doyle family's crest captures the perpetual cycle of consumption and being consumed, with its image of the snake eating its own tail. In this never-ending cycle, death can be recontextualized: Howard Doyle merely transfers his essence into the next generation's body. Such an existence, however, depends on the abject submission of the host body. Doyle explains this necessary step in the familial terms that colonialism often cloaks itself in both in words and in the bleak symbolism on the card he turns over, like a soothsayer revealing Noemí's fate. The third card, "a single, empty cup," is an apt image to accompany words to the same effect: "You'll still renounce yourself in the end. You're already like us, you're family. You don't know it" (219). The demands of becoming a Doyle are consequential and, not so coincidentally, a replication on Spanish colonialism. One conjures up La Malinche/Dofia Marina's role, not as translator but as the symbolic mother of the first mestizo. For Moreno-Garcia, the various ways in which to study and represent consumption can, at times, take on a rather scientific flavor. During a conversation when Noemí and Francis resolve to join forces to rescue

Catalina from High Place, Francis dilates on the topic of Massosporaciacadina, a fungal infection that attaches to the cicadas' abdomen, colonizing them within the mating cycle, luring other male cicadas by mimicking the "wing-flick signaling behavior, normally seen only in sexually receptive female cicadas" (Cooley and Hill). As an empty vessel, Noemi, a womb to birth the next generation of Doyles.

The fungus contained in the unnamed native woman's blood guarantees Howard's healing, even ensures his immortality should he and his family maintain strict breeding protocols. "Three hundred years. Marrying his own kin, having children with them, then transferring his mind into one of their bodies. Over and over again" (213). With some alterations in plot details, this horrific revelation of a legacy of incest, one reliant on "no outsiders" parallels Poe's tale of decay and incest, "Fall of the House of Usher" (213). The narrator summoned to the Usher estate, much as Catalina's letter brings Noemí to High Place, ruminates on his friend "whose family tree I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain" (Poe 2).

The isolation, born out of white supremacy, collapses upon itself, hollowed out in its preoccupation with the preservation of homogeneity. Roderick's sister, from Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher", buried while still alive, with a faint blush and a "suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death," returns as the uncanny, the unheimlich. Madeline Usher, with "a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (Poe 15). The indigenous woman, the empty cup holding the necessary fungus, is similarly buried alive. "They swaddled the body. Swaddled it tight, and there was a pit by the altar, and they were throwing her into it but she was alive" (218). Her child, in a horrific act Noemi does not wish to see, "is torn apart ... and eaten" (217). A bastardized version of the eucharist, the baby ensures the life of the Doyles, their immortality, his role as a "God." Solidifying this warped, twisted ritual are the words accompanying the act: "et verbum caro factum est"

Also paralleling the gothic conclusion of Poe's story, High Place of *Mexican Gothic* is destroyed, burned to the ground.¹⁴ Because of the symbiotic relationship between estate and family, High Place and the Doyles, the deaths of Howard Doyle; his son, Virgil; his daughter, Florence; and Agnes, ominously referenced as "mother," are so inextricably joined that just as their lives were linked, their deaths were mutually assured. The whole system must be destroyed to ensure liberation for Noemí, Francis, and Catalina. This survival comes through female solidarity, from a healthy, respectful use of indigenous medicines, a tincture.

Escape comes through the destruction of most of the Doyle family (Howard and Virgil are both killed by Catalina, Florence is killed by his own son), the liberation of Ruth, and a culturally-affirming trio who

plot in Spanish, call upon the wisdom of indigenous plants and the Tenth Muse (Sor Juana). In her actions, Catalina's described as a "maenad," a devotee to Dionysus who also registers with a hoary tradition of punishing women for their "selfish" and "unnatural" pursuit of pleasure. In Euripedes' *The Bacchae*, the maenads guard the periphery of the Bacchanalia.¹⁵ Loosed from her captivity in her room, and lucid from the drugs used to ostensibly cure her from "tuberculosis," Catalina leaves being the mad woman in the attic of Gilbert and Gubar fame. She performs the necessary act that brings about the downfall of the Doyle family and its feasting upon the land and peoples of Mexico. She stabs Howard with a scalpel right into his eye and because of his connection to the other members of the household, this action effects them all, "their bodies convulsing" (271).

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1. They had six separate labor disputes with the local Mexican laborers who worked the mines and mills, several of which were resolved through Mexican military might. Chief among the demands of the workers was their *partido*, the portion of their payment in silver ore. "The English were never comfortable with this ancient Mexican system of partial profit-sharing, begun in the sixteenth century to offset the shortage of both capital and labor for organized, large-scale silver mining" (Randall 629).
2. Early in the novel, Noemí teases her cousin, wondering if her symptoms might find their origin in Brönte's classic novel: "Have you been pretending you live on a windswept moor, like in *Wuthering Heights*?" (49)
3. Like the main character in "The Yellow Wallpaper," Catalina claims, "The walls speak to me. They tell me secrets" (50).
4. Robert D. Hume dismisses the "trappings" of Gothic literature: haunted estates, trap doors, etc. Instead, he focuses on the psychological effects these tales intend to have on their readers, "to shock, alarm, and otherwise rouse him" (284). If they follow the horror genre, then "they heap a succession of horrors upon the reader" (285). In this genre of the horror gothic, Hume believes we enter moral ambiguity, characters "of extraordinary capacity whom circumstance turn increasingly to evil purposes" (285). Moreno Garcia certainly casts no ambiguity around her villains. When all the secrets of the Doyle family are revealed, we see their evil quite clearly.
5. For Hume, the "key characteristic of the Gothic novel is not its devices but its atmosphere," which it uses "for ends which are fundamentally psychological" (286).
6. As the narrator from Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" comes "within view of the melancholy

melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit” (Poe 208).

7. For more on the historical conflation of women’s bodies and the land, see Annette Kolodny’s *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land Before Her*.

8. For more, see Ben Feinberg “Undiscovering the Pueblo Mágico: Lessons from the Huautla for the Psychedelic Renaissance” Natassia Chrysanthos’ “‘It’s going to be for people with money’: Psychedelic treatments tipped to cost at least \$25,000” and C. Schwartz “Molly at the Marriott: Inside America’s premier psychedelics conference” *The New York Times*. (2017, May 6)

9. In “The Girl in the Mansion,” an appendix to the novel, Moreno-Garcia provides some of the very literary research into the intersection of the gothic and feminism, tracking criticism from the 1960s to the present. Among the scholarly works Moreno-Garcia cites are Kate Ferguson’s *The Contested Castle*, Joanna Russ’ “Somebody’s Trying to Kill Me and I think It’s My Husband,” and Lori A. Page’s *The Gothic Romances*.

10. Tellingly, this particular poem considers the larger consequences of female passion and sexuality, topics take up in “Twelve Dancing Princesses.” In Sor Juana’s “Foolish Men,” the speaker plainly addresses the double standard: “With foolish arrogance/you hope to find a Thais/in her your court, but a Lucretia/when you’ve possessed her” (17-20). Just as Moreno-Garcia references literary predecessors, so too does Sor Juana reference Classic literary figures. Lucretia, sexually assaulted by Sextus Tarquinius, wakes her family to recount, in horrific detail, her own rape before ending her own life. Lucretia’s bloody knife, and the fiery speech accompanying its public appearance, bring about the monarchy’s downfall. Thais, mistress to Alexander the Great, is best known for reputedly convincing the leader to set Persepolis ablaze.

11. Not unlike the poisoning of wine and food at High Place, at times resulting in Francis’ suggestions for what’s safe for Noemí to eat, the princesses of the fairy tale keep their nocturnal destinations a secret by slipping sleeping potions into the spying princes’ food and drink.

12. Moreno-Garcia acknowledges this darker side of fairy tales when Noemí recalls, “rather grimly, that certain fairy tales end in blood. In *Cinderella*, the sisters cut off their feet, and *Sleeping Beauty*’s stepmother was pushed into a barrel full of snakes” (86).

13. Perhaps the text which has most famously addressed Mexico’s own mining past is Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*.

14. The death of the patriarch and the demise of the family estate are two versions of the same death: Howard Doyle and High Place are both dead and in ruins by the end of *Mexican Gothic*. Poe's gothic tale ends with the following sentence: "While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened—there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind—the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight—my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "House of Usher."

15. It's also telling that Moreno-Garcia invokes this classic figure since the play upon which the *manaed* is based centers on the unnatural murder and mutilation of a child. In a frenzied state, the play's central character violently beheads what she believes to be a lion's cub, only to discover, once the hallucination has dimmed, that she carries her own child's severed head in her hand. Howard Doyle enacts this very scene but adds cannibalism to the list of taboo acts: the baby's body is consumed, in accordance with his own ritual, to ensure that he and the other DoYLES maintain their unnaturally long lives.

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Meta-Internal Scapes: Politics of visualized minds in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Paprika*

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Illustration: Atmadeep Das

Abstract:

The visualized mind as an alternate dimension has become an increasingly popular cinematic and animatic motif since the rise of German Expressionistic cinema. The representation of a character's dreams, fears, anxieties, lucidities, hallucinations are popular motifs facilitating an internal projection of characters in various media. However, with Genette's 'Metalepsis' theory the presumed diegetic reality becomes a fragmented plane of bleeding effects between alternate levels. Deleuze's works on cinema discuss how the inhuman eye of the camera can show us disordered and unrecognizable wholes into organized ones, created through irrational cuts to facilitates narrative singularities. The alternate mind domains are thus constructed by these singularities and are infinitely more complex than mere reflections of the mind.

In this paper, I will examine these visualized mindscapes as what I am calling “meta-internal scapes” in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Paprika*. This paper will analyse and study in detail the nature and representation of these meta-internals scapes to show how they are not just insular projections of a character’s outer self but rather exist in a semiotic relationship with the diegetic reality. Derrida’s “Differance” talks about the infinite differing of signifiers without ever reaching a transcendental signified, this paper will show in the light of Guattari’s as-signifying semiotic process how these meta –internal scapes are self-referential yet beyond at the same point by becoming chaotic mediums of an eternal difference between percepts of reality and internal mindscapes within cinematic or animated diegesis.

Keywords: Meta-Internal, Anime, Film, Michel Gondry, Satoshi Kon, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Paprika*, alternate realities, mindscapes, Deleuze, Derrida, Guattari.

Introduction

Exploration and visualization of the human mind, its subconscious corners, memories, dreams and fears have intrigued artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers and animators alike for centuries. The internal mind visualized as an alternate dimension or domain became a significant cinematic motif with the rise of German expressionistic cinema along with its Surrealistic tendencies of showing the inner mind as a world itself, with its own dynamics and sets of rules. Lotte Eisner has called this expressionistic tendency as “*Helldunkel*,” which he has defined as “a sort of twilight of the German soul, expressing itself in shadowy, enigmatic interiors, or in misty, insubstantial landscapes” (Eisner 8). They question the very fabric of reality, the focus here is not on ‘what reality is?’, but rather ‘what reality can be?’

This expressionistic motif of portraying the observable world as they are expressed within the mind with distorted colours, frantic contrasts between light and darkness and a profound sense of ambiguity causes the mental scapes to be ‘expressed’ upon the perceived sense of reality. In other words, they portray worlds as they are imagined to be inside the mind. It is an enhanced crafted reality. David Campora comments that these visualized spectacles “are often used to represent the internal-subjective perspective of a character.” He includes examples like Robert Weine’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), Ingmar Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries* (1957), and Federico Fellini’s *8 1/2* (1963) (Campora 122). Jean Baudrillard has talked about the “hyper reality” (27) in terms of a representational product that causes the superimposition of its own unique existence onto the object from which it derives inspiration from. Baudrillard sees the “simulacra” as having its own subjective identity and existence (qtd in Napier 237). Gilles Deleuze in his works on cinema: *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*, has talked about the liberating power of cinema to shock us into experiencing a beyond sense of reality.

According to Deleuze when Cinema is at its most cinematic it can liberate us from the everyday organizing structures, presenting an inherent challenge to life itself. Claire Colebrook asserts that according to Deleuze, “Cinema...can present images or perception liberated from this organising structure of everyday life and it does this by maximising its own internal power” (31). Deleuze’s split between impersonal and actual time corresponds to the creation of alternate worlds within the inhuman eye of the camera. The time that we experience in the presumably ‘real’ world thus is not the same as ‘experienced’ in the mind’s world. Cinema not only creates a liberated world but also is empowered by what Deleuze terms “Singularities” (Colebrook 33). These singularities are created by what Deleuze terms “irrational cuts” where “colours, movements, sounds, textures, tones and lights that are not connected and organized” are presented “into recognised and ordered wholes” and “(I)n so doing it would take us back from the ordered world we view at a day-to-day level and allow us to think the singular and specific differences from which life is lived” (ibid). In films such as *Memento* (2000), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Minority Report* (2002), *Donnie Darko* (2004), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), *Inception* (2010), *Shutter Island* (2010), *Black Swan* (2010) , *Birdman* (2014) we see these singularities being facilitated by expressionist lighting, surreal imagery, and extreme close up shots, giving the audience a false sense of position into the diegetic reality first, and then immediately transforming into irrational cuts creating a sense of interiority of the character’s mindscape.

In narratological terms, this jump from one narrative level or dimension to another is called “Metalepsis” (Campora 124). Gerard Genette in his book, *Narrative Discourse* (1980) talks about the various levels of narratives present within a text. According to Genette, “any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed” (228). Mathew Campora explains Genette’s theory as:

[All] fictional narratives have two basic levels, an extradiegetic and an intradiegetic. The extradiegetic is the level at which the narration happens, and in film, is represented by the camera-narrator; and the intradiegetic is the primary level at which the story is being told and is one level up in the narrative hierarchy from the extradiegetic. Higher levels, referred to as metadiegetic levels, result if and when additional (embedded) narratives are generated within the diegetic world. (124)

Thus the visualized internal minds are narratologically on a metadiegetic level, which is one level inside from the ‘presumed reality’ of the character’s outer self i.e the intradiegetic level. Genette’s “Metalepsis” according to Campora is the bleeding of the intradiegetic level into the metadiegetic level and vice versa, he further suggests that “In cinema, metadiegetic levels can result from a number of different strategies, including, but not limited to the representation of character memories, dreams, and/or hallucinations” (ibid). The Deleuzian “irrational cut” is the sign or jump from the cinematic intradiegetic plain onto the metadiegetic one.

To sum up until the present status of the discourse, these different levels of diegetic narration are in a state of perpetual removal or dislocation. Due to the correlation between the embedded narrative and the intradiegetic narrative, the viewer's sense of awareness of an occurring metalepsis is gradually blurred. This sense of interiority or rather these internal mindscapes form a semiotic relationship with the audience's sense of position within the screen. The diegetic reality for the spectator gets caught up in the infinite process of Derridian "Différance" (Royle 71) where the "transcendental signified" (Tang 153) is never reached but there happens only the unending process of deferring to other signifiers. They constantly defer to each other in an infinite interplay of signs and symbols derived from different diegetic levels of the text only to collapse onto one another on a loop.

Anime on the other hand however posits a unique position when it comes to projections of the internal psyche where its two-dimensional nature lends it enormous power to exaggerate and distort the sense of reality. Roland Barthes in his *Empire of Signs* (1970) talks about how the Japanese culture is inherently deconstructed with no centrality, this conviction is further analysed by Alan Cholodenko to assert that the Japanese culture is a cannibalistic force that assimilates diverse threads of cultural and literary elements. Anime as a medium of art has opened a postmodern niche for itself by combining high and low culture, fragmented sense of self and becoming (Cholodenko 5). In psychoanalytical terms anime and manga explore the Jungian "collective unconscious" (Douglas 27) of the post-nuclear Japan in many harrowing narratives of internal mindscapes. Frederik L. Schodt comments about anime and manga that, "they are an open window onto the Japanese id, a view—not necessarily of reality itself—but of a culture's aspirations, dreams, nightmares, fantasies, and fetishes" (Schodt vii). According to Cholodenko, in order to supersede the collective defeat of Japan at the hands of the Oedipal father America, Japan has given rise to these 'hyper' real mindscapes (Cholodenko 7). Anime like *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), *Perfect Blue* (1997), *Millennium Actress* (2001) and *Paprika* (2006) have shown embedded sequences of the characters' minds, whether anxious, depressed or dreaming, these spectacles have also questioned the fabric of presumed reality and gone on to blur the distinction between not only imagination and reality but also between characters' internal and external scapes. Satoshi Kon in particular has mastered the mind, the projections of mind and the ambiguity of reality in his oeuvre. His films *Perfect Blue*, *Millennium Actress* and *Paprika* are not mere psychological thrillers/dramas but also explorations of the characters' Husserlian "eidetic intuition" (Sowa 254). They question the existence of 'essence' of these characters' presumptions in the world and through the use of montage and dream sequences present the Deleuzian "shock" (Colebrook 30) of discovering worlds within characters, thus creating singularities. Susan J Napier has talked about the creation of an open space by anime within the rendered reality in the vast field of media in her concept of "Fantasyscapes" (Napier 237). She asserts

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai makes the argument that contemporary cultural flows belong to five different "landscapes": ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, finanscapas, and ideoscapas (Appadurai 33 as cited in Napier 237). Anime takes part in all five of these landscapes, but it also exists in a sixth that could be called the "fantasyscape." This sixth

landscape, which draws elements from each of the other five, has two key aspects, action and setting. The action is play, and the setting is a world constructed for entertainment, a world of simulacra. Unlike other, more ambiguous simulacra, however, anime makes no pretense of participating in the “real” except for what its viewers bring to it (which may be both very real and very serious). This is its ultimate attraction: The viewer may play in a liminal world of entertainment, free to take part in an infinitely transforming state of fantasy. (Napier 237)

This open space can inhabit both a diegetic narrative reality and a crafted reality of internal mind. In my view, both these realities are existent within a semiotic relationship where they are going on an infinite voyage of “Différance” (Royle 71), becoming self-referent yet being intensely layered and beyond itself like an infinity mirror. These realities constantly defer to each other, run into each other and collapse onto each other while playing out in the vast field animation.

My aim in this paper is to study the internal landscapes of the human mind as projected onto the screen both in cinema and anime to analyze their nature and representation and how the realities become self-referential and beyond itself at the same time. From hence forth I will be calling these, ‘meta-internal scapes’ where the first person subjectivity is merely a determiner of varied worlds. For this matter, I have chosen two cinematic and animated works through which I will explore the nature and representation of these ‘meta-internal scapes’ in a detailed way. The works are Michel Gondry’s *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) and Satoshi Kon’s *Paprika* (2006).

Meta-Internal Scapes

The imagined states of human consciousness cause the imaginator to imagine it in divergent ways, but what we are going to be focusing on in this paper are the nature and representation of these states. When I use the word ‘states’ what I really mean is the sequences of images and sounds that contribute to creating a cinematic/animated ‘plane’ or more appropriately ‘scape’. When the imaginator visualizes the internal scapes of a human mind and gives a pictorial and sonic description of its nature and function, it not only gives a sense of *mise-en-scene* but also creates an alternate state of existence i.e. the metadiegetic reality: the existence of an inner working system within the existence of a sentient being that is not only an important component of that being’s existence but also something that shares a mutual correlation where each can be affected by the other. The internal scapes can also alter and influence the outer diegetic personality and on the other hand, the personal experiences and impressions can “express” themselves within the internal mindscapes of that person/subject.

An important point however is that I am here not reaffirming the Cartesian divide but rather my argument is that these states are what we call “meta” i.e. self-referential yet beyond. Douglas Hofstadter

in his famous book *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* (1994) has talked about how ‘meta’ is not only about a condition of self-recognition in epistemology but also a recurrent and pungent idea that explains the internalities of the human mind. He has used the term “Strange Loops” to establish the self-referential nature of the mindscapes:

My belief is that the explanations of "emergent" phenomena in our brains—for instance, ideas, hopes, images, analogies, and finally consciousness and free will—are based on a kind of Strange Loop, an interaction between levels in which the top level reaches back down towards the bottom level and influences it, while at the same time being itself determined by the bottom level. In other words, a self-reinforcing "resonance" between different levels—quite like the Henkin sentence which, by merely asserting its own provability, actually becomes provable. The self comes into being at the moment it has the power to reflect itself. (Hofstadter 704)

My argument here is that the visualized psyches or alternate mind domains shown in films and anime behave in a similar “Strange Loop” where they are continually reestablished by a fluid process of mutual recognition. Their ‘meta-ness’ comes in form of continual self-referencing of fluid transitions between singularities. In other words they are positing an infinite interplay which goes beyond the audiences’ sense of what reality can be.

They are governed and complemented by this co-relational dynamic. When we see the character’s internal mindscapes on screen however we are suspended by the feeling of exploring an alternate reality which is different from the ‘presumed actual reality’, but as we have discussed before there is no concrete relatability agent of what ‘actual’ is thus what we experience is in Husserl’s terms, our own “eidetic intuition” (Sowa 254), i.e., our own subjective reflection of what the character’s subjective reflection of ‘reality’ is. Thus the ‘mind’s reality’ and the ‘presumed actual reality’ inevitably run into one other and lead to one another repeatedly on a loop, and hence becoming a self-referential, ‘meta’ internal mindscape.

Here I must clarify something, Susan J Napier has used the term ‘fantasyscape’ (237) to denote the open play of two dimensional worlds created in anime for the purpose of accommodating the cultural flow of anime. My definition of ‘meta-internal scapes’ concerns itself specifically with the exploration of the mind or rather what the mind thinks is its internal landscape. Napier goes on to include the open landscape created by any media which I have discussed above. So my understanding is that “fantasyscapes” deal with what imagination can achieve in terms of its openness when compared to animation than in film, while ‘meta-internal scapes’ are only those representations of the internal mind or sub-conscious minds whether in film or animation that share the correlational dynamic between ‘mind’ and ‘presumed actual’ reality and hence go in an infinite loop of referencing each other and transcending a ‘beyond’ sense of “percept” (Colebrook 30) for the audience.

Eternal Sunshine of the *Visualized* Mind

Michel Gondry's 2004 masterpiece *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is a highly expressionistic meditation on the fragility and vulnerability of human memory and conscious/unconscious identity. Joel Barrish (Jim Carrey) decides to wipe out his memories of his two year relationship with Clementine (Kate Winslet), after coming to know that Clem has already done the procedure offered by a shady company called Lacuna Inc. But during the procedure, something goes wrong with Joel's anesthesia causing an internal projection of Joel to travel through his memories, where he realizes that he does not want to erase Clem. He escapes the erasure procedure with his own mind's Clem, fleeing from one memory to another when the light finally catches them and everything is erased. The two however meet again, and start to fall in love again when a disgruntled Lacuna employee Mary Svevo (played by Kirsten Dunst), mails all the customers of Lacuna informing them of their procedure. Joel and Clem understand their history but the film ends on a note hinting that they are willing to try again.

According to Mathew Campora, *Eternal Sunshine* is a multiform narrative that features a non-linear structure of time along with multiple narratives (in this case an embedded narrative). The film can be divided into two sections – the waking strand and the internal- subjective strand (which from here I will be calling the meta-internal scape). He further suggests: “In the case of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, the internal-subjective narrative that represents Joel's memory is a metadiegetic level of narration, whereas the waking strand is the film's intradiegetic level” (Campora 124). Joel's meta-internal scape i.e. the internal-subjective strand of the film, is a *mélange* of memory and reality but with the presence of an alternate Clementine inside his head what we get is an extremely fluid mindscape where travelling from one memory to another is seemingly possible. The film here brings into question the existential aspect of memory erasure. The Clem and Joel after memory erasure are not their same selves anymore. In fact, we see very little of ‘real’ Clem in the film, what we majorly encounter is Joel's concept of Clem that too inside his meta-internal scape. But here lies the problem of authenticity. Who then is the “real” Clem? The pre-memory erasure Clem might be the simple answer but again the question remains that what about the pre-memory erasure Clem as seen inside Joel's mind. Joel's love for Clem, may or may not color his impressions of Clem causing her to behave in a certain way inside himself. Clementine ironically says in the movie that

I'm not a concept. I want you to just keep that in your head. Too many guys think I'm a concept or I complete them or I'm going to make them alive, but I'm just a fucked-up girl who is looking for my own peace of mind. Don't assign me yours.” (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, dir. Michel Gondry)

Yet, we only encounter concepts of Clem in the film. The film itself leads to this harrowing realization that the mindscape motif constantly makes us question whether we are encountering a Clem's Clem, Joel's Clem or post memory erasure Clem. The visual motif here plays a part that Joel's internal Clem has

mostly orange hair, while post erasure Clem has blue hair. She herself refers to naming these colours as “Agent Orange” (which she mentions that she made up) and “Blue Ruin”. Apart from the obvious connotations of mental states with the vibrancy of hair colour what can be further insisted is that orange hair Clem is an agency of creating Deleuzian “singularities” (Colebrook 33) within the film’s narrative. As Joel starts the journey inside his mind, he begins with the last time he saw her. The whole film uses the motif of ‘the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning’. The film begins after Joel’s memory erasure and ends with hints of re-starting a relationship between post-Lacuna Joel and Clem.

The meta-internal scape that the film creates calls into question the nature of Bergson’s “Pure memory” and Proust’s “Memoire Involontaire” (Pigott 181), regarding which Michael Pigott explains: “Bergson believed that pure memory could be delved into by choice, whereas Proust characterizes access to it as something more akin to an involuntary eruption, triggered by some sort of evocative sensory stimulus” (ibid). Thus according to the Bergsonian “Pure memory” realm, forgetting is not possible, which the film evokes when Joel and Clem start fall for each other again after memory erasure and when Clem starts to sense something strange with Patrick’s use of words (Patrick stole Joel’s journal in order to seduce Clem), thus the film affirms a pattern of repetition or rather a loop of events. Pigott further comments that, “In *Eternal Sunshine*, the stepping into memory occurs in the present, and what is done with and within memory occurs as the production of the new” (ibid).

The Joel thus who is wandering in the asleep Joel’s memory is indeed a meta-self that is going on meta-narrating the internal mindscape and commenting on and later manipulating memories. This shows us that it is not only a projection of his mind but also an active agent of his subconscious, fighting the erasure light to hide Clem deep inside his memories. He however is constantly being of aware of what is going on due to the sonic bridge of metalepsis between the realms where he can hear the conversation of the Lacuna employees during his procedure. The nature of Joel’s meta-internal scape according to Pigott is thus, “one that is very much present yet also as a mutable, fantastic world ruled by qualities of the remembered and the imagined that rejects the “rules” of memory as defined by the traditional filmic flashback” (Pigott 178). The film does an immaculate job of creating a sense of mutability, confusion and constantly changing dynamics with its camera work. The memories of Joel and Clem’s relationship are only seen as fragments of sequences where each memory slowly is being targeted by the whitewashing light of the erasure machine, the scene shifts give us a sense of unstable interiority of an erratic mind, caused by hazy night shots, focused bright white light and out of focus shots. The camera shows us what memories feel like: incomplete, fragmented, half-clear, sometimes inaccurate yet infinitely significant in a mind’s cognition of its reality. Thus the meta-internal scape causes a “transgression” (Campora 120) of memory into the presumably real life of Joel. His recognition of his own meta-tendencies is a sign that the film’s portrayal of personal memory or internal mind is in a co-relational dynamic with its diegetic reality. There is no transcendental signifying agent, all we see are transgressions. Even the supposedly intradiegetic shots of the film are shown in a surrealistic manner e.g. where Joel goes to the bookstore and

and Clem can't recognize him, he immediately walks off but instead of the street outside the store he comes inside directly to his friends' living room, giving us the sense of open play within the eye of the camera, causing a self – referential relationship.

Torsha Ghoshal has talked about “unprojections” in cinema where a metadiegetic world or dimension is created in a film only to reject or erase it by the end. She has used Brian Richardson's “de-narration” (Ghoshal) i.e. the erasure of a self-narrative by an unreliable narrator to explain how *Eternal Sunshine's* representation of an alternate domain inside Joel's head is an ontological reflection that is in a semiotic relationship with the intradiegetic reality, causing the correlational dynamic to go in a loop:

Eternal Sunshine's narrative unfolds as a *mise-en-abyme*, whereby the framed storyworld is no more or less determinate than the world that framed it. Joel and Clementine in *Eternal Sunshine* re-start their relationship after erasing the memories of their past affair and the narrative ends indicating that this course may keep repeating itself. Erasure generates the conditions for duplication and then this duplication in turn necessitates erasure. We are left with a “self-erasing narrative... [that] ‘bend[s]’ a sequence back upon itself to form a loop, in which one and the same event figures as both antecedent and sequel of some other event.” [Pier 15 as cited in Ghosal] Even during the process of erasure, the employees of Lacuna Inc. note that Joel's memory map leads them to the same spaces again and again, such that memories that should have been logically deleted crop up at other points in his mental terrain. (Ghoshal)

Derrida's concept of “Différance” which Nicolas Royle has defined as “Difference is what makes presence possible while at the same time making it differ from itself” (Royle 71), facilitates the existence of a meta-internal scape within the presumed realistic plain to cinema, but throughout the discussion we have seen that the cinematic motif of *Eternal Sunshine* brings into light the distinction of authenticity: authenticity of a self or personality after memory erasure, authenticity of emotions, authenticity of experience and finally the authenticity of a presumed reality. Pepita Hesselberth and Laura Schuster comment in relation to representation of the mindscape in modern psychological thriller *Memento* that the film's “closed circuit, or the fact that there is no “out there” to the “in here” reality of the medium, resists resolution or closure” and that the film “fully exploits the convergence of mind and medium” (Hesselberth and Schuster 109).

Thus the internal landscape of Joel's mind is not only a vastly self-mediated plain of erratic and fluid nature but also an alternate domain within himself and in relation to that highly self-referential in nature. The intradiegetic and metadiegetic are thus existing in an infinite interplay of “différance”, because the question of authentic essence is never really answered, what is happening is a constant mutual referring causing the two domains to run into one another without ever reaching a “transcendental signified”. Yet the infinite nature of self-referencing causes them to posit a beyond sense of diegesis to the audience. Stephen L. White comments:

Gondry's films reveal the multitude of ways in which the film image may relate (or fail to relate) to the space in front of the camera. And his work reminds us that the axioms of Bazin's film theory and its more recent successors define a space that has no counterpart in the lived perception of our life-worlds. The space of our life worlds is a construction—a *bricolage* or patchwork of functionally distinct zones and boundaries, making for inside/outside distinctions defined in an indefinite number of ways... And Gondry moves effortlessly between the animation of purely artificial constructions and the "recording" of physical reality. What we are given in visual perception are not sense data, but objects themselves in their functional and agential significance. (White 108)

The internal mindscape of Joel thus is a self-referential meta-internal scape where the story world and the diegetic world collide to create an infinite interplay of "différance" which in nature causes them to be beyond any normal cinematic or animated landscape. The visualized mind opens a new portal where the generic workings of cognition and sensation are in overdrive.

***Paprika* and the disintegration of boundaries**

Satoshi Kon throughout his career has taken a keen interest in alternate states of human consciousness such as dreams, dreamlike states, memories, anxieties, hallucinations etc. His psychologically introspective storytelling along with use of dream like hallucinogenic surfaces in his works causes his animated works to stand out in a period dominated by mecha anime and Studio Ghibli. Kon's animation works such as *Perfect Blue* (1997), *Millennium Actress* (2001), *Paranoia Agent* (2004), and, eventually, *Paprika* (2006) along with his manga *Opus* (1996), are all highly postmodern pieces of work with fluid boundaries (or in some cases no boundaries) between an intradiegetic and metadiegetic narrative reality. Alice Teodorescu defines Kon's works as "dense and experimental films that tackle with dream states, virtual identities, shadow selves, psychological deformations of space and time and many more" (Teodorescu 65). She has talked about the "modular" (ibid) nature of Kon's Surrealistic dreamscapes within the intradiegetic frame by pointing out the representation of altered states of the human mind as portals to multiple embedded story worlds. She comments:

The prevalent themes of real and virtual, consciousness and the subconscious, dreams and the self, and the way they are shaped through the animated medium poses a challenging view of contemporary narratives and the modular as concept... (Kon's works present) these doubles not as antitheses, but as blurred sequences being part of a one large and encompassing reality that evades time and, sometimes, even space. (66)

Thus in Kon's work we see the multitude of layers and coefficients of visualized scapes of the human mind's internality.

In this paper I am going to analyze Satoshi Kon's 2006 sci-fi masterpiece *Paprika*, based on the novel of the same name by Yasutaka Tsutsui. The main plot revolves around Psychiatrist Dr. Chiba Atsuko who uses the machine DC Mini to explore the dreams of her patients in order to treat them. The DC Mini is an experimental technology and in the beginning we see Chiba using it illegally to treat the psychological problems of Detective Konakawa. She uses the alter-ego Paprika who is the polar opposite to Chiba's reserved, composed and brooding personality. Cheerful, energetic and brave, Paprika with her signature red hair transforms into various characters while exploring the dreams of the patients. She embodies their desire, fears, anxieties and also assists them to find out more about their unconscious mind. When the machine DC Mini is stolen, havoc breaks out as many doctors including the chief Dr. Shima are invaded by a 'rogue dream'. The shared rogue dream showcases a parade of household items, gadgets, anthropomorphic bodies and the embodiment of many repressed Otaku desires with another doctor Himura (presumably the first victim) sitting at the top. In a dream induced state Dr. Shima jumps off a high window and almost gets killed while others are also injured.

Later, the inventor of the DC Mini, Dr. Tokita is also captured within the dream and it is revealed that the chairman of the Institution, Dr. Inui wants to take over the world of dreams and be a God like omnipresent figure. His misuse of the DC Mini causes the dream world to collapse onto the real world as the whole world seems to be under a shared psychosis. Chiba and Paprika are separated from each other and confront each other about their acceptance. Dr. Tokita transforms into a large robot like creature who wants to "ingest" Chiba, reflecting his obesity, eating disorder and repressed emotions towards Chiba. Chiba is consumed by Tokita's dream self but he feels that it is incomplete, and needs a little spice, indicating Paprika. Paprika then gets inside Tokita's robot and emerges as a baby girl. She starts to eat the whole dream weakening the huge naked God like figure of Dr. Inui. She grows into a mature woman, presumably a mix of Chiba and Paprika and vanquishes Dr. Inui to end the dream.

According to Alice Vernon, the dream self or the dream dimension (what we will eventually call the "meta-internal scapes), facilitates and infinite personality play and a world of "unconstrained role-playing" (115). Vernon cites PierCarla Cicogna and Marino Bosinelli's study on dreams to quantify the "oneric" (116) quality of alternate dream selves. The film stresses that Paprika thus is not only Chiba's alter ego but also the vice versa. Cicogna and Bosinelli comment that:

When a dream is stored in the LTM (Long Term Memory), at the moment of its retrieval it is immediately recognized as a dream. An automatic access to a conscious higher level of consciousness (meta-reflexive) takes place: This kind of functioning even allows a judgment on the subject's representational conditions. (38)

This underlines a potential semiotic process of correlation between Paprika and Chiba and their inhabitant dimensions. The meta-reflexivity here confirms the self-referential nature of the worlds of dream and the dreamer. The exegesis is also applicable to Konakawa's recurrent dreams about films and

theatres, underlining this abandoned love for film making along with his adolescent partner who eventually died causing a repressed trauma within Konakawa.

Paprika as a film disintegrates the metaleptic boundary, which was the *modus operandi* of *Eternal Sunshine*. It was the metalepsis of Joel's memory/dream self into the present intradiegetic level that sustained the dramatic element, in *Paprika* however the metalepsis is shown at a much more ambiguous and indiscernible level. The rouge dream that is slowly claiming targets one by one and trapping them inside the dream realm is a conscious, mobile metaleptic agent and a monstrous one at that. By the climax of the movie there is no concrete difference between the meta and the intradiegetic reality, everything seems to be a mass shared dream. In the climax of Masashi Kishimoto's *Naruto*, the main antagonist Madara Uchiha had a similar motif, where he wanted put the entire world in a mass shared dream of each one's personal virtual paradise and reject the diegetic reality. The "Mugen Tsukuyomi" (Infinite Moon Goddess), causes a rejection of diegesis in favour of an eternal and infinite metadiegesis, causing the dichotomy to switch and the meta-narrative to become the primary one. The antagonist of *Paprika* also has similar intentions only in this case, he wants to compensate his lack of healthy legs by becoming an omnipotent God of everything in the dream.

William O. Gardner has used the term 'Virtual Mirror' to address the sites of 'metalepsis' within the animatic plane. He defines Virtual Mirror as:

I will use the term Virtual Mirror to refer to the opening of heterogeneous space in the fabric of base-line narrative reality—a space both personal and medial. That is, to some extent this space is inhabited by the self-image or imaginative world of a single individual, but to a significant extent it is also determined by narratives, expectations, desires, and other psychological forces that are beyond the control of the individual concerned. Furthermore, this heterogeneous space provides a meeting point and site for interaction between the multiple subjective actors. The space is often opened by a mirror or other portal such as a door or computer screen, but in Kon's later works, the space of the Virtual Mirror is woven into the film's diegetic space, even without the presence of such physical portals. (58)

Thus Gardner confirms that unlike Kon's earlier works like *Perfect Blue*, *Paprika* doesn't require a physical demarcation or portal for the metaleptic jump, it occurs within the animated plane on a much more integrated level. This warrants a much more complex relationship within the two halves of *Paprika*/Chiba.

The alter-ego trope in popular culture generically sustains the identity crisis by pertaining a tug of war between the two selves within a being, here however we see an increasing concern of one half for the other, *Paprika* is worried that her world is engulfing Chiba's and Chiba on the other hand shows enough concern regarding *Paprika*'s well being during the climax. This causes a complex relationship between the

two (or one person embodying two) that manifests itself within the larger *raison d'être* of the filmic enterprise of *Paprika* as a media itself. Takashi Murakami's 'Superflat' manifesto talks about the superimposition of multiple flattened layers to diminish the Western Dichotomy of inside/outside, by collapsing each other causing meaning to manifest on the surface itself. *Paprika*'s approach towards its internal/external blurring of boundaries can be read in the similar philosophical lines as well, the internal and external, Paprika and Chiba are narratologically distinct yet on a surface level are existent in a semiotic duality, where each only leads onto another. The scene where Paprika is restrained on the table and one of Dr. Inui's henchmen grows a tentacle and cuts Paprika's outer skin, it reveals a naked Chiba inside. The skin of Paprika sheds like a snakeskin. The scene dovetails a much more implicit relationship between Paprika and Chiba's duality. I believe it to be like an infinite Russian doll where with each peeling level we will only encounter selves of Chiba and Paprika alternatively. The climax of the film gives us a much more ambivalent sense of unification of both dimensions. When Paprika starts to grow from a small child and begins to ingest the dream, and eventually engulfs the mass psychosis, the destructive dream eventually comes to an end along with Dr. Inui being devoured by Paprika. Detective Konakawa also finds the root of his recurring nightmares by confronting his regret about abandoning his commitment to his childhood love of filmmaking and his partner. The simpler explanation would be that the self and other merge together to save the intradiegetic reality at the cost of the metadiegetic one but there are more layers to it. Kon does not simply reject the alternate to live the actual, rather he stresses on the fluidity of the dichotomy. In the last scene of the film where Dt. Konakawa visits the illegal website of Paprika (where he previously used to go for treatment), he doesn't find Paprika but rather a note from her urging him to go to a new movie called *Kids Dreaming*. Konakawa buys a ticket for the movie and as he enters the theatre the film comes to an end but as it is hinted that, Konakawa's movie is about to begin. Kon here plays the meta-narrative to end the primary one. The clear imposition of one on another gives us the sense that neither should be prioritized within the camera over the other. Like, *Eternal Sunshine*, here also the film ends with a "beginning".

Paprika thus, diminishes the need for a "virtual mirror" (Gardner 58) to distinguish the metaleptic transition, it posits a "reality within reality" structure but unlike Western media, it exercises its 'Superflat' independence by letting both the realities to exist within a similar planar structure, within the same surface. This is the magical field of anime which is so much more liberating than Western mediascapes where the accommodation of alternate states, selves, psyches, realities and narratives can be done without politicizing the practical shortcomings that are present in live action cinema. The dream realm of Paprika is an infinitely self-referential counterpart of the intradiegetic reality of Chiba, which exist in an infinite "différance" where their signs and symbols are going in a loop without ever reaching a "transcendental signified". But this eternal, infinite loop causes the story surface to become an increasingly dynamic plane, a chaotic surface where ephemeral and subjective meanings are manifested, where the inhabitant and inhabited complex has become redundant. This makes it beyond itself, in a meta sense. The internal scapes are no longer a projection of the external anymore but rather a meta-internal scape with potential

to grow beyond itself with an unending semiotic interplay.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude the essay by focusing on Guattari's concept of "A-signifying semiotics" (Guattari 36), which Andrew Lapworth has used to analyze *Paprika* as a machinic agent of churning out desire inflicted signs and symbols. According to Lapworth, Kon's *Paprika* "attempts to think desire as a machinic process of connection that exceeds and transforms personological modes of identity and molar forms of interindividual relation" (Lapworth 196). According to Guattari, "a-signifying semiotics... challenges any hierarchialization of expression (Hetrick qtd in Boldt and Valente 306), naming signs as both material and semiotic" (Boldt and Valente 306). The "A-signifying semiotic registers" (Lapworth 188) according to Lapworth are the main coefficient for the infinite interplay of signs and symbols in *Paprika*'s diegetic reality and the meta-internal scape.

What I have also mentioned before in this essay that neither Satoshi Kon nor Michel Gondry are concerned with discernible boundaries between diegetic worlds but rather the opposite, their works dislocate any sense of hierarchical sense of concrete reality. According to Bold and Valente, that is the very nature of a-signifying semiotics:

Genosko describes a-signifying semiotics as 'any system of signification that dissociates itself in some manner from a meaning component, or considers meaning as an irritant'. Whereas signifying semiotics concern well-formed meanings, a-signifying semiotics exist in the world of affecting and being affected that does not rely upon consciousness or meaning. It is, in fact, 'non-representative, non-illustrative and non-narrative' (Hauptmann & Radman ltd in Boldt and Valente 306). We specifically focus attention on a-signifying semiotics in the movement of becoming-other. (Boldt and Valente 306).

The meta-internal scapes are not mere projections of the psyche but rather an unstable medium where an infinite a-signification process is ever going. Neither can we ever say that Joel's memories are merely memories, nor can we dismiss *Paprika*'s dream world as merely a mishmash of repressed desires, it is a much more complex and fluid set of elements that act as free chaotic agents. As Boldt and Valente assert:

Through a privileged attendance to a-signifying semiotics, we are directed to draw our attention to the direct action of things on things, the nearly infinite ways that affecting and being affected is in constant movement and is therefore immanent, and the ways that signification can never succeed at capturing, representing, or constituting reality...a-signifying signs do not refer to other signs but rather are themselves experiences. (Boldt and Valente 312-313)

The two works: *Paprika* and *Eternal Sunshine*, pose important questions regarding embedded narratives within the cinematic/animated planes. Whereas, Michel Gondry presents us with a meditative “deterritorialisation” (qtd. in Colebrook 58) of memory, Kon gives us a modular masterpiece of possibilities regarding the dream realm. Both the works however proceed with Genette’s metalepsis as a cataclysmic agent between alternate states of the human mind visualized as new story worlds or domains. But as seen from the beginning of German Expressionistic cinema, these new dimensions are not insulated forms of mere reflections of the psyche but a much more subjective and fluid meta levels of narrative reality. They are not compliant with the sense of time in the diegetic narrative neither are they pictorially familiar, rather they are in Viktor Shklovsky’s terms “defamiliarized” (qtd. in Berlina 45). Deleuze’s “irrational cut” inverts Shklovsky’s terminology by saying that cinema shows seemingly disordered wholes as ordered ones within the inhuman eye of the camera thus creating narrative “singularities”. These singularities are the heart and soul of what Allan Cameron has termed as “Modular Cinema” (Cameron 36) with its multiform narrative strands.

In this paper, I have shown how these internal landscapes of the human mind creates new story worlds in cinema and anime and how they are neither separate or insular but rather ruled by their co-relational dynamic where the existence of an essence within another one facilitates their a-signifying semiotic relationship of infinite self-referencing. Both *Eternal Sunshine* and *Paprika* delves deep into the subconscious and unconscious minds of their characters to reveal unending layers of coexistent alternate states, realities, scapes. Thus the internal scapes are meta not only in the sense that they are infinitely self-referential but also because their infinite interplay dislocates any sense of concrete signified, causing the narrative plane to inhabit a beyond sense of diegesis that transcends the pre-existing narrative constraints to posit infinite possibilities.

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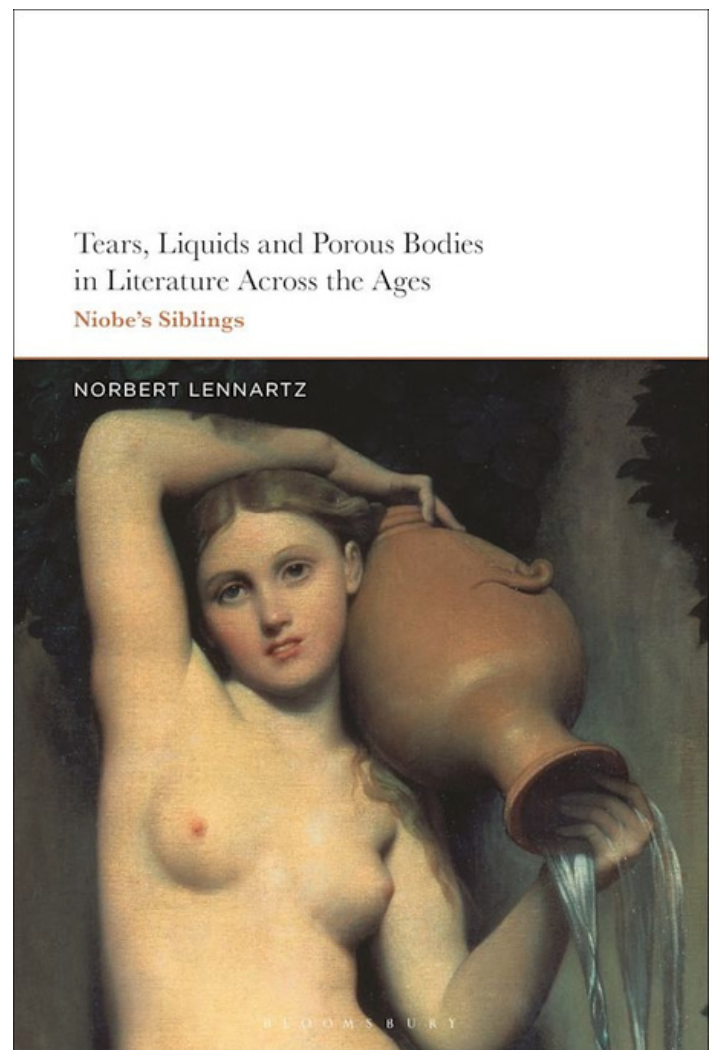
The Apollonian
**BOOK
REVIEW**



Book Review: Tears, Liquids and Porous Bodies in Literature Across the Ages: Niobe's Siblings

Daniel Dougherty

The mythological figure of Niobe is the perfect symbol for Norbert Lennartz' expansive literary history which covers dozens of canonical texts and spans over three hundred years. In *Tears, Liquids and Porous Bodies in Literature Across the Ages: Niobe's Siblings*, Lennartz tracks Niobe's hydrodynamics through art and literature while purporting to challenge traditional readings of the texts he has selected through the lens of their porosity and fluidity. This "new critical porosity" represents a way to "drill new holes into the corpora of various canonical texts" and go "beyond the ossified and stony templates of theories" (p. 18). Straightaway, he argues that tears and other fluids ranging from blood to sweat to urine are at the heart of "European narratives of gender, body and anthropology" (p. 2). Lennartz lays out his terminology carefully in the introduction to this book, as words such as 'porosity' and 'ossification' will come to be inflected and reflected many times over throughout the book, typically as they relate to the relationship between men, "threatened by an uncontrollable expenditure of fluids" and women, "liminal, Ophelian creatures" who "[ooze] fluids in such gigantic and carnivalesque quantities" that men fear erosion "to nothingness" (p. 17).



Norbert Lennartz. *Tears, Liquids and Porous Bodies in Literature Across the Ages: Niobe's Siblings*. London, England: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 267 pp.

The book is largely chronological, but occasionally digressions back to previously covered texts or forward looks which anticipate later literary and social movements prove helpful. These digressions are often humorous—Lennartz remarks offhand that perhaps we never left the Victorian period, save for a brief, luminous few years in the 1960s—and lend the book a playful streak which pairs nicely with the abundance of tight close readings Lennartz employs. The first chapter spans the years leading up to and including the discovery of pores, including Shakespeare and Donne. Chapter two tracks stony poetics and porous effusions in

and porous effusions in the poetry of the Romantics: Keats, Byron, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Chapter three, as one might expect, reads resistance within the narrative of Victorian stoicism through authors including Rossetti, Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Hardy. The fourth chapter, titled “(Re-)Liquification at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century,” pits Lawrence and Joyce’s portrayals of modern masculinity against each other, invoking a sort of “porous carnivalism” (p. 13).

The strongest sections of the book are Lennartz’ detailed close readings, particularly at the points where he addresses the framework of an entire literary genre and fits it to his model of porosity. In the Victorian chapter, for example, he reads the masculine and overtly stony Mr. (and Mrs.) Murdstone from *David Copperfield* and the phallic obelisk Brocklehurst from *Jane Eyre* as ossified figures in the Victorian *Bildungsroman*, which, he argues, overwhelmingly features youths who are driven by society to hide porosity and embrace rigidity through social conditioning. On the other hand, one wonders to what extent, exactly, Lennartz actually resituates the canonical texts he selects. His readings are compelling, but he ultimately subscribes to the same model of periodized canonical literary history that has existed for decades. In a survey as wide-ranging as his, this may be merely the simplest classification of texts which allows the governing metaphors of fluidity to take coherent form. Still, with the exception of the penultimate page of the monograph, there are virtually no mentions of authors of color, and very few of the texts treated could be considered anything but canonical. In a book which so admirably argues for a yet-

undiscovered narrative of porous resistance to dominant power structures through the ages, this is a rather large omission; Lennartz does not think through porosity except through white authors, and white characters.

This is a very impressive study of European literary history, and Lennartz’ comprehensive handling of the canon helpfully reorients our understanding of fluid and fluidity through novels, poetry and plays which have endured and will continue to endure. Admirable in scope and utterly unashamed of the unsightly, *Tears, Liquids and Porous Bodies in Literature Across the Ages* is kept afloat throughout by Lennartz’ engaging prose and sharp insights into his chosen texts.



The Apollonian
POETRY



Ten Attempts at Translating a Binoy Majumdar line

Rohit Saha

মানুষ নিকটে গেলে প্রকৃত সারস উড়ে যায়!

A crane takes off as soon as a man comes.

A crane takes off as soon as a man approaches.

A true crane takes off as soon as a man approaches.

A true crane flies away at the sight of an approaching man.

A man's steps make a veracious crane fly away.

A man's steps make a veracious crane fly in ascendance.

A genuine crane flies away in disregard of human proximity.

A genuine crane responds to human proximity with its vicious flight.

The near the man is, the faster the wings flap of a crane to escape the sight.

The near the man is, the more vicious the disregard for a crane to fly off.

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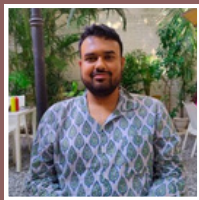
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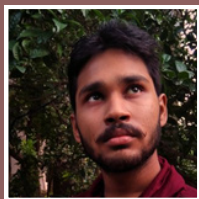
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